

# TUTDoR

## Investigating the adoption and adaption of method acting in South African theatre.

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**INVESTIGATING THE ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION OF  
METHOD ACTING IN SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE**

**DISSERTATION**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**MAGISTER TECHNOLOGIAE: DRAMA**

In the

Department of Performing Arts

FACULTY OF ARTS & DESIGN

**TSHWANE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

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2024

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation submitted for the degree Magister Technologiae: Drama, at Tshwane University of Technology, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher education. I further declare that all sources cited or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references.

M.E. Thaba



Date ...31 January 2024

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my princess, Thuto. Not only did you arrive during my pursuit of this milestone, but also at a time when life was teaching me some of its harshest but character-defining lessons. Your existence has given me renewed vigour in my pursuit of the examined life.

You are destined for greatness!

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•

To each of the participants that made this study possible, thank you for allowing me into your sacred space and sharing intimate details on your approach to your craft. I revere your commitment and dedication to truthful acting.

•

To my parents, Makgale and Raseekele Thaba, my siblings, and my wife, Lerato; I will forever be grateful for your well wishes, patience, encouragement, and prayers. I have come to value the importance of a supportive family, which is an often-underrated anchor for a scholar.

•

My biggest gratitude goes to God, my Comforter, for seeing me through it all.

Ntate kea leboga!

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the adoption and possible adaptation of Method acting by ten theatre actors in the province of Gauteng. The study seeks to identify in the candidates' approach to a role six major elements of Method acting stemming from Russian acting teacher, Konstantin Stanislavski's acting technique called "the System". The study focuses on the candidates' first acquaintance with a script (if any), rehearsal, and onstage portrayal of a role. To achieve this, the study first explores the genesis of Stanislavski's System, its voyage from Russia to America, and its resultant adaptation into different American techniques given the umbrella term, Method acting. The study also examines different interpretations and iterations of the Stanislavski System by scholars and practitioners, and then identifies six major elements common in both American Method and Stanislavski's System. This enabled me to generate questions posed to the research participants during open-ended interviews, after which, two tables of analysis, one dealing with the adoption, and the other with adaptation, were developed. The study takes a qualitative research design of a phenomenological genre, which falls under the Interpretivist/Constructivist research paradigm, the main goal of which is to understand the subjective world of human experience. To minimise misinterpretation and bias, I applied Giorgi's analytical procedures of "bracketing and reduction.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

In 1924, one of Russian acting teacher, Konstantin Stanislavski's<sup>1</sup> Moscow Art Theatre members, Richard Boleslavski, who became an acting teacher at the American Laboratory Theatre, cautioned that American actors could not be like the Moscow Art Theatre actors by simply copying Stanislavski's acting technique called the System because it is a foreign<sup>2</sup> technique (Hirsch, 1984: 59). Boleslavski articulated the need for American actors to adapt the System to an American context. Some students of the American Laboratory Theatre went on to form the Group Theatre in 1930, among them Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler, who later became prominent Method acting teachers in America<sup>3</sup>. Heeding Boleslavski's caution, only some elements of Stanislavski's System were adopted at the Group Theatre (van Heerden, 2007: 52). The Group Theatre later gave way to the New York Actors Studio, where, under Strasberg's tutelage, the System evolved into the "Method". Van Heerden (2007: 52) points out that Strasberg attended Boleslavski's lessons at the time when Stanislavski's earlier version of the System, which put more emphasis on emotional and inner process was taught. As a result, Method acting became more associated with the production of emotion to create "natural" presence and "real" behaviour on stage (Rogers, 2012: 424).

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<sup>1</sup> Some sources use "Stanislavsky" and others use "Stanislavski". Although Carnicke argues in her book, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, that writing the surname with the final "i" is not standard, as it makes it appear as if it were Polish, she concedes that the form with the final "y" is also an anglicised version which was adopted in the "Americanisation" of Stanislavski. This study uses the form with the "i" and retains the form with the "y" only in direct quotations from sources that employ it.

<sup>2</sup> From one country with a different culture and language.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to the United States of America and does not imply all the Americas.

If Boleslavski's assertion to American actors is valid, does the same not hold true for the adoption of the System, or any other foreign acting technique in South Africa?

This study investigates whether Method acting, as informed by Stanislavski's System, has been adopted, and if so, how it has been adapted by theatre actors in South Africa. The study is situated in the discipline of acting and performance, focusing on the rehearsal process and the onstage execution of a role. The primary aim of the study is to identify six specific elements of Method acting, as informed by Stanislavski's System, in the rehearsal and performance process of ten South African theatre actors. The elements are *"Magic 'If", Belief and the Sense of Truth, Emotion Memory, Voice and Speech, Tempo Rhythm, and Physical Characteristics*. These are the elements that are common to the Stanislavski System and Method acting techniques informed by the System, although some elements are given different names.

To better manage the data, the scope of this study is limited to a purposively selected sample of ten theatre actors based in the province of Gauteng. The sampling process is outlined in detail later in this chapter. To put the study into context, this chapter examines the origins of Method acting, as informed by Stanislavski's System, and the process of its adoption and adaptation from Russia to America. But before that, I interrogate what constitutes Method acting and how it was informed by, and developed from, the Stanislavski System.

## **What is Method acting?**

According to Krasner (2000: 5), Method acting is an acting technique that stresses truthful behaviour in imaginary circumstances. Informed by Stanislavski's assertion

that the actors' bodies are at the beck and call of their will, the Method actor creates an "organic and imaginative performance by 'experiencing' or 'living through' the role" (Krasner, 2000: 5). Although it may be argued that the same is essentially true of all acting techniques in the realism and naturalism genres, Hirsch (1984: 75-76) points out that the psychological aspect in Method acting is often disproportionately emphasised. The Method acting technique was made famous by several American acting teachers and practitioners, notably Strasberg, Adler, and Sanford Meisner, who developed their own Methods, based on their respective interpretations of Stanislavski's System (Rogers, 2012: 424). Although multiple versions of Method acting informed by Stanislavski's System exist today, this study limits its focus to the six elements mentioned earlier, in their origin, as conceptualised by Stanislavski. To demonstrate why these elements are regarded as elements of Method acting, the study explores how these elements were adopted and adapted during the transition from the System in Russia to the Method in America, mainly by Strasberg, whose Method is prominent and largely adopted in Hollywood (Rogers, 2012: 424). The study also looks briefly into Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner's techniques to demonstrate the different interpretations that American practitioners of Method acting applied to the Stanislavski System.

## **Background**

Before exploring the historical background of Method acting, in order to depict how it is informed by Stanislavski's System, it is necessary to understand what constitutes acting, and to distinguish it from performance. Kirby (1972: 3) defines acting as feigning, simulating, representing, or impersonating. It is part of performance, but not all performance is acting. Performers, according to Kirby (1972: 3), generally tend to

“be” nobody or nothing other than themselves, and don’t represent, or pretend to be in, a time or a place different to that of the spectator. Schechner (2020: 1) supports this assertion by pointing out that performance is not only limited to a play, but also includes dancing, making music, and playing real life roles such as being a friend, child, parent, student, etc. Harding (1999: 127) adds that the role of the non-acting performer is to draw attention to their skill, such as a dancing, singing, tightrope walking, wrestling, storytelling, etc.

Erving Goffman, as quoted by Schechner (2020: 3), defines performance as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion, which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants, i.e., the audience, observers, or co-participants. But Kirby (1972: 3-4) cautions that the differences between acting and performance may be so negligibly minimal that categorisation may not be easy. To help with this categorisation, Kirby draws a “not-acting” to “acting” continuum, in which he indicates the transition from performance, on one end, to acting, on the other end. At the “not-acting” end of the continuum, he places stagehands who position props and décor and remove them while being watched by an audience. He argues that although they do not act, they are part of the visual representation. He calls this “non-matrixed performing.”

Kirby (1972: 4) points out that costume may create character, even in instances where a performer is not acting, e.g., a performer wearing black leotards and cowboy boots may be identified as a cowboy, but the performer’s behaviour may reinforce or contradict the costume. Kirby calls this instance in which a performer does not act to reinforce the costume or other external references “non-matrixed representation.”

However, the more the references such as costume and setting increase, the closer

the performance moves to acting on the “not-acting to “acting” continuum, even if the performer is doing nothing that can be defined as acting. E.g., If a performer wearing a Santa Claus suit on stage, drinking coffee in a setting representing a rustic interior, the audience might see Santa Claus in his home in the North Pole. “When the matrices are strong, persistent and reinforce each other, we see an actor, no matter how ordinary the behavior. This condition, the next step closer to true acting on our continuum, we may refer to as ‘received acting’” (Kirby, 1972: 5). Another example of “received acting” is when extras do nothing but walk or stand in costume in a realistic setting, yet they are considered as actors. If acting is what is done by the actor as opposed to what is done for, or to, the actor, Kirby (1972: 6) argues that “received acting” is not true acting but an honorary title because although we have moved closer to the “acting” extreme of the continuum, the performer has not yet done anything done anything that constitute acting. To pinpoint the exact point where acting begins, Kirby explores basic characteristics that define acting, which may either be physical or emotional. Below, Kirby describes the physical characteristics of acting:

If the performer does something to simulate, represent, impersonate and so forth, he is acting. It does not matter what style he uses or whether the action is part of a complete characterization or informational presentation. No emotion needs to be involved. The definition can depend solely on the character of what is done. (Value judgments, of course, are not involved. Acting is acting whether or not it is done “well” or accurately.) Thus, a person who, as in the game of charades, pretends to put on a jacket that does not exist or feigns being ill is

acting. Acting can be said to exist in the smallest and simplest action that involves pretense (Kirby, 1972: 6).

Acting can also be emotional, without the physical characteristics mentioned above. The performers may be themselves, not portraying a character, and not pretending to be in some imaginary or represented place, where the acting exists only in their emotional presentation. Kirby (1972, 6) provides a “real-life” example, where a person may be considered to be acting, not because they are pretending to be someone they are not, but because they energetically project ideas, emotions and elements of their personality because they seem to be aware of an audience. Kirby (1972: 9) calls the form of acting where either the physical or emotional aspects are used “simple acting”, and the form where more and more elements are incorporated “complex acting.” This is the last part on the “acting” extreme of Kirby’s “not-acting” to “acting” continuum.

Schechner (2020: 120) sums up acting on stage as an instance at which a performer is “taken over” by a character while performance as not playing anyone else but oneself. He explains performance more clearly by stating that there is being, doing, and showing doing. Performance takes place in both doing and showing doing (Schechner, 2020: 4). “The more clearly you show what you are doing, the more obviously you are performing (Schechner, 2020: 4).” The moment a performer does something to simulate, represent or impersonate, he/she move from performance to acting (Kirby, 1972: 6).

Lavender (2021: 121) posits that Stanislavski’s System is useful for acting, as opposed to performance, since it applies to the representation of a character derived

from a play text. This is also true of Adler's technique, which emphasises imagination in the "*Given Circumstances*" provided by the play text (Hodge, 2001: 139).

Strasberg focuses on "*Affective Memory*", which requires actors to dig into their memories and use an analogous emotion required by the play text (Hodge, 2001: 144), while Meisner discards notions of the Moscow Art Theatre of character creation and text analysis for his "repetition" and "reality of doing" exercises and scene work (Gordon, 2010: 181-183). Meisner wanted his actors to focus on "everyday reality" as opposed to imitative character clichés or theory-based intellectualism (Gordon, 2010: 176). It is this use of the actor's "real" emotion in the imaginary world of the character and putting "everyday reality" on stage that makes Method acting "acting" rather than "not-acting" or performance. From this assertion, it can be argued that Method acting, as inspired by Stanislavski's System, is, from its inception, a technique designed for acting rather than performance. This makes it worthwhile to interrogate if Method acting, as informed by Stanislavski's System, has been adopted, and if so, how it has been adapted in South African theatre, which is historically rooted in performance.

### **The origin of Method acting, as informed by Stanislavski's System**

This section looks at the origin of Method acting to illustrate how it is informed by the Stanislavski System. The origin of Method acting can be traced back to 1897 in Russia, where actor, director and teacher, Stanislavski, in his body of work, the *System*, sought to solve what he identified as the "problems of acting". Stanislavski made an important connection between the body and mind, asking questions such as:



“What is the physiological aspect of the role? What is the psychic aspect of the role?... What are the differences between ‘character’ acting and ‘personality’ acting? How could actors stimulate their imaginations and therefore their ‘creative will’? And how do actors ‘get inside’ the director’s ideas?... When does an actor ‘become’ the character? And how does the actor observe life and then turn those observations into ‘creative will’, or ‘inspiration’?” (Merlin, 2003: 2-6).

Stanislavski founded the Moscow Art Theatre in response to the state of theatre at the time, which he described as “hopeless, with clichéd traditions and ham acting” (Sawoski, 2013: 3). Russian and world theatre at the time was actor-driven, with a repertoire predominated by melodrama, with each performer specialising in a particular “type”; e.g., the “romantic lover” or the “bumbling father” etc. This “type” was called an *employ* (Merlin, 2003: 6). Audiences grew familiar with certain *emplois* which had become a blueprint for any role the actor played, and they expected it every time the actor performed a role, regardless of the play. The result of this was the development of the “star” system, under which a so-called “star” actor would be called back to the stage by the audience after his or her exit to receive wild applause (Merlin, 2003: 7).

Stanislavski abandoned the usual four-to-five-week rehearsal schedule of the commercial theatre at the time and introduced preparations that sometimes ran up to a year in advance, focusing on “inner technique”, where his actors displayed “psychological depth” and searched for “inner truth” as opposed to the audience-obsessed “star” actors of the time (Gordon, 2010: 5). Stanislavski also borrowed from psychology, adopting French psychologist, Théodule-Armand Ribot’s written work on *Affective Memory*, which Stanislavski termed *Emotion Memory*. Ribot’s

work stated that memories of past emotional experiences remain imprinted in the brain, but in a suppressed or acutely buried state, and can be stimulated through an emotional recall of the event (Gordon, 2010: 10).

### **Controversy with Emotion Memory**

Emotion Memory requires that an actor recreate an event from the distant past to generate the emotion experienced at that particular time in order to use that emotion in the current acting situation to “fill” the character with “human depth” (Sawoski, 2013: 20). Stanislavski believed that as opposed to a recent event, an event from a distant past had gone through a time “filter” which transforms the expressed emotions into a “poetic” reflection of life’s experiences. This “remembered” emotion ensures that an actor does not live a “real” life on stage but a “true”<sup>4</sup> stage experience. The emotion would then need to be brought out at the exact moment when required on stage. Consciously aligning the experiences and emotions of the characters with their own, Moscow Art Theatre actors appeared to “live” on stage and soon became known for Stanislavski’s *“psychological realism”* (Gordon, 2010: 10). Although outwardly successful, it was commonly held that the technique was losing integrity because of Emotion Memory, which was believed to be exhausting for actors, producing negative results, such as tension and hysteria, with the mind often closing up (Sawoski, 2013: 20).

Stanislavski shifted his focus away from the mind and explored other ways of getting into character. He concluded that the body was a better instrument that would

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<sup>4</sup> A “true” stage experience refers to the notion of living truthfully under imaginary circumstances, as compared to real life, which is unplanned and unpredictable. An onstage emotion can be controlled and brought about at the required time.

respond to an actor's commands without the fickleness of emotion or inhibitions of intellect (this is expanded on in Chapter 2). To investigate the adoption and adaptation Method acting, informed by Stanislavski's System, in the South African theatre, it is essential to first look at how the technique was adopted and adapted in the American theatre.

### **From Russia to America**

In 1923 Stanislavski and his Moscow Art theatre actors went on a tour of America, a trip which, as Hirsch (1984: 51) asserts, was to revolutionise American theatre and film<sup>5</sup> for generations to come. The tour happened at a time when American theatre was still considered tradition-bound, like the Nineteenth-century Russian theatre that Stanislavski had moved away from. What the Americans had was economic power and technical knowhow – they could afford elaborate sets, costumes, and lighting that the Russians could not afford. American theatre at the time still espoused the “star” system, which Stanislavski had done away with. What they did not have, which the Moscow Art Theatre had, was a system of acting, a repertory of actors who had the benefit of similar training, years of experience in working together, a repertoire of distinguished plays to draw from, and mutual aims and ideals (Hirsch, 1984: 52).

One of the things that impressed both American reviewers and audiences was the exceptionally natural way that the Russian actors portrayed a role. Stanislavski echoed Boleslavski's sentiments when he suggested that his ideals would need to be translated into the idiom of American culture in order to survive (Carnicke, 2009:

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<sup>5</sup> Although in America Method acting is prominent in television and film, this study limits its focus to theatre in South Africa because this is the area in which I am trained and continue to work in.

44). When Stanislavski and his actors concluded their extended American tour in 1924, two actors; Richard Boleslavski and Maria Ouspenskaya remained behind, according to Hirsch (1984: 58), in response to pleas from the American theatre community to bring Stanislavski's "gospel" to America. However, Gordon (2010: 19) points out that although Boleslavski was Stanislavski's student and a member of the Moscow Art Theatre, by the time the Moscow Art Theatre tour occurred, Boleslavski had already been working in America, with the hopes of breaking into the successful American film industry. The American Laboratory Theatre was formed and Boleslavski, who was one of five trustees, was appointed to the position of Artistic Director (Gordon, 2010: 21). The aim of the Lab Theatre was to provide American actors who yearned for more than what the commercial American theatre at the time offered, a school that would encourage and develop native talent in theatre. The programme, which ran for a period of three years, offered to specially selected students, sought to provide more than mere technical skill; this played a significant role in translating Stanislavski's ideas to America (Hirsch, 1984: 59).

Boleslavski valued group training and emphasised the importance of giving his students all the benefits of a collective "method", the first result of which was a play, staged ten months after working with the students, first in class, then in a workshop lab, and then in front of a paying audience, among which was Lee Strasberg. It was a performance that Strasberg would often refer to later in his sessions at the Actors Studio, a performance that also inspired Stella Adler to enrol in the Lab Theatre (Hirsch, 1984: 60-61). Strasberg attended the Lab Theatre classes in 1925 and kept a diary in which he recorded his impressions. Gordon (2010: 28) points out that both Boleslavski and Ouspenskaya stressed Affective Memory as one of the main points

of Stanislavski's System during this time. In 1933, Boleslavski published a summation of his popular lectures, which he titled "*Acting: The First Six Lessons*". Apart from Stanislavski's reference to his work in his translated autobiography, "*My Life in Art*", Boleslavski's book was the first English text focusing on elements of Stanislavski's System. Stanislavski's book, "*An Actor Prepares*" was not published until 1936. However, despite its critical acclaim, the American translation is purported to have left out a significant amount of the original book, and therefore does not accurately depict Stanislavski's work (Carnicke, 2009: 76).

Among the six lessons in Boleslavski's book was *Memory of Emotion*, which was essentially Boleslavski's take on Stanislavski's *Emotion Memory*, an element which was to later provide the foundation for Strasberg's *Affective Memory* (Hirsch, 1984: 64). Although Boleslavski stressed the importance of the Lab to be truly American, it never ceased to look like a Russian import, partly because it continued to stage foreign plays, and the students were being trained by Russians. Failing to live up to its American ideals, the Lab Theatre eventually closed down and Boleslavski left for Hollywood where he became a film director.

After the closure of the Lab Theatre, Harold Clurman, who had been impressed by the Moscow Art Theatre actors, and later attended Boleslavski's lectures, began hosting open lectures in his hotel room, where he would lay out his ideas for a truly American theatre that would present good, new plays that best underscored the American temperament of the day, performed by actors united by training and values. Due to the growing number of attendees, the meetings were then moved to a larger apartment, and later to a hall. To formalise the lectures, in 1931, Clurman co-founded the Group Theatre with two friends, Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg,

and all three of them became directors. Clurman became the spokesperson for the Group Theatre while Strasberg, because of his immense interest in the problems of acting and interpreting Stanislavski's System, was tasked with actor training and directing, and Sheryl Crawford took the job of administration and fundraising (Hirsch, 1984: 72). Among their actors were Sanford Meisner and Stella Adler.

Because Strasberg and his Group Theatre actors were trying out a "new System", they were willing to discard everything they had learnt and start from scratch in order to find an "American System" (Hirsch, 1984: 74). This was a major step in the Americanisation of Stanislavski's System.

Hirsch (1984: 75-76) posits that because Strasberg's attendance at the Lab Theatre was at the time during which Boleslavski and Ouspenskaya placed more emphasis on *Memory of Emotion*, this element became the cornerstone of Strasberg's teachings. Due to raging debate about Strasberg's Affective Memory and the interpretation versus misinterpretation of Stanislavski's System, the Group Theatre suffered a premature demise, which led to Adler and Meisner forming their own studios where they taught their own versions of Method acting, modelled on their own interpretation of Stanislavski's System. Strasberg went on to teach his Method at the Actors Studio. This saw the Stanislavski System evolve from a modest Russian acting technique into a popular American technique that spread to the rest of world in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with the help of famous Hollywood actors.

### **Acting in South Africa**

Identifying the exact genesis of acting in South Africa is complex, mainly because knowledge about precolonial African performance tradition is sparse and mostly

anecdotal, as opposed to the history of Russian and American theatre, which is documented widely in writing. However, this study will show that while African theatre tradition is rooted in performance, contemporary South African theatre bears some resemblance to American theatre, which is rooted in acting, while retaining some performative influences of traditional African theatre. This makes it all the more important to interrogate how American theatre actors adopted and adapted the Stanislavski System into Method acting, and the challenges they encountered (Chapter 2) before interrogating the adoption and adaptation of Method Acting, as informed by Stanislavski's System, by South African theatre actors (Chapter 5).

Hauptfleisch (1997: 12) divides the history of South African theatre into three periods; pre-colonial (before 1652), colonial (1652 to 1990), and post-colonial (1990 and beyond). Some of the precolonial songs and enacted narratives, such as the Xhosa *intsomi* and the Zulu *inganekwane* are still adapted and performed by actors and general people today (Steadman, 2008: 26), hence the hybrid nature of contemporary South African theatre. Another example of the hybrid nature of post-colonial South African theatre can be seen in *The Story I am About to Tell* (van Heerden, 2008: 101), a play inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which combined a script with some actors playing fictional characters while other people recounted their real-life experiences "without being filtered through a playwright's sensibilities." (van Heerden, 2008: 101).

Unlike in Europe and America, theatre in Africa varies from one part of the continent to another, partly because there are many different local languages in use, and local traditions do not necessarily travel well from one part of Africa to another. With

eleven official languages, nine<sup>6</sup> of which are spoken by indigenous black people with different cultures, traditions, and idiosyncrasies, it would not be accurate to generalise about acting in South Africa. However, there are common traits in indigenous African performances, such as the use of other “languages” other than the spoken word, such as drumming and dance, which often communicate better to the African audience than words do. Music, song, and dance in indigenous African performance have a communal “character” which the audience respond to by clapping in rhythm, singing refrains, or repeating phrases – another tradition that makes the African theatre lean more towards performance than acting. The different periods of South African theatre are further explored in Chapter 3. Although the ten participants observed were black and spoke different indigenous South African languages as their mother tongue, language was not the focus of the study and therefore focus is not placed on their first languages as such. Reference to language is only made to highlight other “languages” which are a common trait to black Africans regardless of their spoken language.

## **Motivation and Rationale**

### **Context of the study**

Method acting, as informed by Stanislavski’s System, is practised the world over. But, unlike American actors, who adapted this originally Russian technique to fit an American context, there is no documented South African interpretation, adaptation of, or approach to Method acting, as informed by the Stanislavski System.

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<sup>6</sup> The focus of this chapter is on traditional African theatre, which excludes English and Afrikaans theatre because these forms of theatre in South Africa are influence by the European theatre.



Stanislavski's acting students had the Moscow Art Theatre, at which they were provided in-depth training on the Stanislavski System. American acting students have a variety of Method acting studios to choose from, all dedicated to the in-depth training of a particular American version of Method acting, such as the Stella Adler Studio of Acting, the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute, and the Sanford Meisner Centre. However, the same cannot be said of the teaching and learning of Method acting in South Africa. In my own experience as a Drama graduate with eleven years' experience as a theatre practitioner, I have observed acting students and practising actors learn Method acting directly from textbooks, teachers, or indirectly from other techniques informed by the Stanislavski System and practising it without first adapting the technique to a South African socio-cultural context, like the American actors did.

The need for this study stemmed from the challenges I faced in 2013 as a newly graduated actor venturing into professional theatre, where, despite using the Stanislavski System, I struggled to sustain a truthful character portrayal on consecutive performances. As a university graduate with a B Tech in Drama, I had been equipped with theoretic knowledge and basic practical training on various acting techniques, including the Stanislavski System, which I had chosen as the approach to employ in my preparation and execution of a role. The preparation/rehearsal phase of the work on a role presented minimal to no challenges to me. However, I found my onstage portrayal of the role to be erratic, with natural, motivated, and emotionally engaging performances on some nights, followed by detached and self-conscious presentation on other nights. My frustration grew into curiosity when I discovered that this is a common challenge for my peers.

Since the South African acting industry is made up of not only formally trained actors but an array of performers, some of whom learned acting through practice (such as in community theatre) without the benefit of academic knowledge, there were occasions where I encountered compelling actors who, upon articulation of their approach to a role, exhibited elements of Method acting, although they were never formally trained in the technique. This observation raised two questions:

1. How are actors with no formal training able to deliver truthful and compelling character portrayal, exhibiting elements of Method acting, as informed by the Stanislavski System without having studied Method acting or the Stanislavski System?

2. Is there a way to arrive at Method acting, as informed by the Stanislavski System without following the Euro-American<sup>7</sup> approach?

## **Research Problem**

Method acting, as informed by the Stanislavski System, is a Euro-American approach to acting that is the result of Stanislavski's work in Russia adapted to an American context. Method acting, as informed by the Stanislavski system is often included in actor-training and is aimed at enabling the actor to convey truthfulness on

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<sup>7</sup> This refers to the Russian origin of the American Method acting technique as informed by Stanislavski's System.

stage. Theatre performance in South Africa is traditionally rooted in performative portrayal, which gives rise to the following questions:

## **Research Questions**

- Is Method acting adopted in South African theatre?
- If so, how is Method acting adapted to a South African context?

## **Aims**

The aims of this study are:

- To interrogate whether Method acting, as informed by Stanislavski's System is adopted by theatre actors in south Africa.
- And if so, whether, and how, it has been adapted.

The Sub-Aims of this study are to:

- Locate and define what constitutes Method acting, and how it is informed by Stanislavski's System.
- Study the process taken by ten South African theatre actors in the preparation and execution of a role.
- Consider if and how the ten participants' processes include elements of Method acting, as informed by the Stanislavski System in the rehearsal and performance process.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

To focus the scope of this study, a purposively selected sample of ten actors in Pretoria and Johannesburg were selected to participate in the study. Since the study

required not only thorough knowledge of the topic from the researcher but also a certain level of understanding of acting techniques from the participants, the study limited itself to trained and experienced actors<sup>8</sup>.

## **Participants**

From the ten selected actors, five actors were male and five female. Furthermore, six actors received university training while four were trained informally at various theatres in Gauteng. All participants have professional theatre acting experience, having performed in mainstream theatre productions for three years and above. Due to these specific requirements, a random sample would not have been appropriate for this study. Marshall (1996: 523) compares a random sampling choice for qualitative research to asking a random passer-by for advice on how to fix a broken car, rather than asking a mechanic – “the former might have a good stab, but asking the latter is likely to be more productive” (Marshall, 1996: 523). Because Method acting, as informed by Stanislavski is designed to help actors achieve a truthful portrayal of character on stage, theatre actors who seemed to “live” their characters onstage during the observation phase of the study were approached for an interview. A request for the interview was made to the participants through direct approach after a performance.

## **Sampling**

Data was collected from the purposively selected sample of ten theatre actors through one-on-one, open-ended interviews. Marshall (1996: 523) decries the

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<sup>8</sup> Actors trained either formally in educational institutions or informally in community theatres, with professional onstage experience.

tendency of qualitative researchers to overlook the importance of studying small samples, which is related to the misconception that generalisability is the ultimate goal of all good research. Although there is no specified size of a sample for this type of study, my choice of size was informed by Marshall's (1996: 523) declaration that an appropriate size for a qualitative study is one that answers the research questions. As opposed to probability sampling, non-probability sampling was a better suited method to accurately answer the research questions the study raised. Probability sampling, according to Babbie & Mouton (2012: 166), involves the selection of a random sample from a list containing names of everyone in the population a researcher is interested in studying. This type of sampling is the primary method for selecting large-scale samples, such as political polls. Its main difference with non-probability sampling is that non-probability sampling is not random. In non-probability sampling, "the members of the population will not have an equal chance of being selected, and in many cases, there will be members of the population who have no chance of being selected" (statisticssolution.com).

Although non-probability sampling is mainly employed in small-scale social research, there are other factors other than size that influence the choice of this type of sampling. In fact, Babbie & Mouton (2012: 166) point out, this type of sampling can also be employed in large-scale research cases where probability sampling cannot be used:

Suppose you wanted to study homelessness: there is no list of all homeless people, nor are you likely to draw up such a list. Moreover, as you'll see, there are times when probability sampling wouldn't be appropriate even if it were

possible. Many such situations call for non-probability sampling (Babbie & Mouton, 2012: 166).

Non-probability sampling, as Babbie & Mouton (2012: 166) point out, is further divided into four methods:

- *Reliance on available subjects* – e.g., stopping people at a street corner or other location. Despite its risks, this method of sampling remains popular, perhaps because of the ease and economy associated with it. Babbie & Mouton argue that this method is justified only if the researcher wants to study characteristics of people passing the sampling point at specific times, or if less risky sampling methods are not feasible.
- *Snowball sampling* – considered to be a form of accidental sampling. This method is most commonly used in qualitative field research where members of a special population are difficult to locate. In this type of sampling, a researcher collects data on a few members of the population that he/she can locate, and then ask these individuals for information needed to locate other members of that population.
- *Quota sampling* – this sampling method addresses issues of representativeness. The researcher is required to draw a matrix/table, describing the characteristics of the target population, such as gender, age, education, ethnicity etc. Once this is done, the researcher collects data from participants that have characteristics of a given cell in the matrix. “All the people in a given cell are then assigned a weight appropriate to their portion of the total population” (Babbie & Mouton, 2012: 167).

- *Purposive or judgemental sampling* – Babble & Mouton (2012: 166) contend that sometimes it is appropriate for a researcher to select a sample on the basis of his/her own knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of the research aims. It is in such instances where purposive/judgemental sampling would be best-suitable, with the researcher's judgement guided by the purpose of the study.

As Babbie & Mouton (2012: 166) point out, in some instances, one may wish to study a small subset of a larger population in which many members of the subset are easily identified but the enumeration of all of them would be nearly impossible. This was the case with this study; not only would an attempt to enumerate all theatre actors in Gauteng have been an exercise in futility but, unlike with a quantitative study, it would also not have served the purpose of the study any better than a small, purposively selected subset of the larger population. Of the above-mentioned divisions of non-probability sampling, this study fell under snowball sampling as some of the participants led me to other participants.

### **The Open-ended Interview**

The interviews were one-on-one and conversational, conducted in a relaxed, non-formal style, in settings such as theatres, restaurants, participants' homes, and university campus. The interviews were guided by *phenomenology*, which falls under the Interpretivist/Constructivist research paradigm, the main goal of which is to understand the subjective world of human experience. Moustakas (1994: 114) describes the phenomenological investigation as a process that involves a long, informal, and interactive interview that utilises open-ended questions. The

phenomenological interview begins with a social conversation, or a brief activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere (Moustakas, 1994: 114). Although for this study, interview questions that would best enlist a comprehensive account of the participants' experience of the topic were formulated beforehand, Moustakas (1994: 114) advises that these may be varied, altered, or not used at all when a participant shares the full story of his/her experience of the phenomenon. This was the case with some of the research participants, especially when a participant, in his/her response to one question, provides a comprehensive response that covers other questions yet to be asked, or not asked at all.

To keep the conversational and casual flow of the interview, a voice recorder was used – as opposed to manual notetaking. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews (see Addendum) were generated thereafter and then analysed using Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori's guide on the procedures of analysing talk and text. Denzin & Lincoln (2011: 529) state two much used but distinctively different methods of gathering empirical data in qualitative research; the interview and "naturally occurring" materials. The latter refers to pre-existing materials such as tape recordings of mundane interactions and written texts, which put the researcher in direct contact with the objects of his/her research because the data is uninitiated and thus not influenced by the researcher. Despite this, Denzin & Lincoln (2011: 529) point out that most qualitative research is based on interviews, for good reason:

By using interviews, the researcher can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes. The interview is also a very convenient way of overcoming distances



both in space and in time; past events or faraway experiences can be studied by interviewing people who took part in them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 529).

The open-ended interview was identified as the best suitable method of inquiry to employ as it had better odds of enlisting more diverse and richer experience-based responses than naturally occurring materials. As opposed to a closed-ended interview, open-ended questions allow the respondents to provide their own subjective responses. Closed-ended questions only provide the respondent with a choice between one answer or the other, or a multiple choice of preselected answers. Babbie & Mouton (2012: 233) contend however, that both methods have advantages and disadvantages; closed-ended questions are popular as they provide a greater uniformity of responses and thus are easily processed. However, the shortcoming of this type of questioning is that in constructing the questions and structuring possible responses, the researcher may overlook some important responses (Babbie & Mouton, 2012: 234). One shortcoming of open-ended questions is that the analysis of the responses relies on the researcher's own interpretation, which might open itself to misinterpretation or bias.

To minimise bias, I used the method of "bracketing", a phenomenological data analysis device that requires a researcher to set aside his/her preconceptions and beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation, and "reduction", which, as Giorgi (2008: 4) explains, requires that full attention is given to the phenomenon by the researcher taking the phenomenon as something that is presenting itself to him/her, but does not presume that the phenomenon really exists as it is appearing. On formulating interview questions, Bickman & Rog (2009: 236) caution against simply

translating research questions into interview questions as these have distinct purposes:

...your interview questions should be judged not by whether they can be logically derived from your research questions, but by whether they provide the *data* that will contribute to answering these questions, an issue that may require pilot testing a variety of questions or actually conducting a significant number of interviews. You need to anticipate, as best as you can, how particular interview questions or other data collection strategies will actually work in practice (Bickman & Rog, 2009: 236).

I generated Interview questions, guided by elements of the systematic approach to Stanislavski's System. The purpose of the interview was to understand the approach taken by each participant, from the introduction, to preparation, rehearsal, and onstage portrayal of a role. The questions served mainly to give direction to the interview rather than to solicit specific predefined answers, therefore participants were allowed the leeway when they gave circumlocutory answers. In such cases, a supplementary question or simplified version of the initial question was posed.

### **Duration**

Guided by the list of questions, the minimum amount of time allocated for each interview was 30 minutes. The actual interviews lasted between 35 and 60 minutes. The entire process, from attending theatre performances, observing and approaching potential participants, and conducting interviews lasted for a period of 11 months.

## Data Analysis

Because with a study in the Interpretivist paradigm, the researcher makes meaning of the data through his/her own cognitive processing of data, guided by his/her interactions with participants (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017: 33), data analysis was conducted after listening to the audio-recordings of the interviews and reading the verbatim transcriptions. However, the analysis was not haphazard. A table, which includes both psychological and physical aspects of Method acting, as informed by Stanislavski's System (Chapter 5) was developed and used for the analysis of the data.

## Ethical Considerations

Steps were taken to ensure that codes of ethics were observed. All the participants were;

- over the legal age of consent (18).
- well informed about all the aspects that relate to their participation in the study.
- made aware of their right to withdraw their participation and rescind their consent at any stage of the study without suffering any prejudice.

More ethical considerations observed and measures of ensuring validity were:

- *Informed Consent* – a detailed *Informed Consent* document was sent to the participants prior to their agreeing to take part in the research. As Denzin & Lincoln (2011: 65) declare, research participants have the right to be informed about the nature and consequences of experiments they are asked

to partake in. I also ensured that the participants agreed voluntarily to partake in the study without any form of coercion.

- *Honesty* – Denzin & Lincoln (2011: 65) mention that social science codes of ethics strictly oppose deception of any kind, and that deliberate misrepresentation cannot be justified. However, they caution against such a blanket application, especially for ethical constructs outside the scientific realm, such as psychological experimentation and medical research, where some information cannot be obtained without at least some form of deception by omission. There was no need for deception, even by omission, in this study.
- *Privacy and confidentiality* – Denzin & Lincoln (2011: 66) insist that a researcher ought to safeguard and protect not only people's identities, but those of research locations too, in order to avoid unwanted exposure. Although geographical locations where the study was conducted are not concealed, to maintain privacy and confidentiality, strict care was taken to avoid exposing the research participants' identities and that of their fellow cast mates and directors. Instead of their names, the participants are referred to as P1, P2, P3 up to 10, and their colleagues only referred to with their titles in the productions, such as "the director", "co-actor" etc. Names of characters were also concealed to eliminate any threat to the anonymity of the research participants.
- *Accuracy* – as precaution against inaccurate, misleading, or contrived analysis and presentation of the data, which is not only unscientific but also unethical, the interviews with each participant were audio recorded, the full transcripts of which are provided in the Addendum. However, sensitive and/or

deeply personal information that did not serve the purpose of the study was redacted from the transcripts. A backup of the full audio interviews is available on request.

## **Conclusion and Outline of Chapters**

This chapter provided the historical background of Method acting and discusses how it developed from Stanislavski's System. This chapter also demonstrated the difference between acting and performing. To put the study into context, Chapter 1 also looked at the adoption and adaptation of Stanislavski's System in America. This chapter further outlined the aims and sub-aims of this study. Furthermore, this chapter set out the research design and methodology the study employed in the collection of data, sampling and analysis.

- Chapter 2 explores different interpretations and perspectives on Stanislavski's System. This chapter also explores the problems brought about by the translation and transliteration of Stanislavski's work from Russian to English in America. Furthermore, this chapter looks at three American practitioners, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner, whose Method acting techniques, although inspired by Stanislavski's System, differ in their approach to acting.
- Chapter 3 explores acting in South Africa, looking at three historical eras: Pre-Colonial, Colonial, and Post-Colonial. This chapter also explores how indigenous South African theatre, which is traditionally rooted in performance, developed into a hybrid comprised of part-acting and part-performance in contemporary times.

- Chapter 4 takes an in-depth look into the Stanislavski System and identifies six prominent elements common in both the System and Method acting. From these elements, two tables of analysis, one dealing with the adoption of Method acting, and the other dealing with the adaptation, are developed and used to identify elements of Method acting in the approach to a role of ten South African theatre actors in Chapter 5.
- Chapter 5 investigates elements of Method acting in the approach adopted by ten South African theatre actors in their approach to a role, from rehearsal to onstage portrayal. This chapter begins by outlining the data collection process and explains how the data analysis tables were developed. Further, in this chapter, responses from the ten research participants, acquired during an open-ended interview, are provided, as far as they align with the points on the tables of analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings.
- Chapter 6 provides a recap of the chapters, identifies limitations of the study, and makes recommendations for future research. This chapter concludes by looking at whether the aims and objectives of the study have been met.

## CHAPTER 2

### Introduction

To adequately explore how Method acting, as informed by the Stanislavski System has been adopted and adapted in South African theatre, it is important to first explore how the technique was adopted and adapted in America as this has been well documented. This chapter explores the different approaches which were applied in the adoption and adaptation of the Stanislavski System into Method acting by three American theatre practitioners: Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner. This chapter further explores the evolution of the Stanislavski System and its interpretation from the perspective of science, and the problems that arose in the translation of Stanislavski's texts from Russian to English. Furthermore, this chapter explores the disconnect between Method acting's psychological aspects and the Stanislavski System's psychophysical approach.

### Different perspectives on the Stanislavski System

Jean Benedetti (2008: xv), who wrote *An Actor's Work*, a contemporary translation of Stanislavski's two books, *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*, points out that Since its inception in 1906 in Russia, the Stanislavski System has undergone significant changes, some of which were initiated by Stanislavski himself, some by his students and disciples, while others came about as a consequence of translation and transliteration from Russian to English when the System was being introduced and adapted to the western world. The writer of the foreword in *An Actor's Work*, Declan Donnellan (Benedetti, 2008: xi) posits that Stanislavski wrote in a deceptively simple style, which has contributed to the wide misunderstanding of his teachings

and the appropriation of his work. Donnellan cautions that Stanislavski constantly reacted to the circumstances that surrounded him, which meant that by the time his students completed their training, they left the Moscow Art Theatre with a different memory of Stanislavski's teachings, depending on the given time that each of them attended his lectures (Benedetti, 2008: xi-xii). This explains why Stanislavski's disciples often disagree on certain elements of his System. These disagreements can be attributed to the fact that numerous of Stanislavski's students were assimilating his System at different stages of its formation, unaware that the technique was undergoing constant changes during its development (Moore, 1984: 6). The fact that Stanislavski's own students cannot agree on the fundamentals of his technique often leads to confusion and more debate about what exactly constitutes Method acting.

### **Science vs Intuition**

From its early days at the Moscow Art Theatre to its adoption and adaptation in America, the Stanislavski System has had multiple interpretations and analyses, one of which is from a scientific perspective. However, according to Benedetti (2008: xxiv), Stanislavski made it clear that his System has no pretensions to be scientific, and he cautioned actors against using scientific means when creating a role, arguing that acting is, above all, intuitive because it comes from subconscious feelings and the actor's instincts. It must be pointed out however that, although Stanislavski was unequivocal about his contempt for a scientific interpretation of acting, he was under no illusions about the possibility of his work undergoing criticism, both scientific or non-scientific, and he welcomed such, as shown below:



If my book influences future generations and attracts some attention, it will be subject to rigorous criticism both scientific and non-scientific. That is to be welcomed because criticism by intelligent professionals can clarify many misunderstandings and gaps in our technique. It will reveal and explain the deficiencies of my book (Benedetti, 2008: xxiv).

Moore (1984: 6) submits that that the Stanislavski System is scientific, but not any other science, it is the science of the theatre. Moore's alignment of the Stanislavski System to science is used comparatively rather than equivalently. Like science, the Stanislavski System does not stand still but has unlimited possibilities for experimentation and discovery. Moore compares the continuous testing of different elements and the evolution of the System to the process of testing new chemicals in a laboratory. Although it is agreed that there was no system that taught actors inner technique before Stanislavski, Moore (1984: 8) is against calling the System a Russian method, because what Stanislavski discovered was scientific and based on universal laws of nature for human behaviour which, according to Moore, are obligatory for all people. However, Boleslavski's warning that Stanislavski's System should not be copied directly to America because it is a foreign technique (Hirsch, 1984: 59), and the subsequent adaptations of the System into different American Methods indicate the need for the technique to be adapted. Stanislavski himself developed the System in response to the state of Russian theatre at the time (Sawoski, 2013: 3), not to acting in general.

Pitches (2006: 1) argues that in his autobiography, *My Life in Art*, contrary to his reservations about the use of scientific means for acting, and the connection thereof with his System, Stanislavski appealed to science to validate his ideas. Pitches

(2006: 2) attributes this discrepancy to one of two reasons; either Stanislavski changed his mind, as he was known to often do, or he held different views to suit his particular position at different points. Attempting to find one definitive version of Stanislavski's System is a difficult task because different versions of his work have been presented over the course of his career. The question becomes, which version is the most reliable? This question, Pitches (2006: 5) points out, is further problematised by the various published books written by Stanislavski's former students. Stanislavski jealously guarded against the dissemination of his System until later in his career, which led to people sharing his teachings through word-of-mouth, the result of which was a separation of Stanislavski's theory from its practice, since those who received the System orally missed out on the best method of learning the System, through a practical workshop. In an aim to prove the relationship between science and the Stanislavski System, Pitches (2006: 12) observes that the experimental approach that Stanislavski adopted in the early years of his System, especially after he encountered Ribot's theories on Affective Memory<sup>9</sup>, which was rooted in psychology, was in its nature scientific.

Pitches (2006: 17) compares Stanislavski's approach of experimentation and observation, as well as his self-criticism and criticism of his students in his "laboratory" to that of scientists such as Isaac Newton. Although Stanislavski uses colloquial language and avoids scientific terms, Pitches (2006: 31) suggests that Stanislavski's constant allusion to acting as "motion" and to the actor as an "apparatus" can be compared to Newton's first law of motion, known as the law of

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<sup>9</sup> Stanislavski's earlier work was influenced by French Psychologist Theodule Armand Ribot's theories on Affective Memory, which Stanislavski renamed Emotion Memory. Strasberg renamed the element back to Affective Memory in his Method.

inertia, which states that a body will continue in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a straight line, unless it is compelled to change that state by a force exerted upon it. Pitches (2006: 31) compares the actor to a body in motion, initiated by a force (motivation), which is subject to external forces of inertia (the problem of the play). Pitches argues that for each new performance, the actor must readdress these tasks and seek to resolve the problems:

It should be clear from this that Stanislavsky's view of action as a series of obstacles to be overcome, far from owing a debt to Aristotle is essentially a Newtonian perspective, a point that is given further weight by the mechanistic language used by Stanislavski in his journals (Pitches, 2006: 31).

Although Boleslavski (Hirsch, 1984: 59) was unequivocal that American actors could not be like the Moscow Art Theatre actors by simply studying Stanislavsky's System because that would be tantamount to imposing a foreign technique on them, Moore (1984: 9) argues that since it is a scientific technique, the Stanislavski System is universal and suitable to all actors, regardless of their nationality or the era in which they live. Moore is therefore against the adaptation of Stanislavski's System to an American or other context:

The title that Stanislavski gave to his system – “The Elementary Grammar of Dramatic Arts” – emphasizes the universality of the laws for any actor building any character in any play. “What I write does not refer to one epoch and its people, but to the organic nature of artists of all nationalities and of all epochs,” he said. The system therefore cannot be called a Russian phenomenon, and

does not have to be “adapted” to American actors or to actors of any nationality (Moore, 1984: 9).

Moore (1984: 9) stresses that through the System, not only do actors learn natural laws<sup>10</sup>, but also how to use them consciously in recreating human behaviour on stage, therefore there is no need for an adaptation of the technique. It is worth noting, however, that the first misrepresentation of the Stanislavski System in America did not occur through adaptation but through translation, as demonstrated in the next section.

### **Lost in translation**

As Stanislavski’s biographer, Benedetti (2008: xvi) makes an important observation about Stanislavski’s two books, *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*, which were written in English and published in America thirteen years apart. While for a long time these books were regarded as two volumes, Benedetti (2008: xvi) points out that Stanislavski’s original intention was in fact for a single volume that outlined a two-year training program in which an actor-in-training first learns in Part One the process by which the inner life of a character is created, followed in Part Two by the expression of the character in physical and technical terms – the result of which would be a unified, coherent psycho-physical technique. What was lost in translation, so to say, is this psycho-physical unity.

According to Benedetti (2008: xvi), Stanislavski’s first translator, Elizabeth Hapgood believed that the books were separate, and that Part Two was a revision of Part

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<sup>10</sup> Laws of nature intrinsic to every human, which govern reasoning and behaviour.

One. However, Benedetti does not mention *Creating a Role*, a third book translated by Hapgood, which focuses on the preparation required before performance (Hapgood, 2003: i). Benedetti argues that Stanislavski was opposed to dividing the book, fearing that the first volume, which deals with the psychological aspects of acting, would be taken as his complete System. If one considers what happened when the System spread to America, Stanislavski's reservations on dividing the book into two were justified, and his fears did come true. American practitioners who read *An Actor Prepares* regarded the System as a purely psychological technique (Benedetti, 2008: xvi) while Stanislavski also emphasised physical and vocal training, and a detailed analysis of the script in *Building a Character*. In an effort to restore what he calls Stanislavski's original intention, that of a unified System, Benedetti has reconfigured the two volumes back into one. This division into two units, a book that was intended to be one, was according to Benedetti, a contributing factor in the widespread misconceptions about the System and Method acting. It also contributed immensely to the disproportionate focus on emotion and the psychological in Method acting techniques informed by Stanislavski's System in America, especially that of Lee Strasberg. According to Benedetti (2008: xx), Strasberg was aware of the differences between his technique and Stanislavski's, which was mainly on the role of Emotion Memory:

In the 'system' the primary emphasis is on action, interaction and the dramatic situation which result in feeling with Emotion Memory as a secondary, ancillary technique. In the Method, Emotion Memory is placed at the very centre; the actor consciously evokes personal feelings that correspond to the character, a technique which Stanislavski expressly rejected (Benedetti, 2008: xx).

Benedetti (2008: xx) also points out that while in the System each section of the play contains something the actor has to do, in Strasberg's Method each section contains something the actor has to feel, with little to no textual analysis. Despite Benedetti's proclamation of having restored Stanislavski's work back to its original form, it cannot be denied that for decades theatre practitioners have regarded *An Actor Prepares* as the "Bible" of acting, even after the publication of *Building a Character* and *Creating a Role*. So, rather than solving the problem of different interpretations (or misinterpretations) of the Stanislavski System, Benedetti's book might also be regarded as yet another different interpretation of the Stanislavski System.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Stanislavski's System, as it was portrayed in *An Actor Prepares*, was believed to be exhausting for actors, producing negative results, such as tension and hysteria, with the mind often closing up, because of a disproportionate reliance on Emotion Memory (Sawoski, 2013: 20). Before exploring the Method of Physical Actions, which Stanislavski explored in *Building a Character*, the next section clarifies the confusion between Affective Memory and Emotion Memory.

### **Confusion between Affective Memory and Emotion Memory**

Affective Memory is a prominent element in Strasberg's Method acting technique, which continues to be the subject of much controversy and debate among practitioners and theorists of acting. It is an adaptation of Stanislavski's Emotion Memory. Sawoski (2013: 18) reveals that when Boleslavski and Ouspenskaya remained in America after the Moscow Art Theatre tour, they taught a version of Stanislavski's technique that had Emotion Memory as the prominent element. When

Lee Strasberg, Harold Clurman, and Cheryl Crawford formed the Group Theatre in 1930, they adopted Emotion Memory into their training programme, adapted it and changed its name back to “Affective Memory”, as it was called by French psychologist, Theodule Armand Ribot. Strasberg was to later develop his own technique, “*The Method*”, basing it primarily on Affective Memory. The term, “*The Method*” was yet another contributing factor to the misconception about Method acting as a whole being a purely psychological technique. Besides Affective Memory (Strasberg) and Emotion Memory (Stanislavski), there are other deceptively close similarities between elements of Lee Strasberg’s Method and the Stanislavski System, as will be shown further down.

Sawoski (2013: 22) is of the view that by the time *Building a Character* was eventually published in 1949, the damage had already been done in America, through *An Actor Prepares*, and that it was too late to effect any changes since, for a long time, much emphasis had been placed on internal work based on personal experience at the expense of physical technique. American theatre practitioners had already become entrenched in what Sawoski (2013: 22) calls a “bastardised” Method, which reduced all acting to the level of everyday life. Professor of Acting and Directing at the Yale School of Drama, David Chambers, quoted in Konijn (2000: 8) points out that in mainstream American acting, the enmeshing of the actor and character into a unified emotional complex is the primary, and often only goal. Sawoski argues that not all the “sins” committed in the name of Method training can be attributed only to Strasberg but rather to American Method practitioners who had been deprived of the psycho-physical unity of the Stanislavsky System. Sawoski (2013: 24) decries that in the American Method, the actor is expected to repeatedly

borrow emotions from his/her past, which makes the onstage portrayal lack sincerity. Rogers (2012: 424) is also critical of this assumption that actors have access to an “unlimited emotional bag of human experiences.” The actor is also expected to give a highly personalised performance, which puts emphasis on the actor’s life experience instead of that of the character in the imaginary circumstances of the play. Vocal and physical training, adds Sawoski (2013: 24), is considered unnecessary, leading to faulty speech patterns and mumbling.

The problems with Affective Memory are not unique to Strasberg’s Method and other American Methods. Stanislavski experienced similar challenges early on in the development of his System. This made him backtrack on his emphasis on Emotion Memory in favour of the *Method of Physical Actions* (Moore, 1984: 18-19), which, rather than relying on inner emotions of the actor to influence external expression, relies on external physical actions, which in turn evoke a truthful emotional response to the current given circumstances of the play.

### **The Method of Physical Actions**

One of the problems that Stanislavski encountered in his quest for a reliable technique of acting was the struggle to summon the subconscious. This refers to those inner human mechanisms not easily controlled at will, such as slowing down the heartbeat or dilating blood vessels, as opposed to external actions such as closing the eyes or raising a hand. Stanislavski also observed that an actor who had no personal reason for experiencing emotions, such as fear, compassion, joy or grief, could not easily summon these emotions for onstage expression because these belong to the subconscious. This problem seemed insoluble to Stanislavski



(Moore, 1984: 10) until one day while observing actors on stage, he realised that even though the actors had no real reason to experience these emotions on stage, they began to have true emotions when they became “inspired”. But the question remained; how could one attain this elusive “inspiration”? Stanislavski was convinced that a key to these complex emotions existed, and that this inner mechanism could be “turned on”. This coincided with Stanislavski’s dissatisfaction with his earlier experiments in Emotion Memory, which led him to seek an approach that would change the way emotion is triggered (Sawoski, 2013: 4).

In his quest, Stanislavski noticed that there was a gap between the actor’s internal preparation and the onstage portrayal of a role because actors spent a long time working on inner emotion, and by the time they have to create a physicality on stage, it is too late for a truthful, organic performance (Sawoski, 2013: 4). This was due to the fact that by the time the actors are ready for an onstage exploration, the emotional choices of the actors had already found a physicality which was likely to be too natural for the stage and not in sync with the physicality required by the given circumstances of the scene:

Stanislavski realized that the physical life and the psychological processes the actor underwent, needed to be explored simultaneously because they were *interdependent*. This led him to the simple, yet radical discovery that emotions could be stimulated through physical actions. This move from ‘Emotion memory’ to his ‘Method of Physical Actions’ was an important shift in actor training at the time (Sawoski, 2013: 4-5).

Method of Physical Actions proposes that a series of physical actions, arranged in a chronological order, will trigger the required emotion in an actor's performance (Sawoski, 2013: 5). The emotions referred to are those believed to be lying dormant in the subconscious, which cannot be directly accessed and brought to the surface at will, when needed. Stanislavski believed that an indirect means would need to be used to bring out these "elusive" emotions. He called this a "conscious" means to the "unconscious". Sawoski compares the Method of Physical Actions to a physical map, plotted out for the actor, which would arouse the unconscious emotions of the actor.

Moore argues that science has proven that the psychological life of a human is expressed through physical actions, and that humans need their bodies to communicate their inner experiences to others, therefore there cannot be an inner experience without an external expression because "science has confirmed that neural pathways connect our physical actions with the inner mechanism of emotions..." (Moore, 1984: 17). Moore's assertion is echoed by Lemmer (2010: 59), who posits that all acting is an embodied phenomenon, regardless of style. Munro (2018: 5) defines embodiment as the deliberate and mindful simultaneous "bodyminded" engagement of the self with both the inner and outer environments. Bester (2019: 19) defines "bodymindedness" as the holistic interplay of body and mind during the acting process. Joseph and Roach (1980: 316) stress the need for a fluid interdependence of body and mind, which means an actor needs to be able to place the body at the command of the mind, free from muscular tension. Joseph and Roach (1980: 319) highlight the importance for the indivisibility of the mind and body, which was the underlying premise of 19<sup>th</sup> Century psychologist and science philosopher, George Henry Lewes.

Zarrilli (2004: 655) explains embodiment by pointing out that the body that one calls his or her body is not a body or *the* body, but rather a process of embodying several bodies that one encounters in everyday experience as well as highly specialised, non-everyday or “extra-daily” bodies, such as in acting. Zarrilli identifies four distinctive “bodies”; the *Surface Body*, which one uses subjectively to engage the world around him or her. “This body encompasses the most prominent functions which shape our experiential field, such as the power of gaze (Zarrilli, 2004: 656).” The second body is the *Recessive Body*, which is visceral, inward and deals with inner depth. The third body is the *Aesthetic Inner Body*, which is subtle and is used by one to cultivate one’s relationship to the world. The fourth body is the *Aesthetic Outer Body*, which is constituted by actions or tasks in performance, such as playing a character in a drama. Zarrilli (2004: 657) further simplifies the four bodies as “*flesh*”, “*blood*”, “*breath*”, and “*appearance*.”

Stanislavski declared that an actor executing only physical movements on stage is in violation of the psycho-physical union, and his/her acting is mechanical and dead. Similarly, “if the actor does not express his thoughts and feelings physically, he is equally dead (Moore, 1984: 18).” Moore argues that just as it is impossible to build a character with the body only, it is equally impossible to express a character’s thoughts and emotions without the body, which is why it is important for an actor to have a trained body. Joseph and Roach (1980: 319) assert that Lewes indirectly influenced Stanislavski as Lewes’ views were assimilated by Ribot, whose direct influence on Stanislavski is well documented.

Stanislavski arrived at the Method of Physical Actions, which he believed was the solution to spontaneous behaviour onstage, by realising that to be natural, the actor

needed to be capable of grasping every onstage reaction in a psycho-physical way (Moore, 1984: 18-19). This was after Stanislavski realised that there was a break between the intellectual and physical preparation of a role by actors. To bridge this gap, Stanislavski resolved that the actor needed to include the physical life (his/her body) in the psychological process. But Stanislavski still encountered a challenge stirring his actors' emotions due to the scientific fact that emotions respond when there is a real reason, and the stage is not real. This was when Stanislavski experimented with sparking the actor's creativity by exploring character portrayal from the physical side of the psycho-physical process. This is how Stanislavski found a process that, according to Moore (1984: 18-19) led the actor from the "conscious to the subconscious" without fail, which Stanislavski termed the Method of Physical Actions. Contrary to Moore's assertion, Donnellan (Benedetti, 2008: vii) makes it clear that Stanislavski never sought to create a system that would never fail, because he knew that any fail-proof system is doomed to failure.

Stanislavski's intention with the Method of Physical Actions was not for an actor to go on stage with the intention of fulfilling a physical action, because that would be mechanical (Moore, 1984: 19), but rather for the actor's physical action on stage to have a psychological purpose. However, Stanislavski was in no way suggesting prescribed gestures for onstage expression of certain emotions because that would take spontaneity out of the theatre. Moore (1984: 19) argues that the process by which to achieve truthful physical action spontaneously is as complex as the process by which a music composer finds the correct harmonious sound for his chord and requires exhaustive experimentation through improvisation because as opposed to the expression of emotion in life, Stanislavski's Method of Physical Actions does

things in reverse. In life we experience an emotion and then the body expresses it – in the Method of Physical Actions, the actor achieves the experience of an emotion through a physical action first. It could be argued that Stanislavski's Method of Physical Actions and Strasberg's Affective Memory are two extremes of the body-mindedness continuum since Method of Physical Actions stimulates emotion through the body (Moore, 1984: 18-19) while Affective Memory stimulates an external expression through the subconscious. The next section explores Lee Strasberg's "The Method", particularly elements of the technique directly influenced by elements of Stanislavski's System.

### **Lee Strasberg and "The Method"**

Strasberg acknowledges the major part that Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre played in advancing American theatre, which in turn influenced his decision to become a professional actor. Strasberg (1987: 41) recalls the extended American tour of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1924, after which he decided to join a conventional theatre school called the Clare Tree Major School of the Theatre, where he was taught subjects such as speech, voice, and ballet. After the training, Strasberg felt the need to study further but had no knowledge of where to pursue this, until someone suggested the Laboratory Theatre, taught by Boleslavski and Ouspenskaya. Strasberg compares Stanislavski's findings on acting to those of Freud and Einstein in human behaviour and physics. He declares that the teachings of Stanislavski and his disciples changed not only his life, but that of the entire 20<sup>th</sup> Century theatre. Strasberg (1987: 42) admits that Stanislavski's work has frequently fallen victim to wild and erroneous discussions of actor training, and that just like the

Bible, Stanislavski's writings on acting can be quoted to any purpose. Even Strasberg himself has been accused of the misappropriation of Stanislavski's work.

To clear up what he calls prevailing misrepresentations on "The Method", Krasner (2000: 45) questions why Strasberg's Method has become the target of vitriolic attacks by American critics while Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner's Methods largely escaped criticism. Krasner advances an argument that since Strasberg's Method is equivalent to Stanislavski's earlier work, the attacks on his Method suggest that Stanislavski's early work is of little value compared to his later work. "Does the method of physical actions replace affective memory, or does it work in conjunction with it?" (Krasner, 2000: 45). Krasner refers to *Affective Memory*, *Private Moment*, and *Justification/Substitution*, which are the elements of Strasberg's Method regarded as a distortion of Stanislavski's *Emotion Memory*, *Public Solitude*, and the "Magic 'If,'" respectively. However, Krasner argues that the question should be whether Strasberg has helped facilitate the process for the dissemination of Stanislavski's ideas in America or hindered its flow, and whether a "pure" Stanislavskian Method is actually taught in America. Chambers (Konijn, 2000: 10) Argues that the success of Strasberg's students in film is due to the fact that film is a visual medium where short bursts of emotion and inward focus play best. But the same cannot be said of American theatre, which Chambers argues that Strasberg's plundering of Stanislavski's experiments has done damage to.

Krasner avers that where "The Method" deviates from Stanislavski's System, the divergence should be ascribed to Evgeny Vakhtangov, a former student of Stanislavski at the Moscow Art Theatre who founded his own studio theatre in 1920. According to Krasner (2000: 49), Vakhtangov declared that it was essential for an

actor to 'live' his/her own temperament onstage rather than the supposed temperament of the character, which meant that an actor needed to look inside themselves for inspiration and not from a conceived image.

### **The "Magic 'If" vs Justification**

Krasner (2000: 50) argues that Strasberg modified the "Magic 'if" in favour of Vakhtangov's formulated term, "justification", which requires the actor to "justify" his/her presence on stage by asking "how do I motivate myself or what would have to motivate me to behave as the character behaves?" (Krasner, 2000: 50). This is different from the "Magic 'if", which requires the actor to work with the Given Circumstances of the play. Below is an example of justification provided by Krasner:

If an actor is portraying Hamlet and the circumstances do not enable him to loathe Claudius in the appropriate way, he may draw on his own personal anger towards the actor playing Claudius, if such anger exists. If the actor must demonstrate great affection for another character but such feelings do not arise out of the playing of the scene, the performer may *substitute* the face of someone he does love onto the other actor (Krasner, 2000: 50).

Krasner (2000: 50-51) points out the distinction between the "Magic 'If" and "justification" as follows; while Stanislavski encourages the actor to delve into the Given Circumstances of the play, Vakhtangov and Strasberg encourage the actor to go outside of the play and into his/her own personal feelings and experience.

Strasberg (1987: 86) found that in its original form, Stanislavski's "Magic 'if" limits the actor only to the play's Given Circumstances, whereas Vakhtangov's reformulation involves the principles of motivation and substitution, which do not limit the actor to

how they would behave in the particular circumstances set for the character but can seek a substitute reality different from that set by the play. "It is not necessarily the way he himself would behave under the same circumstances, and thus does not limit him to his own natural behavior" (Strasberg, 1987: 86).

### **Emotion Memory vs Affective memory**

Vakhtangov referred to Emotion Memory as "remembered emotions", nothing that memories drawn from the actor's emotional past could be cautiously used to meet a particular emotional moment in a play (Krasner, 2000: 51). For example, if a character has to react to the death of a loved one, the actor may dig into his/her own memory for a real emotion. The actual event of the memory does not necessarily have to be analogous to the event onstage, but it should stimulate an analogous emotion which would, in turn, produce the required emotion demanded by the moment. This is what Stanislavski advocated in his early work, and Krasner (2000: 51) points out that Stanislavski dedicated an entire chapter of *An Actor Prepares* to Emotion Memory. Krasner (2000: 52) identifies the point at which Stanislavski and Strasberg differ theoretically; Stanislavski held a view that an actor could be in the situation and feel the emotions of the character, so much that the actor actually puts him/herself in the place of that character. Strasberg, on the other hand, expressly declared that when an emotional memory is used, the actor should not experience literal emotion but remembered emotion. Strasberg argued that remembered emotion should not actually be real. He argued that an actual emotion, happening spontaneously on the spot, cannot be controlled, but remembered emotion can be created and repeated. To achieve this remembered emotion in the most real-like way without reliving the actual past experience, Strasberg advises that an actor should



not focus directly on the recalled experience but rather on the sensory circumstances that surrounded the event, such as the place, taste of something, smell, sounds, touch, sight, and remember these things as simply and as clearly as possible (Krasner, 2000: 53). In psychology, as Goldstein (2009: 8) points out, this ability to control one's emotions is referred to as *emotion regulation*. Goldstein (2009: 8) points out that Strasberg believed that an actor should have 10 to 12 affective memories that they could call up on cue, at any time as a part requires.

Strasberg (1987: 111) reveals that Boleslavski divided Affective Memory into two categories; *analytic memory* (which involves imaginary objects) and *memory of feeling* (which deals with intense emotional response), which Strasberg renamed; *Sense Memory* and *Emotional Memory* (not to be confused with Stanislavski's Emotion Memory).

### **Public Solitude vs Private Moment**

While Krasner (2000: 54) concedes that Strasberg's Private Moment is a different exercise to Stanislavski's Public Solitude, he argues that the result achieved by both exercises is the same. Public Solitude, as communicated by Stanislavski, helps actors to feel the privacy of their own world in a public space without being self-conscious – to be able to be as comfortable on stage as one is in their own private space. In this exercise, actors are trained to become aware of their daily surroundings in which they are comfortable and less self-conscious, creating an imaginary expanding circle of light around them so that when required, the actors can recreate in rehearsal the solitary environment by imagining the circle of light in which that environment was earlier contained in order to overcome self-

consciousness. The reaction of the actor will vary depending on the environment imagined. Stanislavski called this imaginary circle of light “circle of attention.”

Strasberg warned against actors getting too involved in “performing” their personal lives in a classroom exercise because they would be creating a real audience where one did not exist (Krasner, 2000: 54). Strasberg made it clear that his exercise should not be “performed” for the benefit of the observers. For him, Private Moment meant being oneself in public – engaging in behaviour that typically happens behind closed doors of the actor’s home. Krasner explains a typical Strasberg Private Moment exercise:

An actor who was grossly overweight and exceedingly self-conscious about it might decide to remove his shirt in front of the class. These actors must not, however think of this exercise as one that should require courage. Instead, they must block out all perceptions of the others, act freely and without self-consciousness, as if no one else were present (Krasner, 2000: 54).

Despite actors “acting” as they would in their private space without an audience, this would still fall under acting on Kirby’s “acting and not-acting” continuum because of the stage setting, costume, and the actor’s awareness of the audience. The kind of natural acting that this exercise would produce is what Kirby (1972: 9) calls “simple acting”. Comparing Strasberg’s Method and Stanislavski’s System, Krasner (2000: 55) concludes that “The Method” is simply “early Stanislavski”. But McLaughlin (2012: 7-8) argues that although “The Method” is informed by Stanislavski’s System, Strasberg’s technique was not so much a direct translation of Stanislavski’s System but a reinterpretation of it into a new context:

Strasberg fanatically pushed his actors towards 'true emotion' without the scripts to completely support these experiments, but with tools appropriated from Stanislavski's System. Furthermore, this volatile quest was conducted during a country retreat where all the participants were cut off from outside influence and later during an intellectual and cultural discipline of separation (McLaughlin, 2012: 7).

Carnicke (2009: 66) adds that Adler and Strasberg ultimately emphasised elements of Stanislavski's system that best suited their own needs. Strasberg and Adler chose those elements that best complimented their individual strengths while at the same time compensating for their weaknesses. Carnicke (2009: 66) argues that the reason Emotional Memory and Private Moment exercises were emphasised in Strasberg's work was because Strasberg was aloof, reserved, and unemotional while Adler had an exuberant personality and enjoyed the company of an entourage, and her emotional humour proved not to be a problem in her acting. Therefore, she naturally gravitated towards Stanislavsky's work on Given Circumstances and action.

### **The Stella Adler Technique**

The daughter of veteran actors of the Yiddish theatre, Jacob and Sarah Adler, Stella Adler was born into a family of theatre actors, with five older siblings who were all actors (Darvas, 2010: 18). Just like Strasberg and Meisner, Adler had the opportunity to watch Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre actors perform in New York, which left a long-lasting impact on her career. She eventually joined the Group Theatre and later married one of its co-founders, Harold Clurman. According to Darvas (2010: 19), Adler's understanding of the theatre was shaped by three men – her father, Clurman

and Stanislavski. After struggling with the version of Stanislavski's technique that was taught at the Group Theatre, Adler had the opportunity to work with Stanislavski in person. Darvas (2010: 19) mentions that during the several weeks that Adler spent working with Stanislavski, the latter made it clear that an actor must have a boundless imagination, unhindered by self-consciousness. Adler is credited with teaching various famous Hollywood actors, among them Marlon Brando and Robert DeNiro. She founded her own acting school in 1949, where she taught her own version of Method acting, based on her own understanding and interpretation of the Stanislavski System. Adler's technique stresses *Imagination*, *Given Circumstances* and *Physical Action*.

Just like Stanislavski, Adler emphasised the importance of an actor to have a strong imagination (Darvas, 2010: 68). She demonstrated the organic relationship between imagination and Given Circumstances, stating that the make-believe Given Circumstances of the play can and should be made real through the use of imagination. Darvas (2010: 70) observes that as much as Adler agrees with Stanislavski on imagination, Adler's imagination exercises differ from Stanislavski's. While Stanislavski's approach to imagination is always aimed towards expressive physical action, Adler's approach has been largely psychological. Darvas (2010:70) argues that Adler's students spent time on descriptive exercises without a sense of their physicalisation while Stanislavski progressed to exercises that prompted both inner and outer action.

Like Strasberg, there are similarities in elements of Adler's technique to those of Stanislavski's, with slight name changes. For example, Adler refers to Stanislavski's "inner action" as "justification" (Darvas, 2010: 51), which she further divides into

“instant justification” and “inner justification.” Instant justification, according to Adler, gives the actor immediate reason for doing what he/she is doing (which Stanislavski calls “impulse”), which leads to inner justification (which Stanislavski calls “internal action”). Adler spoke less about external action but believed that acting is doing. In fact, according to Welch (2013: 14), she disliked the word “acting” and preferred the term, “script interpretation.”

As much as she has been portrayed to have despised Emotion Memory, Adler actually did acknowledge that actors could use it, but only when the required emotion from the text could not be aroused through action. Only then could actors go into their own lives (Darvas, 2010: 100). However, Adler warns that when actors do this, they should not go back to their own lives for the emotion, but for a similar action. Therefore, even in Emotion Memory, Adler advocated the remembered action, which evoked the emotions, rather than the emotion, which evoked an action. Darvas points out Adler’s contradictory stance on this element:

Adler, like Stanislavski, felt that by recalling events that took place in the actor’s past, Actors can relive the emotions as deeply as when the event was originally taking place. The similarity between Adler and Stanislavski on this point is clear. However, Adler sometimes contradicted herself on the subject of emotion memory. Sometimes she said it could be used as a tool, while at other times she said that the use of the actor’s own experience could be detrimental to the performance of the character and the play.

## The Meisner Technique

A trained pianist, Meisner has always had the zeal for acting, so much that in just the first grade he told his teacher that he wanted to be an actor (Ihunwo & Isioma, 2013: 3). Meisner documented his technique in his book, *Sanford Meisner on Acting*, which, similar to Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*, takes the form of a narrative description of a year in one of his classes. Meisner believed more in instinct than technique. He believed that while other professions such as medicine, architecture and others could be taught using standard principles, it is impossible to apply the same principle to acting since the actor's chief instrument is him/herself, and no two persons are the same. Just as Strasberg's Method is anchored on Affective Memory, and Adler's technique on Imagination, the Meisner Technique is anchored on the notion of "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances" (ihunwo & Isioma, 2013: 5) and the "reality of doing." Some of the exercises of the Meisner technique include *repetition, impulse, observation and listening*.

McLaughlin (2012: 4) regards the Meisner Technique as a close descendent of Strasberg's Method because Meisner's position as a founding member of The Group Theatre, where "The Method" was developed, provided him the experience and the credentials necessary to develop his own technique. McLaughlin restates assertions that The Lab Theatre students were influenced by an earlier understanding of the Stanislavski System, as taught by Boleslavski and Ouspenskaya, which went on to influence The Group Theatre and thus Strasberg's Method and Meisner's technique.

Meisner disapproved of the developing culture at The Group Theatre, of isolating itself from the wider theatre world of the time and criticised the improvisation

exercises. As a result, Meisner left The Group Theatre and went on to teach at The Neighbourhood Playhouse, where he admittedly taught a derivative of what he had learnt from Boleslavski, Ouspenskaya and Strasberg (McLaughin, 2012: 8). Meisner began developing his own version of Method and soon became known for quasi-universal principles/slogans such as; “The foundation of acting is the reality of doing”, “Don’t do anything until something happens to make you do it”, “What you do doesn’t depend on you; it depends on the other fellow”, “Silence is an absence of words, but never an absence of meaning”, “The text is your greatest enemy”, “Be specific”, “An ounce of behavior is worth a pound of words” (McLaughin, 2012: 34). Meisner adopted the repetition exercise as a response to The Group Theatre’s improvisation exercise which he claimed had become overly intellectual and prevented the actor from living truthfully in performance (ihunwo & Isioma, 2013: 10). He concluded that if someone is listening to another person and repeating what they hear, they are not thinking, and that this is the reality of doing. The repetition exercise would then escalate to “the pinch and the ouch” where Meisner would tell his students not to do anything unless something happens to make them do it. This places the actors’ dependence on their acting partner, which, according to Ihunwo and Isioma (2013: 10), is fundamental to the Meisner Technique. In addition to the repetition exercise, Meisner taught his students about instinct, taking them through an exercise, urging them to respond “logically and realistically” to an on-stage situation to make it truthful. He also stressed that silence is the absence of words, but never of meaning, therefore, the actor had to learn to pass a message in silence to make their partner do something. What is worth pointing out is that for these partnered exercises, Meisner made use of Stanislavski’s *“Circle of Attention”* inside which he placed both partners, narrowing or widening the “circle” according to the

level of concentration he wanted the actors to achieve. This exercise was first introduced by Stanislavski in his "*Public Solitude*" exercise, which Meisner acknowledged to his students:

Stanislavski... had a phrase which he called 'public solitude'. He said that when you're alone in your room and nobody's watching you, you're just standing in front of the mirror combing your hair. The relaxation, the completeness with which you do it is poetic. He calls this relaxed behavior on the stage 'public solitude' (Longwell & Meisner, 1987: 43).

Rather than Emotion Memory, Meisner speaks of Emotional Preparation, which he argues is what permits the actor to start the scene in a state of emotional "aliveness" as opposed to emotional "emptiness" (Ihunwo & Isioma, 2013: 12). Rather than emotional intensity, Meisner advocated for emotional appropriateness, giving an example of an actor who tried to move a ladder fixed to a wall backstage to generate anger required by an unrelated scenario on the stage. A proponent of living truthfully under imaginary circumstances, Meisner also espoused Stanislavski's "Magic If". However, even though he acknowledges a great debt to Stanislavski, Ihunwo and Isioma (2013: 14) caution against accusing Meisner of simply copying Stanislavski and argue that as much as it is obvious that the Meisner technique is from Stanislavski, it comes with a touch of Meisner's particularisation. Apart from inner technique, Meisner's actors were also physically skilled with training in movement, which allowed them to control every move they made on stage. This is because, just as Stanislavski declared with the Method of Physical Actions, Meisner believed that everything a person thinks and feels is expressed through the body.



## Conclusion

As pointed out by Carnicke (2009: 66), Strasberg's Method acting technique is inspired by elements of Stanislavski's early System, which emphasised emotion and psychology while Adler and Meisner's techniques are informed by Stanislavski's later work, which leans more towards action and imagination. Carnicke points to the conflict between Adler and Strasberg at the Group Theatre over their different interpretations of Stanislavski's System as what set in motion perpetual debates about Method acting techniques informed by the Stanislavski System. Oral transmission and the very nature of Stanislavski's System also encouraged debates; firstly because it was difficult to speak accurately for Stanislavski (as a Russian), and secondly because Stanislavski had never envisaged his System as complete – so, he never offered any final answers, but only suggested various experiments.

Contrary to Hirsch's earlier assertion, Carnicke argues that when Stanislavski worked with Adler, he had felt that her understanding of the System was not necessarily incorrect but rather incomplete. "She had taken one piece of the puzzle for the whole" (Carnicke, 2000: 67). However, Adler was not alone – just as Benedetti pointed out, teachers of Method acting informed by the Stanislavski System in the west taught whatever part of the System they had learned at a particular stage of its development. Polish director, Jerzy Grotowsky, as quoted by Carnicke (2000: 67), declared that although Stanislavski's System, after undergoing numerous years of research, evolved, its disciples did not. Grotowsky pointed to this fact as the main source of conflicts such as that between Adler and Strasberg, which spilled onto their disciples. But unlike his disciples, Stanislavski was all-embracing and could embrace one technique without denigrating the other, despite their

seemingly contradicting logic. “He could see both Strasberg and Adler as right, while they bitterly argued with each other” (Carnicke, 2000: 67). The next chapter explores acting in South Africa, looking at three historical eras: Pre-Colonial, Colonial, and Post-Colonial, from the earliest recorded history to contemporary times.

## CHAPTER 3

### Introduction

To better understand the research participants in this study, this chapter locates acting in the South African context. However, in order to adequately interrogate acting in South Africa today, it is important to understand the historical influences and developments the artform has undergone. To achieve this, Chapter 3 provides a brief overview of the history of acting and performance in South African theatre, from three different eras; pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial, with the aim of identifying acting approaches employed by performers across these eras.

Considering that traditionally, South African acting is performance-based, the purpose of this chapter is to understand the approach to acting in South African theatre today.

African theatre, as Sirayi (2012: 17) points out, has always been difficult to comprehend for Western drama critics because, unlike Western theatre, it is found in multiple languages, including the “special languages”. This does not only refer to verbal or written communication but other forms of communication, such as ritual (to communicate with ancestors), music, mime, poetry, regalia, and other forms unique to Africa. To generate context, this chapter first explores the history of theatre as a whole in South Africa, and then delves into the specifics of acting in South Africa.

### Theatre in South Africa

Unlike the Greeks (with their religious festivals honouring Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility), the advent of acting in South Africa is not recorded in writing. Like many

former colonies in Africa, South Africa only began retracing and documenting its true history in the seventies and eighties (Hauptfleisch, 1997: 10). As much as this was a positive departure from a deeply entrenched colonial interpretation of theatre, Hauptfleisch notes that written material on the history of early theatre in South Africa remains scant:

...the bulk of what was written about the early theatre in South Africa proceeded either from a colonial position, filtered through the thinking and writings of visiting scholars and local institutions of higher learning, or from an Afrikaner nationalist one, propounded in the writings, schools and on public platforms annexed and eventually commanded by proponents of the cause of Afrikaner self-determination and identity (Hauptfleisch, 1997: 11).

Banham (2004: 313) points out that rock art suggests that performance has existed in Southern Africa for thousands of years before missionaries or Europeans on hunting expeditions began writing about performance in South Africa. Hauptfleisch argues that just because Africa is now constitutionally free of its former European colonisers, it does not necessarily mean that the continent is decolonised. This is evident with theatre and acting in South Africa, which, as stated above, are still largely viewed through a Western lens. The importation of British theatre companies, along with their conventions, into Southern Africa during the nineteenth and early twentieth century entrenched the impression that English theatre is the only true theatre – a belief that still lingers among some practitioners today (Hauptfleisch, 1997: 09). Banham (2004: 314) highlights that the name “theatre” itself is a European term. The term cannot precede the performances depicted on the rock art

mentioned above. Hauptfleisch divides the history of theatre in South Africa into three eras: precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial.

### **Precolonial Theatre**

Sirayi (2012: 17) points out that existing scholarship on African theatre focuses only on contemporary African drama while neglecting precolonial African theatre. The fact that history on South African theatre is both oral and thousands of years old also makes it not easily or reliably accessible (Banham, 2004: 313). Banham also points out that because accounts of indigenous South African performance were recorded by passing outsiders, the literature is based on superficial, chance observation, which is significantly impacted by the degree of the author's understanding of the language and culture of the observed people, and such writing, as Banham (2004: 313) puts it, was aimed either for the English or the German reader, or a church organisation.

Hauptfleisch (1997: 32) dates the oldest records of performance in South Africa as far back as 6000 BC, which showed depictions of ritual dances in the form of rock paintings of the San (Bushmen) people. Despite the existence of such ancient evidence, early traditional theatre had only been discussed incidentally by archaeologists, ethnologists, and anthropologists until the late 1970s and early 1980s when art scholars and historians began to focus their attention on the subject. The reason for this (Hauptfleisch, 1997: 23) was due to the powerful hegemonic control exercised over all historic and cultural thinking by the Western or European culture prior to this time. What made this control possible, which Hauptfleisch calls "cultural colonization", was the fact that with their system of schooling and the

concept of literacy and reading, the westerners possessed the most potent of all weapons – the written word:

To illustrate: To read and write requires someone to teach reading. This in turn supposes a school, schools imply a curriculum (a curriculum constructed by the teacher and/or the school – and those behind the school – and consisting of those things the teacher considers important). But in order to be a teacher, he himself will have to have gone through the same process, so that he may read, and know what to teach. In fact, it constitutes a perfectly closed circle of cause and effect. Within such a system, it was quite natural that the history came to be seen as recorded history – with ‘recorded’ meaning ‘recorded in writing’. Reinforced by economic and political control – also based on the written word – the literary culture thus became an irresistible force which virtually swept years of history under the carpet (Hauptfleisch, 1997: 23).

Sirayi (2012: 17-18) cautions that any attempt to do justice to African theatre should take into consideration the cultural, historical, and social conditions that led to the birth of African theatre. To circumvent the problem of limited (and mostly watered down) information on the history of African traditional performance, Hauptfleisch (2007: 33) relied on elements such as records provided by early travellers, oral history, and remnants of past events, which revealed a highly organised African society that had a network of popular performance forms, with their own specific codes and conventions. This, Hauptfleisch declares, was as formal and structured a theatrical system as any European or Eastern one, but distinctly different. He highlights five significant characteristics of the African performance form:

1. It has a ritual and symbolic performance form.

2. It is participatory and public in performance.
3. It has a musical base.
4. There is a strong tradition of oral narrative.
5. The dance forms are distinctive, not only in their physical attributes, but in their function within the total performance.

These characteristics suggest an original African concept of acting that is different from the Western form, mainly because it was neither considered an artform nor a profession. As a result, no acting technique (in the Western sense) was employed by African performers of this era. However, the audience participation, such as “call and response” and unpremeditated song and dance of the traditional and ritual performances are comparable to Augusto Boal’s forum theatre, in which the audience members, otherwise referred to as “intervener-spectators” or “active observers” (Boal, 1995: 72) are allowed to interfere/intervene in the action being portrayed. It can also be compared to Sanford Meisner’s impulse/reaction, which, according to Meisner (Hodge, 2001: 145) is a response to internal or external stimuli that propels the actor to act, thus creating an “impulsive” behaviour that emerges truthfully and spontaneously from a reaction as opposed to pre-planned behaviour suggested by the play text.

Sirayi (2012: 33) compares the precolonial African wedding celebration to another form of theatre. This assertion is valid since the African wedding celebration adheres to the above-mentioned characteristics of the African performance form, firstly because it is a community celebration where not only performers sing and dance, but the guests (audience) also join in. Sirayi (2012: 34) also compares the negotiations between the prospective bride and groom’s families to a dramatic performance marked by rhetoric, music, praise names and dance. According to Kirby’s definition

(1972: 3), this form of “theatre” falls under performance rather than acting because the people are not feigning, simulating or impersonating anyone. They are nobody or nothing other than themselves, and they don’t pretend to be in a different time or place. This is another example of South African acting’s rootedness in performative portrayal.

## **Colonial Theatre**

According to Hauptfleisch (2007: 34), the Western concept of theatre arrived in South Africa in 1652 with the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck and the first Dutch settlers, but the “real” colonisation happened in 1795 with the arrival of the British garrison:

The period following that was largely dominated by the gradual professionalization of the English theatre through increased visits by touring companies from Britain, and increasing activity from the Dutch amateurs. By the turn of the century the European concept of theatre was totally embedded in South African society and in all subsequent histories, which dealt with that history in terms of a very narrow and later parochial concept of what the word ‘theatre’ meant.

During the Anglo Boer War<sup>11</sup> the Dutch/Afrikaans theatre emerged with locally written pieces of a patriotic nature, but despite its focus on promoting and protecting Afrikaans nationalism, it retained a purely European form (Hauptfleisch, 2007: 34). This form became cemented when the Dutch/Afrikaans theatre also became professionalised in 1925 with theatre buildings constructed in European style and

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<sup>11</sup> The war between Britain and self-governing Afrikaner colonies of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State. At the outbreak of this war, Britain ruled South African colonies of the Cape and Natal (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>)



specifications. Schools, universities, and theatre training institutions began providing courses in dramatic literature, where “great works” from Anglo-European playwrights such as Aeschylus and Ibsen were the main focus. This was later followed by the American theatre. One South African playwright worth mentioning is H.I.E. Dhlomo, who is considered a pioneer of black drama (Couzens, 1993: 1). A short story writer, journalist, poet and essayist, Dhlomo produced and directed his own play, *Moshoeshoe* in 1939, which received lukewarm response. Couzens (1993: 4) describes Dhlomo’s directing style as autocratic, working with amateur actors. Dhlomo then wrote a musical play, *Ruby and Frank*, which dealt with the then delicate relations between black people and coloured<sup>12</sup> people. Influenced by his own personal marital problems, Dhlomo wrote *Men and Women*, a play written in the style of an Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy. Besides his poems and plays, Dhlomo was an African literary theorist, writing articles about drama and poetry between 1936 and 1946. Dhlomo believed that the suitable medium for dramatic speech was Shakespearean flexible verse and “Rhythm”, which he argued was essentially African (Couzens, 1993: 8). Dhlomo was also interested in how traditional song and dance, *Ingoma* and traditional African ceremonies such as initiation, funeral of chiefs, and first fruit feasts constituted drama. He argued that tribal drama was national, communal, ritualistic, with actor/audience participation. As Couzens (1993: 9) highlights, Dhlomo was no purist. He neither advocated slavishness to the past nor some form of nationalist purity. He believed that the development of African drama cannot come purely from African roots. He believed that it must borrow from, or be inspired by, European dramatic forms (Couzens, 1993: 9).

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<sup>12</sup> In South Africa, the term “coloured” is used as an ethnic label for people of mixed racial or ethnic origin.

By 1950, South African theatre had become a virtual clone of the London West End theatre and Broadway (Hauptfleisch, 2007: 35). Black writers, performers and producers were inculcated into the European theatre mould, creating amateur plays in English for the black audience. These writers included, among others, Mbongeni Ngema, Zakes Mda, Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya, Fatima Dike, and Gibson Kente. When the apartheid government banned all racially mixed casts and audiences in 1965, most of these theatre practitioners were forced to adapt their works to the new restrictions (Hauptfleisch, 2007: 41). Among these, was Gibson Kente, who turned to the township for inspiration and support, adapting the urban theatre form to a new format, which created its own audience and its own infrastructure. Towards the latter part of this period, different new forms of popular theatre, such as the Township Musical, Community Theatre and Protest Theatre began to emerge in the black community. These new forms were experimental in nature, heavily influenced by the works of Augusto Boal (Theatre of the Oppressed) and Bertolt Brecht (Epic Theatre) and involved the audience in the action through song. Theatre practitioners such as Barney Simon, Athol Fugard and others introduced the improvisational ideas of Antonin Artaud, Joan Littlewood, Peter Brook, and Jerzy Grotowsky, which led to a flood of improvised work at festivals and in training institutions. The result of these new, radical, and diverse theatre forms was a shift from the Western theatre form to one that is neither African nor European, but a new, evolving South African form of theatre with a life and character of its own. This creates an interesting dynamic for the actor since it takes the performative notions of the African theatre tradition, such as engaging with the audience and breaking the fourth wall, and merges them with Western constructs, such as text, fourth wall and

becoming the character. Would Method acting, informed by the Stanislavski System be suitable for this partly performative/partly acting theatre?

### **Postcolonial Theatre**

Describing the then new South African theatre form, Hauptfleisch (1997: 32) uses the term “hybrid”, not to refer to a mechanical fusing of two diverse traditions but to illustrate a theatrical form that has evolved from two older forms but is genetically distinct from them. One of the most prominent black practitioners of this new form was playwright and director Gibson Kente. Known as the father of township theatre, Kente’s genre of theatre, the *Township Musical*, was modelled on the American style musical, but with a South African theme. The township musical became an influential form of theatre in the 80s (Hauptfleisch, 1997: 58).

### **The Township Musical and Kente’s Acting Technique**

Among the prolific black South African theatre practitioners of the time, Kente is the only one known to have taught his own acting technique, which he developed from a variety of influences and already existing acting techniques. As a member of the Yoga Society, Kente based his training on the “*Serpent Power*”, which, according to Kente is an energy that oozes from the inner soul (Schauffer, 2006: 314). The *Serpent Power* is a form of Kundalini Yoga by John Woodroffe which is centred around a “Supreme Power” in the human body. Woodroffe (1974: 1) compares this power to a coiled serpent that is sleeping at the base of the spinal column, until aroused by this form of Yoga.

Kente believed in a sound mind in a sound body and practiced movement. One of his movement and posture exercise was called the “Bucket Dance”, during which his students had to dance while balancing buckets full of water (Ramolahloane, 2022). This is a form of embodied learning, which, according to Bailey and Leigh (2013: 164) is an integral part of a reflective practice. They describe embodiment as an ongoing process of bringing conscious self-awareness to and about the body. However, just like the early African theatre makers, Kente did not document his technique (and many of his plays). Most of the existing information on his rehearsal and performance process has been gathered from his former protégées and family members. In an interview, veteran actor and one of Kente’s former students, Sello Ramolahloane outlined Kente’s acting technique and approach to playmaking, which entails among others, a nine month-long rehearsal, with actors writing their own dialogue as Kente speaks, song and dance, and voice and physical exercise:

Because his place was an institution, you would be there for nine months while he taught you exercises such as tongue twisters, how to properly speak in his style and how to embody his technique. Only then would you get to the script. He would speak the lines, then we would write them. But it was not a workshop per se. He had the lines written in his own notebook, then he would read them to us, and we would write them (Ramolahloane, 2022).

Kente’s process should not be confused with improv. In an interview with Schauffer (2006: 306), Kente made it clear that none of his plays were improvised, and that he has always had a script. Before branching into theatre, Kente was a talent scout for Gallo Music, where he wrote songs for local bands such as the Manhattan Brothers, who were famous in the 1950s (Moshounyane, 2006: 20). Music and dance played

an important role in all Kente's plays as well as in his rehearsal process (Ramolahloane, 2022). Much has been said about the American musical's influence in Kente's work, but his love and passion for music, especially gospel, started from a young age. He attended his primary schooling at a strict Seventh Day Adventist boarding school in Butterworth before moving to Lovedale College in Alice, where he learnt to play the piano (Solberg, 2011: 3-4). Besides the gospel music influence at Butterworth, Kente also acknowledged receiving much influence from Negro spirituals. Kente made use of a professional band that played a wide range of genres of music such as jazz, blues, spirituals, hymns, traditional, etc. As a director and acting teacher, Kente was influenced by Stanislavski. This is evident in how he built his ensemble. He used the double garage of his home in Soweto as a rehearsal space and an incubation centre, or, as Ramolahloane (2022) calls it, a "bootcamp", which produced some of the greatest actors of the time, such as Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa, who went on to make a name for themselves in their world-renowned play, *Woza Albert!*

Kente's actors were described as physical and vigorous, with "big" acting (Solberg, 2011: 14), some critics went as far as accusing them of being profusely gestural and melodramatic. A 1969 Cape Argus review of his play, "*Lifa*" described Kente's theatre as reminiscent of Europe's minstrels and street players, which develops into Commedia dell'Arte, and then folk drama of America and Medieval miracle plays (Solberg, 2011: 15). Asked if there was a Gibson Kente style, Kente admitted that there was (Shauffer, 2006: 314). However, he expressed his frustration at actors who were over-acting and being external. "I teach natural discipline, not indulgence. Over-acting is indulgence" (Shauffer, 2006: 314). Mshengu (1972: 8) reveals that

Kente acknowledged reading Stanislavski's books and using some elements of his technique, but Kente's technique should not be misconstrued as another version of Method acting informed by the Stanislavski System. Meshengu makes it clear that Kente was not an ardent believer in Method acting.

Kente believed that being on stage was more than a question of merely churning out lines, hence he incorporated music and choreography in his work, inspired by the American musical tradition. One of Kente's greatest strengths, Solberg (2011: 97) mentions, was his ability to spot and train raw talent through his special teaching methods, which he drilled into his actors, such as chest-out pride, energy, strong articulation, and his own way of breathing. Kente's strong discipline and control over his students is one of the factors credited for driving his actors to great heights.

There appears to be a reason for the "melodrama" that Kente's actors were often accused of. Due to the loud band and the rowdy audience, compounded by bad acoustics in the performance halls, the dialogue of the actors would be drowned. Gestures and music needed to be used to deliver the message of the play. Mime was also introduced as a support for dialogue, especially when the actors needed to make a point. The music and dance always had to be in sync with a specific message (Solberg, 2011: 120). As much as this kind of acting was mocked by critics, the people in townships loved it, and they could finally follow the story without relying too much on the spoken text, which was mainly in English. When Kente transitioned to television in 1981, his actors appeared as if they were overacting, which made them appear amateurish. To tone down their acting, they adopted the performance style of Robert de Niro (a famous American Method actor), using less mime and demonstrative emotion (Solberg, 2011: 123). Kente conducted extensive research

and observation before working on a play. Solberg (2011: 121) mentions that Kente, as part of his research, took the train from Transvaal<sup>13</sup> to the Eastern Cape, observing different people during his trip and making notes about all his observations. Upon his arrival, he would read several local newspapers, to understand the local people even better.

## **Protest Theatre**

Another genre of the postcolonial “hybrid” theatre, which gradually took centre stage in the early 80s and well into the 90s, was *Protest Theatre*, which came to play a central role in the fight against the state sanctioned apartheid (Havenga, 2020: 2). A popular example is *Woza Albert!*, devised and performed in 1981 by Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa, in conjunction with political activist, director and co-founder of the Market Theatre, Barney Simon. Provocatively depicting what would happen if Christ’s return were to occur in apartheid South Africa, the play was inspired by the actors’ own humiliating encounter with the apartheid police. Havenga (2020: 4) reveals that Ngema and Mtwa were touring the country as part of Gibson Kente’s production, *Mama and the Load*, when they were refused entry into the homeland of Bophuthatswana<sup>14</sup>. The humiliating encounter led to them questioning the relationship between politics and Christianity. Mtwa and Ngema took this further by asking what would happen if Jesus Christ was to come back to earth in apartheid South Africa – this question gave birth to *Woza Albert!*

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<sup>13</sup> A former province in north-eastern South Africa. In 1994 it was divided into the provinces of Limpopo, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and North-West. Kente would have travelled from Gauteng.

<sup>14</sup> Now North-West province.

The play can be regarded as an example of a hybrid as defined by Hauptfleisch since it is European in structure, marked by scenic design or units of action and stage directions (a European convention), combined with elements from precolonial African theatre such as song, dance, drumming and oral poetry (Sirayi, 2012: 158). Inspired by the technique of Jerzy Grotowski, Ngema and Mtwana took the approach of poor theatre, staging the play on a bare stage, with minimal costume and props, and playing multiple characters (Havenga, 2020: 6). The actors studied Grotowski's seminal work, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, after which they experimented with the physical, ritualistic, and spiritual aspects of live theatre. Ngema and Mtwana read Peter Brook's book, *The Empty Space*, which states that any empty space can be a stage, and that all it takes for an act of theatre to take place is for a person to walk across that empty space while he or she is being watched (Brook, 1986: 11). Another significant influence, according to OCR (2016: 6), was Bertolt Brecht's theory of epic theatre/alienation technique (where actors demonstrate roles rather than become the character), although this was never acknowledged by Ngema and Mtwana. It is possible that the Brechtian influence was indirect, since Brecht's own work was influenced by others, such as Shakespeare, American movies, and Greek theatre. The premise of the play itself, asking "What if Morena (Christ) were to return to Apartheid South Africa?", whether consciously or not, was using the "Magic If", an element of Stanislavski's System.

Although Hauptfleisch's description of post-colonial South African theatre as *hybrid* seems accurate, Kruger (2020, 1) argues that *syncretic*<sup>15</sup> rather than *hybrid* best

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<sup>15</sup> Involving the amalgamation of different influences, cultures, or schools of thought.



describes the distinctive South African theatre genre because the term highlights the agency of practitioners to appropriate conventions, scripts, and behaviours to their own ends. Like Hauptfleisch, Kruger (2020,1) also presents *Woza Albert!* As an example of a syncretic genre because it fuses African comedy sketches, experimental techniques from Brecht and Grotowski, and satirical elements in English, Zulu, and Afrikaans.

### **South African Theatre Today**

Precolonial theatre and Western drama traditions continue to have an influence in contemporary African theatre because, as Sirayi (2012: 136) points out, most African playwrights still build their plays around both traditions. However, Kruger (2020: 4) argues that theatre in South Africa is not essentially African or European, but it takes place between and within local and transnational practices, forms, and institutions. While Sirayi and Hauptfleisch's *hybrid* description of contemporary South African theatre focuses on either African or European, and the merging or influence of the two, Kruger's *syncretic* definition best describes South African theatre today as it encompasses a combination of European, African, African-American, and Indian and other influences. How would actors in this *syncretic* theatre employ Method acting, as informed by the Stanislavski System?

With eleven official languages, Kruger (2020: 10) points out that South African theatre practitioners treat indigenous or locally spoken languages pragmatically. "Black urban theatre has tended to use English dialogue, with jokes and songs in a range of vernaculars, which may change on tours to different regions (Kruger, 10: 2020). The main reason why black theatre practitioners use English is because the

number of paying audiences for theatre is small, but even smaller for locally spoken languages (Kruger, 2020: 10). Although only a minority of South Africans speak English as their first language, many actors and writers speak English as a second language since it is the language of instruction in South Africa. This makes it the most widely accessible language. This was the case with the theatre plays observed during the observation phase of this study (expanded on in Chapter 4). English was the main language used (with some indigenous languages), even though all of the plays had black actors. Only one play did not use English, or any other local language at all, because it used gestural communication rather than verbal dialogue. How would an actor using Method acting, informed by the Stanislavski System approach their role in this kind of theatre?

## **Conclusion**

Although the advent of acting in Africa is not recorded in writing, public performances such as praise poetry, singing and dancing during traditional ceremonies have been in existence (just as the ancient Greek festivals) since time immemorial. It therefore will be incorrect to claim that there was no South African acting technique before the Western idea of theatre came into the country in colonial times. The lack of documented evidence however is a major stumbling block for anyone researching the history of acting in South Africa. Existing scholarship tends to focus more on the history of South African theatre rather than South African acting or performance. However, it is an indictment on contemporary performing arts practitioners, especially academics, that there has not been any attempt since Kente to develop and document an acting technique that speaks to the South African context. As Solberg (2011: 124) charges, it may be easy nowadays to dismiss Kente's highly

gestural and stylised technique as merely “overacting”, but it was in response to the challenges he was facing, and well-suited to the circumstances of the time. This gives rise to the following questions: is Method acting, informed by the Stanislavski System well-suited to the South African context? Is there a need for a uniquely African acting technique? Or can the existing Euro-Western techniques be adapted to an African idiom?

With no acting technique that is designed specifically for the South African context, which, as already shown, is deeply rooted in performance, this study sought to explore whether South African actors employ Method acting, informed by the Stanislavski System, or elements thereof, in their approach to a role. To achieve this, the next chapter first unpacks the Stanislavski System and strip it down to its most significant elements.

## CHAPTER 4

### Introduction

It is important for critics of Method acting techniques informed by the Stanislavski System as it is for its proponents to understand that Stanislavski never claimed to have created a fail-proof or be-all-and-end-all system of acting (Benedetti, 2008: vii). His aim was to develop a systematic approach to acting that would help actors act better. As a result, Stanislavski constantly changed his old approaches and ideas in favour of new and better ones. Just as he constantly changed and readjusted elements of his System throughout his life, Stanislavski experimented with different possible modes of its delivery in search of the best medium to transfer the System to students of acting.

This chapter examines Stanislavski's preferred model of delivering his System to students of acting, both theoretically and practically, with a special focus on the two-year psychophysical approach of the System, as intended by Stanislavski. The chapter further identifies six elements of the System (three from year one – *experiencing*, and three from year two – *embodiment*). These are the elements this study aims to identify in the ten research participants' approaches to a role.

### Elements of Stanislavski's System

Stanislavski's first attempt was a draft manual which he wrote in 1906 when he began working on the System (Benedetti, 2008: xv). He thereafter experimented with classes in the form of a formal lecture but soon concluded that actors did not respond well to this kind of approach. He then offered a series of talks between 1919

and 1921, which he never published. Stanislavski then experimented with the novel form, which he also abandoned. In 1928, he finally settled for the diary form – a journal written from the point of view of an acting student, a fictional character named Nazvanov (a representation of young Stanislavski) as he goes through the process of training in the classes given by his teacher, (a representation of the older Stanislavski) named Tortzov. The lessons were divided as follows;

### **Year One: Experiencing**

- Magic 'If'
- Given Circumstances
- Imagination
- Concentration and attention
- Muscular release
- Bits and Tasks
- Belief and the sense of truth
- Emotion Memory
- Communication
- Adaptations
- Inner psychological drives
- Inner psychological drives in action
- The actor's inner creative state
- The Supertask
- Throughaction
- The subconscious and the actor's creative state

## Year Two: Embodiment

- Physical education
- Voice and Speech
- Perspective of the actor and the role
- Tempo-rhythm
- Logic and sequence
- Physical characteristics
- The finishing touches
- Charisma
- Ethics and discipline
- The external creative state in performance

Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: xxv) stressed that actors were free to use those elements of the System that helped them achieve a desired goal while discarding those not helpful to them. It is important, however, to point out that not all these elements are unique to Stanislavski – some, such as *imagination*, *muscular release*, *voice and speech*, are basic to any emotionally, mentally and physically engaging acting technique. This study sought to identify particularly those elements of Method acting that may not necessarily be unique to, but have their genesis, and/or are prominent in Stanislavski's psychophysical technique, *the System*, beginning with what Stanislavski calls the *art of experiencing* (year one), followed by *embodiment* (year two).

## Year One – Experiencing

The *art of experiencing* has to do with those subconscious moments when the actor is completely taken over by the role – those moments when the actor “lives” the role independent of his/her will; where the actor is not thinking about what he/she is doing or noticing how he/she is feeling, where everything comes out spontaneously and subconsciously. However, Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 17) points to a problem with the subconscious – it is not always within our direct control. This then means that indirect ways of influencing the subconscious have to be found, and he concedes that this demands complex work which paradoxically is dependent on the direct influence of the conscious mind.

Stanislavski expounds on this by highlighting that certain aspects of the human psyche obey the conscious mind and the will which, in turn, have the capacity to influence our involuntary processes. He further argues that no technique holds the key to the *art of experiencing* except for nature, which is both subtle and elusive, therefore, special methods of psycho-technique have to be employed to enable the actor to stimulate and control it. This is what Stanislavski calls “the subconscious through the conscious, the involuntary through the voluntary” (Benedetti, 2008: 18). Stanislavski breaks this process down as follows; “Because what is conscious and credible gives birth to truth, and truth evokes belief, and if nature believes in what is happening inside you, then she, too, becomes involved. And in her wake comes the subconscious, and, just possibly, inspiration may then follow” (Benedetti, 2008: 18-19). Being able to stimulate the subconscious through the conscious requires mindfulness, which according to Bester (2019: 48) brings the actor’s body-mind from preoccupations caused by interferences, back to the embodied experience of the

present moment of performance. Blair (2009: 96) prefers this “subconscious through the conscious” approach because it helps actors free themselves from the psychoanalytic approach of some American Methods, “because it is about how to prompt creative responses rather than excavating psychologically repressed memories from one’s emotional history (Blair 2009: 96).

### **Magic “If”**

After taking his students through different Given Circumstances, an exercise in which the students failed to act truthfully, Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 48) explained that the inner and outer actions will arise of their own accord through the use of “if”. To demonstrate this, Stanislavski asked one of the students the question; “if I had offered you not my empty hand but a letter, what would you have done?” to which the student replied;

I would have taken it and looked to see who it was addressed to. If it had been addressed to me, then I would have asked you to excuse me, opened the letter and started reading it. But since it’s private, and since I might show my feelings while reading it... then I would go into another room and read it there (Benedetti, 2008: 49).

Stanislavski pointed out how many conscious thoughts, in proper sequence, and the logical steps, the student called up because of this simple word, “if”. He further stated that there are instances where “if” does its work alone and quickly without the need of outside assistance. To demonstrate this, without revealing what was in his hand, Stanislavski gave one student a metal ashtray and another a chamois leather glove and said; “A cold little frog for you and a soft little mouse for you” (Benedetti,



2008: 49), to which students instinctively recoiled in disgust. Stanislavski calls these, not simple, but magic, “ifs”, that provoke instantaneous, instinctive actions. Kemp (2012: xvii) points out that imagination is more easily stimulated through physical activity than by thought alone. This is what Stanislavski means when he mentions that sometimes “If” needs outside assistance. Stanislavski explains further;

In any further examination of the qualities and attributes of “if” we should turn our attention to the fact that there exist, so to speak, *single-storey* and *multi-storey* “ifs”. For example, just now in the experiment with the ashtray and the glove, we dealt with a single-storey “if”. All we had to say was, what if the ashtray was a frog and the glove a mouse, and the immediate response was an action (Benedetti, 2008: 49).

Multi-storey “ifs”, Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 49) clarifies, are found in complex plays, where a number of possible “ifs” are created by the author to justify different elements of behaviour in the characters. The actor then asks him/herself questions such as, “what would I do if?” or “how would I handle it if?”, and the word “if” becomes a stimulus to inner and outer creative energy.

### **Belief and the Sense of Truth**

On one particular day, Stanislavski entered the class and found the students looking for a handbag one of the students had misplaced, which they found. Stanislavski then asked the students to place the bag back where it had been before and look for it again. This time around, the task lacked genuine truth. Stanislavski used this to illustrate how actors lack truth when onstage in imaginary circumstances, as opposed to real-life circumstances. This, Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 153) adds, is

not a matter of circumstance but a matter of belief which, in turn, creates “truth”. The difference with onstage truth and real-life is that the former is a product of imagination, which uses the magic “if” and the Given Circumstances. This helps the actor to feel and create belief and truth. Stanislavski adds;

In theatre what is important is not whether Othello’s dagger is papier mâché or metal, but whether the actor’s inner feeling truly, genuinely, justifies Othello’s suicide. The important thing is that the actor/human being should behave as though the circumstances and conditions of Othello’s life were genuine and the dagger with which he stabs himself was real (Benedetti, 2008: 154).

Stanislavski stresses that every moment onstage must be endorsed by belief in the truth of the feelings being experienced and the truth of the action taking place. He argues that there can never be truth onstage without belief, and both are inseparable. When an actor has belief and a sense of truth onstage, he/she can convince an audience to believe in imaginary things such as mimed props. Once one, adds Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 156), approaches acting with the truth and belief of children at play, one will be able to become a great actor. Belief and the sense of truth links back to the “Magic ‘If’” because belief in the imaginary world of the play requires imagination. Tamar, as quoted by Bester (2019, 51) gives a similar example to the one above, explaining that Macbeth believes that there is in fact a dagger in front of him, and therefore considers this proposition to be true.

### **Emotion Memory**

As dealt with in detail earlier, Emotion Memory refers to a memory of feelings. The same way visual memory can bring back something forgotten, such as the face of a

person or a landscape, and put it in front of the inner eye, Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008:199) asserts that Emotion Memory can resurrect emotions that one once experienced. Because memory of emotions is elusive, the help of the senses is required to help bring back emotions suppressed or long forgotten. So, actors need not only Emotion Memory but Sense Memory as well. For example, an actor who needs to summon an embarrassing emotion felt in the past may first recall the time of day, the weather, the setting, the people and the surrounding, the smells and the shocked expressions on people's faces, and only then begin to feel the embarrassment. However, this, as Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 221) points out, depends on the strength or weakness of the *Emotion Memory*. Some memories of emotion are so strong that just one sensory experience, such as touch, smell, or auditory, may trigger them.

Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 209-10) stresses that whatever one may have experienced, whether in reality or in our imagination, one is always oneself. Therefore, actors should always act from their own personality, no matter how many performances they give or whoever they portray. Actors are encouraged by Stanislavski to use their own feelings, always. He qualifies this by adding that actors should always play themselves, but with different combinations of Tasks and Given Circumstances. Blix (2007: 161) points out that there is a difference between an actor rehearsing an emotion-laden situation and experiencing the same situation in real life. But the difference is how the situation is confronted and handled rather than in the actual emotions.

Re-experiencing a past emotion onstage is easier said than done, therefore, as Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 218) points out, external and internal stimuli are

needed. 'External stimuli' refers to the *mise-en-scène* – external factors such as the setting, props, costume etc., that may help with the creation of mood which, in turn, helps with the creation of feeling. Stanislavski discourages actors from trying to go straight to the feeling itself, in the hopes of forcing themselves to re-experience it, but to rather think about the conditions that led to the experience. "Never start with the result. It will not come of itself, it is the logical consequence of what has gone before" (Benedetti, 2008: 218). This is what is referred to by internal stimuli. In addition to using one's own past experience to arouse a parallel emotion for Emotion Memory, one can use what Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 224) calls "fellow-feeling". This is the natural instinct of empathising with another person's experience as though it were your own, for example, witnessing somebody being slapped and feeling as though you got slapped yourself. This also applies to the feeling one gets when reading a play for the first time – one may experience fellow-feeling for the characters, although not as strongly as with a real-life person. Stanislavski stresses that it is the actor's job to turn fellow-feeling to genuine feeling. Given Circumstances and magic "if" can also be stimuli because they have the power to evoke a response in our Emotion Memory.

## **Year Two – Embodiment**

In the second year, Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 352) assigns exceptional importance to the role of the body, without which the inner work of the previous year cannot be actualised. Stanislavski is cautious not to assign more importance to either aspect of the technique but to highlight the symbiotic relationship between the two, stating that physical embodiment is important insofar as it conveys "the life of the human spirit" (Benedetti, 2008: 352). Stanislavski also highlights the importance

of developing the body and voice (physical apparatus) in order to enable it to respond to whatever nature asks of it. He refers to nature, as opposed to “the play” or “the script” etc. because his assertion is that the body will not respond to cold calculation and technical means of experiencing, because it is beyond the conscious mind – it responds to intuition. Stanislavski compares an undeveloped body and voice to an unsuitable musical instrument:

You can't convey the subtlety of Chopin's music on a trombone and you can't express delicate unconscious feelings with the crude parts of our physical apparatus, especially if it's off key like a badly tuned musical instrument. It is impossible to convey the things nature creates unconsciously with an unprepared body, just as it's impossible to play Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on instruments that are out of tune. The greater the artist, the more subtle his creative efforts, the more work and technique he requires. Develop your body and subordinate it to the inner creative commands nature gives (Benedetti, 2008: 352-353).

As Lemmer (2010: 59), pointed out, all acting is an embodied phenomenon, regardless of style, Blair (2009: 93) asserts that mind and body are not separate, and require one to think in terms of “embodied mind” or the “conscious body”, depending on which aspect is being privileged at a given moment. This is an important point as it aptly underscores the Psychophysical unity of Stanislavski's System. Experiencing is not emphasised over embodiment, or the other way round. However, Blair (2009: 102) points out that while intellectual understanding is a crucial part of acting, the true test of the actor's work is ultimately in embodiment.

## Voice and Speech

Kennedy (2009: 209) points out that voice is a threefold arrangement, and that arrangement is the self. Just as Zarrilli (2004: 657) referred to the “four bodies”, Kennedy adds that in the live theatre, the actor expresses his or herself, creating a community of selves, which is then shared with the community of selves which constitutes the audience. Voice, as Kennedy (2009:209) states, is the means by which the self is revealed both aurally and conceptually. Stanislavski spends a considerable amount of time on voice and speech exercises, from the most basic and general to the unique and complex. The latter is covered in this section;

- Subtext

In one of the speech classes, Tortsov (Benedetti, 2008:402) explains to his students that to fully play portray subtext, the actor needs not only express physically but through sounds and words as well, and this can only be achieved when the whole line of the subtext runs through the actor’s feelings. Stanislavski equates words that are not filled with emotions to mere sounds, what he calls “little cries”. He calls dialogue made up of such words “a sequence of empty sounds” (Benedetti, 2008: 402). Stanislavski goes as far as declaring that the meaning of a work of art lies in its subtext, and that the text belongs to the writer while the subtext belongs to the actor, otherwise, if this was not the case, the audience would not come to the theatre but rather stay at home and read the play instead.

To demonstrate the importance of subtext, Stanislavski began one of his classes by pronouncing to his students the following words; “cloud, war, kite, lilac” flatly, with long pauses in between, and then asked the students; “what happens when your ear

receives these sounds? Let's take 'cloud', for example. What memories, feelings, images come to you when I say this word?" (Benedetti, 2008: 403). One student had an image of a huge, smoke-coloured blot in clear summer sky while another had a long, white sheet stretched across the sky. Stanislavski used the students' responses to demonstrate how the students immediately filled out meaning of the words in their own minds and described their responses with such care, using sound and inflections to portray their visual images so that their listeners can "see" with their (the students') eyes. Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 404) declared that if the students went through this process with the same affection and spoke their lines onstage with such deep insight into their meaning, they would soon become great actors. He continued with this exercise by repeating the word "cloud" in different ways, each time asking the students which cloud he was talking about, which the students guessed more or less correctly. With variation of his voice, Stanislavski was able to make his students "see" the cloud as a light haze, a fantastical vision, a frightening thundercloud, etc.

Munro (2009: 108) stresses the importance of an actor to have a good quality voice. To achieve this, the actor is required to have a voice that is built and strengthened. Laukkaken, as quoted by Munro (2009: 108) defines a good quality voice as a result of an optimal use of the vocal organ in order to establish the maximum possible acoustic output by minimal muscular effort. Kennedy (2009: 209) highlights the importance of the relationship between voice and breath. Although breath can exist without voice, voice cannot exist without breath, but once the outgoing breath has activated the vocal folds into motion to produce sound, voice and breath are one. Both voice and breath connect the actor to the audience on a much deeper level;

“...the air in the room not only provides life-sustaining breath to both performer and listener, it connects them to each other in both silence and in sound” (Kennedy, 2009: 209).

## **Tempo-Rhythm**

Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 463) defines tempo as the quickness or slowness “length-values” follow each other at any given time signature. He defines “time signature” as the repetition of a group of the said length-values. He further defines rhythm as a combination of moments of every possible duration which divides time into a variety of parts. In an attempt to simplify tempo-rhythm to his students, Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 464) advised them to forget about scientific definitions, as these may confuse them, and simply play with rhythm. He then had metronomes<sup>16</sup> of different sizes placed all over the stage, and then set them in motion at different speeds. Stanislavski then added to the sounds by having an assistant ring a handbell double<sup>17</sup> time, then a key tapping on a table at an even faster pace. The result was an orchestra of ticks and taps, with the ticking of the metronomes and the tapping of the key coinciding each time the bell marked the beginning of a bar. “Listen to that jumble, and yet the order, the harmony of this organised chaos. That’s created by the wizard, *Tempo-rhythm*” (Benedetti, 2008: 465).

Stanislavski likened this “organised chaos” to performing onstage. He indicated how tempo can curtail or extend an action and shorten or lengthen speech. “Quicken the

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<sup>16</sup> A device used by musicians that marks time at a selected rate by giving a regular tick.

<sup>17</sup> (Of rhythm) based on two main beats to the bar.



tempo and there is less time for either. That means I have to act or speak faster. Slow down the tempo and you have more time to act and speak and so greater opportunity to do and say what is important” (Benedetti, 2008: 465). Stanislavski compares tempo-rhythm of the metronomes to the rhythm and tempo in acting. He pointed out to his students that action and speech move through time, which the actor must fill with a wide variety of movements, with intervals of moments of calm. “When we speak we fill time with moments of utterance which have breaks between” (Benedetti, 2008: 466). Stanislavski went on to demonstrate how different tempo-rhythms can affect one’s mood. He ordered the class to clap slowly, this went on for some time until the students became bored and grew uninterested. Stanislavski then increased the tempo of the clap, varying the rhythm at different moments. The class performed different variations, with each, not only affecting them externally but internally too. Nazvanov (young Stanislavski) recounts the experience of the class during the exercise;

When Tortsov went on to sixteenth and thirty-second notes, still with the accent on the first count in each quarter note, all our energy returned. But Tortsov didn’t stop there. He gradually speeded up the metronome. Soon we were lagging behind. That electrified us. We wanted to keep up with the beat, in tempo and rhythm. We started to sweat, we went red in the face, we clapped like mad, using legs, body, mouth, grunts to help us. Our arm muscles were tired and cramped. But we were happy. We were even having fun.

This exercise went on with even more variations, resulting in new responses and moods. The point Stanislavski wanted to drive home with these exercises, something he says everybody knows but actors always forget, is that “proper metre in syllables,

words, speech and movement and precise rhythms, are crucial to the process of experiencing” (Benedetti, 2008: 469). However, Stanislavski cautions that tempo-rhythm is a double-edged sword, which can be as harmful as it is useful, depending on how it is applied. When it is chosen properly, feelings and experiences arise naturally. But when it is wrong, inappropriate feeling and experiences will result.

### **Physical Characteristics**

Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 519) posits that just as intuition can produce external physical characteristics, so can pure mechanical, technical trickery. Stanislavski demonstrated this after one of his students expressed his frustrations with physical characterisation. The student had explained that he understood the process of experiencing intellectually and was able to foster in the mind the elements required for the character, but he was still uncertain about embodying a role. The student understood that an actor couldn't convey the life of a human spirit if he/she couldn't find the right features for the character, such as the voice, way of speaking, walking and behaving. Stanislavski agreed with this, but his students wanted to know; “...how and where do we find these external physical features?” (Benedetti, 2008: 516). Stanislavski explained that these, especially in talented actors, appear spontaneously because the right frame of mind has been created. But if one is unlucky to achieve this from the “inside-out”, then a more direct approach can still be employed. Stanislavski demonstrated this by drying up his upper teeth and the inside of his top lip, pulling it up and sticking it on his teeth so he could appear to have “rabbit's teeth”. Not only did this give him a different facial appearance but it also affected his voice and speech, and then his way of standing and walking followed, so much that his personality seemed to also change (Benedetti, 2008: 518).

Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 518-519) points out that all he did was make one physical adjustment, and the rest followed intuitively. His mesmerised students wondered how they could also get these tricks; do they have to learn them, invent them, take them from life, stumble upon them by chance, or find them in a book? Stanislavski answered that there is a dozen of ways to get to it:

You should draw your external characterization from yourselves, from others, from life (real or imaginary) either intuitively or by observation, from the daily round, friends, pictures, etchings, sketches, books, stories, novels or let chance provide them. It doesn't matter which. Only don't get lost in outer searching, be yourselves (Benedetti, 2008: 519).

To help them explore physical characterisation further, Stanislavski gave the students an exercise called "Masquerade". The students had to come to class disguised as a character, using anything from costume to make-up, and were given three days to work on this. Stanislavski, as cited by Stephenson (2011: 74) pointed out that genuine, living characterisation arises of itself in such a way that the actor is not aware of it, because as soon as the actor starts thinking about the character, he or she cannot refrain from overacting and representation. Joseph and Roach (1980: 318) point out that characterisation in the theatre requires a completeness of responses from the actor's body and mind. This is yet another statement endorsing Stanislavski's psychophysical approach to acting.

## **Conclusion**

Through Stanislavski's psycho-technique, the actor can produce the Creative State at his or her own time, which previously only came by chance. Just as actors apply

makeup and put on costume before a performance to make themselves look like the character, they need to pay equal, if not more, attention to their hearts and minds in order to not only look like the character but to “live” the character. Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 299) suggests that this can be achieved by first not arriving in the dressing room at the last minute, as most actors do. If it is a major role, Stanislavski advises actors to prepare at least two hours before the show begins. First the actor needs to clear the mind of external and personal thoughts, then relax the muscles, then warm up and play games. And then the actor needs to bring the psychophysical elements of the System into the picture, seamlessly, as Stanislavski details:

All the elements of the outer creative state must be exercised and trained to ensure that your embodiment is a subtle, supple, clear and physically expressive as the capricious feelings, the elusive life of the spirit it is called to reflect. It must not only be superlatively well trained but subservient to the commands of the will. Its link to the inner state and their interaction, must become an instant, unconscious *reflex* (Benedetti, 2008: 300).

When these psychophysical elements of the System come together (not all at once, but congruently), the actor will achieve what Stanislavski calls the *Actor’s Creative State*, which refers to a state of authentic human, and almost completely natural spontaneity onstage, which results in a successful, truthful performance.

The next chapter seeks to explore whether South African actors employ Method acting, as informed by the Stanislavski System, or elements thereof, in their approach to a role. This is achieved through an observation of ten theatre actors during their onstage portrayal of a role, followed by a one-on-one, open-ended

interview in which the participants outline their approach to a role from their first acquaintance with the role, up to performance.

## CHAPTER 5

### Introduction

This study has thus far explored the origins of Method acting, its adoption and adaptation from Russia to America, followed by an overview of acting in South Africa, and then outlined elements of the Stanislavski System, with the aim of interrogating whether Method acting, as informed by the Stanislavski System has been adopted by theatre actors in South Africa, and if so, how the technique was adapted. For this purpose, semi-structured phenomenological interviews were conducted with a purposively selected sample of ten actors, as outlined in Chapter 1. This chapter provides an interpretation of the collected data, but before that, the chapter details the process through which the data was collected and analysed.

### Data Collection Process

The data for this study was collected through open-ended interviews conducted in the style of a casual conversation. The participants were selected from a wide range of theatrical styles/genres such as Realism, Musical Theatre, Physical Theatre, and Storytelling/narrative. This was done in order to test Moore's assertion that there is no need for Stanislavski's System to be adapted because it is the "elementary grammar of Dramatic Arts" (Moore, 1984: 9), which emphasises the universality of its laws for any actor building any character in any play. Since the interviews were conducted in the manner of an everyday chat between peers, there was no notetaking at the time. However, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed thereafter. Each interview commenced with a casual conversation about the stage

play the participant performed in, as Moustakas (1994: 114) declares is the best way to open a phenomenological interview, followed by a brief explanation of what the interview would entail. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes.

## **Data Analysis Process**

Because as the researcher, I am in the same field as the participants, I interrogated my own prejudices and preconceptions about the phenomena being studied, in order to neutralise the context as much as possible before commencing with the analysis phase. I began this process by familiarising myself with the data, listening to the audio recordings of the interviews several times without casting any judgment or evaluation. Broomé (2011: 3) states that the isolation of phenomena from their natural contexts into a “sterile laboratory” presupposes that a phenomenon exists independent of the context in which it exists in everyday life. This is what Giorgi (2008: 4) calls phenomenological “reduction”, which is achieved when the researcher begins by first “bracketing” his/her personal past knowledge and assumptions about the topic of the study, including all other theoretical knowledge.

The reason a phenomenological data analyst ought to undertake bracketing and reduction is because many experimental errors are committed when present experiences provoke association with past experiences and lead to the latter being assumed to be identical to the former when they may in fact only be similar but with important differences (Giorgi, 2008: 4). To ensure phenomenological bracketing, I posed the same interview questions to myself in order to unearth dormant biases or preconceptions that I might have. This helped me isolate myself from the

participants' experiences and remove the phenomena from familiar context in order to analyse the data as completely new and free from the contamination of familiarity.

## **Interview Transcripts**

To fully represent the contents of the phenomenological interviews and demonstrate how they were conducted, transcripts are provided in full in the addendum, which include questions posed to the participants, along with details about the participants, such as their educational level, experience, the characters they portrayed, and the stage play they performed in. However, only P1's transcript includes details unrelated to the study, such as greetings and small talk, to illustrate the informal nature of the interviews. In this chapter, only the contents of the interview that relates to the adoption and adaptation of Method acting are dealt with in the analysis.

## **Developing a Table for Data Analysis**

After exploring Stanislavski's two-year programme for the training of his System in Chapter 4, I developed two tables for analysis purposes, one looking at the possible adoption of Method acting in each participant's approach to a role, and the other dealing with adaptation. The "adoption" table consists of six columns, three for psychological elements, and three columns for physical elements. The table is cross sectioned by ten rows, for each of the ten participants. The "adaptation" table identifies instances of adaptation by the ten participants for each of the six Method acting elements where such instances exist.

Since the interviews were done verbally, and later transferred to text through transcription, I was guided by Peräkylä and Rusuuvouri's method of analysing talk



and text (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 529) in developing the two tables for analysis. An informal approach may, in many cases, be the best choice as a method in a study that is focusing on written text, especially “in research designs where the qualitative text analysis is not at the core of the research but instead is in a subsidiary or complementary role, no more sophisticated text analytical methods may be needed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 530).

### Adoption Table

This table identifies the six major elements of Method acting in the approach of the ten research participants to a role as expounded by each participant in the interview. In instances where a particular element could not be identified in a participant’s approach, the block assigned to that particular element is left empty. In the blocks where elements of Method acting are identified, the questions I asked are provided before the participants’ responses. The participants are labelled P1 up to P10. To make the table compact and not burdensome to read, only instances of the interview where words, phrases, and sentences uttered by the research participants pertaining to each element are quoted. I expand on each of these points in the analysis below this table. The full interview transcripts are attached in the addendum.

	<b>“Magic ‘If”</b>	<b>Belief and the Sense of Truth</b>	<b>Emotion Memory</b>	<b>Voice and Speech</b>	<b>Tempo-Rhythm</b>	<b>Physical Characteristics</b>
<b>P1</b>	<b>Question:</b> Could you outline your journey for me, from the first time you were cast in	<b>Question:</b> Do you really work up an emotion of love, or is it put on to convince us as the audience?	<b>Question:</b> How did you get into those emotions?  <b>Answer:</b> <u>I had to use my own</u>	While answering the first question, the participant also addressed this point:	While answering the first question, the participant also addressed this point:	While answering the first question, the participant also addressed this point:  <b>Answer:</b>

	<p>the role of a Pastor?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>One thing I always do when I try to characterise certain characters, I ask myself that <u>magic question</u>; <u>“what if?”</u> <u>What if it was me? What if I was caught in the situation?</u></p>	<p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>You know, the mind is a very powerful thing. The other character was played by a friend of mine. So, I’ve never seen her as someone I can be romantically involved with. But, <u>for the sake of the play, now and then I had to look at her and say “this woman is so beautiful”</u>. And <u>I had to convince myself</u> that this woman is beautiful.</p>	<p><u>personal experience</u>. As a human being, you go through a lot of emotions; you fall in love, you become disappointed, you get angry. And when you are angry for the first time, if you remember, <u>you remember how you felt... So, the emotional journey started with me going back to those emotions when I was disappointed by my closest family and my ex-girlfriend</u>. And I had to tap into those emotions, that’s why they made it look real.</p>	<p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>...<u>I began observing him; how does he speak? The difference between how he speaks when he is at church and how he speaks with his family, and how he speaks to us as the congregation</u> but when he is off the pulpit, and I realised that actually this man is performing but he is not aware.</p>	<p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>The <u>processing of the words</u>; when other characters are talking to him you could actually feel when you’re reading the script that <u>this is actually processing now before you answer</u>.</p> <p>We just took a lot of text and compressed it, and then turned the text into a song. So, <u>the emotions were the same, but the text was cut shorter</u>. It was more like when you summarise</p>	<p><u>So I started looking at my pastor; how he preaches, how he delivers the message, how he makes a point to the church</u>. And for a period of maybe a month, I started looking at him as a character on stage, as a performance when he preaches on Sunday. And I picked up certain elements, for example the speech pattern. He does not speak the way he speaks during the week when he’s at home – the volume of course, <u>the gestures, the way he carries himself when he is on the pulpit</u>, and other things.</p>
<p><b>P2</b></p>	<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>...would you say you have a system or a</p>	<p>While answering the first question, the participant also</p>		<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>Because it is unlike a fictional</p>		<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>Did you then base the entire embodiment of</p>

<p>systematic approach? Is your approach different?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>So, at most of the cases I would ask myself questions as that character and say ok, <u>if they say this character is drunk and then he has to be walking like this and this and this, would I walk like that 'if I was that character? If it was me, would I walk like that?</u> Using also some other questions that I would ask myself personally. <u>If they asked me, if I was one of those police officers who shot those guys, if it was me when they shot, when they said "fire" would I have shot?</u></p>	<p>addressed this point:</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>...<u>belief plays a big role in what you're doing. If you don't believe it, then it's going to be very hard for you to make somebody else believe it.</u></p>		<p>character who is not based on a real person, did you have to actually go and find more about this person, and how did you then get in this person's shoes?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>once I understood the text as it was written, <u>I had to now go and use visuals, like even speech, how he talks, so videos.</u></p> <p>...Just <u>interviews of him talking publicly. I had to understand what kind of a language he speaks, what kind of a man is he?</u> So, I did that, I actually watch a lot of videos of him on YouTube</p>	<p>this character on him?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>...it is him, but it cannot be exactly as he is. So, <u>I had to just find elements that would represent him, and at the same time still have things about me, about my own interpretation of him. So, somewhere-somehow, I think my character had those fictional elements in them because of some things I created myself, like a walk. I would not use his walk that I saw he's using. I'd use a different walk that I think would suit this character, gestures, things like that. I did not use his gestures, although I know that these were his gestures.</u></p>
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				making speeches, when he talks to the people, because most of the time he is addressing the masses.	
P3		<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>What did you do in order to display the character truthfully... because like I just said, you were authoritative. What did you do to be truthful?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>I just try and be part of the environment, and then just let my imagination go there, and <u>just try and live in that moment.</u> What I'd do most of the time, <u>I'd get onstage and say "okay now I'm playing a king... so I'd be like "okay, now I'm playing this character" and now from this point on I need to think,</u></p>			<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>So, now that you've acted in so many theatre plays, would you say that you have a certain way or tradition or routine that you use to get into character?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>So, <u>mostly I just study body language, look at the body language,</u> because as actors, especially theatre, you rely more on being visual, and then the emotional is sort of like an extra, it's sort of like a bonus. So, when you're really good at being visual, it's easy for people to see you, to watch you, to connect to you.</p>

		<p><u>behave and act like the character... So I need to just allow my imagination to just fully absorb the environment and then try and live in the environment.</u></p>				
P4	<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>There are things in the character that you have never been through... How do you play something you are not, something that you've never been, but play it so believably?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p><u>I do my own adapted "Magic 'If", then I mix it with Alba Emoting, and then I feel it in my body, and then I deliver it.</u></p>	<p>While answering the first question, the participant also addressed this point:</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p><u>It's truthful to me because I'm feeling it, and it's visible to the next person...</u></p> <p>I think <u>the one thing that I've learnt in my training is to be truthful to myself.</u> I shouldn't be trying to get things. <u>I shouldn't be trying to be anything other than myself.</u></p>	<p>While answering the first question, the participant also addressed this point:</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>I can't pretend like I don't have any lived experience. <u>I don't have to experience the very same thing as is, but I could have experienced something similar, or something that makes me feel the same way.</u> I might not have lost my parents, but I might have lost a brother, and <u>the feeling is the same.</u> So, <u>It's</u></p>			<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>You just mentioned something about research, especially for characters that don't speak to you immediately or you don't relate to immediately when you see them on paper... did you ever have to do something like that or observe something or someone, anything outside of you?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>Yeah, I've had to... <u>I was looking at her facial expressions, how something would affect her... how to be something inside and how to be something</u></p>

			<p><u>just going back to those lived experiences and trying to merge them with those of the character...</u></p>			<p><u>else externally...</u></p> <p>The character was a Martial Arts champion at some point. So, she had that formal training of Martial Arts. So, it means <u>her body had to be some sort of a formal structure. She doesn't stride like a normal woman, she takes bigger strides</u> because she's trained that way. <u>Her body is a bit more formal.</u></p>
P5	<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>What did you do the first time you were given the script?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>...for me it became easier when I removed everything that the director said and <u>I asked myself "if you were the character, what would you do?"</u></p> <p>...even when I wake up I'd</p>		<p>While answering the first question, the participant also addressed this point:</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>You know with Drama, <u>you always pick up things that really happened in real life, and that's what I did with this whole thing.</u> And that's how I was able to be as strong as you say the</p>			

	<p>ask <u>“If the character was to wake up, what would she do?”</u></p> <p>... with the killing part, I came to think of <u>“if I were to do it, how would I do it?”</u></p>		<p>character was, because <u>I took things that happened in real life and forgot about what the director said...</u></p>			
P6			<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>...how do you truthfully then embody those emotions?  ...How do you then be someone whose husband has been killed when your “husband” has not been killed?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>...when I was 18 I lost my father, so it was quite tough, it was very hard. And then <u>every time we have to do Emotional Memory, it always goes back to that, and I have to dig really deep, fast.</u></p>			<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>How did you first familiarise yourself with the character?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>...what I do is, normally on my everyday basis I’m always observing people. Some people might think I’m crazy or I’m thinking too much, but actually, <u>looking at how this person walks, how they talk, how they move their hands, you know, how they tie the blanket around their waist.</u></p>

<p><b>P7</b></p>	<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>... when you're losing someone who's close to you, like a father or a relative from this thing, the sorrow that you have to portray, where does it come from?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>...it's a matter of "Magic 'If" to say "what if? what if?" It's simply because then it's all in how I imagine if then I didn't have a brothers and sisters I think I would approach it by saying "what if it happened to my parent?" It doesn't have to be a brother or a sister, but it has to be someone close to me.</p>	<p>While answering the first question, the participant also addressed this point:</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p><u>I had to take myself to a fairy tale world where I say "how do I then make people believe? And how do I make myself believe that this is what I'm going through?"</u></p> <p><u>... I think it's more on believing really...</u></p>	<p>While answering the first question, the participant also addressed this point:</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>So it's using the feeling which is them again <u>reflecting, going back and say "I once felt something like this, then how do I come about doing it?"</u></p>	<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>What would you say about your levels of getting the characters, from the first time you started exploring them to the performance stage? What would you say about the steps you took...?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>To me, <u>it starts more in the voice because you know we start from reading, then from there we get to body.</u></p>		<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>And then, for the young boy, at least you have been a young boy. But the old woman; you've never been an old woman, you've never been that age. Where did she come from? Because I saw her onstage.</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>...it's my grandmother from my father's side. So, the first person that I looked at was her because I saw her almost every day when I was growing up. <u>I understood how she walked, how she did things, how she reacted to things.</u> And then there's thing funny old woman that I see all the time. So, I had to merge the two.</p>
<p><b>P8</b></p>	<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>When did the script come into play?</p>			<p>While answering the first question, the participant also</p>	<p>While answering the first question, the participant also</p>	



	<p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>First of all, I approach any story, any characterization, from my perspective first – my perspective as a woman, and <u>had I been in that state, what would my reaction be?</u></p> <p>... And then you ask yourself another question after that; <u>“so and so is this and this, how would she perhaps, and what if she?”</u></p>			<p>addressed this point:</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p><u>I just start reading the lines and the character is already established vocally, and speech patterns,</u> everything. Because that’s the thing that tells I need to say like this, I need to say it like that. <u>Every character that I’ve ever played, from the get-go, what I vocally started with is the most honest approach,</u> and the only thing I can do is to make it better.</p>	<p>addressed this point:</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>I just bring up the script, I open it, after just giving myself a moment, I just start reading the lines and the character is already established vocally, and speech patterns, everything. Because <u>that’s the thing that tells me I need to say it like this, I need to say it like that.</u></p>	
<p><b>P9</b></p>		<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>Would you say for all the characters that you have played, you have one approach?</p>				<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>Did you ever maybe see someone, a real life person where maybe you can take some of the</p>

		<p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>They differ, because you meet different characters. You play different people. <u>You need to start by believing. I am the kind of person who believes in the character before I can play it.</u> I talk to it, spiritually, before I can play it.</p>				<p>qualities of the character from?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>If I play an arrogant character I have to be close to arrogant people in real life, so that I can relate to how they feel when they're angry. I wouldn't fight with them, but when they're angry <u>I would just watch how they tackle moments, how they shout at each other, how do they talk? Do they point? Or does he stand still?</u></p>
P10	<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>Because you're not the character, how did you make sure that you play her truthfully?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p><u>I ask myself "what if something like this was to happen?"</u> That's how I got into this character... I said I'm young and one day I</p>					<p><b>Question:</b></p> <p>Are there things that you did in that rehearsal space as your personal routine as preparation for performance?</p> <p><b>Answer:</b></p> <p>I lock myself in with my mental room and I visualise the character. <u>I look at her and I interview her. I look at how she</u></p>

<p>obviously wish to be married and have kids, so <u>“what if something like this was to happen to me? How would it make me feel?”</u>  ...So, that’s where I started, saying <u>“what if I was here and I had to endure, this was my situation, I couldn’t bare kids and really wanted them? How would I go forward and see that I become the woman that I yearn to be?”</u></p>					<p><u>walks, how she speaks.</u>  ... I would sit with her, I would every time check the little details, <u>how she’s walking, how she reacts, how she’s dressed, how she feels.</u></p>
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### Interpreting the Adoption Table

During this phase, I went through the full interview transcripts again, together with the filled-in Adoption Table in order to interpret the data. To present a clear interpretation of the findings, all the participants whose responses fall under a particular element are listed under it. The participants whose responses do not fall under any of the elements are left out completely. The interpretation of the data is done through a specific lens designed uniquely for this study, using the aforementioned six elements of Stanislavski’s System. However, other acting approached could also be used for a similar kind of analysis because at their core, acting approaches are inevitably interrelated.

## The “Magic ‘If’”

- **Participant 1**

A trained actor with a tertiary qualification in Drama, the participant acknowledged the “Magic ‘If’” by name and credited it to Stanislavski. Not only did the participant credit the “Magic ‘If’” to Stanislavski, his description of how he applied this element was accurate to Stanislavski’s approach; “I ask myself that magic question; what if? What if it was me? What if I was caught in the situation?” P1 performed in a musical, which supports Moore’s assertion that the Stanislavski System is universal and can be applied by any actor building character in any play, and therefore needs not be adapted to America or any other nationality (Moore, 1984: 9).

- **Participant 2**

P2 had no formal training from an institution of higher learning, but trained through practice in community theatre before gaining experience on the professional stage. Although the participant did not have a name for it, his detailed description of his process revealed that he employs the “Magic ‘If’”; “If they asked me, if I was one of those police officers who shot those guys, if it was me when they shot, when they said ‘fire’, would I have shot?” This participant was also performing in a musical.

- **Participant 4**

This participant holds tertiary qualification in Performing Arts. Like P1, she acknowledged the “Magic ‘If’” by name and description, and credited it to Stanislavski. However, the participant stated that she uses a modified version of “Magic ‘If’”, which she ascribed to Alba Emoting<sup>18</sup>. Baker (2008: 5) states that Alba Emoting uses emotional effector patterns, which allow actors consistent access to a

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<sup>18</sup> An acting technique that helps actors to induce, express and regulate basic emotions through breath.

large range of emotions. Baker adds that Alba Emoting is versatile because it can be integrated with other techniques, which is what this participant did. As opposed to using “Magic ‘If” as described in Stanislavski’s System, the participant added breath as a physical mechanism to help induce different emotions as required by the different scenes.

- **Participant 5**

Similar to P2, this participant did not have a name for her approach, but provided a description that proved to be “Magic ‘If’.” When asked how she was able to conjure up the rage that drove her character to murder, the participant proceeded to describe a process of “Magic ‘If’”; “...with the killing part, I came to think of ‘if I were to do it, how would I do it? I don’t know, I don’t have anything else to say besides that; if it was me, how would I do it? And then you start being spontaneous.” This participant did not have formal training, but trained through experience in one of the national theatres.

- **Participant 7**

P7 mentioned the “Magic ‘If” both by name and description while detailing how he was able to summon the painful emotion of losing a loved one. The participant, however, stated that after trying out different techniques, he now uses his own approach of “archiving” different characters that he has played in the past, and the people he observes every day, and brings those to the fore when required by a scene. This participant has a tertiary qualification in Drama.

- **Participant 8**

The participant stated that she adopts a more spiritual approach to her character and treats acting more like a religion. However, an element of “Magic ‘If” was identified in her description; “The question is; if she had a vendetta, would she try and put what

she does and her work in place with that?... had I been in that state, what would my reaction be?” The participant acknowledged borrowing some elements from Michael Chekhov, a former student of Stanislavski who designed his own approach to acting after studying with Stanislavski for several years and, according to Solomon (2002: 3) concluded that many aspects of the Stanislavski system were dangerous and unnecessary. Chekhov’s technique was based on what he called Psychological Gestures, which emphasises the articulation of feelings through gesture. Chekhov believed that understanding language is less important than reading the actors’ gestures (Cornford, 2012: 50). P8 has a tertiary qualification in Drama.

- **Participant 10**

Asked how she was able to truthfully play a childless woman who desperately wanted to conceive, the participant detailed a process of the “Magic ‘If’”, although not by name; “I ask myself ‘what if something like this was to happen?’ That’s how I got into this character... I said ‘I’m young and one day I obviously wish to be married and have kids, so ‘what if something like this was to happen to me? How would it make me feel?’” P10 holds a tertiary qualification in Drama.

### **Belief and the Sense of Truth**

- **Participant 1**

This element was identified in the participant’s description of the process he undertook in order to enable himself to be amorous onstage with an actress who was his platonic friend in real life; “...I have never seen her as someone I can be romantically involved with. But, for the sake of the play, now and then I had to look at her and say ‘this woman is so beautiful.’” As much as this may not be the participant’s true feelings in real life, it is true onstage because of the participant’s

belief, which, as Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008:153) points out, differs from real life truth because it is a product of the imagination.

- **Participant 2**

The participant mentioned the importance of belief while outlining his approach to the “Magic ‘If’”; “There’s those different things you need to ask yourself as a person, before you become an actor; ‘okay if it’s me?’ because belief plays a big role in what you’re doing. If you don’t believe it then it’s going to be very hard for you to make somebody else believe it. This echoes Stanislavski’s assertion (Benedetti, 2008:153) that imagination uses the magic “if” and the Given Circumstances to create truth.

- **Participant 4**

Participant 4’s approach was to believe in the world of the story. However, as a practitioner of Alba Emoting, she arrived at the truth slightly differently; “I register how my breath is in that thing; is it faster? Is it shallow? etc. and then, how is my body reacting? Is it tense, is it open?”

- **Participant 7**

Belief and the sense of truth was prominent in Participant 7’s approach as he outlined how he made his audience believe in the fairy-tale world of the play by first believing in it himself; “I had to take myself to a fairy tale world where I say ‘how do I then make people believe? And how do I make myself believe that this is what I’m going through?... it’s more on believing.”

- **Participant 9**

This element was identified when the participant conceded that he had multiple ways of approaching character, but added that he never plays any character until he believes in it; “You need to start by believing. I am the kind of person who believes in the character before I can play it.” However, this is a limited variation of the

Stanislavski element, which stresses the belief in the whole Given Circumstances of the play (Benedetti, 2008: 156), and not necessarily of the character. This participant was trained informally in a community theatre and has experience on the professional stage.

## **Emotion Memory**

- **Participant 1**

Emotion Memory was identified in the participant's approach when he described his approach to the emotional journey of his character, who was met with rejection when he wanted to atone for his crime after returning from jail for murder; "I had to use my own personal experience. As a human being, you go through a lot of emotions; you fall in love, you become disappointed, you get angry. And when you are angry for the first time, if you remember, you remember how you felt." As someone who had never murdered, the participant used the "Magic 'if'" to get into the character of a murderer, and then used Emotion Memory to play the disappointment experienced by the character when the community rejected him.

- **Participant 4**

Participant 4 was clear on how she used Emotion Memory to align her own past with that of the character. The participant does not credit this to Stanislavski, which makes it difficult to identify whether the influence for this was directly from Stanislavski's Emotion Memory, or Strasberg's Affective Memory, which also requires actors to dig into their past for an analogous emotion required by the lay (Hodge, 2001: 144), or other methods.



- **Participant 5**

P5 also made use of Emotional Memory, although she neither called it by name nor credited it to any method; “You know with Drama, you always pick up things that really happened in real life, and that’s what I did with this whole thing. And that’s how I was able to be as strong as you say Phindile was, because I took things that happened in real life and forgot about what the director said...”

- **Participant 6**

P6 mentioned Emotion Memory by name as she recalled how she used the element to re-live the moment she learned of her father’s passing when she was 18; “The thing is when I was 18 I lost my father, so it was quite tough, it was very hard. And then every time we have to do Emotional Memory, it always goes back to that, and I have to dig really deep, fast.” This helped her to truthfully play the emotions of a woman whose husband was murdered. This participant has a tertiary qualification in Drama.

- **Participant 7**

While talking about the “Magic ‘If””, the participant mentioned a process that includes Emotion Memory; “It doesn’t have to be a brother or a sister, but it has to be someone close to me. So it’s using the feeling which is then again reflecting, going back and say “I once felt something like this, then how do I come about doing it?”

## **Voice and Speech**

- **Participant 1**

The participant gave a clear detail on how he approached his character through voice and speech after studying his pastor's habitual speaking pattern. Stanislavski (Benedetti, 2008: 402) highlights the importance of playing subtext, not only physically but thorough voice and speech.

- **Participant 2**

P2 described how he observed videos and listened to interviews of the man his character was based on, in order to mould his own character. He studied the man's speech and his manner of speaking.

- **Participant 7**

P7 mentioned how his characters starts in the voice as he reads the script; "For me, it starts more in the voice because you know we start from reading, then from there we get to body." It was however unclear whether he was referring to the voice in the same context as Stanislavski, or in his context of "archiving" characters. As an actor with tertiary training in Drama, the participant's approach to voice and speech could also be a result of voice training.

- **Participant 8**

This element appeared strongly in P8's approach. The participant talked at length about how her characters needed to be established vocally before she could explore

other things; “I just start reading the lines and the character is already established vocally, and speech patterns, everything. Because that’s the thing that tells me I need to say it like this, I need to say it like that. Every character that I’ve ever played, from the get-go, what I vocally started with is the most honest approach, and the only thing I can do is to make it better.”

## **Tempo-Rhythm**

- **Participant 1**

Tempo-Rhythm was identified in P1’s approach as he was describing his analysis of the written text; “The processing of the words; when other characters are talking to him you could actually feel when you’re reading the script that this is actually processing now before you answer.” As a musical, the play also lent itself to a stylised delivery of text and emotion; “We just took a lot of text and compressed it, and then turned the text into a song. So, the emotions were the same, but the text was cut shorter. It was more like when you summarise.” This is what Stanislavski (2008: 465) refers to when he says tempo can curtail or extend an action and shorten or lengthen speech. Different tempo-rhythms, as Stanislavski states in Chapter 4, can affect one’s mood.

- **Participant 8**

When P8 was speaking about voice and speech, she mentioned speech patterns, which are relevant to Tempo-Rhythm; “Because that’s the thing that tells me I need to say it like this, I need to say it like that.” However, the participant ascribes her approach to Michael Chekhov rather than Stanislavski.

## **Physical Characteristics**

- **Participant 1**

The same way the participant mentioned studying his pastor for the two previous elements, he studied the man's physical characteristics such as gestures and the way he carried himself on the pulpit, although he added that he only took certain things. The participant credited this to Stanislavski; "Stanislavski, helped me a lot. And again, just getting to live the character, and also seeing someone who looks more like the character and copying from them." Stanislavski encouraged actors who were not lucky enough to be able to conjure up emotions spontaneously from the inside out to try a more direct approach through physical characterisation (Benedetti, 2008: 19).

- **Participant 2**

As P2 mentioned previously that he studied the man his character was based on, this included his walk and gestures. But the participant made it clear that he added his own interpretation of the character and created characteristics such as how the character would walk; "I would not use his walk that I saw he's using. I'd use a different walk that I think would suit this character; gestures, things like that. I did not use his gestures, although I know that these were his gestures. I think the most important thing that I took from him is his speech." The participant did not seek to the feign or impersonate the person his character was based on or try to give the audience a carbon copy of the man, which, according to Kirby (Auslander, 2003: 17) is acting. The participant chose to use only the speech of the person he was portraying. This form of portrayal is an example of performance because the participant is showing/doing rather than being. McAuley's rule of thumb, as quoted

by Schechner (2020: 12), states that for an activity to be regarded as performance, it must involve a live presence of the performer and an audience, and there must be some intentionality on the side of either party.

- **Participant 3**

This element was prominent in P3's approach, possibly because he was portraying the role of an ape, which demanded a lot of time and effort on physical characterisation of such an unusual character to portray; "I found out a lot of interesting things; how similar they behave to human beings. I found out that apes are actually a few of the animals that use gestures to communicate, known gestures like hugs, kisses, faces/frowning, greeting, faces when they are angry. So, they look a lot human when you research about them. I think that helped me a lot, just getting to know how these animals behave, getting to see how they behave around family..." P3 was trained informally and has experience performing on the professional stage.

- **Participant 4**

As a physical theatre performer, P4 insisted that the body has its own story to tell, which was evident in her portrayal. The actors would say one thing verbally while portraying a different message with the body, through physical movements, singing, dance, gestures and facial expressions. This is another example of performance, as Schechner (2020: 1) stated in Chapter 1 that performance is not only limited to acting but also includes dancing and making music.

- **Participant 6**

This participant has tertiary training in Drama. In order to truthfully portray a woman much older than her, P6 detailed how she observed older women around her and practised doing things like them; “So I started looking at women, trying to walk like them, trying to embody them, bit by bit, and even trying to leave me, P6, because I walk like this.” As much as her observation of other people helped her with physical characteristics, the participant highlighted the challenge that came with performing a musical, having to deliver dialogue with music, in Zulu; “We had to watch *Les Misérables* and learn how to speak with music.” Although the participant and her fellow actors studied the abovementioned musical, which is based on an originally French novel, the musical that the participant performed in can be categorised as a traditional African performance because it had traits such as the use of “special” languages other than spoken word, which, as Sirayi (2012: 17) assert, often communicate better to an African audience than words do. The music, song and dance also proved to have a communal character, which elicited a response from the audience through clapping, singing along.

- **Participant 7**

P7 played multiple roles in a storytelling play, but the one character that stood out was that of an elderly woman, which he portrayed with unassuming truthfulness. The participant credited this achievement to his observations of his paternal grandmother and another elderly woman in his community, after which he combined the two women into one.

- **Participant 9**

P9 outlined how he observed friends and other men in the township for his physical characterisation, especially aggressive people in heated arguments as this was the kind of a character he had to play. The participant also mentioned that he considered physical facial changes, such as wearing his beard a certain way for a different character.

- **Participant 10**

P10's approach to physical characterisation was slightly different as it took the route of imagination as opposed to observation of real life people like most of the participants. The participant outlined how she would "sit" with the character by zoning out and locking herself into her mental room; "...because I would sit with her, I would every time check the little details, how she's walking, how she reacts, how she's dressed, how she feels." P10's approach fits well with Stanislavski's assertion that to talented actors, physical characteristics appear spontaneously because they create the right frame of mind (Stanislavski, 2008: 518).

### **Adaptation Table**

This adaptation table looks into the elements of Method acting identified in the adoption table and interrogates whether the elements identified in the adoption table were adapted by the participants, be it consciously or unconsciously, or applied exactly as outlined by Stanislavski in Chapter 4. In cases where adaptation has been identified, I briefly highlight this in the table and expound more on the actor's process and identify how his/her approach deviates from, or adds to, the Method acting

element in question. For ease of reading, where no adoption of a particular element was identified in the Adoption table 5.6., the block assigned to the said element is greyed out. Where adoption was identified but no evidence of adaptation was found, the block is left blank.

	<b>“Magic ‘If”</b>	<b>Belief and the Sense of Truth</b>	<b>Emotion Memory</b>	<b>Voice and Speech</b>	<b>Tempo-Rhythm</b>	<b>Physical Characteristics</b>
<b>P1</b>				<i>I began observing him... The difference between how he speaks when he is at church and how he speaks with his family.</i>		
<b>P2</b>				<i>I had to go and use visuals, like even how he talks...Just interviews of him talking publicly.</i>		
<b>P3</b>						
<b>P4</b>	<i>The “Magic ‘If” works in such a way that Stanislavski speaks of you imagining yourself in that situation, and then it’s, “what if I was in that situation?”</i>		<i>...it’s just going back to those lived experiences and trying to merge them with those of the character and just creating triggers and patterns for yourself as an actor, because you have to take care of</i>			<i>I’m a physical theatre practitioner, and I’ve come to respect the body – that the body has its own story to tell...In that world...that’s how things are done. If you’re angry you step on tables, the same way that if we are angry we throw</i>



<p><i>... it doesn't work for me that way... I empathise so strongly that sometimes it's too much for me to handle... my core is my strongest point – everything of mine happens in the core, so the things that were described in the script that happened to the character, I'd feel them here (points to the solar plexus), and then I would register the feeling in my body, and then I would find trigger words... So, I would adapt the "Magic 'If" in that way, and I'd use Alba Emoting</i></p>		<p><i>yourself. Otherwise you'll lose your mind...</i></p>			<p><i>things... it's a norm in that world.</i></p>
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P5						
P6						
P7						
P8				<p><i>I just start reading the lines and the character is already established vocally, and speech patterns, everything.</i></p> <p><i>I don't change meaning, I don't change perspective or interpretation because it's lying. Anything after that for me is lying to yourself. So, I cannot lie to that voice, I respect it.</i></p>		
P9						
P10						

### Interpreting the Adaptation Table

In this phase of the study, I went through the full interview transcripts again, this time together with the Adoption table in order to identify whether an adopted Method acting element was adapted by each participant, and if so, how. Participants whose approach did not fall under any block on the Adaptation table are left out.

## **The “Magic ‘If’”**

- **Participant 4**

This participant was clear that she uses an adapted version of “Magic ‘If’” and she articulated the adaptation clearly. The participant also knows the systematic approach to “Magic ‘If’” according to Stanislavski but stated that it didn’t work for her as intended, which made her take it a step further. As a person with a strong sense of empathy, the participant started empathising with her character as she read the script, then she would identify “trigger” words that would elicit that empathetic feeling during a required moment on stage, and she would use Alba Emoting to physically induce that feeling; “So, if the word was ‘gruesome’, that’s my adjective. So, the moment I read that word, my body will react. So, I would adapt the ‘Magic ‘If’ in that way, and what I’d do is I’d use Alba Emoting.” An important point to make is that all truthful acting in its nature is empathetic. Lighthelm (nd: 3) defines empathy as the ability to understand, interpret and experience the feelings and emotions of others, which is what actors do, albeit in imaginary circumstances.

## **Belief and the Sense of Truth**

No evidence of adaptation could be identified.

## **Emotion Memory**

- **Participant 4**

The same way she adapted the “Magic ‘If’”, P4 uses a slight variation of Emotion Memory, where she goes back into her lived experience as Stanislavski prescribes,

but instead of taking the emotion as is and use it in an analogous scene, she creates “triggers” and “patterns” that she calls upon when required by a moment on stage; “I might not have lost my parents, but I might have lost a brother, and the feeling is the same. So, It’s just going back to those lived experiences and trying to merge them with those of the character and just creating triggers and patterns for yourself as the actor, because you have to take care of yourself. Otherwise you’ll lose your mind, so you create patterns for yourself that the audience can recognise, and that are truthful to you as the actor in your body, in yourself, in your being. And then you share those then, hopefully it works.”

## **Voice and Speech**

- **Participant 1**

Apart from spending a considerable time on voice and speech exercises, Stanislavski focuses more on subtext on this element (Stanislavski, 2008: 402). The participant, however, achieved a desired voice and speech pattern by observing his pastor and “copying” his voice and speech pattern, along with his gestures. So, the arrival at this element came about through a different approach to that of Stanislavski, which stresses that the text belongs to the writer, and the subtext belongs to the actor (Benedetti, 2008: 402). Stanislavski demonstrated the importance of arriving at voice and speech through subtext by asking his students what feelings and images come when they say words such as cloud, war, kite, lilac. He would then say the words in different tones, using variations of pauses and inflections. The students would imagine and feel different each time. Stanislavski

conducted this exercise to encourage his students to speak their lines on stage with deep insight into their meaning.

- **Participant 2**

Like P1, P2 arrived at voice and speech by watching YouTube videos of the man his character was based on. Although he chose not to use the man's gestures, he chose to use his voice, therefore arriving at voice and speech through a different approach to that of Stanislavski.

- **Participant 8**

Unlike P1 and P2, this participant arrived at voice and speech from her first reading of the script. The participant declares anything else that comes after the first reading as lying; "Every character that I've ever played, from the get-go, what I vocally started with is the most honest approach, and the only thing I can do is to make it better. Just for understanding, as I understand who I'm playing, that's the one reference that I use. I don't change meaning, I don't change perspective or interpretation because it's lying. Anything after that for me is lying to yourself. So, I cannot lie to that voice, I respect it..." This approach is different to Stanislavski's as he encourages actors to try different variations of saying their lines in order to have deep insight into their meaning (Benedetti, 2008: 403). During the process of reading the script over and over again, actors uncover a lot of things that deepen character and story, which cannot be discovered at first reading. The participant's approach could be viewed as a limited version of the Stanislavski approach, or it could be a result of other voice and speech training.

## **Tempo Rhythm**

No evidence of adaptation could be identified.

## **Physical Characteristics**

- **Participant 4**

Stanislavski arrives at physical characteristics through intuition and what he calls pure mechanical, technical trickery (Benedetti, 2008: 519). He acknowledges that not all actors can arrive at physicality spontaneously, and therefore might need a direct approach. This, according to Stanislavski could be achieved by drawing from oneself or other people, including other stories. As a physical theatre practitioner, acting in a surreal play, the participant's approach to physical characteristics is different from Stanislavski's. Not only does the participant believe that the body has its own story to tell, but the play itself required the actors to perform physical actions that contradicted the message portrayed on stage; "If you're angry you step on tables, the same way that if we are angry we throw things. So, if you are angry you step on tables, and that's what you do. It's a norm in that world. So, you familiarise yourself with the world, become a resident of that world, believe in that world, so everything that you do is not like 'oh my God', your body is not in shock."

## **Discussion on the Findings**

During the observation phase of this study, I attended multiple theatre shows as an ordinary audience member without revealing the true purpose of my attendance. I watched some of the stage plays that the participants performed in more than once before deciding on which actors to approach. I identified actors who displayed the

most compelling portrayal of character. The open-ended interviews and the resultant analysis revealed some expected, and unexpected findings. While it was expected that as professional and experienced actors, the participants would have some routine or approach that enabled them to deliver such compelling portrayal of their characters, I found it surprising that their approach was less systematic/methodical and more instinctive. As a result, nine out of the ten participants did not follow Method acting or any other particular technique dogmatically but freely used some elements from Method acting and other techniques to help with their character portrayal. This is the extent to which method acting is adopted, which answers the first research question.

In seeking to answer the second research question about how Method acting is adopted, I observed how during the interviews, the participants would use phrases such as "...I borrow a few from..." (P8), "it depends on the script and on the story" (10), "...it would be problematic if I approached every character the same way" (P4), "...sometimes you get too challenged and you realise that it's not working" (P7), "...it doesn't work for me that way" (P4). The result was that, as much as there were elements of Method acting identified in the approaches of all the participants, each participant had his/her own unique technique, made up of elements from Method acting and other acting techniques. For Method acting purists, this may be frowned upon, but Stanislavski was not against it. In fact, he encouraged actors to freely use those elements of the System that may help them achieve a desired goal and discard those not helpful to them (Benedetti, 2008: xxv).

As much as I identified different elements of Method acting in all the participants' approach to a role, the number of elements identified, and the approach to those

elements differed from one participant to the next, e.g., all six Method acting elements were identified in Participant 1's approach, despite proclaiming that he did not have a "method" that he followed. The participant did however credit some of his elements to Stanislavski. The participant did not state where the other elements in his technique derived from, except that he learned them at the institution of higher learning where he studied. Participant 2 did not credit his approach to anyone or called any element by name. However, through his description of the steps he undertook to get to the truthful portrayal of his character, I was able to identify the four elements of Method acting stated on the adoption table 5.6. Only two elements; *Belief and the Sense of Truth* and *Physical Characteristics* were identified in Participant 3's approach. The participant revealed that other people's techniques fail him, so he found his own approach that works for him.

Participant 4 articulated her approach clearly. The participant credited Stanislavski on some of the elements of her approach and admitted to modifying some elements of Method acting using other techniques. I identified four elements in Participant 4's approach, three of which were indirectly achieved through using Alba Emoting and the Laban Movement.<sup>19</sup> Although Participant 5 did not credit her approach to any technique, her description revealed two prominent elements of Method acting; the "Magic 'If'" and Emotion Memory. Participant 6's approach revealed two elements, which she directly associated to Method acting. Although Participant 7's own method of "archiving", the five Method acting elements identified above were more dominant in his approach than those of his own method. As much as Participant 8 used her

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<sup>19</sup> A method for interpreting and documenting human movement, used mainly by physical theatre performers and dancers, based on the original work of Rudolf Laban.



own approach, along with elements from Michael Chekhov, her assertion that her first response to the script is the most honest is the same as Stanislavski's "fellow-feeling," which is the natural instinct of empathising with another person's experience as though it were your own. This also applies to the feeling one gets when reading a play for the first time (Benedetti, 2008: 224). Although in his description of his approach I was able to identify two elements, Participant 9 did not credit his approach to any technique or practitioner. The same was true with Participant 10, who used her own approach which comprised visualisation and an almost spiritual approach to characterisation.

## Conclusion

The findings can be summed up as follows;

- Elements of Method acting were identified in the approach of all ten participants to a role, although these elements varied in number and degree from one participant to the next.
- The number of elements identified in each participant range from one to six.
- The most prominent element identified across participants was *Physical Characteristics*, identified in eight of the ten participants' approaches, followed by the "*Magic 'If'*", identified in seven participants, then followed by *Emotion Memory* and *Belief and the Sense of Truth*, both identified in five participants' approaches, and then followed by *Voice and Speech*, identified in four participants' approaches. The least identified element was *Tempo-Rhythm*, found in only two participants' approaches to a role.

- Of the ten participants, direct influence from Method acting was identified in the approaches of three participants; P1, P6, and P7, who directly ascribed certain elements to Stanislavski or to Method acting.
- Indirect influence (through other techniques influenced by Stanislavski) could only be identified in the approaches of two participants; P8, who, along with her own technique, used the technique of Stanislavski's student, Michael Chekhov's technique, and P4, who ascribed her approach to Alba Emoting and Laban Movement.
- Although elements of Method acting were identified in P2, P3, P5, P9 and P10's approaches, I could not make a conclusive finding on the source of the influence as the participants did not ascribe these elements to any particular technique or practitioner. The participants could have arrived at these elements intuitively, or through other techniques they learned at acting school, which they may have neglected to mention.

The next chapter brings the study to a conclusion by first recapping the previous chapters, then identifying limitations of the studies, followed by recommendations.

# CHAPTER 6

## Introduction

This chapter brings the study to conclusion whilst reflecting on the discoveries made throughout the process of carrying out the research; from Chapter One to Chapter Five. This chapter also gives my overall reflections, identifies limitations of this study and makes recommendations for future research.

## Recap on Previous Chapters

### Chapter 1

This chapter introduced, and put into context, the aim of the study. The chapter also gave a background of Method acting, from its genesis in the Stanislavski System in Russia, to its adaptation in America. Furthermore, this chapter explored the difference between acting and performance. This chapter also identified the research problem, which gave rise to two research questions; *Is Method acting adopted in South African theatre? If so, how is Method acting adapted to a South African context?* Guided by the research problem, questions, aims and objectives, the research design and methodology were also formulated and outlined in this chapter, which set this phenomenological qualitative study in motion.

### Chapter 2

In this chapter, different views and interpretations of Stanislavski's System were explored, notably the interpretation of the Stanislavski System from the perspective of science, contradictions among Stanislavski's former students, who developed their

own methods, inspired by the Stanislavski System, and probable misinterpretation of the Stanislavski System caused by the translation from Russian to English of Stanislavski's texts, and a 13-year spilt (Benedetti, 2008:xvi) between the publications of part one and part two of Stanislavski's book. The chapter also compared elements of Stanislavski's System with those of Lee Strasberg's Method, which is often the source of confusion between the two practitioners' works. This chapter also looked briefly into two other American teachers, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner.

### **Chapter 3**

Chapter 3 explored acting in South Africa, with a focus on theatre, looking into three historical eras; precolonial, colonial and post-colonial. This chapter also looked into the acting technique of Gibson Kente, who is regarded as the father of "township theatre", and acting in South Africa today. This chapter found that although scholarship on the advent of acting in South Africa is insufficient, performance forms such as poetry, singing, and dance have existed just as long as that of the ancient Greeks through traditional ceremonies. With regard to South African theatre today, this chapter discovered that it takes on a syncretic nature, which is an amalgamation of different influences and schools of thought from different regions and eras. This chapter also found that Kente's highly gestural and stylised technique is was not overacting, but rather a response to the limitations and circumstances of the time, such as township halls with bad acoustics.

## **Chapter 4**

This chapter explored Stanislavski's two-year actor training programme, the first year of which has sixteen modules/elements dedicated to the inner psychological work on a character, and ten modules/elements in the second year, dedicated to the external embodiment of character. The chapter then explored in detail three elements from year one – *Action/Magic "If"*, *Belief and the Sense of Truth*, and *Emotion Memory*, and three elements from year two – *Voice and Speech*, *Tempo-Rhythm* and *Physical Characteristics*, which are elements common in most Method acting techniques, with their genesis in the Stanislavski System.

## **Chapter 5**

In Chapter 5, the research design and methods were put into practice, with the data collection and analysis processes detailed further. This chapter further developed two data analysis tables; the *adoption* table and the *adaptation* table based on verbatim transcripts of the ten participants and the six elements of Stanislavski's System explored in Chapter 4. An interpretation of the data was also conducted in this chapter, detailing each participant's approach to a role. This chapter identified elements of Method acting in the approach of all ten participants to a role, although the number of elements differed per participant.

## **Limitations of the Study**

As much as the aims of the study were achieved, which were to interrogate whether Method acting, as informed by Stanislavski's System is adopted by theatre actors in

south Africa. And if so, whether, and how, it has been adapted, the following limiting factors were encountered:

- Although the narrowing of the scope of the study to ten participants, who are all based in the province of Gauteng helped me focus the study, lack of representation from other provinces further limits the study since one province cannot be an adequate representation of the whole country.
- Truthful acting in its nature is instinctive, and therefore many acting techniques bear resemblance to Method acting without being influenced by Method acting or the Stanislavski System. This may result in a researcher identifying an element of a particular technique as that of Method or System while it is not.
- The study may have benefitted from focusing on only on Stanislavski's System, and used one American Method acting technique to explore the adoption and adaptation of Stanislavski's System in America. This would have focused the study more and eliminated the confusion between Method and System.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

The small sample was the major limitation for this study. Therefore, future research might benefit from a more diversified sample, e.g., participants from all nine provinces, from different racial and language groups, to give a better representation of acting in South Africa. Future research might also benefit from investigating the use of Method acting in TV and film in South Africa.

## Conclusion

If Lee Strasberg's definition that Method acting is what all good actors have always done whenever they acted well (strassberg.edu) is anything to go by, then all the participants that took part in this study have adopted Method acting. But such a sweeping statement cannot stand to academic scrutiny. Before commenting on the adoption and adaptation topic, I would like to debunk some long-held beliefs on what Method acting is by pointing out from my discoveries in this study what Method acting is not;

- Method acting is not when an actor immerses him/herself completely in a character, so much that they live as the character outside the acting space.
- Method acting is not when an actor loses or gains weight (or extremely deform their physical appearance in any way) for a role.
- Method acting is not when an actor goes to extreme, often dangerous, measures to get into character – such as experimenting with drugs in order to play an addict believably, or engaging in reckless sexual behaviour in order to play a sex worker.
- Method acting is not the *Method* (Strasberg), but the *Method* is one Method acting technique among many.
- Method acting is not one particular technique but a term coined by American theatre practitioners who developed their own approaches to acting, informed by their interpretation of the Stanislavski System.
- As much as it has become a tendency, Method acting is not Stanislavski's System but a technique informed by it.

These are some of the misconceptions I had about Method acting, especially equating Method acting to Stanislavski's System, which is evident in the title of this study. This study has helped to correct these misconceptions. An interesting observation made during the interviews is the aversion to Emotion Memory in fear of "bringing out the demons". A majority of the participants only spoke of this element as a last resort, which is only explored briefly when all else fails. This fear may be linked to the confusion between Stanislavski's Emotion Memory and Strasberg's Affective Memory (which is subdivided into Sense Memory and Emotional Memory), and the notion that Stanislavski turned his back on Emotion Memory in favour of the Method of Physical Actions. However, Gordon (2010: 14) disagrees with this, stating that Stanislavski never abandoned any of his discoveries, although he often shifted the importance of any one element at a given particular time. Gordon maintains that all elements of Stanislavski's System more or less coexisted with one another, yet "like a bank of electric bulbs, any one – or line of lights – could be charged with a higher or lower intensity" (Gordon, 2010: 14). The same has been found to be true with the research participants. But, unlike Stanislavski's students, they do not do this with one particular technique, but with different elements from a variety of techniques, and also from intuition and instinct. Therefore, Method acting, informed by the Stanislavski System, has been adopted by all the participants, but the amount of elements used differs from one participant to the next. Only four participants; P4, P2, P8 and P1 adapted the technique and combined one or more elements of Method acting, informed by the Stanislavski System, with another technique to "create" their own acting technique. No evidence could be found to suggest that the performative nature of South African acting, or the rootedness of it in performance,



hindered the actors from using any Method acting technique informed by the Stanislavski System or the System itself.

Since no “pure” Method actor could be identified among the research participants, it can be argued that while the privilege enjoyed by Russian and American students of acting, of the benefit of one technique, learned over a long period of time, is a need for South African actors who want to specialise in a particular Method acting technique, informed by the Stanislavski System, it is not a prerequisite for a truthful portrayal of a role. One may argue, in fact, that South African actors are much richer when they have a variety of techniques at their disposal, on top of intuition and instinct, to freely choose from in order to achieve truthful acting.

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# ADDENDUM I

## The Interview Transcripts

### Participant 1

R: Could you outline your journey for me, from the first time you were cast in the role of a Pastor?

P1: One thing I always do when I try to characterise certain characters, I ask myself that magic question; “what if?” What if it was me? What if I was caught in the situation? How is it like to be that somebody? And then I decided to look at my pastor. I believe that I was typecast in a way because the play is about something that I live, the life that I live every Sunday when I go to church. It’s what happens at church. So I started looking at my pastor; how he preaches, how he delivers the message, how he makes a point to the church. And for a period of maybe a month, I started looking at him as a character onstage, as a performance when he preaches on Sunday. And I picked up certain elements, for example the speech pattern. He does not speak the way he speaks during the week when he’s at home – the volume of course, the gestures, the way he carries himself when he is on the pulpit, and other things. So, it was a mission for me to just observe everything that he does, you understand?

R: Yes.

P1: So, okay, without him noticing, I began observing him; how does he speak? The difference between how he speaks when he is at church and how he speaks with his family, and how he speaks to us as the congregation but when he is off the pulpit,

and I realised that actually this man is performing but he is not aware. And because of that, it means I can take certain things from him when he is on the pulpit, because anyway, people come to church to see that. If they don't see that they don't feel like they are at church. But I have to say, the first Road To Damascus, it was me performing or playing the character more like when you read something and play it exactly the way you read it. It was not me wearing the character, it was me playing something that I noticed, like completely copy-cattng someone. And then when we did the second Road To Damascus I went deeper into the character, and then certain elements came. I had to research "why is this character behaving this way?" and then I realised that it is because of the background why he is the way he is. And that added something to my experience that people behave a certain way because of the background. Because of what happened in their lives, they are doing 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, in most cases – not all the people though. And because of that, the second Road To Damascus was completely different, because I had to become the character. Becoming the character meant that I had to sit down and just ask myself a question; "who is this guy?", "where is he coming from?", "why is he doing 1, 2, 3, 4, 5?", "why did he go to prison?" Because the storyline goes like this; this guy goes to prison and becomes a pastor in prison, then when he comes back he tries to change the community. But there's a young boy whose father he killed, and he has to come and meet him...

R: Who killed whose father?

P1: Goodwill Madisha killed this boy's father, that's why he went to prison. So now he's coming out of prison, he's a pastor. He's a completely changed man. He has to face the things that happened before he went to prison, and now the dynamics have

to change because now he has to deal with the situation in a completely different manner compared to what he would have done before he went to prison. So, getting back to my point, I had to ask myself the “Magic ‘If’”, what if you were in that situation? You went to jail because you did 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. You killed someone. And now you’re coming back and you feel like people just don’t understand that you are a changed man, because they keep reminding you of the past, and you yourself are dealing with the things that you used to do in the past. So, my journey with this character started with saying “get to know this guy, carry him everywhere you go” and sometimes it got to the point of, even when you are at home, you’d reply to my younger sister, to my mom in a tone of this guy. And when they started looking at me differently, that’s when I knew that I am going somewhere. So I can safely say that the “Magic ‘If’”, Stanislavski, helped me a lot. And again, just getting to live the character, and also seeing someone who looks more like the character and copying from them.

R: Okay, so the first time you got the script – do you remember how you got the script? I want to understand the process from first receiving the script, to know what happens then, also up until the first day when you have to be onstage. What happened with Road To Damascus? You can either talk about the first one or the second one.

P1: Okay, let me talk about the first Road To Damascus because I didn’t know the script. I got the script from Bongani Masango, my director, and it was almost everything we spoke about on the script. So, I started reading the script whenever I got the opportunity; in the taxi, wherever. I read the script not with the mind of getting to know the script, but reading the script as if you’re reading a story from a

magazine. And then getting to understand what happens when and after what. And then I focused more on the conversation between my character and my fellow actors' characters onstage, and the first thing I noticed is the language. He speaks totally different from me, because he is a pastor. Now and then, you know how pastors are, they would use the word "bless you my child", "you are blessed", now and then they'll just include God in their conversation. And you think it's unnecessary, but that's how they are, you won't stop them. The processing of the words; when other characters are talking to him you could actually feel when you're reading the script that this is actually processing now before you answer. And then I worked on that for at least a week to two weeks before the first rehearsal, then after understanding that, I had to do my lines, get to know my lines.

R: Okay, so now let's talk about the latest Road To Damascus that I watched recently because it had been transformed, because now you had like a live band onstage. It was like a full-on musical, if I can say that, even though you did have normal speech. How was the difference? How did you adjust from talking with music while singing, because that's not an ordinary play, where it's just realism, like we are talking now. So, how did you then get to adjust to still being in that character, in that moment, with that emotion, but knowing very well that this is not the way people talk, people don't sing when they talk. How did you adjust to that and still remain emotionally truthful to that character?

P1: Okay, so... you know what I find interesting in that musical? Not many things changed from the first Road To Damascus to the second Road To Damascus. We just took a lot of text and compressed it, and then turned the text into a song. So, the emotions were the same, but the text was cut shorter. It was more like when you

summarise. So now the text is shorter, but now you have to play the emotions bigger because you are singing now. You can't explain or get into details with text. And that's one of the challenges that we came across, which was a good thing because we were exploring. And another thing that helped me is that I'm a musician, so the live band made my work very very easy; the piano, the way some songs were delivered. It just made a whole lot of things easier for me to get straight to the emotions.

R: Now let's talk about rehearsal. Let's talk about State Theatre, the show that I watched. How was your everyday rehearsals, did you have a routine or anything that you do just before starting the actual rehearsal?

P1: So, Road To Damascus was a very spiritual play, and one of the things we couldn't avoid was starting with prayer – we had to start with prayer. We didn't necessarily have someone who prays everyday but what we did is, we usually sang one song, and then held hands and prayed before we started rehearsing. I don't want to lie, we didn't have a lot of physical warmups and whatnot. We worked a lot on the songs, the music, because we couldn't call it a musical if the music was not on point. So, we worked a lot on the music, to make sure that we perfect the music, and prayer as well. I remember there was a day when one member of the cast who had "madlozi"...

R: Like ancestors?

P1: Yes, ancestors. So when we started praying, her spirits started and it was chaos. And a lot of us were frightened because it was when it dawned on us that this is real now, we're tapping into another world that we're not even sure how we're going to

conclude, but we had a purpose and we had a plan, and there's an outcome that we were hoping to achieve – to change people's lives. And the nice thing is that Road To Damascus changed people in the play before it could change people outside the play.

R: Let's say this is just before you go onstage, the audience is coming in, this is the opening night. What was happening backstage, just before the audience came in?

P1: Before we open the doors we pray, after we pray, everybody goes to their corners, and we keep quiet. We wait for "action". So when each one of us is at their corners, we're thinking about the play. Some of us are interceding, we're praying, and others are just focusing, doing their voice warmups, you Y-buzz, whatever. Sometimes we play games, focus games so that we have the same energy. And sometimes it was that thing that we could open a scripture before we actually open the doors, just share a scripture a bit, so that we are on the same page. And that's what made Road To Damascus a success.

R: Did you have any personal routine? Did you do any specific exercises or warmups?

P1: I had to do warmups before the show. It's something I have learnt at TUT; you can't perform with a voice that's not warmed, especially when you're doing a musical. And it was winter, so we had to be warm and make sure that we eat the right food. And I always had my *Fisherman* sweets with me. I always made sure I dressed warm. The thing is, I was in every scene in the play, so I literally performed 1-hour-30-minutes onstage, and the only time I was offstage was when I was not in a

scene that's very short. So, that's the only time I got to drink water, do whatever. But I had to be focused, for the sake of the lines, not missing the cue and everything.

R: So, what role do you think the director played in helping you with your character?

P1: I want to believe that sometimes I'm a lazy actor, that's what the director says. I don't believe him though, but that's what he says. So, the director knows me, he knows my abilities, he knows what I can do and what I can't do. We had a lot of fights when I could not deliver what he expected me to deliver, especially about the script. Now and then I would want him to understand that the script is too long, there's monologues and everything, he must just be easy on me because I have more lines than everybody on the cast. And he never took that. He always fought about that, until finally I got my lines. And after Road To Damascus I sat down, it was not the first play I did with him, and that's when I realised that this guy actually understands me as an actor, and he understands that he must not be soft with me. And that's the only way I would deliver. So, I can safely say that when you work with someone, they archive your strong points and your weaknesses somewhere in their heads, and it works better the next time they work with you, and it makes sense why a lot of directors prefer certain actors, to a certain point. So, I can safely say that I was privileged to work with a director that understands me, so he knew which buttons to press, and what to say when.

R: Okay, so let's talk about your character's journey; the fact that he is a pastor, and you are Christian, and you minister with your singing. You also talked about how you modelled him from observing your own pastor, but then the trick is that your character was a pastor with a very tough background and a tough backstory, which

is someone who murdered a person before he became a pastor. So, how did you embody that? I'm more interested in how you embodied a murderer-turned-pastor. It's easy to play a pastor when you have someone to model that with, but when you don't have a murderer, how do you... how did you tap into that?

P1: I struggled with it, I don't want to lie. I always say it's easier to listen to someone who has been through something, because if you have not been through something you can only assume. I have never murdered someone, so I assumed until I got to a point where I said "it's not enough, let me read about stories of people who went to jail." Some of them were framed, some of them did kill people. And then I came across the story of a man who killed his wife because he caught her cheating. And I realised that the guy is not a bad guy; it's just that he made a decision at that certain moment when he was very very angry. And we can argue it and say Goodwill, the pastor, was a good man, even before he went to jail. But then, how do you say someone is a good person when they killed someone? Because when you kill someone, people don't want to understand the reason behind, you can't justify it. There's nothing that can justify that. So, I had to put myself in this man's shoes, and use the word; I can just "imagine" how it's like, because reality is; I've never been there. And me trying to put myself in his shoes, I came across this man who is very, very, very heavy-burdened, everything he says, he even chooses every word he says because if you say one wrong thing jokingly about someone... certain things you just don't say if you murdered someone and you went to jail, and everybody knows that you went to jail for murdering someone. And I just imagined how difficult it was for him to come back to the community and try to show everybody that "hey, listen, I am not that man anymore" and to tell someone who is not a believer that



“God changed me”, because the question you get is that “oh, so you think you can kill someone, go to jail, and then come back pretending as if you are holy and say ‘God has changed me?’” So, my challenge more than anything was; I’ve never killed someone, I have to play a character of someone who killed someone, and the only word or the only feeling I got from that was “very very very heavily-burdened.” That’s the only thing that helped me portray the character.

R: And then the emotions, because later when Goodwill encounters and realises that the boy he slapped or that boy he handled is actually the son of the man he murdered, he goes on an emotional journey. How did you get into those emotions? During rehearsals, up until performance, did you get them immediately or was there things that you had to do in order to get there? Or were you helped in any way to get to that level?

Although he did not mention Emotion Memory by name, the participant went on to detail how he taps into his own personal experiences in order to feel the emotions of the character;

P1: I had to use my own personal experience. As a human being, you go through a lot of emotions; you fall in love, you become disappointed, you get angry. And when you are angry for the first time, if you remember, you remember how you felt. And when I manhandled that boy, because he is a boy and he was just trying to be funny; Goodwill Madisha had to put him straight where he is supposed to be. To me, I had to use the emotion of someone who is trying to make a difference in someone’s life but that person is just not interested. Like when you try so hard to tell someone “listen, I’ve been there – go to school and your life will be better.” And you realise

that this person just doesn't care. And as a parent who is trying to caution a child, it gets to a point where it just becomes painful to you because you wish they can see what you saw. And the sad thing is that they have to go through it in order for them to understand. They have to go through certain things in order for them to understand where you are and why you are doing certain things. So, the emotional journey started with me going back to those emotions when I was disappointed by my closest family and my ex-girlfriend. And I had to tap into those emotions, that's why they made it look real.

R: Do you consider how you get into different characters to have a certain routine that you follow, or is every character or every journey unique on its own?

P1: It's very unique. Like I said before, people do certain things because of their backgrounds and the families they come from. I'll give you an example; Goodwill Madisha is a pastor, he has his own story to tell. I played a gay character before, back in varsity. They come with a different background as well. And when I was playing the gay character, unlike this one, I just thought about a young boy who just does not care how his actions affect his father. So, this young boy was getting back at his dad, and he got to a point of saying "look, I don't care how you feel about what I am doing, but I'm going to be selfish about this situation and you have to accept it, whether you like it or not. Although some people say other people are born gay whatever, I can't go deeper, but for me it worked better with the "don't care" attitude, like "I'm getting back at you, and I know you might think you have a point, or you might think me being gay is wrong, but hey guess what, I don't care!" And that's how it worked for me. It really depends on how you understand the character as an individual. I mean, for example; we always play gay characters externally when we

are onstage, but what about the gay people who are internal? Who are not even out of the closet? So, of course you won't use the same backgrounds for them as well. A different background would work better for them, but yet you are playing the same character. So different stories, different backgrounds work for different characters. Sometimes different backgrounds work for the same character.

R: Sometimes I hear people saying "I'm following this type of system" or "I'm following this type of approach" or "I'm following that type of approach" or "I'm following this person's approach." In general, what is your approach to your acting? Do you ever, maybe sometimes, say "let me pick this" or "let me follow that" or is it an intuitive type of thing, or is it something that you do, like experimenting and then taking what works? Just how do you approach the whole thing when you are acting?

P1: I'm going to give an example; I don't read those books and magazines that are written by Americans, novels and whatever. I don't read them because Steve Harvey writes a book; *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man*. There's not even one part in that book that talks about *Lobola*. So, for that, I feel like the book is not relevant to me. Certain things are relevant, but the important ones are not, to me. The point that I'm trying to make is; different strokes for different people. I can say "this is what I do to get to this point" acting-wise, and someone's method might work differently from my methods, but we still get the same results. We get the character onstage. So, I say one must find themselves, what works for them. And the interesting part about this industry is that what works for you today might not work for you tomorrow, in a different character. Something else might work for you discovering another character. The nice thing about it is that then you will know that this method works

and also this method works. So, I don't really have a method, because if I was following a certain method, I was going to falter when coming to certain things.

R: Lastly, your character had a bit of a romantic moment with the character of Nomangaliso. How do you approach that type of romantic feelings towards another character to portray them truthfully? Do you really work up an emotion of love, or is it put on to convince us as the audience?

P1: You know, the mind is a very powerful thing. Nomangaliso was played by a friend of mine. So, I've never seen her as someone I can be romantically involved with. But, for the sake of the play, now and then I had to look at her and say "this woman is so beautiful". And I had to convince myself that this woman is beautiful. And when we are onstage, it helped me because I looked at her differently, I flirt with her onstage so that we build the relationship until it got to a point where we fall in love and we kiss for the first time, towards the end of the play, so that it doesn't become a shock to the audience. The audience has been reading it. The audience has been noticing that "no, man, this guy is looking at this woman differently" although it looks innocent. So, for me is; I look at the person I am involved with in the play completely different when we are offstage, for that period. And then after the play is done, I have to "break up" with her.

**End.**

## Participant 2

R: When you got the role, how was the whole process? Did you know that you got the role and then got the script? Or did you work on the role before the script was developed?

P2: I actually did two productions, so *Marikana* actually started rehearsals while *Hungry* was running. So, I got the script later in the rehearsal. The same process on *Hungry*, where I started rehearsing while the rehearsals are on was the same process with *Marikana*. Somebody else was already given the role. So, when I got there, there were two of us that were supposed to play the role. Because it's a musical, and vocally I'm not strong. I know that, and vocally he is strong, but his acting was not that strong. So, I think I got the role because strength-wise in terms of acting.

R: Okay, so you got the script and had to work on the role?

P2: Yes, specifically on that role.

R: Okay, so you found the rehearsals already on, but were they too far ahead, or had they just started?

P2: I think it was too far ahead because I was the last one who got the script. So when I got there, people were already having around second week rehearsal. And then some had to come on that day that I came. So, there were people like me, but they were called earlier than I was called. So, I had to be briefed on what was going on.

R: When you received the script, and in your own time when you were alone, how did you then familiarise yourself with the character before going to rehearsal the next day?

P2: Actually, to be honest, when I first got the script I knew about the incident of Marikana, but I didn't know specifics. Even the role that I was playing, they kept on saying "Mathunjwa, you don't know Joseph Mathunjwa?" I didn't know him at the time because it's politic and what-what. I was like "okay sharp, let me just read the script, the whole script and then understand what's his role in the script", and then I can go and try and find out more about him as a person.

R: And then, how did you eventually get to know this person? Because, it is unlike a fictional character who is not based on a real person. Did you have to actually go and find more about this person, and how did you then get in this person's shoes?

P2: I think it was a list of steps that I took; one, when I read the script I started understanding that this person's role here, in this event, is 1, 2 and 1, 2. Now, once I understood the text as it was written, I had to now go and use visuals, like even speech, how he talks, so videos. I got a lot of interviews, even interviews where he was not talking about Marikana. Just interviews of him talking publicly. I had to understand what kind of a language he speaks, what kind of a man is he? So, I did that, I actually watched a lot of videos of him on YouTube making speeches, when he talks to the people, because most of the time he is addressing the masses. So I had to look for videos where he is addressing the masses.

R: Did you then base the entire embodiment of this character on him? Like, was he your main focus when you were dealing with, maybe characteristics, walks, tone of

voice, mannerisms. Was he the only thing that you were focusing on when working on it?

P2: Not necessarily; like I said, there may be certain things that I was looking at, but at some point I had to find something in me that might work with the character, not necessarily be completely like he is, because he is Joseph Mathunjwa and I was playing “Ngcobo”. So, still, it is him, but it cannot be exactly as he is. So, I had to just find elements that would represent him and at the same time still have things about me, about my own interpretation of him. So, somewhere-somehow, I think my character had those fictional elements in them because of some things I created myself, like a walk. I would not use his walk that I saw he’s using. I’d use a different walk that I think this character would suit this walk, gestures, things like that. I did not use his gestures, although I know that these were his gestures. I think the most important thing that I took from him is his speech. In terms of how he addresses the miners. There’s a lot of interviews of him on TV, how he talks, his English; is it pure or is it just a normal English that politicians like to use, or is it deep? So, I used those kind of things. Focusing on him was more on speech than everything else.

R: You were not only playing him. You also played a security guard. And then, in between, or the next scene, you’re back to playing him again, and then you change costume. How did you manage these two different characters, to be able to transition so smoothly from one to the other?

P2: (*Laughing*) I’m laughing now because you say “so smoothly”.

R: Did you struggle?

P2: I'm recalling, how many times have I struggled with that? Because there's a point where I play a policeman, and then the next scene I'm supposed to be... like my first appearance as Joseph Mathunjwa, as Ngcobo, comes after a scene where I'm wearing a policeman costume, which heavy; boots and everything, and all that. Sometimes you have these assistant stage managers who are doing the job very well, whereby they see that you're still struggling, and they know you have the next cue. Then they'll help you take off the costume much faster. But every time I would put a different costume where I know I'm going to end up. Sometimes I would run changing. As I go to the next costume I'm busy taking that one off, so that when I get there, it's not that process that I have to now start by taking off this costume. So I would pre-set the next costume where I know I am going to, where my next entrance is at. So, when I'm going to that entrance, at the same time I'm taking off my clothes, so that when I get there... but I'm not sure what your question is about.

R: Let's say, now you're playing this character, and then like you just said now, you're running, changing costume, to be the next character...

P2: Yes...

R: How do you move from this guy who is a policeman, and then 5 seconds later, or 1 minute later, you appear as a different person – a calm union leader with a totally different tone of voice? What happens in between these scene changes when you become that other person? Is it a mental thing? Or is it an external thing, maybe putting on the costume transforms you to the next one? I just want to understand how you manage that.



P2: I would say both, because in the process of running to that, mentally in your head, as you take off your costume, I'm actually "taking off" that character that I'm wearing now. Costume plays a big role, though mentally you're going to the next character – once you put on that costume you also feel that now I am not that character that I was. I am a totally different person. So, I would say mentally and physically it does work.

R: And then rehearsal-wise, was there ever a point before the actual opening where either you or the director, or other people said "damn! Finally that's what we were looking for" or you, where you say "finally, now I got the character"? And if there was that time, how long after receiving the script for the first time?

P2: Well, during rehearsal, but I don't remember actually saying "you know what, now that is it", not even on the opening night, but during the run of the show. There was, maybe twice, where the director commented on the character, that he is seeing the growth of the character and he is quite liking it, the way it's coming. But during the rehearsal process, I think that's when it was a lot of work because now you're getting a lot of opinions from the actual director and the assistant director, because sometimes you'd get notes from the director. You'd get notes from the assistant director, and the notes are kind of contradicting you at the same time or contradicting the main goal of what they are trying to say about the character. So, the struggle would be there most of the time.

R: And then, when you are rehearsing, were there any things that you did before starting the actual rehearsal of the character? Were there ritualistic, not meaning actual rituals but the things that we usually do, before starting rehearsal? And were

they consistent, or was it a different thing today, a different thing tomorrow before we start?

P2: Personally I would come early for rehearsals because I understood that it's a musical. Most of the exercises they did were more on vocals. We had dancers, we had actors, and then singers. But the show was driven more by music. So more exercises would be done musically, so I preferred doing also rituals for drama, the usual ones that we do, like stretching, vocal exercises, tongue twisters for articulation, all those things. I kept on doing them, even though they were not part of the rehearsal.

R: And then, the role of the director in helping you get into the character, as you've said you had a director and an assistant director, just how much was their input on making you understand the character?

P2: I think they played a big role, though they never had a problem with my acting or the way I'm acting. The only problem was they needed me to have the understanding that they wanted me to have. So they helped me a lot because of that, because sometimes as an actor you do need a director like those harsh ones that will make you see things differently, because you get these actors that don't take notes very well. You're given a note by a director and then you think "maybe he doesn't like me". I didn't do that; when I was given a note by either the director or the assistant director, regardless of whether they contradict each other, like tell you different things, when I got home I'd say "let me think about these thing they way these people do" and try them out. Tomorrow you get a different opinion because you applied what they said on the previous day. You come the next day, then you're

growing every day. So I think they play a major role for me to actually get the point where I'm saying "okay, now I am this role now".

R: I don't know if you were also part of that because you arrived after they had started, I also read that they went to the "koppie" at Marikana. Did you also go there, or were you not part of it?

P2: Well, on the research part, because they went before they actually made the play, when they were researching, before adapting the book. They went there as a production team. Then the cast of Hungry, because there's quite a number of people who are on Hungry who are also on Marikana The Musical. Almost the majority of the cast is there. So, when they went to Mafikeng to perform, that's when actually on our way back we decided "let's go to the Koppie and see where those people got killed". So, yes we did go, but it was after the whole process of the play being made.

R: But, was it during the run of the show?

P2: It was after the run of the show. The run of the show at the State Theatre was two years back, so it was after the run. After the run around December.

R: Would that experience enhance anything if you had to play the character again? Being at the Koppie?

P2: Yes, it would. It would change something because, you see, when you're onstage it's a different feeling because it is artificial. It's not the real world. We as actors, in our minds, create that world. It's different from when you are actually there. You actually still feel the presence of those guys when you are there. Because there are some other people among the cast who are not so emotionally strong; just being

there was such an overwhelming feeling. You feel like the people who died here haven't rested yet. You still feel them. So you can imagine, you see everything there, it's visual. They tell you that this whole mountain was covered with people, and you just imagine. You see it's a different feeling when you are onstage, even if you take the play and place it there, I don't think it will have the same feeling and effect of that. So, yes, I think it's going to enhance performance-wise, next time you have a different understanding, even if you're looking at yourself, I think you'll still visualise there more, to make your character more truthful.

R: And then onstage, now the performing part; things didn't always go as planned. They didn't always go the same every night...

P2: Yes, true...

R: How then were you guys able to maintain a level of acting that doesn't make you get distracted when things go wrong? Because I watched it, I think I watched Marikana more than 5 times. And I always saw those bit of differences here and there; something not going right, the reporter slipping and falling, or someone coming to speak and a mic not working. How did you guys manage to keep the focus?

P2: One thing I love about that cast, the bond that we have as a cast is truly amazing because we would feel each other throughout the performance. I recall a lot of events where things didn't go right. There was another time, because it's a musical, people sing a lot, so some people would not take care of themselves properly. Tomorrow you come, you don't have a voice, and now it's a problem. So, they would sing and not finish the song. As a cast we would feel that "that one is losing his

voice”, somebody who’s vocally strong would just jump on and cover that person’s vocals, so that it doesn’t become visual to an audience that’s coming there for the first time. But obviously if you’re coming for the fifth time you would those things. Or you get an instance where an actor falls, yes we improvise, especially if you’re alone and there’s no one to assist you.

R: Since you also mentioned Hungry, let me just chip it in. When you approach a character, for any other director or any other play; do you sort of have your own way of approaching a character? Or is it open, sometimes directed by who directs the show? Because Hungry was directed by Paul Grootboom, Marikana was directed by Aubrey Sekhabi; your approach to characters, was it the same or was it determined by who directs the character that you play? How was it?

P2: I think it also depends on the director, because with Hungry the director was specific in terms of characterisation and all those things. And he’s willing to walk you through those things until he gets what he wants. And you get Bra Aubrey who has a totally different kind of directing, whereby there is no time to take you through all that. It’s all up to you. He tells you “this is what I see” and then you come, you deliver and then he gives you notes. He won’t always be there saying “you must get it like this”. He’ll tell you that at the end of the day it’s you onstage, so you need to either up your game or you’re going to lose the role to somebody else who is going to execute the role the way the director wants. Because sometimes your ideas as an actor are limited. You want to try this out, you want to try that out. Depending on the director; if the director is going to give you that type of freedom to explore, try something new, then you have that kind of space to say “I want to try this out, I want to try that out”.

But in terms of this, I really really had to listen to the specifics that the director is asking for and leave my own beliefs out of it.

R: And then you, as yourself as the actor, dealing with character in your own time and in your own space, would you say you have a system or a systematic approach? Is your approach different?

P2: I don't know if my approach is different to most, I don't know how actors approach most things, but there was a quote that I follow most that said, in order to be a character you don't have to change and be that character, you just have to find things within you that are similar to the character. And that's how you embody the whole thing. So, at most of the cases I would ask myself questions as that character and say ok, if they say this character is drunk and then he has to be walking like this and this and this, would I walk like that 'if I was that character? If it was me, would I walk like that? Using also some other questions that I would ask myself personally. If they asked me, if I was one of those police officers who shot those guys, if it was me when they shot, when they said "fire" would I have shot? Or would I have just watched others shoot and just stand and be shocked? Because I don't think all of them shot. There's those different things you need to ask yourself as a person, before you become an actor; "okay if it's me?" because belief plays a big role in what you're doing. If you don't believe it then it's going to be very hard for you to make somebody else believe it.

R: And then in terms of the exercises when you were rehearsing, did you have a specific person or was it like, every time they just say "okay, let's do warmups" or

“let’s do exercises” and then someone volunteered? Or was there a dedicated person to do those things with you guys?

P2: No, there was not a dedicated person. Well, we were all different. If one is good in music, then that person would be the person who would most of the time be doing the vocal exercises because they are more stronger on vocals. Acting exercises we would change. Someone else would come, so the whole cast would actually play a role in the exercising.

R: In closing, you had so many performances, I think when we are counting, you might have had more than 20 runs of this show. And then you, as yourself playing the character; do you feel like every night was the same, or were there some nights when you didn’t feel like you were that good or what?

P2: In terms of the character growing, yes. But in terms of consistency, I am more key on that. I don’t want a person to come see a show today... If there’s going to be enhancements in terms of performance, it has to be in terms of the character growing. But the consistency must still remain there. What I did yesterday is the same thing I’m going to do tomorrow and the other night. So, I would not try out new things about the character because I think it was very important that I just sustain and enhance maybe the character in terms of growing.

R: And then how important is to you for an actor to research characters? Like you said, you researched the person your character is based on. How important is it?

P2: It’s very important because you’ll get people who come watch the show, who would pick up elements about that person and that would be an accreditation to you.

That person would notice that “I saw that person in you”, and I think as an actor you enjoy hearing that. Because I got a person who said “hey man, I watched *Miners Shot Down* and then I recalled Marikana...” he could see elements of Mathunjwa. So, I think research is very very very important. Because in terms of language, what I didn’t know was that Mathunjwa was not even Xhosa, it’s just that he knew a multitude of languages to accommodate. He speaks Fanakalo when he is talking to the miners so they could understand him. So, I thought that he was Xhosa, so that means when I speak Xhosa it has to be fluent. And then during my research I find out that no, he’s not Xhosa, so it doesn’t mean that his Xhosa has to be fluid. He could do his Xhosa in Fanakalo, mix Zulu there.

**End.**

### **Participant 3**

R: When you got the role, did you know that you were going to play an ape?

P3: Yes, I knew that I was going to play an ape. The first play before *Primal* was called *In Time*.

R: Is it the one that went to Grahamstown?

P3: Yes. So it was sort of a similar idea, but it was not a full-on ape or full primate. So, this one was adopted from the one that we did in Grahamstown. The director just decided that he wants to go all-ape to make sure that the characters are more un-human than earlier.



R: Let's talk about the first one; how was it done? The whole show. Did you get a script, or did you workshop moves, and then a script developed from that?

P3: The first one we got a script, we got the script with the concept that the script is not about humans. The script basically is a story about humans, the trick was trying to make it about apes. Trying to adapt the script into a primal life. So, we got the script and then worked on it, as opposed to working on it and then getting the script.

R: And then, when you got the script and you knew which character you were going to play, how were the directions written? Was there dialogue or was it directions like "they do this, they do that"?

P3: There was dialogue. It was a full script – the usual, typical storytelling, with dialogue, directions, everything, and the staging as well. The only thing that we did was that instead of staging it in a house, we staged it in a jungle. So, it was just that shift.

R: Then you've got the script, it has dialogue, and now you know which character you are playing, did you know the character? Did you know what kind of a "person" the character was? Or did you then have to go and work on that?

P3: When I first got the script I had no idea who the character was. I had an insight of the character as I read the script. But then, when it came to staging the character, that's when I had a problem because I had a small conflict, because it was between staging a human and staging an ape, and then trying to find out who would behave how and who would not behave how and trying to understand the character, the background. And since it's an animal, you don't have much to play around. So, the

only thing to do is to sort of try aligning the animal to a human being, and then try to tell the story of a human being from an animal's point of view. So there was a bit of a struggle getting the character and understanding it. It took me a long time to understand or to even actually know what I needed to do. Normally when you act you get a character bible, it tells you everything about the character. But you as the actor needs to give life to that. So, in my case it was more of what this "person" really is, instead of who this person really is, because I had to study animals and I found out a lot of interesting things; how similar they behave to human beings. I found out that apes are actually a few of the animals that use gestures to communicate, known gestures like hugs, kisses, faces/frowning, greeting, faces when they are angry. So, they look a lot human when you when you research about them. I think that helped me a lot, just getting to know how these animals behave, getting to see how they behave around family and stuff like that. So, I think that helped me a lot. When I got that character bible, that's what I had to do, just research a lot.

R: How much work did you have to do on your own as opposed to when you are in rehearsal with other actors, and also when the director is actually helping you? Can you just talk about those three elements?

P3: If we are going to break it down to figures, I think I did about 80% of the work, and with the co-actors it was about 10% because it was a lot more easier, and with the director, because the research had already been done and the understanding was clearer, it was just maybe another 10%. So, I think that's it, because researching cleared a lot of things up and gave me room to experiment more, so working with the co-actors was just more of understanding each other's research, knowing that we came across a few similarities that "oh, I found this one or that, this is what I found

out as well.” So, it was just a matter of just colouring, like taking out the things that don’t work and just leaving the ones that work. And with the director it was just a matter of overseeing the relationship of the characters and seeing if the character works and understanding, trying to see if he can understand if the character relates to the story as well.

R: Now, when you get to rehearsals, working with the other actors, what sort of exercises did you guys do before starting with the actual rehearsals? Did you have exercises? Did you have any warmups or anything to actually prepare you to rehearse?

P3: Yeah, we had a lot of exercises, physical exercises, heating the body up a bit, getting the body used to these weird movements – making these movements “un-foreign” to the body. So, that’s what we did; stretching, a lot of stretching, a lot of working on the stamina as well.

R: Now let’s move to the very latest *Primal* that I saw; you were full-on baboons. So, expressing emotions as baboons; how was that different from humans expressing emotion? How did you decide on what to do when you’re expressing a certain emotion that as a human you’re used to and you know how to express it?

P3: It was tricky. It was a bit tricky, because something I realised, especially Alfa baboons or apes, they don’t really get emotional. For them it’s more of a territorial thing. So, when maybe another baboon in the group dies, for them it’s lesser responsibility, lesser things to share because it’s a territorial thing, especially if it’s a male ape. So, the emotions, I had to try and see what makes the ape sad and then try not to play the emotion as human because, I think maybe I toned the emotions

down a lot and portrayed a lot of more anger because apes are very territorial animals and they react more in anger.

R: Who did you model your character with? Did you have anything that you took, or any person that you looked at or observed that “now I’m moulding this character”, not just an ape but your ape as the character? Was there any frame of reference that you chose and said “this one” if it’s a person or whether it’s a baboon “this is who I’m going to model it on”, did you have any of that? Or was it like “this is an ape” but then you have no frame of reference to say “this is *the* ape that I’m modelling it against” or “this is an ape I’m modelling against *this* person”?

P3: Not necessarily modelling the ape around a specific person. What I did is that, because this character is new, I didn’t really want to model it around any other characters. So, what I did was; I would just study a certain number of characters and see how they react, and just study the way they exist. So, I just look at these different characters and then try and take a few elements from those characters to build this character.

R: And then how well would you say the director helped in the whole process?

P3: That’s a tricky one...

R: Did the director help to explain more things that you did not understand about the character?

P3: No no no, not at all. I think the director trusted the cast. So, he just came with the story and said “guys, this is the story I’m going with. This is what I want to stage, can we work on it?”. And the whole idea was so exciting because it was something

different, it's something that you hardly see being staged in theatre. And because I worked with the director before, we've done a lot of productions like *Mother Courage*, *The Movement* and stuff like that. So, for me it was more like something out of the box. So, that triggered a lot of curiosity. So, it made things easier for me because I had that research, the urge to just find out what this thing is all about and all that. So, I think for him it was a lot easier. For him, the only struggle he had was embodying these characters, not just making it a mental thing because, don't forget, when you're human you react in a certain way, but when you're an ape you're on all-fours, which we tricked and just went a bit and just went on fours sometimes, and sometimes we would be half-straight up. So, that was sort of an illusion of evolution, sort of like these things are in between human and ape. So, it was sort of a subliminal text or subconscious thing that the more angrier the apes got, the more human they got. And the more calmer they are, the more primate they became. That was some sort of a symbolic message to say, because the play revolves around racism, so it was more that. The more the black race got angrier and abused, the more upright they got. So, that was a symbol to show that they were losing their origin in some way. So, for the director it was just a matter of looking at the whole thing and seeing if this works, and if it doesn't work keep it. If it doesn't work, let's find something else. And then we'd come up with something that works, so I don't think it was that much work for the director.

R: Let's talk about the other play, *The Kraal*, which you did before; it's a totally different thing because you are human there. You play a role that's very authoritative there. So, when you get such a role, how different is your approach from the one in *Primal*? Your processes of getting into character; were they different experiences?

P3: With *The Kraal* I think it was a lot more easier because it's a human character, it's easier to base it on previous experiences, like all these characters that you encountered in the past. So, it's more like you just have a library in your head and then you just think "oh there's this guy I once met, looks just like this character might fit" and because this person's experiences are like this, I can't just keep the whole character. I need to find something from that character that will complement the character that I'm working on. So, I think with *The Kraal*, playing the King was easier, as opposed to playing that ape because the character's psyche was a lot more clearer and easier to get than that one.

R: I'm going to ask you this question, I don't know how you'll answer it. We can take it to *The Kraal* or we can take it to *Primal*. Usually they would ask someone that "you've never been this thing, and now you have to play this thing. What do you do in order to play this thing truthfully?" It could be for the King on *The Kraal*. You've never been a king. It could be for the Ape in *Primal*, but let's talk about the king. What did you do in order to display the King truthfully in *The Kraal* because like I just said, you were authoritative. What did you do to be truthful?

P3: I think getting into character for the King, for me it wasn't getting onstage in character. For me it was; I get onstage, and then the environment, I just try and be part of the environment, and then just let my imagination go there, and just try and live in that moment. What I'd do most of the time, I'd get onstage and say "okay now I'm playing a king, I'm playing Bonga from *The Kraal*, so I'd be like "okay, now I'm playing this character" and now from this point on I need to think, behave and act like the character. So, from that point on, I wouldn't full-on be the character. I think that's one of my struggles as an actor, not being able to fully get into character. So, for me

it's something that I need to psychologically align the character to the environment and to the people because when I'm me, this person is a friend, but when I'm the character, this person is my wife. So I need to just allow my imagination to just fully absorb the environment and then try and live in the environment.

R: And then, in between scenes, where you are offstage. Let's say before going onstage, before the play opens. Do you guys maybe do anything to get rid of inhibitions, or were you already in the moment before the show even starts? What happens in between?

P3: In between, usually because we are so different people, you find some of them who want to meditate, you find people who just want to take that moment and be quiet, you'll find those ones that just want to go through the script again and just try and see what they missed or maybe just re-acquaint themselves with the character again. And then you'd find those who are just ready, they are just waiting for the lights to go on, then they start. And then for me I think I'm usually just me. So I'll just get onstage, or before that I'll just go around being me, so that when I get onstage I can feel the transition from being me to being someone else, so that it's a bit more easier, as opposed to try preparing the character before you get onstage. And then when you're onstage you kind of lose the realism between the character and you, because you're not sure who you are and who the character is. But then if you are you at that moment, for me it's easier to play the character truthfully that way because I know that now I'm not me, I'm not playing me, so this is not how I would drink juice or this is not how I would pick up the glass. So it becomes a bit more different. It's more in the moment.

R: How important is it for you to do your own exercises and whatever preparations? Which one do you prefer? Do you prefer to do things as a group? Because some usually, let's say it's a rehearsal, they come together and choose one to do certain things, maybe someone to do vocals etc, but some people would say "because I have my own way of doing things". Which one do you usually prefer and how do you go about it?

P3: For me, I think I've done both of them. For example, when I'm doing a play, there's this culture of teamwork, we are in this together and we need to do this together. So when you're in a play it's a lot easier to just be a part of a group and then maybe find someone who's going to do this, or in fact we all just come up with suggestions; if you want to do voice we just come up with suggestions, "let's do this, let's do that". We just come up with a few exercises. But when you're doing TV it's a different story. So, I think for me in theatre it's okay because you already need to be into that relationship as a group. So, for me these things are not really an exercise, they're not vocal exercises. They are more of bonding, getting to understand each other as a group, getting to know each other's energies and getting to know each other's characters as individuals. And then that makes the working environment a lot more easier because you know, this person is a person like this, so I need to respect this person's space, so that the working environment can be more conducive, as opposed to just working individually and then coming to work within the group. That's bound to cause conflict somehow, or in some way someone is not going to understand the other. Because when you're in a rehearsal space, when you start rehearsal, it's no longer me and you, it's the characters. So, whatever we do is based on the characters. So, before that it's me and you. So, if me and you and



establish a relationship, in some cases it gets a bit hard to establish a relationship within the characters. But some people do it. You find two people who hate each other very much and they need to play maybe characters of lovers, a couple, and you find that they excel at it, they get onstage and they kill it. But for me, it's not that they don't have a relationship. These people know each other, so there's sort of a relationship there, even if it's hate, there is still a relationship. So, for me that relationship is important, regardless of what kind of a relationship it is. Us knowing each other is important so that when we stage this we stage it as whole as we can.

R: In wrapping up, when you have to call a certain emotion into being onstage, do you have a technique? Let's talk about when you are actually playing an actual human. Do you have a technique that you use to bring those emotions when they are needed or do you have maybe a different way of bringing those emotions? Let's say your character needs to, at a certain point when another character tells him something, your character needs to react with a certain emotion on cue. Is there something that tells you that the moment is coming, so that when that moment comes, the emotion is available immediately, or is it something that immediately when that thing happens onstage you have a way of bringing it up. Because it's one of the thing we mostly struggle with, and I usually want to know if there's a technique that people use and I'd like to know if you have any that you use.

P3: I don't think I have a technique, or if I have one, it fails me a lot because it doesn't always happen when I want it to. For example, I tried a lot of techniques, especially for these emotional scenes where you need to cry, where you need to be emotional and feel. So, for me my approach to that, initially was "okay, I'm told to cry and I need to cry" but then the crying comes out empty. It just comes out as crying,

so what? And then I found that this is not working. And then I tried building the emotion within the dialogue, but that also depends on the character and on your co-actor. So, sometimes it comes out empty, sometimes it comes out proper. So, for me I think that give and take is very important, understanding each other's characters, understanding how they react is very important. I think, for me, it works best when I know my co-actor's character. So, what I would do sometimes, or the times that it has worked, hopefully, is when, let's say I'm sharing a scene with an actor, and then this person, let's say from the start of our dialogue we are just happy and normal, and then in the middle of the dialogue I'm very pissed, and then at the end of it I must be very emotional, maybe break into tears. So what I'll do is just try and find out where this person starts ticking, making me tick, so I'll just try and find that out within the script first before I try and play the emotion. Because I feel if I just play the emotion I'll be lying to the character because things, words don't affect us the same way. For example, for you, me putting this here is okay, but for someone else, they want you to put it on a serviette or something, and that pisses them off. And then you might find for you, you feel like "why?", but then to this person it's attached to something maybe that affected them back at home. So, that's what I would usually try and do, try and see the connection between them. For example for that person it might be that every time she did that the father would beat her up, brutally so. So, every time she sees this being placed it reminds her of that and so she gets very pissed off, so that there's an intent to the emotion. So, now the co-actor, how the co-actor does it, that's what your emotions as an actor depend on – on the co-actor. How they drive you towards it, and how you receive it as well as an actor. So, I just look at the words, trying to break down the script and see where it starts, and then once I find where it starts, I would try and align it to the character's background,

trying to find out “okay, this character was this person” so, every time this person says this, this character would likely be angry. So, I just associate everything the character does from that point after with the character’s history. So that builds emotion to the point where they just explode. And then when it comes to the emotional scene where a character needs to cry, I’d also do that. But then sometimes it comes out even worse when your co-actor is not delivering the same energy that you are giving back. So, when you need to be angry, I think I find being angry easier than being sad because when I play an angry character, I just say every time this person says this I’m going to get pissed off. And then this person says it and I get pissed off, I get irritated over and over until those emotions come. But when it comes to being sad, this has to be attached to a deeper thing. So, it depends on the energy that this person brings into the scene and how they bring it in, and how I take it in as an actor and how I give it back to my co-actor. So, that give and take for me is very important.

R: Now that we talked about the emotional stuff; *The Kraal*, playing the king, Bonga. You played him regally, authoritatively. How did you decide to make him that way? Which king did you see? Did you model him according to a king or for you, was the king just a title? Did you have to find other things to make him who he is or as authoritative as he is?

P3: For me, I looked at a lot of kings, different kind of kings. So, I didn’t just model him based on a certain king, because even in my research it wasn’t just, for example, a cultural king only. I looked at a lot of people with authority, leaders, be it president, be it a king. I looked at this guy from Thor, Thor’s father. I looked at King Leo, I looked at the king from Troy, and then I also looked at king Mswati and the

Zulu king as well. So, I just look at all these people and then try and see how they behave and how they go about, communication, what they do, how they react, what affects them, which I found a lot of similar reactions, a lot of similar behaviour. Even in the vast cultures I found those similarities between them. So, I think that helped me understand more. And once I understood that, I didn't really need to model it based on someone. I just needed to bring my own idea of a king.

R: So, now that you've acted in so many theatre plays, would you say that you have a certain way or tradition or routine that you use to get into character? Or would you say that each and every character had their own ways?

P3: I think it changes most of the time, but I have sort of like a direction to how I want to always get into character, but it doesn't really stick to that. So, I think I'd say every play that I have done, I've gotten in character differently. So, there's not a structure or formula that I've found out to say "to get into character I need to do this and this and that and then I'll get in character." I'm not that fortunate, which is what every actor wants – that formula, when you know when you do thing and you do this and you do that and bam! The character is there. So, for me it's a bit different. Every character that I get into depends on how much I know about the character. So, the more I've learnt about the character, the more information I have about the character influences how I play the character, and then getting into character as well. Mostly it's based on research. Sometimes I'd maybe just go out to, let's say a restaurant or hotel, and then just get into that environment where there's a lot of people and just study people's behaviour. Just see the intention of their movements, the intention of their emotions and what provokes it and what causes them to behave like that, just try and see "why is this person doing this?". And sometimes I'd just watch a movie

and switch off the volume, and then just see this person playing this perfect character, and then try and see at that point “what is the body language saying?”. So, I think what I value most, or what is easier for me to look at and align the character to, is the body language, because one trick I’ve realised, humans we never really listen to a person. I think 25% of the time we listen to people when we talk, but mostly the mind just makes up the gestures and everything, and then it associates that to what you’re saying. That’s why most of the time when people talk they don’t usually just look at you. You find sometimes this person is looking at something else, they are hearing you. But in your peripheral view you can see what this person is doing, so you can align that to what he is saying. For example, it’s really hard to pay attention to what someone is saying when you close your eyes because then your imagination wanders off. So, when you look at a person it’s easier. That’s why they say listening is a skill, because you miss a lot of things, you never listen. You only listen like 25, 20% of it. The rest is from what this person is doing as opposed to what he is saying. That’s why most of the time you just remember key words of what this person has been saying as opposed to hearing the whole conversation. You just remember “oh, we spoke about this” and that is usually influenced by how this person was saying it and what he was doing when saying it at the time. So, mostly I just study body language, look at the body language, because as actors, especially theatre, you rely more on being visual, and then the emotional is sort of like an extra, it’s sort of like a bonus. So, when you’re really good at being visual, it’s easy for people to see you, to watch you, to connect to you. And then when you align that with your emotion, even your voice, it brings out this spectacular response for an audience.

**End.**

#### **Participant 4**

R: I watched the show and I thought it would be interesting to find out how you were able to portray the character, also looking at the style of the show; it's not your straight up show. It's not the style of Realism that we are used to, where it's natural acting. There are certain elements which are physical, and it also has like a dance feel to it. So, the first time you got the role, what happened? Were you given a script to say "this is the character you're going to play", and then you read the script, or was it explored before you actually got the script?

P4: The beautiful thing is, the show was produced by a company I'm part of, so it was like an in-house kind of production, where the script was written, and then I was given the script to read before I was even cast. So it was like "okay, just read the script and tell us what you think". So, I read the script and I was like "ah, proper". So, I gave notes on the conceptual kind of vibe, the characteristics, the character development and all of those, just to round it off a bit. And then after reading the script, that was the first draft. The script has been changing, by the by, so on the fourth draft they sent the script to me and told me I was going to be part of the cast; "just read the script and see where you find yourself in it. So, I was not told where I am, So I just read the script in general. And I think when I was reading the script, it was that inkling of, the character of Nozi is very interesting in terms of how she is portrayed in the script without me having to put any of my anything on it, but I felt a deep connection with Phindile because I felt that Phindile was going to challenge me as an actor. And then when we were doing casting they were like no, Nozi is for

you... Well, because I'm a trained actor, it was that thing of going back to that thing of getting a character, and then you explore the character, you look at likelihood between the actor and the character, you look at the difference between the actor and the character, so that you can bring the character into life. So, I checked Nozi and said "okay, Nozi is this kind of person", apparently she is Pedi, we have one thing in common, she's in her twenties, I'm in my twenties. She has a very dramatic past, her childhood was very dramatic, which led to the decisions she made in the play. So, she has a front, she's very crazy in the sense that she's very vengeful and very spiteful. She has a grudge that I understand but I don't encourage, because I'm that kind of person that if something happens I deal, I move on. So, Nozi has that thing, she has a motive for almost everything that she was doing throughout the play. So, reading the character, for me I struggled at first, I'm not even going to lie. It was that thing where I couldn't connect to her, I couldn't get her. The problem was that I was searching for her elsewhere, whereas what I needed to do, which I realised, I think two weeks before opening. This one night I couldn't sleep and I was like "let me just read my script", so I opened my script, I read my script. And then as I was reading I found things, characteristics that just gave her a beautiful colour. I saw her as this, as amber. You know the colour amber has the elements of red and elements of orange, and if you look at colour coordination and colour analysis, red is that danger, strong, passionate kind of feel. And then orange has got that active, that impulsive, that action-driven kind of vibe. So, when I put the two together I was like "yeah, that's Nozi. She's dangerous. I mean, she's very lethal. She has a mission and she's on a mission to achieve that". So, the moment I discovered that, I discovered that you know, she's human and she's hurt, she's a woman scorned and she's on a mission. And that night when I discovered those things, I felt so much

lighter, even in the rehearsal, my director was like “now I see you blossom”, I’m like “because now I know what I’m doing” because all this while I was following direction. It was do as the director says and I as the actor didn’t have any say. So, that night after discovering her I was like “now I have her”. So, I only got the connection between me and Nozi that night. Before then it was a lie.

R: So, now you have the script, when you were home, on your own, how did you try and internalise the character to make her part of you?

P4: You know the trick with *Rocks* is that it was done immediately after *Chimumba’s Last Breath*, one of the productions we were doing here at the State Theatre. We were doing *Chimumba* for three months because it was a development programme, and then immediately after that we moved to *Rocks*. So, I didn’t have time to de-role from that into that, so it was just a quick jump, and I struggled as I’ve said. So, for me to internalise it, I had to familiarise myself with the script. I read the script to an extent where I read the scripts to forget it, so that it’s no longer lines that I’m reciting but rather words that come from me, if that makes sense. It was that thing where I read the script a lot, we had a lot of good discussions as characters, deconstructing the script, like script analysis and all of that thing. And when it happened it was so beautiful because we had a lot of brilliant, intelligent actors, that we were able to come together and deconstruct the script and help one another understand the characters as they were. And that also helped me into realising Nozi’s relationship with everyone else. So, the reading of the script constantly and the conversations that I had with my fellow actors, that made me internalise her and make her into a full-blown person other than a distant character that I get into.



R: There are things in Nozi that you as P4 have never been through, how do you deal with such things? How do you play something you are not, something that you've never been, but play it so believably?

P4: I love that question. I think that's one of the reasons why I love acting. Acting for me is literally the thing that allows me to be anything I want to be. And, I mean I'm only 22 years old, I only have so much lived experiences. So there are things that are naturally far from me. And then when we look at Nozi, as I said, she's got a very dramatic past. Her childhood was very dramatic – my childhood was not that dramatic. And there's this beautiful thing that Stanislavski speaks of, the "Magic 'If'". The "Magic 'If'" works in such a way that Stanislavski speaks of you imagining yourself in that situation, and then it's, "what if I was in that situation?". And then what you do is that you get that feeling that you get from that "what if" circumstance and then you relate it and put it in line together with the event as it happens in the script for the character. So, that's how Stanislavski explains it – it doesn't work for me that way. What works for me is I've got a very beautiful, strong sense of empathy. I empathise so strongly that sometimes it's too much for me to handle. So as I was reading the script, you know I would feel like... my core is my strongest point – everything of mine happens in the core, so the things that were described in the script that happened to Nozipho, I'd feel them here (points to the solar plexus), and then what I would do is I would register the feeling in my body, and then I would find trigger words. So, if the word was "gruesome", that's my adjective. So, the moment I read that word, my body will react. So, I would adapt the "Magic 'If'" in that way, and what I'd do is I'd use Alba Emoting. I don't know if you know Alba Emoting; Alba Emoting makes use of the breath, behaviour and circumstances. So, the

circumstance was gruesome, and then it's a very gut-wrenching kind of feeling, you know. That already affects my breathing pattern. So, I register how my breath is in that thing; is it faster? Is it shallow? etc. and then, how is my body reacting? Is it tense, is it open? is it shallow? So, I register that, so after registering that, that's already a pattern that I've already, that my body has already encoded. So, the moment I go to that word "gruesome", already my body goes to that point. And then that pattern becomes visible to the person looking at me. It's truthful to me because I'm feeling it, and it's visible to the next person. So, how I address things that I've never felt, and even things that I've felt, because like said, I feel, I let go. Like "bye-bye", it happens now, after it has happened I move on. You can't hold, I don't believe in holding onto things because then things get messy. So, I do those. I do my own adapted "Magic 'If", then I mix it with Alba Emoting, and then I feel it in my body, and then I deliver it. I think the one thing that I've learnt in my training is to be truthful to myself. I shouldn't be trying to get things. I shouldn't be trying to be anything other than myself. I mean, I use my body, which is the only thing I have. I use my voice, I use my lived experience. And I can't pretend like I don't have any lived experience. I don't have to experience the very same thing as is, but I could have experienced something similar, or something that makes me feel the same way. I might not have lost my parents, but I might have lost a brother, and the feeling is the same. So, it's just going back to those lived experiences and trying to merge them with those of the character and just creating triggers and patterns for yourself as the actor, because you have to take care of yourself. Otherwise you'll lose your mind, so you create patterns for yourself that the audience can recognise, and that are truthful to you as the actor in your body, in yourself, in your being. And then you share those then, hopefully it works.

R: Because you guys, you'd have a situation, let's say the situation is tense.

Normally, in real life it would be acted differently, but then you guys are acting it, for example, stepping on a table, and while you are talking, stepping on a chair, doing something that looks like a dance movement. How were you able to reconcile those two with the emotional sincerity of what's happening?

P4: I'm a physical theatre practitioner, and I've come to respect the body – that the body has its own story to tell, and that the body is not disassociated, it's not a separate entity from the mind. They are kind of the same thing. They feed off each other. So, doing that absurd thing of Jackson and Nozipho shouting at each other, walking on tables in a tense situation when they should be gritting their teeth, but they are busy flirting on top of the table. It's that thing of understanding the text, and then the body responds, regardless of what you're doing. So, what we did was we had a full understanding of the text before we even did anything. I think we had a week where we were doing nothing but script reading, so you know what you're talking about. So, the moment that we put in the physicality, you already know. Merging the two, for me, it was not that thing of saying "these are words and these are actions and I have to merge them". It was more like in that world, in that world of *Rocks & Roses*, in the world of *The Republic*, that's how things are done. If you're angry you step on tables, the same way that if we are angry we throw things. So, if you are angry you step on tables, and that's what you do. It's a norm in that world. So, you familiarise yourself with the world, become a resident of that world, believe in that world, so everything that you do is not like "oh my God", your body is not in shock. Because your body is attuned to that world, there's nothing that you do that's out of tune for your body. So, it's that thing where you let yourself, you surrender,

you know. Surrender to the circumstances – that’s what helped as well. You surrender to the circumstances, because the moment you understand something it makes sense to you. So, for a logical person like myself; if I don’t understand something I don’t understand it. It doesn’t make sense for me to do it, so it becomes a problem. But the moment I understand and surrender to the world, then it becomes a fluidity between my brain and my body and my world to merge as one. So, I think that’s how that dilemma, if I might call it such, was conquered.

R: And then, to what extent did the director in you being able to portray that character so beautifully?

P4: A lot. A great deal. I mean, I’m only as good as my team. My director was very strict as to what he wanted. He was strict, he was hardcore – you don’t give him anything less than what he wants. So, he was very specific as to what he wanted, how he wanted it and when he wanted it. So, we had a good leader, a great director in terms of what to execute and how to execute it. So, if anything that I did on that stage was... my director and I worked, I think, 55%/45%. So, most of the work there was his, and then I just contributed my part as the actor, and as the conceptualiser, and as a performer. But the choices were directorial choices alongside actors’ choices, because there were things where he would want to be done and it was impossible for my body. It didn’t make sense and I would tell him “leader, it doesn’t make sense in my body to do that”, “why”, “well because, let’s think about it, Nozipho is this kind of person, and this is where the story is coming from and this is where the story is going, so to go there is a diversion. In any case it doesn’t make sense to anyone. It makes sense to you because you wrote the story, so you have that foreground information which the audience doesn’t have.” So, it was those kind of

debates that we would have, but most of the work was his. He did 55% of the work that I did on that stage, and then we collaborated.

R: Exercises. Now we are going into the rehearsal room. So, now you are with the other actors, they also have their own roles. In preparation for the actual performance; did you guys have a routine of exercises or warmups, anything that you do before actually starting rehearsal?

P4: Yes, of course. Like you said, the play was not a typical realism play. The world was shaken and turned upside-down a bit. And we can't deny the fact that we as human beings are not like that. So, it took us out of our comfort zone a bit. As physical theatre practitioners also we believe in taking care of the body, so that the body can take care of you. So, it was warmups every day we got on set, rehearsals and in that call time interval of two-hour preparation, we get there, roll down the spine 8 times, 4 times, 2 times. Warm up your ankles, warm up your knees, do crunches, tummy, so that you make the body fit. And then do a few sequences that we do to just get the body flowing. So, we would have, I think a 30-minute body warmup, and then we would have a 20-minute vocal warmup because articulation and resonance and projection; those things are very important in theatre. The person sitting at the front and the person at the back should be able to hear you. Vocal warmup was very important, especially because we spoke our mother languages. And when people speak their mother languages they become comfortable, and when you're comfortable you forget to hit those consonants, you forget to elongate those vowels. So, you become comfortable and start speaking like that, which is fine, but in a theatre everyone needs to hear everything. You need to indulge and devour those words so that the next person can get them. So, we would take the first hour of our

call time; 30 minutes of body warmup and then 15 to 20 minutes of vocal warmup, and then we would go and change and do whatever. And then every time you were not doing anything you would hum, so that the larynx and vocal folds and your megaphone is kept warm. So, when you get to the stage you shouldn't be speaking for the first time and only then is your voice warming up. When you're humming, you keep it active, and then lubricate it with a lot of water. We were drinking so much water I felt like I was over hydrated at some point because when you're busy working, the body wants something to suck on, and water is very good for the body and for the vocal folds. You could tell, because everything was exaggerated; with the passion that Jackson and Nozipho and everyone was speaking with, those things require the body to go an extra mile to execute them. So, you as the actor have to do things that will support that. So, vocal warmups, body warmups, a lot of water – that was our ritual. And we prayed, our director believes in prayer. So, we would pray at the beginning of each rehearsal session. We would pray around 12. We would pray at the end of the session. And then the actors had a moment at the back; we would sync each other's energies, just so we are together, so that Jackson is not shining alone, Nozipho is not shining alone, etc. so that we are shining together as an ensemble. So that when the show ends they "those people were good", not that Jackson was good and everyone else was just lacking. So, while they were doing the cell phone announcement, we would just sync each other's energies backstage and stay together, say whatever that we want to say in our hearts, just to make sure that we are together and when we go on that stage we slay. That was our ritual.

R: Was it important for you guys to work as an ensemble?

P4: Very much so, I mean, *Rocks & Roses* was not a one-hander. If it was a one-hander then there's no need for ensemble work. But because we were working with different bodies of different training and different experiences, we couldn't expect everyone to be on the same level. So we had to somehow bring ourselves on the same level, and that requires us to bring all the different trainings and different backgrounds together. So, ensemble work is very important, again, to ensure that Jackson does not shine alone. That we shine together as a group. And again, ensemble work is good, to make sure that we are an ensemble, we have different skills and different qualities that if we can bring them together we can be dynamite, we can explode, other than if we are focusing on ourselves as individuals. What is beautiful about the type of work that we do is that we are different people from different backgrounds trying to impact on other people, and we can't do that if we are self-centred because then it means we are doing this for ourselves. And it's not about us. We do our part to impact on others, and then for people to receive us we have to be one. We have to be together like a pack of sticks, so that we can impact. Otherwise when we are one it's very easy, and then when you are individualised, you're not an ensemble, it's very easy for negative energy to come and infiltrate and take you off track. Whereas if you are together, your energy is synced, your mentality is synced, you become like one big happy family where you think together. You're on one mission, one goal, in solidarity, in camaraderie. And that is important because even the world receives you as one unit, instead of Jackson, Nozipho. Yes, obviously people are going to have their favourites, but the spirit of the group must stay together, especially in a theatre work where everything is live, like it's happening in that moment. If you're not in sync, things could go wrong and you might not be able to save them, but if we are together and we are synchronised, we know that the

moment Jackson jumps or skips a line, we know what line he jumped, and then we know where he should be going, so we are able to help him get there. We are able to help the scene get there, otherwise if we are not synchronised it will be that thing of “oh tits, Jackson has messed up” and then we would panic and be all over the stage. You know the stage is such a beautiful space. It exposes you. You’re so vulnerable when you’re onstage. Everything that happens on your body, the audience can see. So, if you tension up, the audience can see that. But if you’re synchronised and your energy is on one bar, if Jackson skips a line, you’re able to bring him back together as a group, so that we are there and we move forward like a little pack of soldiers going towards one mission. So, ensemble work is very important, especially in team work, because there’s a reason why it’s a team and not individual work. It’s so that you work together to achieve a certain goal.

R: You also mention your approach, that you use Alba Emoting, and also you have your own way of “Magic ‘IF”, which is not exactly as it’s described. Would you say you have a specific systematic approach to character and characterisation whenever you approach a character? Or is each and every character that you’ve played unique in how you approach it?

P4: Each character is different. I think it would be problematic if I approached every character the same way, although there are recurring patterns that I use for my character approach. Some characters are easier to find, like school girls – it’s not characters that you have to delve deep into yourself to find them. Each character is different, and it will depend on the depth of the character and how relatable I am to the character, and how much work I have to put in, to relate and to get that character into my body. I approach each character as it comes. As a different new experience,



so that I'm not stuck as an actor. And to allow for variety to take place, and growth as well. But I do have, however, specific patterns that I use. My Alba emoting will forever be there. My "Magic 'IF" will forever be there. My inner-outer expressions will always be there. My Laban Matrix will always be there, because those are the fundamentals of characterisation. Every character has a metric, every character has a psychoanalysis, every character has a mental state that you have to understand. So, those things will always be there. It's just a matter of which one you start with and which one do you need to delve more into. There are characters that the moment you read the script, already it takes you, you've got it. You don't have to do that much work; the analysis is there, you get it, it's superb. But there are some characters that will require so much out of you that they'll require you to even go and research and speak to people and read and do things. So, every character to me is a new challenge that I work on, although I always have my toolbox ready, which are those set patterns of mine.

R: You just mentioned something about research, especially for characters that don't speak to you immediately or you don't relate to immediately when you see them on paper. For now, let's go back to Nozipho; did you ever have to do something like that or observe something or someone, anything outside of you?

P4: Yeah, I've had to. I've had to. Initially when I was doing Nozipho, before the style of the play changed, I was looking at this lady, this character from *Scandal*, Thembeke. I drew a lot of inspiration from her, in terms of how she carried herself. Thembeke is very devious, I love her. She's very devious, everything she does is very calculated, well-thought of, she's sharp that girl. I'm a fan of *Scandal*, and I'm a fan of Masasa (the actress), but when I was watching, I was watching to learn. I was

looking at her facial expressions, how something would affect her. You know when they tell you that they've just realised that you killed Vuyo, inside it's like "oh, my tits, oh, my tits", but on the outside it's like "oh, really? That's a lie", but inside she's boiling and you see it here (pointing at the solar plexus), but here (gesturing to the face) she's so calm. And it's that thing that I had to look at, and it inspired me, especially in that moment when Jackson came and caught Nozi... so, for me it was a matter of finding the contrast. I was looking at Thembeke to find the contrast; how to be something inside and how to be something else externally. And then I'd also look at Meryl Streep; Meryl Streep is amazing, especially in *Iron Lady*. If you look at *Iron Lady* or *The Devil Wears Prada* or *Margaret Thatcher*, those are moments where someone is feeling something inside, but on the outside they are cold, they are blank, like they are not affected, but it's a lie. And the moment that something turns away, it's their moment to go "oh God, I almost died there" or "oh, almost caught me". And then I was also looking at Zoe Saldana in *Colombiana*. Nozipho was a Martial Arts champion at some point. So, she had that formal training of Martial Arts. So, it means her body had to be some sort of a formal structure. She doesn't stride like a normal woman, she takes bigger strides because she's trained that way. Her body is a bit more formal. If you looked at her in relation to Jackson, they were almost like they were trained together, though she tried to loosen up for Jackson. So, it was looking at those women to get my characters. I also looked at... I read this article on women in politics; how as a woman in politics... you know there's always this thing about females, when she takes a position, because we live in a patriarchal world, females are always perceived in an inferior manner to men, and then there's always a set standard as to how females must behave and how they must hold themselves. So, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, when they hold positions of power, there's

always that thing of having to prove themselves against the men. So, they always do things to the extreme, just so that they could be recognised. And then I read this article on mam' Winnie Madikizela on how, because in the story it seems as if Nozipho betrayed Jackson whilst Jackson did his own part of betrayals. I mean, he was not a saint, especially what he was doing to the people of the republic. He was not a saint. But at the end of the day, because our society is so men-favouring, Nozipho is seen as the bad girl, and Jackson is like "oh, my God, Nozi how could you do that to Jackson?" and in my head I'm like "uhm, guys, what was Jackson doing to Nozipho? What was Jackson doing to the world that he was living in?" which was overlooked. So, I also looked at the relationship between Nelson Mandela and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela... I also looked at that relationship as to how it informs my thinking as an actor and how I'm going to approach Nozipho, because at first I was getting very passionate and very touched; I'm like "the society is very weird." But I had to come back to myself and say "no no no no nana, come back. It's not about you, it's about the character. We are working on Nozipho here". Those kind of articles and those kind of events helped me shape her into this rounded figure. That she's not just a girl that seduced Jackson to take Jackson away from Phindile and then married Jackson, and then now she's betraying Jackson. But it was that whole journey of "I'm a girl, I have dreams. I have things that I want, and here's a person that can help me get there. And then I'm going to do everything in my power to maintain that." But the moment this person deviates from the bigger picture, then I have to do something for the bigger picture. Hence it was not an easy choice for Nozipho to decide "I'm going to poison Jackson's drink"... because me as P4, I'm not that kind of person, I'm not spiteful, I'm not vengeful. Me, in that situation, what I would have done, I would have walked away. Personally I would have walked away.

So, it was finding those moments in myself and in the character and saying this is something that I had to do, and I had to have motivations, I had to have things to spike me, because I read a lot. I'm a knowledge junkie, so I need something to feed me. I've heard of those articles, those events when you look at history, when you look at how women in power are treated... when you look at such events and you look at the level of status quo that we are in in our country as it is, and you look at this whole trend of "blesser/blesse/blessed", it's the same thing. So, you look at those kind of events, because this blesser thing is not something that started now. It's been happening; people are just catching up now. So, it was those kind of events that I had to look at, that had to inform the decisions that I made for Nozipho as the actor. So, Nozi is that character that I had to delve a lot out of myself, externally and go deep into myself like look at things that I would and would not do, and then try to merge the two, so that Nozipho can become the person that she was. And I think at the end of the day I like her, I don't know, but I like her.

R: In conclusion, playing this character every night, do you ever have moments or a night where you felt like "I was less better than this other night" or "I was much better than before" or were you constant? And if you were constant, how did you manage that?

P: My friend asked me that question as well. The funny thing is, every time I got offstage, after the curtain call, I'd high-five everyone, like "guys, we are slaying" because what happened was, I was not constant every night. I was not, I could never, because every performance is a new experience. No performance is ever the same, even I as the actor I'm not the same every night. There are things that happen during the day that affect me as a human being, which will affect my performance in

the night. So, I think every night I grew, and ever since that day that I told you about that I found Nozipho. Ever since that day, that night, I discovered who she was, and every day it was like a building block for me. And by the last night, I had built my mansion of Nozipho. I was not constant, but there was never a night where I felt like I did not do her justice. There was never a night where I felt like yesterday was better and today I lacked. Every night for me was like I'm climbing. There's no set destination, but you feel yourself grow, you feel your confidence levels on that stage elevate. You find yourself onstage doing something that you did not do yesterday. You respond differently. You feel things differently. Things don't affect you the same way. So, every night we slayed, and I'd tell everyone "guys we are slaying" because for me it felt like every night we grew. Every performance we just got better and better and better, and it was not the thing of "yesterday we were bad"... for me as an actor it took me a while to get to that point where I stopped judging my performances and comparing them. I took every performance as a new experience... it's a new day, it's a new performance, it's a new audience, because an audience also has an impact on your performance. And that's the beauty of theatre and live performance that you don't have the same audience every night.

**End.**

## Participant 5

R: From that first moment getting the script, to rehearsal, and finally portraying that character truthfully – what was the journey? What did you do the first time you were given the script?

P5: I'm not going to lie, the first time I got the script from the director I was shocked, I was scared of the text because, as you heard on the show, the script had a whole lot of bombastic words. When I read the first line I couldn't understand what the person was trying to say because the English is not like the our everyday English that we speak. And when he explained the character to me I was excited because I'm very fascinated with stunts and action movies and whatnot. And because I'm a small person and I'm short, people assume that I'm younger. I'm turning 25 this year but people would assume that I'm 21 or 18, and because of that look, I thought even if I wanted to play main character, that won't work because of how I look. And then I went home, I read the script, and I couldn't understand what this play was saying. Besides the summary I was given, I couldn't understand a thing. The director said "no, it's fine. We will read, during the reading you will ask whatever you want to ask me." And then I looked for a dictionary, I had to buy a new phone now because my phone had cracked and I couldn't go to Google. And still that didn't work. *Rocks & Roses* was hard for me, from day one... I was never happy. I was like "how is this guy expecting me to do this?" especially with a text that you're not used to. I did not want to embarrass myself. I also did not want to disappoint him because he chose me, because he had so much faith in me, and then if I let him down I'm letting myself down as well. Acting was never my priority, I've always wanted to be a dancer, to do all dance genres, and to do Drama theory. I was only acting when we do practicals

and that's it. I did shows before... all of those things, but not because I want to... I did them because I was told to do them, and I would do my best because I did not want to fail – not because I loved it. But then *Rocks & Roses* came, and then we started reading. I was the worst reader in the rehearsal. The director did the reading with me twice and then found me an understudy... The first day he told me what kind of a person Phindile was, I loved her from the word go. After understanding the story, I was like “this girl is me on some steroids”. But I'm not like Phindile, I'm not even close to what Phindile is, but one thing that we have in common is that she is Xhosa, I'm Xhosa. I'm 24, she was 35, she is a politician, I'm just an actor who can be whatever she can be. You know, Xhosa people have this “hardcoreness” in them, so for me to be extremely that hardcore is because it's something that I already have in me. But because Phindile is not that sensitive, and I'm very sensitive, the more we just talked about her the more she came to me. The script and how the director wants it is important, but for me it became easier when I removed everything that he said and I asked myself “if you were Phindile, what would you do?” So, I think that's when she slowly came in. during that process that's when I was starting to understand and see, and at some point I can't think of anything else, even when I wake up I'd ask “If Phindile was to wake up, what would she do?” And then it started like that... Another thing that made me understand, we changed the script six times. So, I think that's another thing that helped us because you always combined from script number one, even though it was removed it's still in your head. So, that way you're building your character to have a background... For me, coming back to real life as a woman... I know it sounds so unreal for a woman to be single for 15 years, but it's possible. It happens. My mother broke up with my father in 95 and she passed away in 2012 and she never dated, she never had a man in her life. So, for

me, that's what I had in mind – that Phindile had something in common with my mom, even though my mom exiled from her house. Phindile was exiled from her country... Love can really make you ruthless sometimes. You know when you love someone so much and then they do things that make you angry, you do things that you never knew you're capable of. You know with Drama, you always pick up things that really happened in real life, and that's what I did with this whole thing. And that's how I was able to be as strong as you say Phindile was, because I took things that happened in real life and forgot about what the director said, and I was like "I am P5, doing this as P5, and I'm representing Phindile..."

R: Okay, so you've talked a lot about Phindile. Now we bring it back to P5 as the actor; firstly, Phindile was portrayed as this hardcore soldier or trained soldier who's been through hardships, and who seems to have a specialty also in making people disappear, which is why the guy wants her back. She is the one person he thinks of when he wants to get rid of Malan. Firstly, Phindile – for Jackson to want to ask Phindile to do this, for us as the audience it gives us more information on Phindile that, "okay, so she's quite skilled in making people disappear". But you as P5, you have never killed, I'm just assuming...

P5: (Laughs) I almost did though, but no.

R: So, you've never killed. When Jackson asks Phindile to kill, and then in their conversation it shows us that Phindile has killed before. Also when you read the script you get that this girl has killed, and now she is asked again to kill, to a point where she also agrees that "I'm going to do it" because she knows that she's doing it because she is asked by the one guy who makes her do crazy things. So, how do



you then take that thing and personalise it? You've never killed; how do you play someone who has killed? Do you have things that you do or things that you look at or people that you model it against, in order for you to embody this person who killed? What do you do?

P5: For me, I know at school they used to tell us to read a lot, to watch a lot of movies. The show had a lot of fighting scenes, we were doing a lot of physical, Karate, dances like hardcore, painful movements before. They cut all of that, it's not there anymore, but when we were doing that, the choreographer was telling me to watch *Columbiana*, Angelina Jolie to get that. And then I tried, but then again, for me it was; if I was going to observe Angelina Jolie killing a person in this way, that's what she came up with, that's how she decided to do that characters, and it's not going to be rooted if I take something that's already done by someone else, and I doubt my audience would believe me because I'm very afraid of embarrassing myself, because I'm afraid of failing. For me everything that I was doing had to be real. That's why even out of rehearsals, when I was starting to get Phindile, everything that I did, I was doing it because Phindile was doing it, not because P5 is doing it. I'm very afraid of dogs, but when I'd see a dog, I'd try to be strong because Phindile wouldn't run away from a dog. So, with the killing part, I came to think of "if I were to do it, how would I do it?" I don't know, I don't have anything else to say besides that; "if it was me, how would I do it?" And then you start being spontaneous... that's how I came to that point. I didn't take it from an actor that I know because for me I always struggle to watch an actor and then go and imitate that.

R: Okay, another thing; you gave me one of your backstories which you also aligned with the backstory of the character; the betrayal part. So, you then taking the betrayal part in your own life; how did that help you? Did it help with the anger or was it useless?

P5: No, it wasn't, it wasn't, because the play is based on politics. It's based on greed and betrayal and racism and all of that. And I see all that; can we forget about all that? For me, can we put that aside and have this small world in your head. It helped so much because I'm struggling as we speak to back to P5. I'm struggling. I think I still have Phindile in me. I'm even struggling with the play I'm doing right now because I took so much, which is good because I wanted people to believe Phindile. I wanted people to see the real Phindile, not P5 acting a character that's Phindile, and I took so much. Everything that I did on the play was something that had to be real, and I had to go back to things that happened. And I used to sit; you know old people always teach us to forgive and forget, which is so untrue. Even if you'd forgive, but if you talk about it, it comes back, it lightens up in your heart. And I soaked myself in those bad memories because I wanted it to be that when I was talking, it should be the truth – not an actor portraying a character. That why I'm struggling now, because I want people to believe me. I soaked myself in the things that happened for real. When I said Phindile comes back and then her parents were gone, I experienced that, because I was sent to a boarding school because I used to fight so much with my brother... and when my mother passed away I felt like I didn't spend so much time with my mother because of the abuse that my brother had towards me. There's so much that I thought of, to make everything be real. When Phindile walks in onstage, I didn't want them to see P5, even though the only

common thing people would see that it's me in the language. That's the only thing, not that I changed everything and made her a complete different person from me, no. I built her from the things that I've gone through in my life. And because people know me as this talkative person, I'm always bubbly, I'm very hyperactive, and then they think P5 is like this. But it's easy to judge a person from a distance, until you sit down with them, until you spend time and then you get to know them. So, what I was reflecting on onstage is another side of P5 that people didn't know. You don't go around and tell people the bad things that you're going through. And then the part where they torture her, I thought of when my parents separated...

R: And then when we conclude; when you are rehearsing, you're working with other people, you've done your work on your own, you've used memories from the past to help make your performance real. When you are now in rehearsal, working with other actors, did you guys have any routine that you did in order to prepare you in order to be able to begin rehearsal or begin performance?

P5: Routine how? Exercise?

R: Exercises, relaxation, or anything.

P5: No, we didn't. We didn't, the only thing that we did with the co-actor playing Jackson, we spent a lot of time together. We spent a lot of time, and the way these characters were getting to us, whenever we spent time we'd have nothing else to talk about but what Phindile would do, what Jackson would do. Otherwise things like meditation and whatnot, the director does not believe in those things. We exercised a lot, and then after that; rehearsals, and then we go. Otherwise, things like meditation, connection, focus, nope, we didn't... At school you had to focus for like

an hour before a play because to the teacher it was like you're going to forget your lines, your mind is going to be all over, which is true. And I was used to that. For me, first week of performance, I'm not going to lie, I struggled so much because I was used to focusing before the play. And with them, they are giving you notes while you are backstage, everyone's laughing and whatnot. Others are warming up. Nobody is focusing; there's just so much noise, and I struggled with that, until I decided "you know what..." costume has power. The minute I changed into costume, I'm no longer P5... costume is what helped me – not these things of focus because they don't focus.

R: And then, would you say that when you approach characters, from the one that you played of Phindile to the other one that you played in *1606* and other characters; do you have a way of doing things, getting into character, or does each one have its own unique way of getting into?

P5: I've always played a girl, a young girl. Remember earlier on when I told you I never thought I'd play a main character because of how I look, I'm small and all of that. And because at school, honestly speaking *Rocks & Roses* was the very first play that I have done so much work that I feel like I've worked. Most of the times I put so much pressure on myself because I don't want to do things that won't be recognised by people. And back at school, because *1606* I was still a student, it was a pressure of doing things right, not because I was an actor basing a character on a certain event a certain someone or anything like that. So, I just realised now that you are asking me that I never had a background story for my characters. What I had in mind going on stage was "okay, Sir said I must do this, and I'm gonna do that." at

that time my heart is racing like there's no tomorrow because I don't want to screw up.

**End.**

## **Participant 6**

R: Let's talk about when you first knew that you were going to play this character, *Mma Tshabalala*. You got the script; I want us to talk about that journey – the first time that you got the script. Moving from P6 getting the script and then finally embodying this person. How did you get that? We can start from when you got the script at the theatre or wherever you got it, and then going to work on the character. How did you first familiarise yourself with it?

P6: Okay, firstly *Road To Damascus*, the show; it had played before with a different cast, and I was always a fan of *Damascus*, so I always watched the show and I'd be like "Hmm", and I told the director that "you know what, I want to be in this show. I don't care if I'm an extra or what – give me something." You know, and then he said okay. I think in January or Feb he contacted me, telling me to come through to Pretoria. I didn't even know, I thought I was playing an extra for *Damascus*, I'd be the Chorus, I'll sing my lungs out – done. And then he came to my place and he told me "you will be playing Mma Tshabalala", but now the problem for him with me was that I'm not Zulu first of all, second of all, my accent was just not proper enough. But he entrusted me with this character, and I was like "okay, I'll take it upon myself as a challenge". And the thing is, the person who played the character before played it so nicely, played it brilliantly. And I was like "you know what, I need to do something with this. I need to take this challenge and make something". Then we got the

scripts; so I had to change it from English to Zulu, and I'm not Zulu. So I thought to myself "you know what, let me start talking Zulu. Let me start familiarising myself with Zulu", because you can't just change a script into another language that you don't know. And then when it comes to stage, you can't even improv because it becomes a problem if you're stuck there and you don't know the language and the mannerisms and the whatnot. So, I studied the character and I'm like "you know what, let's listen. Let's listen to how the Zulu people speak." And it's not the "Zulu-lite", this mama is from KZN, so I really need to be that woman right now. And of course being around so many women in my life I saw, the thing is with me, what I do is, normally on my everyday basis I'm always observing people. Some people might think I'm crazy or I'm thinking too much, but actually, actually looking at how this person walks, how they talk, how they move their hands, you know, how they tie the blanket around their waist. And I took it upon myself to say "you know what, I must do it". And then rehearsals came, and there was a competition between the two mamas, because there were two families. So, this woman was younger, but she was bigger, her body was bigger than mine, and I was playing an older version and I was smaller. And I was like "okay, here's another challenge. I need to run, I need to run with it." So I started looking at women, trying to walk like them, trying to embody them, bit by bit, and even trying to leave me, P6, because I walk like this. My director would also say "P6, I don't want to see you today. Really, why are you here?" so I'd be like "okay, conscious. Come back." And then it was character analysis. We had to watch *Les Misérables* and learn how to speak with music. And now it's African. It's vernacular, it's not English that you're used to, where you know that this one you can play around with it like this. It's now Zulu. So, there were different exercises that we did in rehearsals that helped us with our characters and whatnot, and they helped us

build our characters. But it was up to you as an actor that you need to take it further. The director is taking you so far, you need to go all the way. And then with the character that I hated, which was the pastor who was in jail and then came back. The thing is me and him, personally we are friends, and we once played in *Silent*, I don't know if you remember it. He was playing my boyfriend and a stepfather to my child, but he then raped my child. So, that was different because it was like love and hate. So, now it's different; you don't have a relationship with this man, so it has to be different from the show that I did, because are going to see us together and say "ah, she's doing the same thing that she did in *Silent*." So, I started hating him. I never told the director, I never told anyone, no one knew. I took it upon myself to say "you know what, I'm never going to talk to this guy." Every time he'd speak I'd feel like "why are you speaking?" I hated him at that time, until the last day of the show and I told him "you know what, I was doing some Method acting, you know, I don't really hate you that much." So yeah, that was heavy. Because if the energy was felt that these two, they should never be under the same roof together.

R: So, now you get the script, you are told of this character, maybe her history and everything. Firstly, she has a son and daughter, they are in their teens – you yourself don't have a teenage son and daughter...

P6: No.

R: How then did you play that motherly role to teenagers?

P6: Okay, the character first was an aunt to these two children. So, the relationship was different, until I had to change it and really find out, how would a mother respond to those two children who had lost their father, who has been a single mother for all

this time, and knows who the person who killed their father was? And now this person is back, and how am I going to advise my children to forgive when I myself am still angry? You know our parents, even when they are angry, they would try and do better for us or advise you to do better than what they are right now. So, with my sisters, I have five sisters, I have a lot of nephews and nieces; so I've always played like a mother role to them. But now I had to extend that further and actually be a mother.

R: Are there any elderly women or people who are motherly that you picked some things from, or maybe you remembered some things you played before?

P6: I was with my niece in this show. She was playing the lead, the young girl. So, every time I went onstage, she said she pictured me as my mom. My mom was old, so the things that she did, I did because I know that they come naturally because I remember her. And I'm like "okay, here are my two children", it just comes naturally, subconsciously, because there are so many women; my aunts, my aunties, everyone is just there around me. And if I see that this thing is not going to work I'm going to try something else that someone else does in my family.

R: And then, no one has ever killed your husband...

P6: (laughs) Nobody. I don't even have a husband, let's start there.

R: That is another point; this one is very emotional...

P6: Yes.



R: So, how do you truthfully then embody those emotions? Because they were truthful, even though you were singing “you’re a killer”, the emotions were real. How do you then be someone whose husband has been killed when your “husband” has not been killed?

P6: The thing is when I was 18 I lost my father, so it was quite tough, it was very hard. And then every time we have to do Emotional Memory, it always goes back to that, and I have to dig really deep, fast. Because even in that scene, it was a very short one because I came in and I was like “what’s happening?” and then it was split. So, I had to really be focused backstage and say “you know what, dig deep, think about that day when you went to the hospital and you found your dad gone – and he was gone”. And then every single day I’d go into that space, that time and be my mother, because I remember that day I went home and found my mother on the bed, crying her eyes out. So I had to also borrow from that, to say; “my man is gone, he’s gone! Now I’m left with children, I can’t even support them. And now they’re bringing this guy in my house, who is the reason we’re struggling like this”.

R: And, the singing while acting; was it ever a challenge.

P6: Well, it was a different challenge on another level of challenge because I’ve done singing separately, I’ve done acting separately and I’ve done them both because in high school I was in a lot of musicals, but I was used to the English way of singing. Now it had to be different because I’m singing in vernacular and I am an African woman, so I need to do it like an African woman. So, even the process of the musical direction was taken differently with someone who has a theatre background because we wanted to make it real-real, like township real. You felt everyone’s single

character that “this one, there’s someone else out there who’s like this,” so it wasn’t really that much of a challenge because I’ve been doing it.

R: And, because you are singing, you are acting; are there any exercises or anything that you guys did when you had to perform or was everything you did random?

P6: No, it wasn’t random. We had a set exercise with body warmup, we warm up our bodies, and then we had to do characterisations improv, then it was the music. So, it was like that every single day, it was a routine. And there was a time where we just did music only, and focused on all the solos that we had to do personally with the band and the musical director. And then the acting as well was hardcore. There was a day where it was just strictly acting. So, all of them; the acting, the singing, the body, all of them.

R: And then, was it any important for the actors to sort of work together? By that I mean as opposed to you just saying “well, I’m doing my own stuff , I’m good at what I do”, but then maybe when one actor is not pulling themselves up. Was that important for you guys to be an ensemble?

P6: It was very important because you have to pass on the energy ball. It had to be a give and take type of situation, and if one actor is slacking it becomes a problem to you...

R: I watched *Road To Damascus* a few nights, just to sort of get an understanding. From an outsider watching it, I realised that it was very solid, because I watched the previous *Road To Damascus*, which was less of a musical than the one that I

watched later. I found that it was very solid and consistent. What did you guys do, or what did you have to do for you to be constant throughout?

P6: Well, you know we have mentorships with the director and whatnot, so there was a mentorship the Artistic Director of the South African State Theatre – he mentored the director. And then, he would give us crits. We received crits every single day. The show changed so much. What we performed was not what we rehearsed, because it started getting tighter and tighter. The story started to link tighter. So, I think it's the crits that helped us execute what the final product was, which was the *Road To Damascus* – the musical.

R: Because you've played in so many theatre shows, you've portrayed so many roles; do you find that your approach to character has a certain systematic way of doing things, or everything is different?

P6: Everything is different, every single thing. Every character that I do I'm like "what am I going to get today?" I don't even think and say "okay, today I'm going to execute this one like this."

R: And in *Road To Damascus*, now we are in performance. Now that you are in performance phase, it means that you've been with the character for a long time and you embodied it to such a point where you feel that it's ready to be seen by an audience. Was there any difference when you were rehearsing it and when you were performing for an audience?

P6: I think yes, because rehearsals I felt like it came part time, like it came when I needed it. And then with performance, even the younger cast members would say

“oh mama” they even called me “mama”. So, I was the “mama”, so it stayed longer, that’s why the character was so truthful every single night and so consistent every single night, because I was that woman for that time.

R: Did the director ever check or maybe advise how you should get into character?

P6: No. I think he did it for the other people, but not for me.

R: Do you think the director played any role in you understanding the woman?

P6: Definitely.

R: How?

P6: We had long talks after every rehearsal because we drove home with him. So, every time we’d have these conversations about how to, like “you remember that character. That one did it like this, you can do it like this.” That advice helps when you need it most. And it also helps with other people’s opinions about your character that you didn’t even know you’re doing because you’re just doing the character. And then when you hear someone else explain it to you, it’s like “okay, at least I’m on the right path, let me just stick on it”.

R: And in the theatre when you guys arrive for your call time and just before going onstage; are there things that you did by yourself?

P6: Yes.

R: What are those?

P6: We worked with a lot of young actors, and they didn't have big characters that we had, so the other character, the big character and I, the mothers, we shared a dressing room together. And we knew, we all had our corners. Every time at call time we'd have our meeting, talk talk talk, after that everyone goes to their dressing room. When the others are loud, you need to focus on yourself because you can't be having conversations when you're going to perform right now. So, we'd both go into our own corner, into our own spaces, maybe listen to some music and just be in touch with yourself and your inner being for what you're just about to do right now. And just before we got onstage, there was a mic check obviously. So, now you had to do your songs and whatnot and go back to your space again. So, there were like a bit of distractions here and there. So, you really had to focus, a lot.

R: And then from you leaving your place, wherever you live, going for the call time; where is P6 and where does she become Mma Tshabalala?

P6: When I step inside the theatre, that's when I leave P6 there, and I get her after the show.

R: So, all those emotions that you played, were all of them from your own life?

P6: No. Some of them were from my own life, and those that I had never, like I don't really hate people first of all, so it was quite like I don't want to, it's not me. But it was not me, I had to step into someone else. So, if it was in that instant, I had to borrow from something, find something. That's why I had to Method act for that anger. And with happiness of course be happy, but then I had to also borrow because it's different being happy as me, P6, and being happy as a mother, because there was a scene where I was outside and then my son came and startled me. I had to react like a

mama, and these are the things that I also do to my mom. So, I was like okay “this is how she would react”, so you borrow if it’s not what you’re used to.

R: So, you now as P6, let’s leave Mma Tshabalala. Would you say the approach that you took for *Road to Damascus* was better than the approach you took for any other character? Or you don’t judge your performances?

P6: I do, I’m so insecure sometimes, because, I don’t know, I butcher myself. Every single character that I play, I tell myself “you can’t be on the same level as that one you played last year. Last year was last year. You need to raise the bar.” So, that’s why I fight so hard to get into that character. For instance, there’s a show that I’ve been doing for three years. Even now, today, I’m like “no, but I don’t want to do it like the same way” because it becomes a pattern and you’re not being truthful now because you know everything. It’s like the lines; when you get the script, you know the lines every single day and they start becoming like a rhyme. So, for me, even my lines, I never learn them. I just look at the script when I get to the theatre space.

**End.**

## **Participant 7**

R: You have a different dynamic because you wrote the play. So, it’s different from someone who gets a script, where they still have to learn who these characters are, who even now have to ask the writer or the director. So, the process then when you were writing these characters, in a way also knowing that you’re going to perform; how did you familiarise yourself with these different characters? Or did you not even think about it, and only started them on rehearsals?

P7: The play is cowritten. We wrote it in 2010. So, what makes it interesting is the fact that during the writing, my cowriter and I were not even planning to play in the show. Our aim was to direct. So, first time we played it in, I think it was 2011. So when we played it in 2011 it was actually really different from what it is now. So, what happened is that my co-writer and I now had to play it and we got ourselves a director, so that we can focus on getting things right, characters and all that and not confuse ourselves. Then the challenging part was having to forget about the fact that you are the one who wrote the play because at the end of the day we wrote those things out of excitement and thinking it was right the way it was, but then it was challenging when we have to get the characters and make the story work. We have to make it work. So, whatever characters we played there were less than the ones that we have now, because then it was getting onstage, doing the storytelling with these characters. And I think the process of actually trying to understand, forget that we wrote the play and focus on us getting things right, was a challenge because even the director kept on reminding us that “guys remember, it’s not what you wrote. Now we are going beyond what you wrote, we need to then put another step to it”, of which when we were writing, yes we saw these characters, yes we imagine all these characters, but when you have to put it on the floor it becomes different. The challenging part was that it’s really challenging to write and act in a play because you have to delete that part of “I wrote it”.

R: Let’s talk about the young boy that you played; you are not that young boy, but then you have to play him. How did you characterise him? Where did you get that characterisation of that boy? Did you create the characterisation or did you take anything anywhere? How did you get it?

P7: I have what I call an “incubator” of my characters, of which every character that I’ve played, I write it down – all the characters that I’ve played before. And then what I do again is, I reflect back in my life when I was growing up. That young boy is one of the friends I had when I was growing up, of which I didn’t see my friend like that then. But as I grew up and I had to get the character then I remembered that out of all the friends I had while I was growing up, there’s that specific one who was naughty, who was troublesome. And he had a brother who would beat him up every day. So, I had then to relate myself with that particular person, so I drew the character from him by remembering that this boy was naughty, he used to do this and that. So, I drew the character from my childhood, and well some of the elements I used are out of who I am as a person. To say then how would I go about doing something? How would I react to certain things as thing young man? How would I do it? Because I also have my own experiences as a boy, because that boy is like 12/13, experiencing puberty and all that. So, I then had to reflect back and think of when I was discovering all these things about myself and my body changing. So, it’s a matter of reflection; I just had to reflect back and say “what happened in my life when I was growing up as a boy?” and going back again to my incubator of characters, then I said “oh, I played this before. What are the elements of this character?” so that it’s easily remembered in my brain. So, I keep record of all these characters that I play. So, it’s a matter of just reflecting back and see what I’ve played before and, how did I grow up? Who did I meet in the process?

R: And then, for the young boy, at least you have been a young boy. But the old woman; you’ve never been an old woman, you’ve never been that age. Where did she come from? Because I saw her onstage. Where does she come from?



P7: It's my father's mother. It's my granny. So, what actually happens is; there was a play in 2011, *Malibongwe Igama Lamakhosikazi*. It was challenging because I played about 14 roles there, and most of them were women. I was still at school and I actually got an award for one of the supporting characters, which was the old lady. And, for me to get that old lady I had to take two grannies and mix them up, because I couldn't play one granny since I'm not a woman. So, I had to double the power of being a woman in order to get to be one, and really understand. There's an old woman in my hood; she has all those tendencies of being bitter and all those things, and then it's my grandmother from my father's side. So, the first person that I looked at was her because I saw her almost every day when I was growing up. I understood how she walked, how she did things, how she reacted to things. And then there's this funny old woman that I see all the time. So, I had to merge the two. Then now when I had to play this one on *Kwanhliziyo Village*, the challenging part was trying not to have an old woman who looks like that one, which then I had to remember. Then I was still at school, so I was still learning all these processes and how to go about characterising. So, what I did with this one, I found a way of expressing myself without having to pull faces like I used to do. So, I played it more inside than out, so that I had to play the heart of a woman instead of portraying a woman. So, playing it from inside really helped; in the mind I would think about this old woman, how she looks, without having to exaggerate her. So, the process was actually reflecting, it's a reflection, to say who were the people I saw each and every day. And every time I see people walking on the streets I always check all those things and I put them into my incubator just to say "one day I will play this", and when I have to play a character I just explore those different characters.

R: And then, there's about either playing a disappointment or shock, or just sorrow. In the play there was this monster that eats people. Then when you get to discover that the guy who was like the King's righthand man is part of these things; when you play the disappointment or when you're losing someone who's close to you, like a father or a relative from this thing, the sorrow that you have to portray, where does it come from?

P7: It goes back to what makes me sad because sometimes you find that you don't connect with whatever the situation that is, I mean one thing about *Kwanhiziyo Village* is that it is a myth, that thing where there's this animal, they go to it, they talk to it and whatsoever. So then, with this one I had to take myself to a fairy tale world where I say "how do I then make people believe? And how do I make myself believe that this is what I'm going through?" So, because in the play one of the elements is brotherhood, I have a big brother in life and I have a little sister again. So it's all in my mind, I have to take it back and say "what if something bad was to happen to them?", so it's a matter of "Magic 'If" to say "what if? what if?" It's simply because then it's all in how I imagine if then I didn't have a brothers and sisters I think I would approach it by saying "what if it happened to my parent?" It doesn't have to be a brother or a sister, but it has to be someone close me. So it's using the feeling which is them again reflecting, going back and say "I once felt something like this, then how do I come about doing it?" Because during rehearsals it's very difficult to even to a point of crying, but the more we rehearse and the closer get to performance days then you start to get that true feeling because then you're becoming honest and you get to really react on what's happening more than on what would happen. At first it's "what would happen if this was to happen?" but then once

you get it right, it's the matter of flowing and being realistic to all the situations that are happening at that moment. I think it's more on believing really, and to say the actor that you're with onstage, in as much as you guys are acting, you're working, but to also take it on a personal level to say "what if something bad was to happen to him?" and depending on your relationship at the same time. I mean I've known my co-actor for about three years now, and looking at him, at some point in the play, teasing me and all that, but then I started getting a sense of brotherhood. Because I've always looked at him as a brother, so it became easy to just tweak it a bit. I'm actually asking myself how would it be if someone else was to play it, somebody I don't know, and I'd have to build that relationship because so far I've played it with people that I know.

R: The dynamic of the play, was it self-directed? Or was there an external director?

P7: It was directed by me and co-director; reason being that I wanted to direct it and play it, but then I realised that there's a lot to it, and I play a lot of characters there.

And there's some things which I wouldn't be able to see, since I'm in the play. I think I can direct a play whereby I'm playing two or three scenes and someone else is the main character. But when I'm on stage all the time I need that third eye, someone to really help me look at the play, relook and it and say "this is what it is and these are the loopholes", so he became that character who looked at everything that we do by co-directing it. So, I threw in a lot of ideas at first, especially when we were blocking. I was blocking with him, but the deeper we got in the play, then he had to take the platform because I was no longer focused on making the play look good or who should stand where. I switched off my whole directing mode and had to focus on me

being an actor. So, we both worked. I didn't make it alone. I think if it was just me it would have had more loopholes than the ones it has so far.

R: What would you say about your levels of getting the character, from the first time you started exploring them to the performance stage? What would you say about the steps you took, up to the time when now you are sure that "I can do these characters"?

P7: I think what really helped me is that I'm not scared of looking stupid and exploring, so I start by doing the weirdest things about the character. So, when I received the script, I mean on *Kwanhliziyo Village* I've always had the script, but I've had to rewrite it now. After rewriting it then I sat down and I started reading the script. It felt new, it felt like it's something else. It's not what it was before. So, reading it for the first time, then taking all these characters, writing them down, saying "I'm going to play this and that and that and that. How do I then portray these things?" So, from first day of rehearsals when we're reading, I look at my relationship with another actor, because I just come up with a character and the next thing it doesn't really relate. Because these were brothers, something has to be similar, they need to have something that would glue them together, and which would say these are brothers. So, in the process of characterisation, when we do scriptwriting because that's where it starts, from how I read and how I express myself through text before we even get to actions. So, it's a matter of really discovering and seeing how we react to each other as characters. To me, it starts more in the voice because you know we start from reading, then from there we get to body. It being the body then I do the craziest things, especially in rehearsals when I play a kid I play a lot. When I get my own time in rehearsals and the director is not there, I focus on getting all these other

characters and how to go about transforming into them. And during the process, I write down all the differences in these characters, to say “okay, this is what makes these characters different, because they shouldn’t look alike at all. So, I try to say “okay, this I can take out, this I can leave, this I can take out, this I can leave”, which is challenging because sometimes you even forget that I’m in this character, you end up using that voice for that particular thing. So, it’s a matter of rehearsals and practising and taking acting as homework, because every time I get home I even experiment with the people that I live with, then when I get home I just play around with characters, and when they ask me a question I react according to how Gogo would react to her kids. No it’s a matter of first I work on the voice when we’re doing reading, text-wise, then after that I look at how we portray the body and play around the body. And what really help me again is that during that process I observe a lot of people in the streets, to say that yes I have this Gogo, but when I look at another Gogo, what if I add that? How would it look? Then I add it and play around it during rehearsals, then more impressive things, and it’s a matter of incubating, like I said – you go back, you relook at it and say “this one I’ve played, and this I can take and use for that”, so, my processes that; text, voice then getting to the body, then the last thing is the mind obviously. That’s when I start to internalise everything, and just let go and say “whatever happens to this”, because already it’s in the mind, I know what the character is like. But then I have to lock it in and say “this one is like this and that one is like this and that’s it”, so it’s a matter of respecting the process. I think if I am to jump any of them I’ll face trouble somewhere somehow.

R: And then, the text; because you wrote it, does it change anything? Because if you were directed by someone, there are those directors who tell you “this is how you

say this, this is how you say that". Are you driven by the text and how it should be? Or as long as the intention is what it's meant to be, you can twist a few things, it's not a problem?

P7: It's not a problem really, I mean if something changes, as an actor I believe that I need to be able to adapt. So, the text changing doesn't mean that elements of a character will change. It's just those few things, obviously how you react towards things and all that, because when the text changes it just influences reactions and actions, and intentions in a scene. But otherwise, I don't think it would really, really affect how I characterise.

R: Would you say you have the same process for all the characters that you play, for example in someone else's play, or is every experience unique?

P7: The one that I just explained is my method, the one that I discovered along my studying years. But sometimes you get too challenged and you realise that it's not working, for example when I did *Relativity*, I was playing a serial killer, and it was really difficult, extremely. I think one of the major things is that I've never been a serial killer, I've never seen a serial killer, but when I check the documentaries of how serial killers behave and all that, they are just normal like us. So, it was actually challenging having to be believable as a young man who goes around killing women. So, when I started to realise that maybe the method that I was using wasn't working, then I had to go the Method acting route, whereby I would spend a lot of time alone like that character would. When we are in rehearsals I would take my own space, be there, be a loner for some time, just to feel what it's like. But the only scary thing was when I started to feel like I don't like women at all, I hate them whatsoever because

that's where the character led me. Then it started to affect me psychologically, because I would be depressed, really thinking about the character, and not live the character, without really getting into trouble killing people. Because this young man was raped when he was growing up; I've never experienced that, I don't know what it's like, I've never been around someone who has really told me about it. So, I had to then imagine all these things, but imagination was not enough. Then I had to push it to an extent of filling those little characters, the little characteristics that the character is going through, so that I can be able to go through it, at least half-way there. Then I can go back to my method; for example, the character was reading a book, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, so I really had to read that book, so that I can understand how he thinks because he reads that book almost all the time in the play. So, I really had to understand what this person really thinks and how they go about doing things. So, it was going an extra mile and going Method with the character more than anything, which was scary. And taking it out when I came back in South Africa was really hard. Then after that I learned and said, If I'm to play any character, especially dangerous ones, I'll start with my method. If some things don't work out, then I'll go deeper, but I must be careful on how I go about doing that.

R: So, would you say the one that is yours; is it things that you learned along the way and then took whatever that works for you, or is it something that you might have learnt from somewhere and it's like "this is how it's done"?

P7: It's bits and pieces of what I've learnt over the years, because I would choose. I mean, when I read Stanislavski and I see certain things that work for me then I use them. To this day I'm still struggling with the crying method, to say how do you go about crying in a scene. You know, breathing, I've tried it but it doesn't work for me.

Imagining is so difficult. Then when I go Method with it then things just come. It's a matter of then taking all those bits and pieces and seeing what works for you in that scene. I mean there are scenes where you don't have to do much or do anything. You just have to sit down and cry, like when I did *Protest*, there was a scene where my mother dies. When we first did it, the guy who was the assistant director wanted me to shout out how I felt, to scream and cry. But how I felt was not like that; I just need to keep quiet and see my mother dying, and I had to just say "she's gone". So, I think it differs from production to production or character to character. It depends on what works for me then, but the method that I've compiled is what works for me, and it's bits and pieces of what I've learnt along the way. It's not a fixed method.

R: And then in *Kwanhiziyo Village*, apart from getting the characters, are there things that you did to warm up or exercises or anything that helps with voice, except the actual characterisation.

P7: Yes, I mean the world is far apart from us. It's not the world that we live in. With an emergent village, so we really drive ourselves there. We use music because we sing in the show, we play backtracks, like the one that we played when the audience was coming in, just to set ourselves in the mood. So, I personally, I would get in the rehearsal space, sleep for some time because I would get there earlier, maybe 30 minutes before, then I sleep, play music whatsoever, then I wake up at a sing with everyone, we sing, then we get deep into it, because we really need to go through that. Because it's more psychological than anything otherwise you're not going to be believable to the audience. We're just going play what we think, we're going to play ideas. We can't be playing ideas all the time, so, then we had to go really deep into that world and re-imagine this world that we live in. So, we are going to go to that



one, and let's see how we go about portraying it. So, even during performances, that's why at the beginning we went Brecht on it, like the audience was coming in, we were onstage exercising. So, that was also helping because it prepares you for that world other than being backstage and waiting. So, we had to be on that set so that we just connect with the set before we can even start. And again, because it was a festival. So, when it's a festival, people move out and then we have to jump in and be onstage. So, it was little time to do a lot of things, other than maybe when it's a season, when it's a season I think it would be easier to just get there, sweep the stage, audience comes in, you get onstage.

R: And then, when do you move from, now we're talking about performance time. When do you move from being P7 into the character, in between those times? Let's say maybe from the time you come in, your call time. Do you come in as the character or is that process of coming in where you are yourself? When does that happen?

P7: I believe that my characters live inside me, so even if I just snap right now, I can snap. It's not even a long process for me. For example, by the time I get in the theatre – not even the rehearsal space. By the time I get inside the theatre, I know it's a safe space to do whatever. Time I get inside the theatre then I start to live that particular character. For example, when I played the character of Mpilo during *Kwanhliziyu Village*, by the time I got in at the Stage Door, I would get into it and just be playful, so that, because the thing is, that energy of that character is a lot, so you have to draw it from somewhere. Otherwise if you get onstage and try to get into it, half the show you'd be tired. So, I had to live it so that I can always jump into it. So, it's like an exercise throughout. So, usually that's what I do. And for other characters

that I was playing, those are the ones that I get to seek when I get in the space because they were not the main characters that I played. The main character that I was playing was Mpilo, that was the main character because he is the one who was driving the story with the brother. But, otherwise, the other ones are the ones that I had to draw in. I think another thing is that when characters are far from you, there's things that you had to embody. So, if it's a character that I have to embody, more than just play psychologically, then it's a quick process that I can just get and then the body works, then the body follows. But, for the ones that I play psychologically, like the kid, then I really have to start being a kid from when I enter the theatre, so that it can live in me.

R: Because this was almost like storytelling, you were aware of the audience and you interacted with the audience. To what extent does that help the character? Maybe reactions and stuff, or to what extent does it hinder some of the characters? The pros and cons of being aware of the audience and actually engaging with them through your character?

P7: I love interacting with an audience, especially with the character of Gogo. What made it really work, because in rehearsals we were kind of sceptical about it, due to the fact that we didn't have an audience. But once we started doing runs and inviting people to come see the run, then we started to see that interacting with the audience even more can really help. And being Gogo at that particular time, I enjoyed them. Because it's like making adults your kids for the first time. So, it helps because your character is a gogo, so it's much more easier. And even the characters that I was playing, Mpilo was telling the audience the stories "so, this is what happened, this is what happened", and him doing that, then we feed off from the audience. From when

kids are smiling watching the show, even adults smiling. It's even nicer when you see older people interacting and becoming children. So, it's really feeding those characters, and it hypes them up more than anything because if it was up to me, I would prefer the audience lights not to be switched off. It shouldn't be dark, because they are part of it. They are part of the process, they are part of everything that's happening onstage, other than when it's off. Because the main idea then was, if you're telling kids a story while they are seated, you keep talking to them, you keep telling them to reply, to sing along. So, that's what we were creating so we can just be able to do that. So, it really helps; it fuelled the characters onstage. It excites them, and whether people react the way you want them to or not, but that's the fun part. It's a challenge for you to be feeding these people so that they can feel involved.

**End.**

### **Participant 8**

R: How did you find out who you were going to play? How did that come about?

P8: Well, I got a call from the director, and he said "I'm writing a play called *The President's Man* and there's a character I'd like you to play, almost someone that can be like a representation of Thuli Madonsela. She's not going to be the Public Protector, but she will be a public prosecutor, and I thought of you. Are you available for this? And, you know, I thought "why not?" I said of course, because I've never really played an advocate, you know, very tough, formal, at the same time eloquent type of character. I've played around with a lot of different types of characters, those strong type of characters I'm always associated with. For some reason they're never

really people with no backbone; they've got a tough exterior. But for me it was a nice challenge because first of all I'm playing a very mature woman who knows a lot, and you kind of need to find her colour. And yes, of reference could be Thuli Madonsela because I don't know her personally, he stressed that he doesn't want me to look to her in terms of character reference too much, because they needed almost that raw thing in terms of being expressive. He didn't want her to be expressive, not have this light voice but have a very tough, very bold voice, because of the type of battles she would be fighting. And again I had to take into consideration that we've only seen Thuli Madonsela when she's in front of the cameras, not when she's inside these boardrooms, not when she's meeting people one-on-one, not when she's having these tough arguments. We don't really know, characterisation-wise, what type of a person she is. So, I couldn't really be in a position where I could really get her as an answer. Maybe gestures here and there, and how she likes speaking, how she listens. Perhaps those are the things I could catch from the clips that I would watch of her with these different conferences that she would have.

R: When did the script come into play?

P8: It was developed. I mean, it was a very intense story, and as you know, the original version was 4 hours long. So, we really needed to establish what works and what doesn't, what are we telling? You know, what is he telling? And obviously it took time for the script to come together, but at least we knew who we were playing. And other things obviously you discover the script, what kind of person you are playing. And, because in general I already do my homework, almost before, because he told me this like a weekend before, and I started reading, working during that weekend, trying to see what I could find, trying to capture what I could bring out in

terms of the character. Was very very cool, it was intense because I didn't know where he wanted to take the character, but having said that, in terms of the script, as a direction, it was the first time you so just a draft, almost, of the play. And that indicated already what type of person she is; calculating, listens before she says something, but also very clear when she needs to charge and actually attack a situation. So, it gave me, I would say, 30% in terms of direction of where I can go. And obviously every week what's the new time to kind of revise if it works, if it doesn't. And most actors work outside-in, some of them finding characterisation outside, but I kind of need to know her emotional journey and almost have an idea of where she comes from, together with Thuli's past, in terms of her biography report. Also from what my perspective as a woman, being the way she is and always going to male-dominated industries, and first thing that's always there is the protective shell. We need to almost be tougher than an ordinary person in your position, and always have to keep your guard, almost like you have to check your coast before moving on to do something. You need to check what works, what doesn't work, in terms of this person. Already there's a child that she had before. The fact that she's a single mother. The impact that has; in the storyline this man has left me for a younger woman. The impact that has, how do I separate the two? And what kind of the person am I when I'm around these people, and how do they treat me, and how do they know me? There are a lot of questions to ask; the details of my environment, my environment is the biggest thing, understanding the type of environment that this woman is used to, and this woman is exposed to. That was the biggest thing I had to find because it's not an environment I'm used to. Yes I'm an actress, a young woman, and there are things that I can relate to in terms of that, in terms of certain industries such as politics it intensifies, and there's always that almost ugly thing that

when you're a woman, you're a lawyer, an advocate, already people undermine your sense of judgment. Already women are told that they act too emotionally, they behave too emotionally. There is this very sexist thing about the way women are and their logic, and when it's from a woman's perspective it's not logic – it's “emotionally driven”. So, already you're fighting those stereotypes. And those are the first things that I needed to understand about this woman, that just been facing these battles for some time now, and her reaction towards these battles. A woman in her 40s; what would be reaction now? How would it have progressed? So, there's this thing that the woman already has to assert her power wherever she goes. Like, you don't need to ask me three times whether I will sort this thing out or not. I know my job, don't ask me, don't even try asking me if I know this well or not, because I can smell someone who is undermining me, from far. So, that's the type of battles that she could've faced. First of all, I approach any story, any characterization, from my perspective first – my perspective as a woman, and had I been in that state, what would my reaction be? And then after looking in terms of my reactions and my emotions and how I would react. And mind you, I revisit this question every time because each character demands their own type of treatment. Some questions you've never asked yourself as a person, but now with characters that you're playing, you need to ask yourself that question first, so that you define who you are and define who this person is. And then you ask yourself another question after that; “so and so is this and this, how would she perhaps, and what if she?” and some questions you answer them the same; “is she stubborn? Yes. Am I stubborn? Yes. Degrees of stubbornness; how stubborn is she? How stubborn am I? I'm stubborn but I believe that I've still got 30%, still going to listen. I'll make up my mind, but at least 30 percent chance of me changing my mind, if you have the right reasoning tools. On

the other hand, this lady for me was 90% and 10% chance of her changing her mind. So, I was playing someone who was ultimately more, because she's older than me, she knows a little bit more. I'm 28, there's only so much I know about myself, I'm still discovering as I go. A woman who is in her early 40s, she's been there done that, got the t-shirt. And a woman who's been an advocate, she had to really work to get up there. And it's not easy for a woman to be in a position, especially back then, never mind now. Back then it wasn't easy for a woman to find herself earning the position that she is earning. So, I had to take those things into consideration. The fight was tough, which means she had to fight harder to get to where she is today. The stress on morals and ethics, she has a lot of those, the law needs to be followed. The question is; if she had a vendetta, would she try and put what she does and her work in place with that? Or is she someone that even if she was placed in a situation where she didn't like the person but what is wrong is wrong. Would she place her own personal thoughts on a situation? Would she put her personality in a situation? Or would she look at it objectively and say but what I see is wrong whether I like you or not. And right now the person I was playing is a person who wouldn't have a vendetta. Even if she does have it, even if that would drive her towards it, but she wouldn't judge you harshly because of what she already feels for you. She's able to tell that, even by herself, she's lonely, she has time to think about these things. And she focuses her work, she focuses so much on her work because her life is in a mess, emotionally a wreck. But I think those are the few things that I relate to; when things are collapsing I look to work to comfort to me, but she takes it to another degree that I can't take it, because at a certain point I crack. I fall apart very quickly, but Zukiswa Ndamase on the other hand, the character I was playing, she will flipping take it far. She has an extreme personality and she always wants to look like

she has it under control. She even wants to convince herself that she's in control, that's how intense it is. She doesn't give herself room to let go of her soft side because she's had to protect it for the longest of time. So, that's, in terms of this person, the first thing I need to do; establish who she is, and establish who I am, where we meet, where we don't meet at all. And then after that, then I got into "okay let's find the colour now, let's find the detail", and most of these things yes you find during rehearsal, but I always leave a moment for performance. I work so hard to find the research and research can be anything from the documents I find on YouTube about this character reference, to actors, other actors who have portrayed these women who have a lot of strength, because you don't want to be like the others. That's the first thing about me; I hate portraying someone that someone has already portrayed, but it's physical mannerisms are internal reactions. Don't expect that I will respond a certain way. I will respond, but I don't want to do things that are expected, really want to find other ways of doing it, so I watch other actors, and that's the first thing technically from the outside. Much as I work from the inside, technically I do, I watch other people's performances, other actresses. My main ones would be obviously a lot of Viola Davis, a lot of Sibulele Gcilitshana, a lot of Meryl Streep, and Angela Basset. I looked at what they did and I thought they are all different, they're all amazing in every part they've ever played. Now the question is my woman, my power streak advocate, how would she be? That was the difficult question because I didn't really want to come out sounding or looking almost like them in any way; difficult part to do, because you need to be different as an actor. You need to find yourself, find your voice and not be in a position where you just mimicking what has been done before. So, I moved on from that; not just the actors that I've been watching. So, the job, what it entails, being an advocate, being a



woman in the public, being a public figure, being someone who works with men most of the day, being someone who has almost been like an overachiever all her life.

What are the characteristics of someone like that? I can't relate, I really can't relate to that. I've never really been an overachiever. I've always been that student who did well enough to be considered as an okay student. I'm a B student as far as I know, according to stats of high school. And when I got to tech, I've never been a cum-laude type of child. But this character that I'm playing is that nature, she's really intense with her work. A person like that, who's really obsessed with her work, what does she experience? That's what I'm asking myself, and that's what I find out, the emotional capacity of being somebody who is very very intense with their work. So, I even started looking at doctors – what are the things that doctors face? The loneliness, the terrible working hours. What impact does that have on you emotionally as a person? Hi, I got over and done with that. And then that's the work that I do during rehearsal. I'm usually the last person to learn their lines on time, because the lines will come as soon as I understand who I am playing. The lines will make all the meaning, I cannot cram for the life of me, I cannot cram. And I see the lines, but I need to make meaning. Scriptwriters hate me because I change their lines here and there, not everything but I need to make sense of who I am playing. So I cannot lie to the character and say this line may work, this line will not work. I'm sorry, character says this line works. And I've got an advantage because the first day when I read a script, which is something very spontaneous for me, I still don't understand till today is that before I read a line, already internally my thoughts, there's a voice that's reading those lines. A voice, and it's speech patterns is doing that. I call it, just something, maybe it's intuition whatever, but that's when acting becomes more a spiritual thing for me. Cause I've always had this idea that these

characters we know, it's characters that have lived; we're playing someone that has been here before and also that have been in this situation before. Therefore, the first thing I do before playing any character is I ask myself to be open to the person that has gone through these things before I play them, and I'm very sensitive about that. I would not even read it aloud until I'm clear that this person that I'm hearing in my head is speaking already. And that is how I manage to have a reading, and spontaneously, just like that, the person is alive. Already the character is speaking; I never analyse it before, I don't even bother. I just bring up the script, I open it, after just giving myself a moment, I just start reading the lines and the character is already established vocally, and speech patterns, everything. Because that's the thing that tells I need to say like thing, I need to say it like that. Every character that I've ever played, from the get-go, what I vocally started with is the most honest approach, and the only thing I can do is to make it better. Just for understanding, as I understand who I'm playing, that's the one reference that I use. I don't change meaning, I don't change perspective or interpretation because it's lying. Anything after that for me is lying to yourself. So, I cannot lie to that voice, I respect it, and sometimes yes it has given me a lot of problems with the director change perhaps how to voice is. I say "you don't even understand where I'm going with this, I promise you, my first reaction to something is the reaction to use. Otherwise, anything that comes back later", and obviously they reject you because they don't know where you going, don't understand your process, and I respect my process very well because the more honest you are with the person you're playing, the more natural the other traits will come together, so that the overall product comes together towards the end. And that is why 80% of my work, maybe 70%, is done during rehearsal. The 30% I honestly leave it for the day of performance. I don't even fight with the urge, I act whatever I'm

doing, I play/perform the character the way it was during rehearsal. The director won't really see; they will see where it is and they will be happy, they'll be satisfied thinking that is what it is, until performance day. And then it goes to another degree, because now I understand exactly where I am. I'm wearing the costume that I'm supposed to be wearing; the shoes, which mean a lot to my character. The physical appearance of the character is now alive. And that is why the rest comes into play, hence mannerisms, I don't really bother with them until I'm in my element, until the character is in their element with the clothes, the hair, the style, the clothing, the shoes. That's when I take that one hundred, anything else that comes after the first day will come through naturally. It will only be part of a process. In terms of the situation with Method acting and whatnot; for me I found it too damaging. That's why I run far away from it as best as I can because it's so easy. Already my mind is able to capture voices in my head, creatively capture voices. Because, what I found out about myself is that I've been around so many people, and I like hanging around people; I've been observing people all my life before they told me that "you need to observe people" in first year. I've been doing that. People amuse me, people entertain me, I empathise with people. I really really like watching people live. I really like being around people, and I don't even have to say anything, I'm just watching them – they're interesting... in a nutshell I let the process happen. I don't rush it, unless I'm doing an industrial work, which is almost like cut and paste and edit. But even that, I don't rob the experience. I try the best that I can to make sure that it's a great caricature for a one-dimensional character. But as soon as it's a character that needs to be three-dimensional and more, I really can't rob the character of an experience. And for me the more the actor disappears the better, but at the same time you need to kind of watch yourself from being lured into believing that's who you

are. And sometimes it does affect me; suddenly because of Zukiswa Ndamase and *The President's Man*, I was almost impatient. Not quite like totally, but my temper was two seconds away, and exploding was easy for me, and exploding naturally for me is not an easy thing to do. My personality doesn't allow me to do that. I know that I'm a very reserved person when I want to be, and I don't really easily express my emotions, unless I'm in a good mood. But when I'm not in a good mood I really don't want to talk. This character is so intense; it does interfere with the emotions for example, like stubborn even when it's not necessary to be stubborn. It interferes here and there, and those are the things that you need to watch. That's why it's important to establish right from the beginning who you are, who this character is. So that we go back to that thing of "I'm getting out of this theatrical space, I'm going to my life. Who am I?" let's go back to the drawing board again. Let it not affect your personal life, try by all means. But it does, because you can't run away from still using your instrument – using your body, using your mind, using your thoughts to be where you want to be. Obviously I borrow a few from Michael Chekhov, in terms of gesture and almost treating acting like religion. I mean I've had days where I thought I saw the character looking back at me and telling me how they want things. Or almost seeing the character walking this way and walking that way. Those are the moments that I know that the character is living more than the actor right now. I allow it during the duration of the play or just before the play starts, but after that I cannot allow it. I just distractive. I mean I've been in situations where it was difficult for me to step out when I was playing a character for *Matatiele* and the woman had to be crazy; she had just lost a child. Her child was kidnapped and she had no idea where she was. She had just given birth. She's been through so much with her parents and the guy who's supposed to marry her, and the mother in law. It had built up to this,

almost insanity. And there was a point where I really, like me, the actor, was exhausted because I remember I did more than 18 scenes, and all of them were emotionally messed up. She went from being happy to sad, to bitter, to crying, to giving up. You know, intricate emotions. And there was a point where I couldn't step out; the director says snap out of it. It took time for me to get back to myself, and that's when I knew that I need to have steady control because it can take over, and you can't be in a state where you are insane. And even when you are insane, you're not just opening up the character's wounds, you're opening up your wounds. That's the danger of it, and your wounds as a person are very terrible. So, even with this character it was difficult because even with this character and her journey realised that it would open up the demon. They always refer to it as the demon. If the director can open up your demons, it's great to open them up, but they also need to be able to put it back, you the actor needs to be able to put back those demons in place and walk away. The difficult part of stepping in and stepping out of this. And that's why Method acting for me, that's why I walk away from it as best as I can. There comes a time where it's just a natural way to respond to characterisation. The problem is going fully, totally being into it. And that's where I knew that's dangerous and will mess up the way you think, the way you do things, and your life, because I've heard stories of actors that I've worked with, where literally 13 years of their lives disappeared because there were mistakes that they couldn't get out of, and that for me is a horror on its own. And that's why I try so hard because I know that I can easily go into that, and it's nice because there's nothing nice that being on your element in your character. You're exploding, you are having the best time of your life because your character is alive and well. It's a great situation, but it is to be treated with respect. And you need to treat your body with respect, your mind with respect,

your soul with respect. You just establish again and again. Sometimes people do it with music, I do it with music, u put on my earphones, I play hip-hop; the most wretched song I can think of so that I almost like getting into a mode where I'm dancing or I think I'm in a club because that's my best time, I think to my happy place. Because sometimes the scene is so intense that you can't even go there.

R: And then, in wrapping up; how much work do you do personally outside of the rehearsal space? And then how much work was done by the director, and working with the other actors?

P8: Okay let's start with the inside work during rehearsal period; I really like actors who can feed you. There's nothing worse than working with someone who's just giving you the lines, and now you almost feel like you're upstaging them or scene stealing, or for lack of a better word "masturbating" onstage, which is terrible because you're trying to fill up for their presence, covering the space with your presence. It's not a nice feeling to be put into. That's why it's important for the person you're working with to understand. That's why I try by all means that the person I'm working with is not intimidated by me, I'm not intimidated by them. I try to be in their space as much as I can, enough for us to get used to each other's energies. We don't have to meet outside the rehearsal space; just a simple thing like chatting about something that's outside of the work or maybe chatting about the characters and see what their thoughts are. It's important to have that conversation, again and again and again, running the lines, reading together and talking about what would you feel, how would I feel? A lot of that is the work, because chemistry is important onstage because I can't be giving everything. You also need to give back. It's unfair even for me to be in a space like that. Some just think this girl is playful, "just learn

the lines, just get the lines out of the way.” Some get pissed off because I never want to go through the lines. Actually all I want is for us to know each other. Can I be free enough to hold you? Can I be free enough to talk and bond with you? Not even talking about personal life; we just need to get used to hearing each other talking first before getting used to each other talking as characters because that’s another thing that will help us get to understand the energy you’re about to put in. understand each other as we are ourselves, understand each other as we are characters, so that we don’t mistake a situation of “you’re being personal. Let’s establish that it’s a professional environment, now I’m getting to know you as a person, now I’m trying to get to know you as the character. So we need that time, it’s very important, the lines aren’t everything. They are part of it, but the people are not coming to see lines, they are coming to see people, other people. At outside of the space, I’m definitely just watching, like observing, chatting to other people like “what’s your opinion about so and so? What’s your opinion about strong women? What’s your opinion about feminism? Pinion about a woman is taken charge? What opinion about the government? See how the view is; get the view from people because once you get the view from people you kind of can imagine the environment that she faces every day because now you hear people’s comments uncensored. People who think they are not being insulting you, but they actually are, because you know, I’m also a woman. But they’re really sharing what they really think about women who are in that position. So, you can imagine that woman also experiences that said in front of her. So, for me it’s always about environment; once we establish the energy in the space you have established a chunk, then you know the part that you need to play in the space and what sort of energy you are bringing in the space and the sort of ripple effect you are causing, and also chaos your personality is triggering in the space. So,

energy is everything, chemistry is everything for me, because that will cause the friction. So, if we need to fight right now, I know my role, you know your role, and right now we are about to collide. Same thing with this thing of how you need to be there, and what's your vision, and that person's vision. You know what everybody's point or objective is. You need to know yours, you need to push your agenda because your character is doing that. So, the minute you know what your agenda is in that space, how they respond to that is their problem. So, that has always been me. People are my real reference. An environment is everything because that will give me an understanding of the chemistry and how I need to approach it.

**End.**

### **Participant 9**

R: Getting straight to your character of Legadima, how did you know that you were going to play this character? How did you know that you were going to be in *Tau*? How were you approached? Or was there an audition, or were you called?

P9: We were at *Ishashalaza* festival with the director but not knowing that he wrote *Tau*. I went there as a director, I directed my own show, and he was there as one of the participants of poetry because the festival takes 20 shows and 10 poets. So, we were just sitting. We know each other in the industry, so one day it happened that he asked me to come and see what you wrote, and then he opened his laptop and I read the first page of the play, the first monologue of the show. Today felt that show was so interesting because it talks about a lot of things that, I've watched plays, a lot of things that people are afraid to talk about such issues. I fell in love with the show, and they never went through audition. He just said to me "I want to cast you but I



don't have money". I just said "no, it's okay, cast me, call me for a reading. Here's my number, And I'll make a means. I'll be there for the rehearsal. We will support each other because we are brothers." That's how I got the character at *Tau*. I didn't go to auditions; I just spoke to him that I want to be in the play.

R: Did they tell you which character you going to play, or did you fall in love with this one?

P9: I fell in love with the story from the beginning, before I was even told which character was going to play. So, we had a reading at the Market Theatre, maybe two weeks after we had met. So, he gave me the character and told me I was going to play Lehadima. It was my first time; I read and learned what kind of a person Lehadima was. I didn't love the character when I read it, but I loved the story, it's depth, how it opens. That was powerful. And I got the character I felt like "okay I'm coming late a bit in the show", but I had to make it worth it that I'm part of the show.

R: So, were there other people who were cast before you?

P9: No, he cast us and told me we are meeting on a particular day. He even told me about the cast when he gave me the script, and I had read about some of them, I had heard about them, I saw them performing, I saw their work, so I wanted to be part of it, to share a stage with them. It was a breakthrough of some sorts to share a stage with these kind of people.

R: So, now after reading you knew that you were going to play this character of Legadima, right?

P9: Yes.

R: Then before the actual rehearsal, after reading the script, are there things that you personally did before actually coming into the rehearsal space and being directed?

P9: Yes, I think that's the first thing that comes to my mind when I already have lines, it is my responsibility to impress the people who cast me. I can't see I already have the job, so I no don't learn the lines, I don't work on my character, I don't read subtext. Because I was from Tembisa and they were from Soweto, I need it to be different, how are play my character had to be different, from the word go it had to be different. So there are things that I did in terms of going deeper into the character, analysing my character, looking at the things he says and finding out why he is so angry. Finding other things that are not in the story, trying to connect it with myself to produce a character.

R: And then now, getting into rehearsal; you are working with other people. Has that helped you in anyway? Has that enhanced what you had already done by yourself and then coming to work with other people as an ensemble?

P9: Yes; working with other people was not a challenge because as an actor you need to understand and accept, especially when you walk into a rehearsal room, you need to accept everything you are given at that point. So, it was not a challenge, it was something that was "wow, I needed this." I need it to work with someone who can at least have my back and say "my brother, you did it better today. Let's see tomorrow and how you're doing it." And when we are on lunch we talk about our characters. And that's how we love the story; when we are on lunch we're still talking about the show. If we were not happy about the morning run, how can we uplift and the second run before going home? We give each other tips; someone would say

“don’t speak that lie in this way”, and when you start accepting and being free and the space you will deliver. I promise you, you will deliver.

R: Let’s look at the type of person that your character was; were there any characteristics of this character that I’m not like the characteristics of you?

P9: Yes.

R: What are some of them? And what did you do in order to be able to play them truthfully? Because I did not know you before, I did not know your characteristics. So I did not have anything to compare the character with you. All I saw was the character, so the first time when I was introduced to you was through the character.

P9: What I played truthfully was the entire play, as I’ve already told you; but we started with the play we took the story and put it down before even speaking to the director... we started going deeper that way, to say “paint my arrogance there. You need to paint it out to say what kind of man is coming” course once you can lay a foundation, when I come I’m going to build a double storey, I promise you... one thing that I’m different from the character is that I don’t have a problem with gay people kissing. Don’t have that problem because I’m not gay and I shouldn’t judge people. But finding them kissing in that space; the problem was the space. They were kissing at the initiation school at the mountain, which is the place where we are taught to be men, not dreamers. So, these people are dreaming. I wanted to be the Lerothodi, I wanted to be the man who calls the rain. I wanted to be the lead... but according to the story I’m not that person. I played my character with that intention. I wanted to be there... but we don’t have similarities, me and the character. It was just the challenge of the actor, becoming in that moment. The co-directors were so

helpful with their experience, because I'm always high, some people might think I have similarities with Lehadima because of that, but as an actor you need to be loud so that the director can tone you down. Because I once directed people, and when you come at 30% energy it's so hard for me to pull you up to 90%, but when you're at 90 I can always say "be at 89, just a bit". Always that allowed but we don't have similarities with the character.

R: So, talking about the arrogance of the character, for me, as an audience, more than the arrogance I saw the ambition – he is overly ambitious, so much that he exposes Tau to prove that he is not the rightful person. Do you have ambition to that point of actually a backstabbing someone to gain what you want as P9?

P9: I don't know, as myself I wouldn't do that. But to be honest we all need to earn our position, like Tau was supposed to earn his position when he was chosen to lead. Once you're in the leader of people, we are all watching you, and once we find a mistake, because all of the characters thought that they stood chance...

R: So, this guy Legadima, from the moment he enters, you can see that he is too proud, he is arrogant, he is out there, almost to a point where he wants to make other people feel small. Did you ever maybe see someone, a real live person where maybe you can take some of the qualities of Legatima from? Or did you ever see any other character and take those qualities from them. Where did they come from?

P9: I took my character from our age group... I look at the guys that I hang around with. I can't look at older the people because I'm playing a character that's within my age range. So, there is this guy that I know. To tackle such a stubborn and fighting character you have to look among the people that you live with, maybe when you've

had a few things to drink. There's this friend of mine, once he says one, it's one. Even in the play when I come back and tell the man that "I saw these girls kissing", when anyone disputes it I say "I said one." I took the relevant characteristics of this guy and used them for that Particular moment where I catch them. But on the other parts, it was just the character coming in the story, but when he was angry I would reflect on that guy... I took other people's characters, the people that I live with influence my characters, a lot. I choose who I have to be close to. If I play an arrogant character I have to be close to arrogant people in real life, so that I can relate to how they feel when they're angry. I wouldn't fight with them, but when they're angry I would just watch how they tackle moments, how they shout at each other, how do they talk. Do they point? Or does he stand still? So, I look, but at the end of the day I will separate them.

R: Setting of the play was on the mountain at the initiation school, it's not your usual setting. It's not our everyday setting, unlike a play that is set maybe in a living room. So, did you have to learn anything about the process or maybe you are from initiation and you did it from memory? Did you have to learn, or its things that you knew already?

P9: I didn't know all of it, most of it I had to learn because on the play we are Sothos and I, myself I'm multilingual. I speak all different kinds of languages... so, I had to learn. Some of the things that I had to learn, like ghosts on the mountain, the totems, speaking to the sun, eating food without salt, because some of the background of the show, we got it from the director. Maybe he wrote the play from his experience. Some of the things he told you so that they remain in your mind when you have to use them. I believe that play is so spiritual, because I remember before we could

open, I had a problem performing the show. My body was hot. There was a time where they said “guys we need to call the ancestors of the characters.” I’m not used to that, I’m not a person who goes to ancestors and talk to them, I don’t know that that part of spirituality. I know the spiritual part of God, where I could go to church. It was so heavy because when you play something you are truthful to, then we ended up having that feeling as well, as a human being. When you’re home you’re singing the songs, you’re getting into a taxi, plus there’s this process they gave us where they “said every time when you go home you carry your sticks”, so, after rehearsal if we are going to pass somewhere, I should have my stick. Everyone of us should have their sticks, tomorrow when you come to work, have your stick so you can get used to holding it and playing with it. Don’t just hold it when you get to the rehearsal, it has to be important to you than it being important in the play. Once you leave it, we don’t have a show. Once you forget it at home, we don’t have a show.

R: Now, let’s say at the rehearsal, there comes a time where you have rehearsed more and more. So, now you’re starting to feel the character. Do you start becoming the character for example do you nip home already in character, or are you P9 throughout until “action”.

P9: You see, when you’re already into the play, things just happen by themselves. There was this time, I leave here and go to Jozi for rehearsal, get into a taxi, they see a young man with a stick, and I’m bald. Even when I pass at the street I see people sometimes looking and I started feeling my character. That’s what I needed; when I walk past, people should hear about me, because I don’t even smile. Sometimes I would sing the song because I’m enrolling the character from home. Once I’m done praying, closing the door and leaving, I have songs from *Tau* on my

phone, I have my lines. If I don't have someone to talk to in the taxi, I would keep on miming my lines, saying my lines unconsciously so. Maybe singing the songs until I could get into the rehearsal space. And when I get there I'm already there, unfortunately they would take us out to play for like 30 seconds as that's how an ensemble should work together. But the character I'm always there from home until I get there, because when people give you certain reactions you know that this person will not say anything because he/she thinks I'm from the mountain for real...

R: So, now comes the time to play in front of an audience. Was there ever a time where you or the director felt like "this is it, I'm ready for performance", or was it that point where it's never ready, even if it was time for performance?

P9: From the guys I was working with, sometimes when we were given notes; most of the times, I'm not saying anything, but I always received positive feedback, from how I worked. from my character, from how I bring new things every day. My character doesn't fade, even now, we are off season as we speak, but yesterday I was thinking about a new thing that I'm going to do on my character, can you believe that? I don't know when I'm going to stage the show, but I'm thinking about a new thing that I'm going to do once I get that opportunity... there were times where I felt like I've nailed it. I find my character when I'm in the moment. I find it in those beautiful moments.

R: So, every night when you're performing at the Market Theatre, are there some nights where you feel like your performance was much better than other night? You know actors have this thing of saying "tonight I wasn't feeling it."

P9: To be honest, our ensemble was great every day, but after the opening night, I guess people were tired, but we kept on having that rule as performers “they don’t know the show – we need to pull up.” We were amazed by all the standing ovations we received, but it’s only after the opening night. From there we were pushed, because we ended up getting sold out. Can you imagine? When you get to Market Theatre *Tau* is sold out. It was the best ensemble in that you wouldn’t want to lose, you wouldn’t want to fail yourself because once you’ve performed on the opening night you’d have people like the chairperson of Grahamstown Arts Festival tell you that this is the best ensemble I’ve ever seen in my life. So, it gave us a motive to do more. So, we never failed because we understood the importance of being into the show. We have goals, we are grownups, we can’t do sketches like any other person. So, we need to prove a point. I’m not saying we are proving a point, but we need to prove a point that we are adults, we have grown up in the industry. We know this industry; it doesn’t mean we know better but we’ve been here. We’ve done it all, we’ve performed at the Market Lab, we’ve performed at schools. We have performed outside, where we were performing for food, but now we need to eat out of this. So, we understood the importance of the show.

R: Would you say for all the characters that you have played, you have one approach? Or does how you approach all the characters you’ve played differ? How you get into them.

P9: They differ, because you meet different characters. You play different people. You need to start by believing. I am the kind of person who believes in the character before I can play it. I talk to it, spiritually, before I can play it. I’m proud of that. I talk to my characters, I talk to the lines. All characters are different, and I challenge



characters in a different way. Sometimes I play characters that are smoking.

Sometimes I play characters that are drunk and I've never been that drunk in my life, but I have to play a character that's drunk. So, I need to find someone who's drunk, maybe sit with them, listen to them how they talk. So, I challenge my characters differently because they are different people, because if I challenge them with one technique I will fail myself. It will be like the character I played in *Tau* is the same as the one in *Whistles*, you need to see another character.

R: So, would you say that you have a way of working, or anything goes? So someone might say "I use this to get into character" do you have anything where you say "this thing works for me when I want to get into character"

P9: I don't know if maybe you are speaking in terms of enrolling?

R: Any system that you use, for example, a person might say "for me to get into character I meditate", someone might say "for me to get into character I smoke pot", I'm just giving you an example. Someone else might say "for me to get into character I separate myself from people", someone might say "to get a character I live like that character out there", someone might say "to get a character I research it, but I don't live it, people will only see the character on stage", such things. Do you have anything that you do to help you get into character?

P9: Yes, I think it's there, but I don't know if my answer will be fair in terms of that thing. I fall in love with my character first. It's like when you love your child, you will be interested and say "I need to find work and clothe him/her." So, I also love my character, I also need to clothe it. Last I was playing an old man who had this beard. So, I'd think "maybe if I leave a beard like this?" I start loving my lines, I start loving

the character. I question; I'm that kind of a person, not that I was once had a directing skill and I'm now a director tapping into an actor's shoes. But it's also wise for other actors to question "what am I playing? In the story, why am I playing this?" so that you also have to be familiar with the show, from point A to Point B. You have clarity now of what you are doing. I see a lot of people say "I need my space alone", I don't need my space alone, but I can pray. But at the end of the day, if we perform as an ensemble we need to be like this all the time. From 6 O'clock, if others are smoking, we allow that; "okay, go smoke and come back at 06:30 or come back at 7 so that from when we say we're starting we are like this. And team work beats everything. Whether your show is the best, when it doesn't have teamwork we will be able to see that you don't have teamwork, because you can't even read moments, you can't even let other people shine...

R: Did you guys have exercises or anything that you did in a group before starting?

P9: Yes, we did have those exercises. That's why I'm saying the experience of the codirectors and everyone within the team was so effective, because we were able to come up with a good exercise that can make ensemble to work. Then for the body, the director would say "you should run guys. I can feel the run today was not okay. You should wake up in the morning and start running, you should start exercising." We also had a positive thing in terms of how do we talks to each other. We shouldn't talk to each other like we are kids, we're sharing the same stage. We should talk to each other like brothers at the end of the day. I shouldn't make you angry before performing with you. If I made you angry we should work on that now and say "my brother, let it end. can we talk after the show?" so that, you'll be concerned because we are still going to share the same stage, and we don't want to bring new things

and have the director saying “no” because we are now fighting outside and we’re going bring that to the stage... so, we started working on a common goal for the show. Where do we want to see our show? We all want to see that show going places, besides being there for money, the show is relevant for every citizen in the world. From Europe to America, everywhere, because that’s how everyone wants to know the process of black men going through their manhood, especially South African men, because I don’t know how they do it in Kenya, how they do it in Senegal. I have a belief of that show. If we can love a show as an ensemble of 7, from our hearts, I’m telling you, it’s powerful.

**End.**

### **Participant 10**

R: I usually start by asking participants about their process from when they received the script, but you wrote the script, so my first question; how were you selected to play this character?

P10: Okay, so I’m going to take it from when we started the play. I was working with other people and we were taking a show to Grahamstown. We wanted to take two shows to Grahamstown. So, what happened; we collectively looked at the other show. I wrote the show *Mosadi Lolea*. So, because we had no funding, nothing whatsoever, it had to be among the four of us who was going to play the character. I, being black and a woman, I had to play the character, even though I wrote the play because we had no one else, because of lack of funding. So, then I took on the journey with them. That’s when it started.

R: Was there a script when you guys thought of staging this play?

P10: I had started writing the play but I had not finished, so immediately when we thought that we needed a second show, I thought let me complete it and explore it.

R: And, you as the actor, do you separate yourself from you as the writer?

P10: I don't know if it happens 100%, but I try to. But I think there's always that one person, especially when the director is giving you direction. Sometimes you feel like saying "no", but I try to submit myself as much as I can to the direction of the person directing the show. Having directed before, I know that sometimes what you do is not the same as other people see it. So, I try. I really try.

R: So, tell me about your journey, firstly as an actor, now knowing that you are the one who is going to play Lolea. How was your first encounter with her? How did you approach her?

P10: I would say Lolea in the beginning, it was really hard. She's a tough woman. What assisted me, to be honest, is I had to step out or forget in a way, or try to forget that I wrote this play. And I started the journey of reading the script so I can understand what the writer wrote, and Lolea's journey. So, I started there, by eliminating the writer in me and kind of try to understand this woman's life and why she did certain things in the play, and what was the main cause of everything. That's where I started, just to understand her life.

R: And then, before the actual rehearsal, did you have to do things to explore her? Like how you would play her?

P10: Yes, did a lot of speaking to some of the people I know; close people that are experiencing Lolea's journey, experiencing her life, being barren, being unable to conceive. I spoke to a lot of people like that. Because also from a writing point of view, I was influenced by certain people in my life and questioning how is it like. It started from there. So, I did a lot of that. And normally what I also do is I watch a few documentaries just to see what other people experience with the issue because I think women would react to it differently depending on what brought you to that state and who is involved in your life on that journey of not being able to have children, especially in the black communities.

R: In rehearsal, now working with another actor and having a director also; from you writing the character by yourself, and then you familiarising yourself with the character as an actor, and then getting into rehearsals, would you say that influenced what you had already prepared positively, or were there negatives in that space?

P10: I think a lot of good things came out. Some of the things to be honest, because also as a writer I wanted the play to be explored so I can see the loopholes. So, a lot of good things came up in the space because you had the co-actor who had no idea what the play was about, so he came there innocently. And the certain questions that were asked also assisted. So, I think a lot of good things came. Also through having a director, because before it was director/actor, so now having a director sitting outside and overlooking the whole thing brought things that at the same time there were hiccups that came along, but I guess I took them positively because I believe that in every situation there's always something one can learn from it.

R: Because you're not Lolea, how did you make sure that you play her truthfully?

P10: I think it's because I'm a woman, I'm a young woman and I don't have kids. So, what I normally do is, I think even when I'm writing, I ask myself "what if something like this was to happen?" That's how I got into this character; I said I'm young – most people don't speak about such problems, especially in their married life. So I said I'm young and one day I obviously wish to be married and have kids, so "what if something like this was to happen to me? How would it make me feel?" So, that gave me a starter. That was my gear 1. And constantly asking yourself those questions, "why?". "Why?" is a powerful question, it's not a stupid question. You realise that the more you ask yourself that, you come up with different answers, and they grow each time because there's a different motive every day. So, that's where I started, saying "what if I was here and I had to endure, this was my situation, I couldn't bare kids and really wanted them? How would I go forward and see that I become the woman that I yearn to be?"

R: Were things that you did in that rehearsal space as your personal routine as preparation for performance?

P10: Yes. What I do is normally I would arrive early because rehearsal starts at 6, so I would have like two hours or an hour. I think I go deep into the fault of the character, literally I would lock myself. And that works for me I thing as a performer. I lock myself in with my mental room and I visualise Lolea. I look at her and I interview her. I look at how she walks, how she speaks. That routine for me makes me very close with the character that I need to play or portray or tell the story of. So, I literally sit anywhere. I can zone out and lock myself into my mental room where it's just me

and the character. That's what I think also brought the relationship between P10 and Lolea, because I would sit with her, I would every time check the little details, how she's walking, how she reacts, how she's dressed, how she feels. And you can actually get to speak and communicate with your character. And if you allow yourself to go deep enough sometimes, which is what was also difficult like I'm not going to go too deep because it affects me, but step out, I guess.

R: And, you and your fellow actor; did you have anything that the two of you did in order to get the characters?

P10: In the beginning we did not have anything, but as we rehearsed we found that it was difficult to do certain things onstage because we didn't have a relationship. Yes, I studied with him, but we needed to have a strong bond as husband and wife, and that's something we did not have, although rehearsal was almost finished. I think the last two weeks we were forced, the director would give us thirty minutes to an hour to just chill together. And what we planned was that we just hug, we laugh and play with each other, and then that relationship grew from there because before can merge John and Lolea, we ourselves need to be comfortable with each other. So, we were not. He was not, at all, and he was afraid to touch me sometimes. So, we had to really break that wall so that John and Lolea can also become alive because they are a married couple, they are not dating, they are not friends, they are married, they've been together. So, their routine was that; hug every day, communicate with each other almost every day and play.

R: What I noticed is that she goes through a rollercoaster of emotions. How do you get to call on those emotions and then they are there when the things happen with the baby and the abuse?

P10: I think that was a challenging thing at the end; going through a series of emotions that she goes through, but I think because, like I said, I ask myself “what if” questions, I communicate with her a lot, I used to communicate with her a lot. I don’t know whether to call it a weakness or strength, but I’m also an emotional actor and a physical actor. So, the more you rehearse, the more you understand the character, the more you spend time with the character, and even at work during break, instead of going to the staffroom, I would chill in my class and try to understand her. And the more I did that, as rehearsal went on, they kind of came. I did not have to think “oh, in 5 minutes I have to cry. What am I going to do?” They came because I think I borrowed my body to the character to move. I became a tube, and that naturally happens when you submit yourself to that spirit, to that soul that needs to occupy your body. It comes naturally. In the beginning I used to think about that and say “oh, that scene is coming”, and already by doing that you’re out of character. I think this time I just submitted because if I did not submit, it gave me stress. It hindered me from achieving the character in the past because I used to think. I used to think about them and say “flip, now I must laugh, now I must be angry, now I must be upset, now I must be scared, oh, now they’re hitting me.” But if you submit, I swear to God, I don’t know how, but they naturally come.

R: So, do you have the same systematic approach to the characters that you play? Or, every time you do something unique with the character?



P10: I think depending script and on the story, but unfortunately most of the characters that I have played are deep. They might not be only emotional but I would say they are strong people. So, to answer your question in a straight way, I'd say they are almost the same, because as a human being who has not experienced that person's life, I cannot go without asking myself "what if it was me? What would happen?" I'm sorry but that always comes up when I'm dealing with a script. After the script I then question "I'm not this, I've never been this". Sometimes you find that the situations of characters you've lived them, but sometimes not at all. So, I think possibly the same, sometimes.

R: Did you ever observe a model your character on the real life person? Some of the traits of your character?

P10: No. As much as I said I know a person who also can't conceive, but because of their journey to that, their lives are different. So, I couldn't really model that character on her because their motives are not the same, although they share the same situation. That's why I say I try to read her in my head because I've never met her before. So, I try to kind of understand what kind of a person she is. Maybe unconsciously influence, yes I do not literally check and observe.

R: In helping you play the character truthfully, is there any role that the director played that helped you get the character?

P10: A lot. Also luckily he is a truthful director. He tells things as they are. So, like I said in the beginning I used to think about the emotions, and I think he assisted me to stop that, because firstly he would say "read the script every day. Don't sleep without reading the script, even though you know your lines because subtext doesn't

stop growing, and you don't stop understanding the words better." So, he played that role of saying I need to read the script every day, which I did. And that assisted me a lot, spending time with your character, and telling me directly that "now you're acting, you're not 'being', you're not being truthful, you're acting these emotions, you're not being truthful to Lolea, you are trying to colour the situation." So, until I got to understand what is the difference between acting, which is what we call ourselves – we are actors. But there is a difference between acting and actually 'being'. So, until I stopped acting and started 'being'. So, he played a role, a big role because he would say things as they are, to say "no, let's break this, let's stop. You're stopping. Let's figure it out. Think about your character. Go think. Go sit by yourself. Stop acting her out and be her."

R: And then, Lolea stole a baby from what I saw, right?

P10: Yes.

R: You've never stolen a baby, I think.

P10: (laughs) No.

R: What goes through your mind having to be that desperate? How do you, displaying that character, get her to that level of desperation?

P10: As the actor?

R: Yes.

P10: Yoh, it's crazy. It's crazy, but I think it's a build-up because for her to get to the point of stealing a bay, she tried everything possible. So, walking the journey with

her and seeing that “I tried, can we go to the doctors? Come with me.” Husband says “no, we can’t go”, priest, husband says “no, it’s not my tradition.” She tried this woman, so I think for her to get to that, this was her foundation. It was her solution to now bring happiness into her home. So, she was not rational. She was crazy, but because of yearning for something, it’s like being thirsty. You would do anything to get water. After having tried, after asking people for assistance, nobody there. You would do everything; you’d drink your own urine because you’re thirsty. So, that’s what happened to Lolea. She was at a point whereby she did not see things anymore, she wanted to get this happiness. For her it was, you see when a person is dying and then they put her on the oxygen machine? It was that, a baby was that oxygen machine to keep her body pumping, to keep her body going. So, the series of events led her there, I would say so. And if you travel the journey with her, even if you were to read the script and just try to travel, you’ll see that she had no choice but to be there. So, it was hard but shame, she tried, but because of the clashes between her and her husband, she was left with that option, because adoption he said no, everything he said no. But at the same time, because of honour, he wanted a child, and also because of stopping the rumours of the community, she wanted a child.

R: And then you, having to play those things, is there ever a burden of saying “I have to be truthful”?

P10: There is, to tell you the truth. When I go into character, I want to commit to the best of my ability, as much as I can. The scary thing for the journey of *Mosadi Lolea* is that it left me with a burden or a mark somehow. Because, like I said, I’m a woman, and playing a person who can’t conceive is scary as sh\*t, I’m sorry but it

does leave that. It leaves part of it on me because every time I'm also left with those questions because I think I've lived Lolea for a long time. To be honest with you, I won't lie to you and say "no, it's just acting" because, like I said there's a difference between acting and being. If you're going to be the character, for me it leaves a bit until today, even the other day I was telling my mom that Lolea is deep, I think I'm going to stay away a bit.

R: Let's talk about the whole experience; you started it at Grahamstown, and then now at the Breytenbach Theatre. Is there a growth that happened, firstly for the play, and secondly for you as the actor?

P10: Yes. When we came back, after getting reviews from people and the Grahamstown newspaper, I kind of extended the script again, obviously looking at loopholes that were possible because it was the first time we played it for the public at Grahamstown. So, the play also grew a bit, but it grew. And then now that it was my second time playing the character, I think I also grew because then I went deeper into trying to understand her. I think at Grahamstown also because of time, that it was against us, I took shortcuts. I didn't really go as deep or into understanding because I thought I wrote it so I understand it. But from that experience I learned that you can write something, but still, if you have to portray it it's a different story. So, the play, yes it did grow, and then the character also grew. Lolea of Grahamstown I think is not the same as Lolea here, because then I took the liberty of stepping out of the writer and trying to understand what the writer wrote, and submitting myself as well to her life, to her journey.

R: And then, you as P10, the actress; do you think or do you ever think that there were things that you could have done better for the character? Or do you feel you've done the best that you could have done?

P10: Maybe it's the best of both. I think I submitted, but I think growth never stops. I think there are still things I could do for Lolea. There are still things that I could have done for the character; for the play as a whole. And I think time limited us because I was not the first person to play it for this show that you watched, but now the actor, I would not go deep into that, but she ended up not wanting to, so I was asked again to step in. So, I think there are things that I would still love to explore or to find out about the character, like the words that she speaks to her husband, to the world. I would still like to go deeper into that, and maybe the way I bring them out, there can still be depth – more depth, I believe.

R: When you guys felt like you were ready, maybe running the show a couple of times; are there ever times where you felt like “this time I wasn't hot, this time I was fine, this time it was cold”, or once you guys were in performance mode it was like the same thing over and over again?

P10: Never the same, never. Not even once. Never the same thing, never the same reaction even. I think the only thing that most of the time is the same, but not all the time, but most, is the blocking. But I think that play shifts. It moves or something. It feels like, yesterday is yesterday. You can have a routine – you brush your teeth every morning, but you can never stand in the same position in your bathroom. I think it's that. There's always kind of something new happening. And yes, there were times that I felt like today, flip, it was cold. But that was merely because I wasn't in

character. That is maybe because I had not submitted to the rehearsal because we are in a rehearsal space. But normally when I feel I have really submitted it's when, I don't know if it's just me, but before the play starts I become blank. Like when they say 5-minute call, I don't remember the lines. And even after the performance, if they are talking about a certain part, I don't even remember what part they are referring to. That for me, I believe, that's when I have at least gone into the character...

R: In conclusion, would you say you have a systematic approach to a character? Would you say you know what your approach is to deal with character?

P10: I would say yes I have.

R: Would you give me maybe just an example of when you get a character, what's the first thing that you do.

P10: When I get into character?

R: When you get a character, like when you meet a character or a role.

P10: The first thing I do, like I said, I like asking questions. Like, a character could be saying a simple thing like *voetsek*. Then my question would be why? What makes you say that? How would you say that *voetsek*? What's the intended conclusion for it? What's the subtext for that? So, that's what I do, I kind of, when I meet a character, I can take long not knowing the lines. I'm trying to know the meaning of the lines. That's where I start, I don't stop reading the script, and some people don't like it because they believe you must learn the lines. But what's the purpose of learning the lines if you don't understand what the person is saying? Because I could be speaking right now, you're listening to me but you don't get what I'm saying,

which is what normally happens with us actors. You are speaking, you're saying the lines but you don't know what the line says, so I first start by understanding what she means by these lines that she wants to say, so I can assist her say them better to the world.

R: And then, how do you get rid of P10, and how do you get P10 back after the performance?

P10: I meditate quite a lot, getting out of myself. Especially, I think that helps me because most of the time when I rehearse I come from work. It's not like I wake up in the morning and go rehearse. I go to work and I come back, because I know I need at least an hour to kind of breathe, to kind of release the tension off me; tell my body, tell my mind that now this will be happening. I do that every time I have to step into a rehearsal if I have the time. But I make the time by arriving early. So, I need to kind of release the tension. And with coming back to myself, which I don't necessarily always believe I do come back to myself fully because then, one person there is a lot of characters, and it sort of stays a bit with you because you've lived with that person. But I perform a basic step-out routine that we learned. And my personal step, I would be singing because that's what P10 loves. I need to really sing the whole time after rehearsal.

**End.**

## ADDENDUM II

### Interview Questions

1. How were you selected to play this role?
2. Was there a script? If so, tell me about your first encounter with the script.
3. Tell me about your journey in this play from your first acquaintance with the character, to exploring the character, to rehearsals, and everything in between, up to performance.
4. How did you make sure you become truthful to the character?
5. Were there any personal set routines you followed during rehearsals, such as warm-ups or exercises, or games etc?
6. Were there any set routines the group followed during rehearsals, such as warm-ups or exercises, or games etc?
7. You played a character who was not yourself, how did you become something you are not in real life?
8. Did you observe any real person or model your character on anyone?
9. How did you get to display the character's emotions? What did you do for the emotions to come at will?
10. Do you have the same systematic approach to characterization or is every character or play or experience unique? Please elaborate.
11. What role did the Director play in your journey into the character?



# ADDENDUM III



**Tshwane University  
of Technology**

*We empower people*

FACULTY OF THE ARTS

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DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA & FILM

## INFORMATION LEAFLET AND INFORMED CONSENT

### **PROJECT TITLE: INVESTIGATING THE ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION OF METHOD ACTING IN SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE**

Primary investigator: Mr. M.E. Thaba, BTech (Drama)

Supervisor: Dr K. Lemmer, Tshwane University of Technology, Arts Campus

Co-supervisor: Prof O. Seda, Tshwane University of Technology, Arts Campus

Dear Potential research participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study that forms part of a formal MTech study in Drama. This information leaflet will help you decide whether you would like to participate.

Before you agree to take part, you should fully understand what the study entails. You should not agree to take part unless you are completely satisfied with all aspects of the

study.

### **WHAT IS THE STUDY ALL ABOUT?**

The project forms the practical part of a research on Method acting elements and influences in South Africa, specifically in the work of theatre actors in Gauteng province. This specific project will examine the approach the identified actors take in preparation for, and execution of, a role, looking to identify specific elements of Method acting. For this reason, the study will focus on a small group of actors in theatres based in Pretoria and Johannesburg. The result of this project will potentially provide an insight on the extent of Method acting influences on actors in Gauteng.

### **WHAT WILL YOU BE REQUIRED TO DO IN THE STUDY?**

As a participant in the study, you will give the researcher an opportunity to observe your preparation for a role and take part in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Should you agree to take part in the study, you will be required to do the following:

- Sign this informed consent form.
- Participate in the interview where you will be required to detail your approach in preparing for, and executing, a role. The interview will be conducted in the form of a casual and relaxed conversation that will last approximately 30minutes.

**NB.** The interview will be audio-recorded.

### **ARE THERE ANY CONDITIONS THAT MAY EXCLUDE YOU FROM THE STUDY?**

You will not be eligible to participate in this study if:

- You are younger than 18.
- You have no acting experience or training (from a theatre or academic institution).
- Your performance in question was not based in Pretoria or Johannesburg.

### **CAN ANY OF THE STUDY PROCEDURES RESULT IN PERSONAL RISK, DISCOMFORT OR INCONVENIENCE?**

The researcher will only explore what you normally do in your regular, safe working environment when preparing for a role, without interfering in the process. You will not be required to share sensitive and intimate details about yourself during the interview.

Therefore, participation in the study involves minimal to no risks, discomforts and/or inconveniences.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS THAT MAY COME FROM THE STUDY?**

The benefits of participating in this study are:

- You will contribute towards documenting the first research on Method acting influences in the approach of South African actors to a role.
- You will gain an increased personal awareness of the approach you take in your work on a role.
- You will be invited to attend a presentation of the completed study by the researcher.

### **WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY FINANCIAL COMPENSATION OR INCENTIVE FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?**

You will not be paid to participate in the study as the researcher is a student and this is not funded research.

### **WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT IN THE STUDY?**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any stage without any penalty or future disadvantage whatsoever.

### **HOW WILL CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY BE ENSURED IN THE STUDY?**

All information obtained during the course of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity will not be revealed while the study is being conducted or when the study is presented anywhere.

### **IS THE RESEARCHER QUALIFIED TO CARRY OUT THE STUDY?**

The researcher is in the same profession as you; this means that the researcher deeply understands and respects you and your craft as an actor. The researcher is a BTech Drama graduate, conducting this study as part of a requirement for MTech, fully supervised by a professor and a doctor in Drama. This makes the researcher qualified to conduct this research.

### **A FINAL WORD**

Your cooperation and participation in the study will be greatly appreciated. Please sign the informed consent below if you agree to participate in the study. In that case, you will receive a copy of the signed informed consent from the researcher.

## CONSENT

I hereby confirm that I have been adequately informed by the researcher about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of the study. I have also received, read and understood the above written information. I am aware that the results of the study will be anonymously processed into a research report. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study. I had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and of my own free will declare myself prepared to participate in the study.

Research participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Research participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name: Edward Thaba \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Researcher's signature:  \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_