

## Thinking and Talking About Acting:<sup>1</sup> Re-Reading Sonia Moore's *Training an Actor*

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### Introduction

When we think about and talk about acting, we usually do not examine either our language or the assumptions that lie behind it. In raising the same issue for historians of the theatre as I raise for performers, Bruce A. McConachie locates "the source of the problem [ . . . in] a frequent human failing: the tendency to believe that the mode of perception common to the majority is the best way to understand the world".<sup>2</sup> In addition to McConachie, a number of scholars from a variety of disciplines have begun to question this typical non-reflexive, positivist way of thinking, talking, *and* writing. Anthropologist James Clifford recently asserted that all narratives [including those about performance], are "constructed, artificial [ . . . ] cultural accounts"<sup>3</sup> which are not representations of *a* truth or *a* reality, but rather are inventions of culture in Roy Wagner's sense.<sup>4</sup> Edwin Bruner said the same thing in a slightly different way--that all texts are formed around implicit stories constructed according to who receives the narrative.<sup>5</sup> If we accept the premise that all narratives are inventions, it means that each narrative is located within a particular historical, socio-cultural context, i.e., each narrative has one or more implicit stories that were written for *particular* audiences in *particular* contexts.

Many narratives are written by authors who assume that what they are constructing is *a* truth and/or *the* "best" version of a particular reality. Most narratives foreground neither the process of constructing this version of "the truth," or the voice with which this version was constructed. To do so would reveal the fact that *this* version is simply one particular version situated

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in space and time, and authored by a particular person. Therefore, implicit stories, assumed by an author when writing a narrative, usually remain hidden. This view recognizes the importance, even urgency, of re-viewing the narratives of all disciplines--including performance practice and scholarship--and of articulating their hitherto implicit stories.

To that end, this essay is a close re-reading of one narrative about acting, written to illuminate the implicit stories that one author assumes, but never foregrounds.<sup>6</sup> I have chosen to re-read Sonia Moore's *Training an Actor: The Stanislavski System in Class*.<sup>7</sup> I have selected Moore's work, not because it is either remarkable or a book I would recommend to a student of acting, but rather because Moore's version of American method acting is suffused with those most commonplace modernist, positivist assumptions which inform how we often think and talk about acting, and which in a postmodern world have become problematic.<sup>8</sup>

Before discussing Moore's text, I want to foreground my own point of view. As a teacher of actors I have long been troubled by the confusion students in a university setting exhibit over the relationship between themselves and what they do (acting). In contrast, and for many reasons I cannot detail in this brief essay, when talking to performers trained in traditional disciplines in Asia, I have never encountered this same confusion. The rather obvious idea long ago dawned on me that one reason for the difference is that traditional Asian performers have very different enculturated ways of thinking and talking about the experience of performance which do not raise the primarily psychological and identity issues or confusions implicit in how we usually think and talk about performance. For one thing, Asian notions of the "self" are quite different from our common Western ones; therefore, Asian notions about the relationship of "self" to role, character, and acting are also quite different.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to know that I also have a vested interest in clarifying my students' confusion. Since I use non-Western performance techniques to teach Western actors, I question whether the positivist, psychologically-based notions of self, behavior, experience, role, and character assumed by most students of acting are clear and adequate paradigms for understanding performance as an embodied, psychophysical activity. Consequently, I am in the process of articulating an alternative paradigm of acting which may better delineate the relationship between self, behavior, experience, role, and character; may better fit a postpositivist approach to acting; and better fit the contemporary American performer's experience of what they do and how they do it. This rereading of Moore is a preliminary step in this direction.<sup>10</sup>

### *Re-Reading Sonia Moore's Training an Actor: Four Legitimizing Discourses*

In her foreword Moore states her purpose: "to demonstrate how an actor is trained" in the "Stanislavski System".<sup>11</sup> She asserts that "the System should

be *the required* training for all actors" (13), and wishes to demonstrate "the fact . . . that there is no other method of acting but Stanislavski's" [italics mine] (14). The book consists of twenty-four chapters prepared from tape-recordings "made during Sonia Moore's classes at her Studio in New York City," (27) a foreword by Sonia Moore, and five appendices including selections from *The Three Sisters*, notes on scenes used in the classes, notes for a character biography, a brief Stanislavski chronology, and a selection of suggested exercises. But neither in the foreword nor body of the text does the author inform us about either the specific period during which the tapes were made or the process of editing. Nor is there specific information on the class environment, students, or instructor. The "truths" of the edited transcripts are apparently assumed to be universal enough that such specific contextual information is deemed unnecessary.

Moore uses four closely related discourses to legitimize her claims for the supremacy of her version of the Stanislavski System: (1) the professionalization of acting; (2) the necessity of systematizing the method of acting; (3) reification of Nature and her "natural laws" as the source of acting; and (4) the hegemony of the experimental, scientific method in discovering the truths of the essential nature of acting. First is the discourse of "professionalism." The implicit story is that of the actor. For Moore, "acting is a profession." (32) One goal in writing the book is to make up for the present "lack of professionalism" in the theatre by introducing a system (The System) which will "provide one professional language and *the one criterion*" [italics mine] necessary for establishing a consistent professional standard for the theatre. (25)

The larger story of professionalism which informs Moore's rhetoric says that if you want to be a professional you must receive professional training which will give you professional credentials. Getting professional credentialization means working "on the . . . System is not all fun," and that there will be "tremendous demands" imposed on performers. (32)<sup>12</sup> Therefore, if you want to "become professional actors . . . this is the only way." (32)

Moore's rhetoric of professionalization may be read as an extended apology for acting--a profession which has often been considered marginal and suspect. It lends an aura of legitimacy to acting, and at least rhetorically if not actually makes it equivalent to other acceptable professions like law, medicine, teaching, etc.

As a "system" or "technique" of professional training, The Stanislavski System takes on the trappings of other professional training programs--first of all, it must be systematized. A systems rhetoric is Moore's second legitimizing discourse. If something is represented as systematic, it gathers to itself the authority and power of [at least apparent] logical organization. It is an authorizing and legitimizing language that makes what is done appear comprehensive and thorough--a system is, after all, all-encompassing.

If acting is to be professionalized, then like other professions there must be a method of preparing the would-be professional. Moore asserts that

Stanislavski established the System once and for all precisely for this preparation. Moore's use of the capitalized System to represent this *particular* mode of transmission of performance skills reifies it and makes it appear to be the one and only acceptable mode of acting, and the one and only legitimate version of Stanislavski.<sup>13</sup>

Does Moore's use of a systems rhetoric really tell us anything unusual about *this* mode of training? The following *should* be obvious to the reader, but is *not* obvious since it is not made explicit in the narrative: all modes of transmitting knowledge are systematic, i.e., orderly means of imparting [for the teacher] and actualizing [for the student]. Although some systems of training may appear dis-orderly to the outsider, each may be said to be ordered by the culturally constructed framework of expectations, assumptions, and activities which collectively constitute the activity being transmitted/learned. Is Moore's version of the Stanislavski System any more systematic than any other mode of transmission, or does her systems rhetoric simply make it appear to be so?<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, to establish the legitimacy of The System, Moore appeals to the highest authority--unchanging, universal, natural law--Nature Herself. "That is why he said, 'There is no Stanislavski System, only the system of nature herself.'" (27) Nature and the System are equivalent. What is natural and organic constitute unchangeable truth for the actor.

Nature [and its "natural laws"] is the third discourse which shapes Moore's text. She assumes that acting, like the natural physical world, is governed by laws.

Having studied the laws that govern human nervous activity, Stanislavski gradually developed a System that permits an actor consciously to control his entire apparatus of experiencing and of incarnating. (34)

Moore quotes Stanislavski as saying

'This method is based on laws of the organic nature of an actor, which I studied in practice. Its strength is in the fact that there is nothing in it which I 'invented' and nothing which I did not verify by applying it to my students and myself.' (26)

Moore assumes (1) that these laws have lain dormant in human nature, awaiting discovery; and (2) that *the only* method of discovering truth and thereby establishing once and for all these laws is an experimental scientific method--her fourth discourse. Consequently, invention is equated with falsehood since it is not eternal, organic, and part of nature. To eschew human agency and invention further establishes unchanging Nature as the untainted source of Stanislavski's System. She assumes that the laws of nature were always *in* the actor, waiting to be discovered by Stanislavski.

Moore's assumption of the primacy of the scientific method as *the* method of discovering these eternal truths leads her to cast Stanislavski in the role of the scientific investigator as she tells [invents] the story of the revelation of The System. She represents him as studying human nature itself and thereby developing a progressive set of hypotheses in his laboratory, making discoveries which were verified along the way:

The System progressed as Stanislavski learned more about the human being, and his greatest discovery, made at the end of his career, was the fact that we behave in life in a psychophysical way. This discovery became the basis of what he called 'the method of physical actions' and considered to be the result of his whole life's work and the heart of his System. (34)

The inevitability of progress, of discovering *the* answer, is supported by an implicit faith in the process of scientific discovery--Stanislavski making his "greatest discovery . . . at the end of his career" as the curtain dramatically drops on his life.

The metaphor of Stanislavski-as-scientific-discoverer lends the entire discourse further authority as *the* answer to *the* historical dilemma which, Moore asserts, has always confronted the actor--discovering the universal laws that rule theatre. Moore cites a host of "great men of letters" and actors who "tried to formulate [these] laws for dramatic creativity." Moore never questions whether the premises, acting problems, or specific style that this system was historically designed to address are or are not the same ones necessary for other performers to address. She simply asserts that the problem as she defines it is *the* eternal problem for all actors, which is now solved.<sup>15</sup>

Of these laws of acting inherent in human nature, Moore concludes that

only Stanislavski succeeded in reconciling the contradictions between the actor as creator and the actor as character, and he alone developed the concrete techniques by which an actor consciously transforms his psychological and physical behavior into those of the character and creates the unique life of a man in every role. (14)

Her logic is intriguing: having established that there are universal laws, she admits "contradictions" [an impossibility were this a physical law] in acting, but glosses this fundamental problem as if Stanislavski has solved it once and for all. The problem has supposedly been solved by developing the System which "Stanislavski determined with astonishing precision" (15)-implying that the techniques of the System have the precision, weight and absoluteness of those used to conduct a physics experiment and establish a physical law.

Derived from natural law, The System as well as the biography of its discoverer, Stanislavski, are reified and essentialized. It is not one system or a system among many possibilities, but *the* answer for all time:

since the System is based on natural laws of human behavior, it is the same for old and young actors, for classic and contemporary plays, for conventional and unconventional productions, for all nationalities and in all times. (32)

The Stanislavski System creates life by following the laws of nature through which the human being functions in life; *therefore it can never become dated.* (27)

The arguments of timelessness and universality garner to The System an aura of unassailability. It implies that once one *has* this, then the actor's search is over--nothing else need be done. This valorization of the System gives authority to this particular *version* of what is natural.

Moore's arguments clearly identify her thinking as sharing in the basic assumptions of modern positivist thought. McConachie summarizes three of positivist thought's basic assumptions which obviously have informed Moore's four legitimizing discourses:

(1) The belief that only objective truths can be counted as knowledge; (2) The assumption that only facts, dispassionately observed, can provide the basis for significant truth; and (3) A commitment to a 'theory free,' inductive process of arranging the facts so that they yield objective explanation. (467)

Moore's assumption of laws also disregards completely the historical context and intellectual environment within which these supposed truths were discovered by Stanislavski, and within which she constructs her own particular version of the System. The lack of any contextualizing discourse is a common way of masking the particular context within which anything is first invented. Such masking hides all available alternatives. It creates the impression that *this* version is *the only* version.

Not only does the assumption of laws and their subsequent reification leave us with little sense of the creative process through which Stanislavski might have made discoveries which she interprets as eternal laws, representing these discoveries as laws creates a closed system, and confuses the question of how they might take on meaning for the actor. It may seem axiomatic, but even if there were eternal laws, and even if we agreed that the use of "law" were an apt category with which to describe some aspect of the acting process, cognitively knowing a law of acting is quite different from the process of corporeal actualization.

*A Problematic Paradigm of Acting*

Although Moore never explicitly defines what she means by acting, her operative paradigm focuses almost exclusively on the self-conscious process of constructing the role or character an actor is to play, rather than on the phenomenon of en-acting that role. For Moore, creating a role involves determining the psychological and physical behavior of the character so that a "unique role" is developed (14), and then "living" that role by entering "a lifelike state on stage". (35) Since The System is founded on universal laws, it is the "concrete technique by which an actor consciously transforms his psychological and physical behavior into those of the character." (14) Moore asserts that the "ultimate goal" and "final objective" of the actor is "reincarnation"--the state in which he creates [a character] subconsciously" (15), "a state of . . . inspiration" (98).

Regarding the actor's development of the physical side of characterization and acting, Moore merely pays lip-service to the primacy of the body in performance. She says she wants to redress "one of the gravest distortions of Stanislavski in the American theatre" by reasserting the important place of "the actor's physical training" in the Stanislavski System. She states that "an actor's control over his body should be as complete as that of a dancer;" (16) however, the only idea of control which she articulates is that of the controlling mind. She claims that "the physical excellence that Stanislavski demands is intimately related to the psychological side of the technique," but does not articulate the precise nature of this "intimate relationship." (16) On the one hand she says that the ultimate goal of the System is "reincarnation" (15) and asserts that "the body must begin the action and it must finish it" (38); however, Moore provides no description of how "the body" accomplishes this. Rather, she assumes a Cartesian body-mind dualism and always iterates the supremacy of the mind, thinking, and therefore conscious control of the mind *over* the body, as when she concludes that the System permits the actor "consciously to control his entire apparatus of experiencing and incarnating." (34) From this statement it would appear that the actor's mind is an all-knowing entity controlling *all* experience and embodiment. But is this an accurate description of the bodymind relationship? Of the bodymind experience of the performer?

The body along with "voice, speech, his powers of observation and imagination, his constant control over the 'feeling of truth,' his spiritual movement" are part of the "actor's apparatus." (35) Giving instructions Moore says, ". . . Let your body express what you have *in* your mind." [*italics mine*] (36) She tells students to take an image *in* mind, and then "make sure that your body expresses it." (37) She instructs people to "think, think and make your body project what is *in* your mind." [*italics mine*] (42) Here the mind is a container (of images, etc.) which are consciously transferrable from the mind into the body. The mind-as-container is the place where the "emotions" are "stored" (65) to be re-lived in the act of performance.

Just as problematic is the notion of the psychological in Moore's paradigm of acting. Moore differentiates between what she calls "stage emotions" and "live true emotions," and tells how the performer develops these:

through rehearsals, the actor develops a conditioned reflex in which his emotion is stirred through the stage stimulus. (65)

To create the life-like character, the actor "re-lives" these "emotion stored in the actor's emotion memory." (65) By extending Moore's analogy, performance becomes a complex set of stimuli and responses. Like well-trained canine counterparts, Moore's actors are able to perform repeated emotions.<sup>16</sup> But unlike "live true emotions," these stage emotions do "not absorb the actor completely"--the actor "never forgets that he is performing on stage." (65) Somewhat uncomfortable with her own mechanistic language, Moore adds the caveat that these "repeated [stage] emotions" are "absolutely sincere." (65)

Moore speaks as if science/technology and acting were analogous:

To transform an actor's emotions into those of the character, according to scientists [which ones Moore does not say], is as complex as, for example, transforming the energy of Niagara Falls into the lights on Broadway or in this studio. It is the responsibility of technology to transform elemental forces of nature into useful work. And Stanislavski gives us a technology with the help of which an actor transforms his own emotions into those of the character he portrays. (33-34)

She equates the elemental forces of nature with the actor's own emotions. In both cases technology is the means by which these raw, uncontrolled, wild forces are consciously controlled and transformed into something useful. In the case of Niagara Falls we get electricity for lights; in the case of the actor we get the emotions of the character. The System provides a supposedly sure-fire means of control [stimulus-response] which brings order to disorder. Moore assumes a nature/culture dichotomy where culture (i.e., man) controls, shapes, and tames wild (female) nature. Once nature is controlled man uses it constructively (in a civilized manner) to make something else.

What provides this control? How does the actor develop this control? What she variously calls "thinking," "logic," or "conscious control"--again, the Cartesian rational mind. For example, Moore tells her students: "We stop thinking in life only when we are unconscious or dead, and the character is dead when you stop thinking as the character." (81) But is thinking what the actor does in the act of performing the character and is that really the same as our typical mode of thinking in daily life? Moore is unclear in her use of thinking. What she calls "thinking as the character" is a complex set of



cognitive (and therefore psychophysical) processes of perceiving, imagining, remembering, etc., and not just *one* thing.

Just as problematic is Moore's inadequate use of image and imagination. As Edward Casey eloquently points out,

an inadequate descriptive basis leads to . . . the failure to distinguish imagination in any decisive way from other mental acts. This is a failure in proper identification--in other words, a matter of descriptive confusion. Such confusion . . . [is] present in the very way in which we use the word 'imagination' in ordinary language. To take three expressions from everyday speech:

- (1) My imagination was playing tricks on me when I mistook that tree over there for a man.
- (2) It was just my imagination when I thought I saw a red rat in my bedroom.
- (3) In my imagination I thought that he was out to get me.<sup>17</sup>

Casey's conclusion regarding "these quotidian examples" equally applies to Moore's use of 'imagination': of these "quite different types of experience, *none* . . . can be considered a case of imagining proper." (10)

Correcting a student, Moore says,

You seem to be only trying to impress us with how well you read. But I want you to know why you say what you say and see the images [...] move your body logically to express your inner monologue and your images before you speak. (80-81)

Moore's instruction to move the body logically is constructed from the point of view of the audience/outsider, and *not* from the point of view of the performer/agent. She wants the body's movements to *appear to her* as logical, i.e., fitting the given dramatic circumstances of a scene in a realist drama. To the actor, these instructions give the impression of a cause-effect process in which mental images propel the inner monologue, logically expressed in the body movement, all of which propels the speech act as next in a hierarchical cause-effect order. But again, I ask, from the performer's point of view in the act of performance, can/does the body "logically express" anything? To use the word logical is to give the [especially inexperienced] actor the impression that this is a cerebral, self-conscious way of embodying action. Ultimately, Moore's mind is the Cartesian ruling mind which imposes order on its world-the body and "live, true emotions." Moore's view reifies consciousness into an object "which has neither life nor history."<sup>18</sup> For the reader, her narrative represents the performer as if s/he were divorced from the process of enactment, i.e., from the active corporeal engagement in the act of

performance. Her narrative makes the entire process appear *conscious*. However, as phenomenologist Calvin O. Schrag makes clear, consciousness is *not* a thing; rather "consciousness is always contextualized in the deployments of the lived body, and embodiment always provides the *vicinity* of consciousness."<sup>19</sup>

What is so problematic about Moore's paradigm and makes it so potentially confusing for the inexperienced actor is the lack of a clear description of the relationship between preparation and performing, and of the act of performance itself. What does it mean to be "lifelike?" If the actor's optimum state is to be "lifelike," from whose point of view is this "lifelike" state constructed? Moore's "life-like" ideal is constructed from the point of view of the spectator at a realist drama. "Lifelikeness" is judged according to how well the actor is able to behave (psychologically) like characters conjured by the playtext. But from the performer's point of view *qua performer*, does embodying the psychophysical actions appear life-like? Or does being life-like better describe the embodied psychophysical experience of appearing life-like? Is not the actor in the act of performance *living* an experience? If so, this mode of experience or state of consciousness needs much clearer phenomenological description than it has had in the past, *if* it is not to be confused with the everyday.

The implicit point of view most often assumed is that of the pedagogue, spectator, or director. Indeed, it is the "job" of the pedagogue-as-director in a realist drama to serve as the "audience's third eye." However, as Mark Weinberg pointed out in a personal communication. "Moore never differentiates between the 'is' of the performer and the 'appears to be' of the spectator." Many if not most of the commonplace instructions that directors give to actors in rehearsal assume, like most of Moore's coaching instructions, this outsider's point of view, such as "You're not concentrating *on* what you're doing."

One thing we learn from other cultures is that their languages of the stage are not oriented to the outside, observer's point of view, but to the point of view of the cultural actor--the doer or performer. Therefore, the fundamental set of assumptions about the act of performance are founded on culturally specific notions of praxis/action. When there occasionally is a description of the performer's optimal condition, non-conditional state-of-being verbs are often used.<sup>20</sup> When there is no overt description, the assumption is that the state is a non-conditional one.<sup>21</sup>

The "like" of life-like points to one problem with the assumption of representation and mimesis as the primary category of Western theatrical realization--that there is some-thing to be re-presented; that there is *a meaning* to be transmitted: that there are characters *in* a script to be (mimetically) re-created, etc. Moore reflects this fundamental view in her text on acting when she says, "Since each play presents a different world, each will have its own organic dramatic truth. The System is a means for finding it." (19) She

assumes that each play *has a truth* in it. The method of preparation becomes a treasure hunt for something findable. She reiterates the idea that there is one locatable meaning when she says "the director and the actors [ . . . must] understand the author's style and grasp *the meaning* as soon as possible." (24) She claims that the technique of analysis she presents in the book "brings *the essence* of the play to the surface . . ." (24)

Mimesis assumes that there is an original thing (Plato's essences) to be copied. The primary concern of a representational way of reading a text and creating a character is with a systematic analysis of the text in order to "find" the character already "there," which is then carefully reconstructed, and then mimetically re-presented on the stage. The processual, phenomenal dimensions of the act of enactment are often neglected in discussions like Moore's.

In Lakoff and Johnson's terms, this view of meaning assumed in representation and mimesis is part of the "myth of objectivism" which views the world as made up of objects which have "life" or properties independent of the people who make them or experience them; that "there is an objective reality, and we can say things that are objectively, absolutely, and unconditionally true and false about it [ . . . ]," that "words have fixed meanings [ . . . ];" that "people can be objective and can speak objectively [ . . . ]:" and that "to be objective is to be rational [ . . . ]."<sup>22</sup> It is a discourse which reveals a metaphysics which is objectivist since it postulates, like model-theoretic semantics, "a structure of reality that is independent of the way any beings, human or otherwise, come to experience and understand that reality."<sup>23</sup> Its semantics are objectivist since its account of meaning is "independent of any beings, their nature, or their experiences" (*ibid*).

Even though creating a role is presumably an activity in which the actor must be experientially involved, as we have seen the rhetoric and semantics used by authors like Moore to represent its creation gives the impression that it is an object logically constructed by the mind to be put into the body. The notion of character is a "model-structure" which becomes represented as logically constructed by the mind. There is a lack of descriptive detail regarding precisely how the human being comes to understand this model-structure, and how a relation-in-meaning is created to this "character" so constructed. There is woefully inadequate detail regarding the mental processes by means of which the character is understood. Rather, attention is focused primarily on the logical/cognitive decisions one makes while creating the character, rather than on the phenomenon and process of coming to actually embody, actualize, and thereby "know" the character. When represented as a conscious set of logical, mental decisions, the active engagement of the cultural actor (or subject) in the process of creating the character is misplaced, lost, dropped out of view.

The presence of objectivist assumptions demonstrates the power of these fundamental metaphysical assumptions even in an activity which must be

embodied and actualized processually. Following Johnson, I argue that even in the case of acting selected "objectivist themes constitute a background against which [its] main" theories have been elaborated in the modern period (xxxv).

Moore locates the creativity of the cultural actor on the stage where the actor achieves his "final objective" and "ultimate goal: 'reincarnation,'"--a state in which the actor "creates subconsciously." (15) However, the only description Moore musters of this ideal state of subconscious creativity is to call it "inspiration." (98) All of the "conscious work is the means which prepares the most favorable grounds for possible inspiration." (98) Here Moore places the performer squarely within the Romantic arms of the muse of creativity, i.e., the subjectivist notion of the lonely artistic genius receiving inspiration. But Moore doesn't trust the subjective side, and asserts that "even the greatest talent will gradually fade without technique to control it." (99)

Moore's emphasis on conscious control is in part a reaction against the traditional romantic, subjectivist notion of "experience" (the presence of the poetic "muse") assumed by some actors to lie behind what they do. But does Moore really escape subjectivism as she embraces objectivism? Not really, since she never is able to clearly articulate the nature of the experience about which she is attempting to write. The deeper problem, as pointed out throughout this essay, is with the fundamental categories she uses to discuss acting in the first place which assume the myths of both objectivism and subjectivism.

Moore's use of the word, "experience" is also problematic. She says that the actor who actualizes the technique of the System will "live the experiences of the character and 'incarnate' him." (19) Although Moore appears to be concerned with the actor's experience, we have seen how she is actually more concerned with describing how to self-consciously construct a map of a character's experience from a playtext--with building a set of psychologically "logical" behaviors. Only secondarily is she concerned with the phenomenon of "living," i.e., performing/doing those behaviors. When it comes to the qualitative, phenomenal domain of performance per se, her terminology remains a loose collection of rather ambiguous generalities: the actor "relives the emotion," "believes", and "thinks." But how (in descriptive terms), and what that experience is like, never quite becomes clear. Moore renders and represents experience [and performance] as an entity, altogether missing the embodied nature of the act of performance. As Schrag puts it,

The body as an experienced phenomenon is primordially presented not as a representable object but in the immediacy of its lived concreteness. The experienced body is not an object for the abstractive gaze: it is the body *as lived, as lodged in the world* as a base of operations from which attitudes are assumed and projects deployed. The body as object, which has its limited natural

justification in the anatomical and physiological sciences, is the body excerpted from its living involvements and quoted out of context.  
(130)

Behind Moore's lack of any clear description of the nature of experience is the tension of her implicit dualism--the assumption of an all-controlling Cartesian mind at war with potentially uncontrollable feelings, emotions, etc.

What are the larger implications of this particular rereading of Moore's text? First, this and re-readings of other acting texts may help us recognize the constructed nature of what we assume when we think and talk about acting. Second, by carefully rereading this and other texts we can begin to see how our thinking has been conceptually and culturally bound by particular paradigms in the past. Third, perhaps we can begin to construct better, more helpful paradigms focusing on the phenomenon of performance, more clearly articulating the relationship between preparation of a role and its enactment, and more sensitive to the performer's point of view. Perhaps we can rethink our own thinking and talking about performance by looking more closely at other cultures' assumptions about the body, bodymind, experience, and emotions--the "stuff" out of which performance, from the performer's point of view, is created.

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## Notes

1. I use acting to refer most broadly to its root meaning derived from the Latin *actum*, "a thing done," and actor from the Latin "one who does things" (Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*. New York: Greenwich House, 1983, 5). I often use performer and performance interchangeably with actor and acting, recognizing that perform derives from the Latin "per-, thoroughly + *fournir, fornir*, to complete" (485). An actor/performer is a doer who brings to completion.

This essay was stimulated by discussions of thinking and talking about performance with Peter Claus, Professor of Anthropology at the University of California-Hayward at a recent international conference on performance in Calcutta, India, and by the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson *Metaphors We Live By*. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980). See also Lakoff's *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987), and Johnson's *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987). I also wish to thank Mark Weinberg for his reading of the original manuscript and suggestions for revisions.

2. "Towards a Postpositivist Theatre History," *Theatre Journal*, 37, No. 4, 1985, 466.

3. James Clifford, editor, *Writing Culture*. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) 2.

4. Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture*. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981).

5. "Ethnography as Narrative," *The Anthropology of Experience*, eds. Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner. (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986) 139-158.

6. My approach is similar to that of Natalie Crohn Schmitt in her critique of some of the assumptions which inform Stanislavski's ideas about acting and creativity, "Stanislavski, Creativity, and the Unconscious," *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2, No. 8, 1986, 345-351. See also Alice Rayner's

"Soul in the System: on Meaning and Mystique in Stanislavski and A.C. Bradley," *New Theatre Quarterly*, 4, 1985, 338-345; and Sharon Marie Carnicke's excellent discussion of Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* based on her rereading of the original Russian text with the English translation, "An Actor Prepares/Rabota aktera nad soboi, Chast' I: A Comparison of the English with the Russian Stanislavsky," *Theatre Journal*, 36, No.4, 1984, 481-494.

7. New York: Penguin, 1979 (1968).

8. Sonia Moore is well known as President of the American Center for Stanislavski Art, as a Russian born student of the Third Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre, and as author and/or editor of a number of widely circulated books on Stanislavski including *The Stanislavski Method* (New York: Viking, 1960), *The Stanislavski System* (New York: Viking, 1965) and *Training an Actor: The Stanislavski System in Class* (1968).

She has often been consulted as an expert on Stanislavski. After the 1964-65 visit of the Moscow Art Theatre to the United States, the editors of *Tulane Drama Review* solicited her clarification of Stanislavski's ideas about the "method of physical actions." For her clarifications see Sonia Moore, "The Method of Physical Actions," in *Stanislavski and America*, eds. Erika Munk [(New York: Hill and Wang, 1966) 73-76].

Her books on Stanislavski remain in print and are some of the more widely circulated books on acting available to students of acting and the general public. *Training an Actor: The Stanislavski System in Class* was reprinted in a 1979 revised edition by Penguin and *The Stanislavski System* appeared in a second revised edition in 1984, also published by Penguin.

9. For a preliminary discussion of these issues see Phillip B. Zarrilli, "What Does it Mean 'To Become the Character?'" in *By Means of Performance*, eds. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, in press).

10. Throughout this rereading of Moore I ask my readers to keep in mind the practical, pedagogical issues at stake in this discussion, i.e., the hegemony within the subculture of American acting of the primary paradigm of method acting and its commonplaces which are the subject of this paper. Among some who teach a version of Stanislavski's method, not only do they share McConachie's expression of a common human failing, i.e., believing " . . . that the mode of perception common to the majority is the best way to understand the world," they do so *passionately*, often defending their version of the "world" (of acting) against alternative paradigms. Indeed, today's acting classroom might be considered, following Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, as one public arena or "zone of cultural debate" where various paradigms are "interrogating and contesting each other in new and unexpected ways." See "Why Public culture?" *Public Culture: Bulletin of the Project for Transnational Cultural Studies*, 1, No. 1, 1988, 6.

11. All references to *Training an Actor: The Stanislavski System in Class* are from the 1979 revised edition (New York: Penguin) 13. References to this text in the remainder of the essay are given in the body of the essay.

12. The picture of the actor that emerges is of a person willing to surrender entirely to the System—one who gives oneself over completely, even blindly to art for the sake of the art. This is the typical romantic, subjectivist notion of the artist as "feeler," and martyr for one's art.

13. What Moore represents here as "the System" is further legitimized by her assertion that it is the same system practiced in Russia: "All the five hundred professional theatres in Russia use the Stanislavski System [ . . . ] The System is studied in Russia by opera and ballet students [ . . . ]" (26) Operative here is the commonplace assumption that receiving a tradition from its origin or source means receiving the most authoritative, and therefore the one true essence of a tradition or teaching.

14. It is interesting to note that the authorizing rhetorics of Western, rationalist science and systematization are often used today when discussing such "traditional" oral modes of transmission as martial arts. *Kalaripayattu*, the martial art of Kerala, India, is often represented in English discussions written by practitioners as a "scientific system" of physical culture training, i.e., as an orderly progression in practice which (ideally) renders the body supple, flexible, balanced, and controlled. This rhetoric is self-consciously used to garner respectability and authority for a form of martial art struggling for survival within its own culture with non-indigenous forms like the popular *karate* of Japan.

15. The practical result of assuming that one has discovered eternal laws governing acting is that versions of American psychological realism are often unreflexively assumed to be appropriate for enacting non-realist texts from Shakespeare to Beckett.

16. In her discussion of "The Method of Physical Actions," Moore is explicit about Pavlov: "Pavlov's teaching about conditioned reflexes became important during the same period as Stanislavski's own teachings did. Stanislavski was searching for conscious means to control the inner mechanism responsible for our emotional reactions. Pavlov and Sechenov confirmed the correctness of Stanislavski's thesis that the whole complex inner life of moods, desires, reactions, and feelings is expressed through a simple physical action." (In *Stanislavski and America*. ed. Erika Munk. New York: Hill and Wang, 1966, 73-74).

17. *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana UP) 9-10.

18. Calvin O. Schrag, *Experience and Being*. (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1969) 144.

19. Schrag has called for a "new phenomenology of spirit [ . . . ] so as to restore the full sense of existence with its tragic resonance and joyous fulfillment. To achieve this goal a notion of 'embodied spirit' or 'incarnated consciousness' is required." (144). Certainly this radical reorientation of point of view has been present to some degree in the work of Grotowski, Barba, Schechner, Chaiken, and others focused on the *act* of psychophysical incarnation. What has yet to be accomplished is both a reexamination of the assumptions behind each of these approaches as well as the construction of a more adequate paradigm of the bodymind relationship in 'incarnated consciousness' which does not romanticize the process of performance.

20. For a discussion of the importance of this distinction see Phillip Zarrilli, "Where the Hand [Is] . . ." *Asian Theatre Journal*, 4, 2, 1987, 205-214.

21. For preliminary discussions of these assumptions see Phillip Zarrilli, "Three Bodies of Practice in a Traditional South Indian Martial Art," *Social Science and Medicine* (forthcoming), "What Does It Mean 'To Become the Character?'" in *By Means of Performance*, eds. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, forthcoming): and Mark Nearman's series of commentaries in Zeami's texts: "Kakyo Zeami's Fundamental Principles of Acting," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 37, 3, 1982: 333-374; 37, 4, 1982: 459-496; 38, 1, 1983: 49-71.

22. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 186-188.

23. Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) xxxii.

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