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A QUEER ACTOR PREPARES: A REIMAGINING OF STANISLAVSKI'S SYSTEM TO WORK AGAINST THE CONSEQUENCES OF HETERONORMATIVITY

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ABSTRACT
A QUEER ACTOR PREPARES: A REIMAGINING OF STANISLAVSKI'S SYSTEM TO WORK AGAINST THE CONSEQUENCES OF HETERONORMATIVITY

by

Samantha Lynne French

Actor-training is a practice that has constantly evolved and shifted as we develop our understandings of humanity. However, for some contemporary actors, actor-training has not grown enough to acknowledge and liberate certain 'truths' of the self. One of these 'truths' is one's queer identity. Without careful examination, 'tried-and-true' methods of actor-training can reinforce heterosexual standards and write-off queerness as taboo. As a result, many queer actors are left feeling alienated and stifled as they try to fit a mold that does not honor their lived experiences. This thesis argues that actor-training must be reinvented to not only include queer actors but also to liberate their queerness and use it as a valid means of connecting to their art. Modern actor-training in the Western world is heavily influenced by the works of theatre practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski. The longevity and success of this actor-training prove the existence of valuable tools that demand a queer reimagining. His work encourages the actor to tap into the self and work off inner, 'truthful' impulses. Too often, the queer actor is failed in this training and assimilates to anti-queer standards by ignoring their queer impulses. This thesis argues that this issue must be dissected and addressed to further the trajectory of actor-training that is cognizant of

contemporary ‘truths.’ My work reimagines several of Stanislavski’s methods through a queer lens and proposes them as a valid alternative to classic techniques that do not fully honor the queer actor’s experience. By engaging with queer theory and acting theory, this work explains why queer actors are performing heterosexuality in the space and how this false impulse defeats the intentions of Stanislavski’s methods. I describe a practice-as-research approach that allowed me to develop a workshop where I tested out my reimagined Stanislavski System and received feedback from my queer-identified participants. If reimagining how we utilize Stanislavski in the studio proves useful to the group, then this is something that should be considered for all methods of actor-training.

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This thesis is dedicated to my late mother Tracy who passed on 11/1/20.

Mom, I promised you that I would finish this degree and that I would finish it well. Everything I have accomplished here is because of you. I had many moments where I felt consumed by darkness but I knew that I had you watching over me, filling my spirit with light and conviction. You always believed in my career as a theatre artist and supported my dreams until your very last moments. I miss you. I love you. I know you are so proud.

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INTRODUCTION:

I am standing across the theatre from a male-identified fellow actor. Our goal is the same, to successfully undergo a Stanislavskian silent étude exercise. We are supposed to connect our energies so fiercely that we begin to draw closer. Our attention is set on one another and our own inner impulses. Once this closeness becomes so intimate that we cannot proceed further, we must initiate, again off of mere impulse, physical contact. It can be a handshake, high-five, hug-anything. As we draw near, my attention falls off the impulse and onto a deep-pitted nervousness. "*What am I going to do? Will my touch be too casual? It's an acting class, I need to raise the stakes! I need to put forth dynamic work! It needs to be romantic, the touch. It should be a lover's embrace, a tender holding of the hand, a romantic caress of the cheek. Great, now am I not only distracted from the exercise, but I have also totally altered the definition of an impulse to one that is mediated and inauthentic! Why do I, a gay-identified woman, choose to act romantically when instructed to act on impulse?*" Without this inner dialogue of hesitation and fear, I would not have performed heterosexuality in this exercise. Heterosexuality is, at my core, a way of existing that has been conditioned onto me, not one that truly lies within. Yet, in the same space, the thought of enacting a romantic gesture with a female-identified actor feels dirty and misplaced. I was actively partaking in what Russian theatre practitioner Stanislavski had warned us about in *An Actor Prepares*, "When the subconscious, when intuition, enters into our work we must know how not to

interfere" (1936, 21). My intuition told me to not perform heterosexuality, yet there was an anxious voice in my head that countered my intuition. The unwritten rules of the space informed my actions in the exercise. I was stripped of my ability to live in the moment and my art suffered as a result. In "Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavsky" Phillip B. Zarrilli, actor and scholar, reinforces this,

> "If and when you have a predetermined idea of what it is you can or should be doing, feeling, or experiencing, your relationship to what you are doing will not be totally in the moment. Your relationship to a task or action will be tainted by an intention or an idea. You will not be inhabiting the bodymind and energy simply and clearly—as fully available … here … now." (Zarrilli, 102)

This interference forced me to put on a heterosexual facade. Instead of living 'truthfully' in the studio, I lived in a characterized version of myself. In my day-to-day, I was used to portraying characterized versions of myself: the academic, the friend, the employee, the girlfriend, etc. All of these selves, to an extent, are characterized versions of myself. However, the consequences of performing these roles were never as damaging as the one I played in the actor-training space. This character was not one that I welcomed with open-arms and devoted my craft to. It was a character that undid years of acceptance, one that was painful to step into even briefly.

I take a breath of relief as I leave the studio and find my cohort of fellow queers. I mention this strange feeling I had during the exercise, and they agree with my frustration. Queerness did not feel attainable in that space. Even when my colleagues and I caught glimpses of it in the classroom, it was performed between two cisgender, heterosexual men for a cheap laugh. We all felt this need to perform

straightness in an environment that is supposed to connect us to our honest, unmediated impulses. Before an actor can know a role, they must know the self. Yet, the self I encountered was more like a stranger, one who needed to protect me but did not allow me the right of authenticity.

As a fervently proud and unabashed queer person, I hearken back to those rehearsal moments where my colleagues and I were rendered silent in our queerness. This silencing was not deliberate; none of us were explicitly instructed to perform straightness. However, this exercise, combined with the lack of discussion around queerness as a valid 'truth,' allowed for more damaging consequences to creep into the studio. It created an assumption that everyone in the space was cisgender and heterosexual. It not only mediated and silenced the inner impulses of the space's queer actors, it reinforced the notion that queerness is not a valid means of existing both on stage and in life. When facilitated in an unexamined way, this simple acting exercise turns into a contribution towards the greater systemic oppression of queer populations. This calls for a radical examination and upheaval of the way actor-trainers facilitate their spaces and the modes of training we are accustomed to. It is no secret that queer people are often subject to alienating experiences. However, not enough practitioners are reimaging common modes of actor-training to combat these problematic occurrences.

Having undergone Stanislavski training myself, I feel grounded in my ability to not only identify potential shortcomings but also to acknowledge the evident benefit and success of what is called the 'Stanislavski System.' The Stanislavski

System is taught to actors all around the world. Many theatre practitioners have been inspired to build upon Stanislavski's works and have created their own methods of actor-training. I will explore these practitioners more deeply in the next section. The reinvention of a few Stanislavski exercises to liberate[1] queer performers is a crucial step towards a more inclusive, liberatory future. This future will require an examination of all modes of actor training and present reimagined techniques to directly counter any present anti-queerness. Without inhibition, the actor steps in as a vessel to relay these messages and fully embody the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual 'truth' of their character. Stanislavski affirms this, "Then regardless of his own will he lives the part, not noticing how he feels, not thinking about what he does, and it all moves of its own accord, subconsciously and intuitively" (1936, 20). This work demands that the actor knows themself in this manner, as well. Without proper reinvention of modern actor-training, the queer actor is not given the same space and authority for fully-realized self-exploration as their cis, heterosexual colleagues.

In my thesis, I will begin by presenting the history behind Stanislavski and his involvement in the theatre. I will explore the why and how of the birth of the Stanislavski System and track its popularization from Russia to the United States and beyond. I will then explore how current practitioners are identifying problematic aspects of Stanislavski's works while simultaneously adapting his techniques for modern populations. This will then lead to my explanation as to why the queer actor

[1] I am using the word 'liberate' in reference to freeing one's queerness from the constraints of heteronormativity that can be present in the actor-training space.

is in dire need of an actor-training rehabilitation, one that puts the queer actor at the center of the work, after years of alienation. As a potential solution (and a step in the right direction), I will present a queered version of Stanislavski's System that I put into practice in the form of a workshop. I will conclude by reflecting on my findings and detailing the potentialities of this form of research.

STANISLAVSKI:

Before one can fully understand the complexities of the Stanislavski System, one must understand Konstantin Stanislavski himself and the context in which he birthed this new, revolutionary practice. Oftentimes, Stanislavski's techniques are used in the modern-day actor-training space without acknowledgement of their creator or the sociopolitical context in which they were created. Both life and art are constantly changing shape and one's personal encounter with both can create a response that counters the status-quo. The historical background of Stanislavski provides the modern-day theatre practitioner with a roadmap to understanding why we must constantly reevaluate popularized forms of actor-training.

Konstantin Stanislavski was a theatre practitioner, actor, director, and scholar born in 1863 in Moscow, Russia. His father worked in manufacturing and his mother worked as an actress. His parents would oftentimes include young Konstantin in their performances, which began to cultivate both Stanislavski's talent and his passion for theatre-making. He was also a key part of the Alekseyev Circle, a theatre group created by his family. This group allowed Stanislavski to identify some of his unique weaknesses and strengths as a young actor. This total submersion into the theatrical

realm gave Stanislavski a keen eye for the craft, all of which can be explored in his following ventures and texts[2]. In 1898, he founded the Moscow Art Theatre, this is where he truly honed in on his craft and developed his revolutionary acting techniques that can be seen in his fully-realized text, *An Actor Prepares*, a text that is now in the toolkits of thousands of actors around the world.

In *An Actor Prepares,* Stanislavski presents his readers with ideas on how to construct realistic, "authentic" performances through exercises that aim to tap into the actor's lived experiences and imagination. His early integration into the theatre-world, as well as his introspective nature, allowed for the birth of innovative techniques. These techniques were wildly different from anything theatre had seen before, they allowed the actor to tap into an imaginative state and investigate their inner 'truths.' These sets of exercises are commonly referred to as Stanislavski's System or, the System. Actor and teacher Jean Benedetti notes:

> What we received as the System originated from his attempt to analyse and monitor his own progress as an artist and his attempts to achieve his ideas as an actor and meet his own developing standards, and it is all the more valuable for being born of concrete activity since the solutions he found were lived and not the result of speculation or abstract theory. The System is his practice examined, tested and verified. (2004,1)

Stanislavski designed these techniques as a response to the theatre culture that was prevalent in late nineteenth-century Russia, a culture that heavily relied on spectacle and did not respect the role of the actor. The most popular forms of theatre at the time were rich with the heightened conventions of grand gestural and vocal performances: Vaudeville, Melodrama, Opera, etc. Benedetti observes this, stating:

[2] For more on Stanislavski's early life, see Benedetti, 2004 and Whyman, 2013.

> Stanislavski was implacably opposed to meaningless conventions, to 'Theatre' in the theatre, which he hated. He was no less opposed, later in life, to experiments of the avant-garde, which he considered reduced the actor to a mechanical object. Dehumanised actors lead to dehumanised perceptions. (Ibid.,17)

These exaggerated forms of theatre removed the craft of acting out of the actor's hands and into the director's. As a result, the nature of art was lackluster and desperately needed a makeover. The actor was merely imitative and devoid of depth. Theatre needed something to breathe a new life into it. Stanislavski expert, Bella Merlin, notes :

> As far as *the state of the art* was concerned, Russian theatre at the end of the nineteenth century was in a tawdry condition. Morals were low, ethics were shabby, and acting was little more than a poorly paid means to a poorly valued end. The repertoire was uninspiring. The performances were dissolute. And actors staggered drunkenly through performances, relying on the prompter to haul them through to curtain call. (2007, 6)

Observing what he saw as 'dehumanizing', Stanislavski worked diligently to invent a set of conventions for actors to rehumanize their role in the theatre. His goal was to put meaning and life back into every fiber of the actor's process. "For Stanislavski, theater was an institution of cultural and moral education. Theater, he believed, besides being entertainment, should develop people's taste and raise the level of their culture" (Moore, 13). Knowing that theatre holds incredible power to assimilate knowledge and reveal moral truths, Stanislavski needed to create a system that not only complemented this view but also was strong enough to create a paradigm shift in the realm of theatre. Stanislavski redefined and reimagined the craft of the actor, moving from spectacle to the art of experiencing. At the core of it all, Stanislavski pursued authenticity and fought against any preconceived notion of how the world,

and theatre, should operate. This, combined with developing understandings of human psychology, inspired Stanislavski's naturalistic, introspective approach, also known as psychological realism[3]. He was experimental in his practice and placed the actor, the human, at the center of his techniques. The actor was to be in constant dialogue with the inner self, honing in on what it means to experience. He knew that power resided within the lived experiences of the actor, the actor's 'truth.' He needed to design a system that would help flesh out these inner 'truths' in the actor's training. In *An Actor Prepares*, he hones in on the importance of the actor's lived, 'truthful' experience saying, "An artistic truth is hard to draw out, but it never palls. It becomes more pleasing, penetrates more deeply, all the time, until it embraces the whole being of an artist, and of his spectators as well. A role which is built of truth will grow, whereas one built on stereotype will shrivel" (1936, 38). The actor's ability to tap into their lived experiences was crucial to Stanislavski, this was the starting point for the actor to connect the self to the character. When a performer successfully combines the self with the role, they are then able to lose themselves in the performance. They live in both personas equally, tapping into the vibrant, emotional life of the self and letting that inform the believability of their performance. Stanislavski coach Sonia Moore notes:

[3] Psychological realism was a term Stanislavski used to differentiate from his naturalistic mode of acting he adopted in his early career. Jean Benedetti notes, "Naturalism, for him, implied the indiscriminate reproduction of the surface of life. Realism, on the other hand, while taking its material from the real world and from direct observation, selected only those elements which revealed the relationships and tendencies under the surface" (2005, 17).

> If an actor wants to impress the audience with the "truth of passions," as Pushkin[4] called it, he must follow the Stanislavski formula, "Go from yourself." An actor cannot and should not reject his own " I ," if the character is to be alive. He must become another person while remaining himself, using his own organic nature, his personality, as material in the creation of a character. (1960, 70)

With this System, the actor begins to reclaim an art that was always theirs to begin with.

Similarly to Stanislavski, I believe storytelling belongs in the hands of the actor. He recognized how actor-training was failing the individual and presented the world with a means to combat that. I am responding to the actor-training of my time, the one that takes agency away from queer actors and puts it into the hands of the heterosexual experience, ultimately deviating from inner 'truth.' Stanislavski created from a white, cisgender, heterosexual perspective. Again, his introspection was a driving force towards the System he created. A system born out of a cis, hetero perspective does not account for queer potentiality. Without a conscious awareness of the nuance of queer experiences, actor trainers and directors strip their queer actors of the ability to honor Stanislavski's exercises, as they are not allotted the space to connect with their queer authenticity.

While Stanislavski was widely informed by the theatre-culture in Russia, his texts and techniques now have an immense impact all around the world, especially in Western culture. In the United States, we can see many actors utilizing his works and actively being taught his techniques, whether he is being credited or not. Many preeminent theatre practitioners have been inspired by Stanislavski's works in their

[4] Aleksandr Pushkin was a Russian playwright and novelist who was born into nobility in Moscow, Russia in 1799.

own techniques. In particular, Stella Adler, born in 1901, was an American actress and actor trainer, who worked with Stanislavski during her time as a member of the Group Theatre and was heavily inspired by his methods in her own practice. Lee Strasberg, born in 1901, was a Polish-born American director, actor, and theatre practitioner. He built upon Stanislavski's emotional memory work and created what is now commonly referred to as, 'method acting.' This system encourages the actor to tap into the complex facets of the self in order to produce a fully realized character. Sanford Meisner, born in 1905, was an American actor and actor trainer, who was inspired by Stanislavski and created his own method referred to as the 'Meisner technique', which focuses on the actor's reception and response to outer stimuli.

Many American actors clung to Stanislavski's work, as they shared a common goal of psychological realism on their stages. His works arrived to Americans at an opportune time. American theatre educator Richard Hornby details this theatrical history in his article, "Stanislavski in America," in which he states:

> ...many Americans had been fascinated by the 1917 Russian Revolution; even though the MAT[5] long predated it, and Stanislavski himself had come from one of the richest families in Czarist Russia, he seemed part of both an economic and artistic revolution that was a refreshing contrast to American capitalism and its vulgar, shallow theatre. (2010, 295)

His techniques removed American theatre away from their 'vulgar, shallow' characteristics. Similarly to Russia, American theatre experienced a new, meaningful way to engage with the actor-training process. Realism flooded the American stage in the twentieth century and found wild popularity in productions such as: *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, *The Glass Menagerie,* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. For once,

[5] The acronym MAT stands for Moscow Art Theatre. Stanislavski founded the MAT in 1898 with director and writer, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko.

the American public was able to see their trials and tribulations in a 'slice-of-life[6]' manner. The deeply relatable nature of Stanislavski's work is a testament as to why we continue to see such widespread use of his techniques in America's twenty-first century.

The Magic If, The Fundamental Questions, Emotional/Affective Memory, and Text Analysis are widely known examples of Stanislavski exercises that are still present in contemporary acting. His techniques are often in any Western acting class one may attend, whether their presence is blatant or altered. Stanislavski's influence exists in places we might not ever suspect. If one takes an acting class on Meisner, Mamet, Adler, or Strasberg-they might be surprised to know that Stanislavski's influence is present and mighty. Knowing that this System has a widespread influence on modern actors, we must investigate how it impacts different populations. The acknowledgment of his presence is still not enough to critically assess actor-training, there must be an examination of how his work relates to the contemporary actor.

In her online article, "Creating the Living World: An Anglo-Russian-American Perspective on Psychophysical Acting," Bella Merlin explores the malleability of Stanislavski's methods with her young, undergraduate actors. She describes her experience in adapting his work to connect the 'iGeneration' of young actors with one another. She generates dynamic listening, intense connections, and fruitful eye contact amongst them, taking them away from their various technologies. She also makes it abundantly clear that Stanislavski's work presents itself with

[6] 'Slice-of-life' refers to the naturalistic qualities of the plays mentioned.

elements that are outdated and harmful towards specific populations of actors. Merlin states:

> It's extremely off-putting, especially for a student of color, to read on the second page of *An Actor Prepares* about Stanislavsky's use of blackface and his offensive assumptions about Othello's African origins, even if he's being deliberately naïve. My student's observation was a valuable moment for me, proving that learning is a two-way street – whatever our generation! (Par. *The iGeneration and the 'creation of the living word'*)

Merlin's continued use of Stanislavski in the classroom is a testament to the fact that we are still able to siphon the grit, the truth, and the beauty out of Stanislavski's work. It has withstood the test of time for a reason. She can heavily base her instruction on Stanislavskian underpinnings while also holding Stanislavski accountable with her 'iGeneration' students. We hold a responsibility, as critically engaged actors and actor-trainers, to see where our students are being alienated, omitted, or inhibited in the work. In Merlin's case, she was able to identify that her students of color were not given space to exist or feel liberated in *An Actor Prepares*. Her modern adaptation of Stanislavski's exercises is a testament to the fact that we must constantly be engaging with our "tried-and-true" techniques to identify underlying issues and do better. My examination and reimaging of Stanislavski's System is the necessary first step towards a future of doing better for queer actors.

In summation, Stanislavski was born into the theatre and produced revolutionary advances within his field up until his death. The culmination of his techniques, Stanislavski's System, was a direct response to the popular forms of theatre that were flooding the stages in nineteenth-century Russia. His works began to situate the actor at the center of their craft, allowing them to blend lived 'truths' into roles, ultimately manifesting in believable, dynamic performances. This work was so

revolutionary and so innovative that many American practitioners were inspired and built upon it. American theatre welcomed Stanislavski's realism with open arms and implemented his techniques in the studio at large; this continues to this day. We even see examples of modern practitioners identifying problematic aspects of his works and adapting them to fit modern actors. However, we are missing a key population, queer actors. His positionality, combined with Russia's immense homophobia, did not allow him to create techniques with queer populations in mind. Stanislavski never intended for his techniques to be law. He knew that exercises must develop and adhere to the individual. "We asked Stanislavski about the method. 'Create your own method,' he said to us. 'Don't depend slavishly on mine. Make up something that will work for you! But keep breaking traditions, I beg you'" (Moore, 10). With the changing times, we are able to discuss queerness more openly and it is imperative that we assess the effects (both intended and otherwise) his System has on the modern-day, queer actor. There is a dire need to take after the Stanislavskian spirit and break tradition by addressing the needs of the contemporary queer actor.

THE QUEER ACTOR:

When examining how actor-training impacts queer populations, we must use both a historical and present-day context to understand the immediate need for reformation. Theatre practitioners Lazlo Pearlman and Dierdre Mclaughlin recognize and problematize anti-queerness in the actor-training space today. They describe a real-life encounter of this experience in their article, "If You Want to Kiss Her, Kiss Her!" They detail an instance in which a pair of opposite-gender actors were

encouraged to kiss each other during a Meisner acting course. This direction from the instructor was deeply rooted in straight impulses and not only takes these two actors away from their authentic impulses but alienates any queer performers in the room. They note, “This potential for relationality can allow an actor to be open to discoveries and responses beyond the normative, if relationality and responsiveness is not conditioned as to what is and is not inside ‘coherent’ parameters of behaviour” (2020, 321). This same alienation of the queer actor is present in the narrative I described in the introduction. From Stanislavski to Meisner, there are underlying, oppressive forces that are impacting the performer negatively. What can be observed here are two detrimental phenomena that contribute to the oppression of queer folk: heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality.

Heteronormativity is a deeply damaging phenomenon that runs rampant throughout patriarchal societies. It is a concept that many people actively participate in and are subconsciously aware of, without ever having the proper terminology to define it. Professor Chrys Ingraham explains, “Heteronormativity is an ideology that promotes gender conventionality, heterosexuality, and family traditionalism as the correct way for people to be” (Ingraham, 1996). This ideology is based on a set of assumptions that directly counter the existence of queer individuals. It assumes that heterosexuality is the standard sexuality we all experience and should experience. It assumes a binary in terms of one’s gender expression, either one is male or female and this information is based on one’s genitalia. It also assumes that one should model their life around heteronormative standards of hetero-marriage, reproduction,

and working within chronology shaped by capitalism. “Everyday heterosexuality is not simply about sex, but is perpetuated by the regulation of marriage and family life, divisions of waged and domestic labour, patterns of economic support and dependency” (Jackson, 1999, p. 26). Any way of living or experiencing outside this standard is perceived as taboo, unproductive, and oftentimes, sinful. Society actively rewards those who adhere to the heteronormative standards and punishes those who do not.

Those who do exist outside of the parameters of heteronormativity are, oftentimes, not experiencing a normative temporality. This alternate version can be referred to as “queer time[7].” Queer temporalities develop in opposition to the ideals that heteronormativity maps out for us. For example, for those who undergo the process of gender transition, life can present itself with a whole new set of firsts, firsts that heteronormativity does not account for. Even the coming out process, at any given point in one’s life stage, can alter the path that heteronormativity dictates. These very experiences impact the lives of queer actors and when alternate realities are not welcome in the training space, the actor is then forced to mask, erasing lived experiences that should be enhancing their art. Queer time also extends into the historical battle for queer rights: having to fight for marriage equality, equal parenthood, and against the stigma that queerness equals death (due to the nature of the AIDS pandemic and hates crimes.) These unfortunate truths force queer people to

[7] Queer Time is a term coined by theorist Jack Halberstam. He notes, ““Queer Time” is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” (2005, 6).

create their own timelines and spaces. Furthermore, some queer people actively refuse to conform to straight power structures, not only in their sexual and gender identity, but in choosing to not partake in the institutions of marriage, reproduction, and capitalist means of working. Normative time does not welcome that which challenges its power structures, although our training should.

The possibilities of other temporalities are then theorized and explored by scholars and gender studies experts, such as Jack Halberstam. In his book *In a Queer Time and Place* he explores queer connection to alternative temporalities, noting that "Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience--namely birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (2005, 2). If queer actors exist within the parameters of queer time, then should this not be reflected in the actor-training space? Why should queer actors tap into false impulses that uphold a dishonest temporality? Actors already exist in modes of queer time, tapping into false realities, experiencing life scene-by-scene, being driven by one's inner impulse. This queer time encapsulates the work of the actor up until it confronts the actor's literal queerness. This paradox must be broken to fully submerge the actor into queer time. This submersion is a direct act of power to counter and dismantle the toxic heterosexuality that is also present in the space.

Compulsory heterosexuality is a byproduct of the heteronormativity we are faced with in our day-to-day. It is the idea the heteronormative way of existing is assumed, encouraged, and reinforced within with constraints of our patriarchal

society. Society is not accustomed to life without compulsory heterosexuality, as it is in the very foundation of our larger, power structures. "As we have seen, the notion of compulsory heterosexuality is not only tied into conceptions, ideas, and acts of sexuality, but it is rather viewed as a foundational structure in society and culture" (Herz and Johansson, 1011). This foundational structure then allows for those who perform compulsory heterosexuality to benefit, while those who do not, suffer. The assumption that straightness is always at the core of one's desire is not only harmful, but forces queer people to assimilate to heteronormative ideals. My resistance to displaying queer action in the actor-training space is an example of this assimilation. Adrienne Rich, a notable feminist writer, details compulsory heterosexuality's damaging consequences in, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence," "Heterosexuality has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women. Yet everywhere women have resisted it, often at the cost of physical torture, imprisonment, psychosurgery, social ostracism, and extreme poverty" (1980, 30). Understanding how society at large benefits from the harms of compulsory heterosexuality provides us insight into why this may be bleeding into the actor-training space. The actor's job is to imitate life. If we see it in society, it will be seen in the actor. Without active dismantling, the taboo nature and demonization of queerness are not exempt from these spaces.

With psychological realism at the core of many forms of actor-training (Stanislavski, Meisner, Strasberg, etc.), an interesting duality appears. First, with naturalism at the core of this acting, the actor must strive to engage with the world's

realities and transport them onto the stage. However, if we attempt to tap into inner impulses, we will quickly shut them down if they fall into the category of taboo. Compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity are so prevalent every day that when we do see queerness in the actor-training space, it can be perceived as shocking, comical, or uncomfortable. Second, we are completely failing our training and side-stepping realism when we do not allow our actors to experience their queerness openly. When the queer actor is inhibited, their art is negatively impacted as a result. When we are not proactive in dismantling these systems of oppression, we not only open up our theatre doors to our actors, we also open it up to deeply problematic systemic oppressions and microaggressions.

Pearlman and McLaughlin recognize where actor-training is falling short for queer folk and do revolutionary work to unpack it. Steve Satta is another example of a practitioner who actively works against heteronormativity and seeks classrooms that liberate and uplift those of queer identities. In his article, "OUT AND LOUD: The Queer Student in Undergraduate Actor Training Programs," he gives insight into the importance of creating queer-friendly training environments:

> As teachers of theatre (in general) we most likely encounter more students struggling with their sexuality than many of our colleagues in other departments. More specifically, as performance teachers we must acknowledge that the very nature of actor-training means we are more deeply engaged with students' personal identities and development than in many other academic disciplines. (Satta, 203)

He touches on the fact that many actor-training spaces may seem safe and welcoming, but the world, at large, is not. Queer people are still queer people outside of the seemingly docile actor-training space and are subject to multitudes of bigotry, often are taking shape in heteronormativity. It may seem that if we are not explicitly putting

anti-queer rhetoric in our training spaces, then we are not a part of the problem. However, this is a fallacy. “Our challenge is to remind ourselves of that struggle, lest our sense of well-being allows us to become complacent in confronting homophobia and makes us not implicit but complicit with the negative forces working against these students" (Satta, 205). Silence on queer issues perpetuates this idea that anti-queerness is a problem of yesterday. Modernity is oftentimes mistakenly conflated with progressiveness and equality. While strides have been made in terms of queer liberation, the deeply anti-queer history of the queer performer should never be understood as a thing of the past.

The plight of the queer actor extends beyond the classroom and into their employability and their career trajectories. There is a rich and complicated history behind queer experiences in the acting industry, one that details those who hid deep in the closet, only expressing their queerness in secluded spaces. In the United States, being gay was not decriminalized fully until 2003, only eighteen years ago. Predating 2003 was an extensive, oppressive history of queer actors needing to conceal their identity. The role of actor extended beyond the stage and into grand society, producing artificial heterosexuality and binary gender expressions. Now in the 21st century, the queer actor has begun to see the world embrace their identity more openly. However, heteronormativity continues to present another set of complex, homophobic issues. Oftentimes, an effeminate gay man going for the role of the straight, leading man would audition to no avail. The reasoning was often a baseless claim that one could ever suspend their disbelief enough to perceive the queer as

normative. However, the masculine, cisgender, heterosexual actor is encouraged to pursue the challenge of playing a queer role. Queerness is no longer threatening to society's heteronormative foundation when it exists within the realm of make-believe. Alfred L. Martin Jr. and Kathleen Battles observe this appropriation in, "The Straight Labor of Playing Gay":

> The result is the production of paratextual discourses that assert that convincing performances of gay characters involves a burdensome and anxiety-producing form of labor. These anxieties are quelled through the deployment of ironic humor that, while never fully homophobic, reifies gay intimacy as unnatural, and by extension, white gay masculinity as always-already artificial. Perhaps the more invested an individual actor is in his commitment to hegemonic forms of white masculinity, the more insistent he will be about coming out as straight and emphasizing his performance *as* labor. (2021)

This denotes that in the industry, both the validation and welcoming of queerness are performative and illusory. The straight appropriation of queer stories reinforces the idea that queer people are not welcome to take center stage and that there is a 'right' way to be queer. This not only feeds into heteronormativity by allowing the straight actor to profit, but it also encourages those who fall outside the perceived 'queer standard' to assimilate. The straight actor is applauded for their impressive 'transformational' abilities while the queer actor is rendered silent and denied employment. Representation is so important, having queer stories in our theatre and film is essential to opening people's hearts and minds. When the industry claims to support queer existence yet casts the same white, able-bodied, straight men in our stories, it does nothing but emphasize the notion that only one mode of existence will obtain success. What results is performative activism[8] that upholds the idea that

[8] Performative Activism can be defined as such, "a form of activism used to increase one's social capital or personal gain rather than genuine support towards a movement, issues, or causes" (Ira, 2020).

queerness can be commodified, not embraced wholly. There is nothing natural about this. They can steal queer narratives, cast their straight actors, and forget about the uncomfortable, painful, lived 'truths' at the end of the day.

This is why we must break down these barriers to truly liberate the queer actor and put the queer experience back into the hands of the community. This process of liberation must happen early, in training. Queerness needs to be a part of the space and conversation, always. The space welcomes realism and one's queerness is so deeply real. By incorporating queer methods of actor-training widely, we are normalizing, representing, and celebrating that which the industry actively rejects. The actor- training space gives way to some of the most vulnerable, honest experiences an actor might have. When queerness is in the equation, it is from the source, untouched by the heteronormative hands of Hollywood. This seed that gets planted in the training space must be watered so it can blossom into a future where queer people are given accurate representation and respect, from studio to big screen.

These barriers not only inconvenience queer actors, they dehumanize them. Queer actors are then reduced to playing a part in a straight machine, wherever heteronormativity deems fit. This same dehumanization of the actor is what Stanislavski actively fought against in his works. While he was not concerned with queer populations of actors, it is only right to advance his works to change with the times. In order to honor his passion for reinvention and his desire for the actor's agency, we must actively create a radical queer space to counter these oppressive forces previously described. Knowing this to be true about the world at large, it

makes complete sense as to why the queer actor might silence their inner 'truth' in the actor-training space.

Let us consider a hypothetical: A gay male actor is performing an étude exercise with a straight male actor in an unexamined, heteronormative space. If the gay actor has an impulse to act romantically towards the straight actor, they might shut down this natural impulse in order to uphold heteronormativity. The gay actor's mind could flood with possible negative outcomes: being (falsely) perceived as predatory, angering the straight actor, or having their queerness be seen as comedic. This inner dialogue is shutting down all 'truthful' impulses and removing the actor's mind, body, and energy away from the work. The gay actor is then feeding into compulsory heterosexuality by crafting a predetermined idea of what they should be doing, instead of freely living in the moment. This experience is alienating and cannot allow the actor to fully translate the uninhibited nature of the exercise into the role.

A QUEER ACTOR PREPARES:

It is important to note that Stanislavski's System does not actively perpetuate anti-queerness or homophobia. However, given the harmful history of queer actors in the industry, and the extreme homophobia that was (and continues to be) alive in Russia during Stanislavski's time, we are left with techniques that do not cater to those of the queer experiences, as they have long been left out of the conversation. The success of Stanislavski's original works is obvious; he has inspired many theatre practitioners around the world who reinvent, alter, and build upon his techniques. Stanislavski's techniques, if reimagined effectively, can act as a powerful tool to

liberate the queer performer and actively fight against a system that dehumanizes LGBTQ+ individuals.

I had the privilege of interviewing Bella Merlin about her experience with Stanislavski and reinventing the classroom for modern populations. We agreed upon the accessible nature of his System, he has laid out a blueprint for dynamic actor-training that can be used by actors from many different walks of life. Merlin had this to say,

> ...the most transferable and the most inclusive element of Stanislavski's System is the element of psychophysical coordination, what I feel inside and how I express it to the world and how the information I get from the world impacts how I feel inside and how I develop that porous membrane between inner world and outer experience, thin-skinnedness, if you'd like. I would suggest, is applicable to every nationality, physical ability or disability, ethnic-racial identity, gender identity because it's about listening on a deep level. (Merlin, Bella. Personal Interview. Feb. 25, 2021)

Stanislavski's body of techniques allows an actor of any identity a common starting point. Everyone has a psyche, everyone has a body. The ability to tap into the psychophysical nature of his methods can be done by all who seek it. No matter your race, gender, sexual orientation, class, or status-you can connect with your inner 'truth.' If deliberately reimagined, Stanislavski's System has the potential to be a beneficial, liberatory tool for queer actors to enhance their sense of self and connection to their character. There is a dire need for this liberation, so we must be intentional and specific in the reimagining of Stanislavski to fully reap the benefits of its accessible nature. The uninhibited, complete awareness of the queer self is key. When queer people cannot express their queer 'truth' in the space, they then present the space with a characterized version of the self, one based on heteronormativity. This character stands in the way of the self and inhibits the queer actor from wholly

inhabiting their role. A character cannot blend truthfully with another character. Stanislavski notes, “If you only knew how important is the process of self-study! It should continue ceaselessly, without the actor even being aware of it, and it should test every step he takes” (1936, 148). To understand and explore the scope of one’s own queerness is a complete and radical celebration of the self and of the actor’s craft. After all, the self is the most important tool to an actor.

Some queer actors have had a less-than-favorable past. From forcibly hiding in the closet to feeling alienated in modern actor-training space, these anti-queer experiences illuminate the need for actor-training that not only includes queer folk but acknowledges one’s queerness as a valid part of the self. Attempting to tackle the issues of the industry is a grand task, in order to combat the consequences of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality, we must begin at the actor’s infancy; their training. By queering [9]modern modes of actor-training, we are helping both one’s queerness and their art. The queer actor is then able to exist proudly in the studio, knowing that despite society’s anti-queerness, there is work being done to oppose those forces. This work must adhere to Stanislavski’s principles and connect the queer actor back to the self, the ‘real’ self. Only then, can their art begin to flourish authentically, proudly, and queerly.

QUEERING STANISLAVSKI:

My queer reimagining of Stanislavski’s System can be examined in the chart below:

[9] I am using the verb ‘to queer’ in reference to the process of examining something through a queer perspective.

Stanislavski's Technique:	*Queered Technique:*
Magic **IF**	Magic **IS**
The Fundamental **Questions**	The Fundamental **Truths**
Emotional Memory	**Empowered** Memory
Text Analysis	**Liberatory** Analysis (Queer Imaginings)
Silent Étude	**Vocal** Étude

I selected a handful of his most prominent techniques that are still being taught widely today and am proposing a new iteration of the System. Again, it is imperative to note that these tools and exercises are popular for a reason; they work. For decades, actors have been trained in these methods and have gone on to produce beautiful, complex pieces of art that fuse the self with the character. I am not intending that we do away with Stanislavski's work altogether. However, I do intend to present a queering of his work that will specifically liberate queer performers. These methods are intended to be used by actor-trainers and actors, as they see fit. They can be used in tandem with the original System or they can stand alone. Their purpose is to break down complex societal barriers (compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity, etc.) and enhance the queer actor's art by connecting them to the 'truthful' self and by Stanislavski's logic, heightening their ability to blend self with role.

Before looking at the specific techniques, it is crucial to establish that if the actor-trainer is looking to incorporate queer methods of actor-training into the space, the first step starts with them. They must take initiative, whether using these tools or

not, to create and maintain a space that honors, upholds, and validates a multitude of identities. Queerness can be a facet of one's identity. However, other facets such as race, ethnicity, disabledness, class, etc should never be ignored. These identities [10]can intersect and play a crucial role in the actor's concept of the self. Being equipped to honor these different, and often layered 'truths' of your actors will be key to liberating them and tapping them into their authentic impulses. An actor who feels validated and safe will be more so inclined to make creative, dynamic choices in the studio.

My system has been reimagined with both the actor trainer and queer actor in mind. While it is wonderful to imagine a world where all acting spaces are implementing queer techniques, it is not realistic and queer performers will still find themselves feeling alienated in their practice. This queered System of Stanislavski is intended to be utilized in the training space, but it is also intended for the actor to use on their own accord. The actor can reference back to these techniques if they are not being implemented in the space. If the space is one that does not welcome or openly discuss queerness as a valid existence, the actor can use these tools in their own, singular practice to undo the shameful, inhibiting effects of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality that may be present in the space. Additionally, a queer actor may find themselves cast in a cisgender, heterosexual role that does not line up with their own identity. While the job of the actor is to transform, the queer actor may experience an onslaught of negative feelings having to fit into a role that

[10] For more information on intersecting identities and their importance, see Jones and McEwen, 2000.

heteronormativity already tries to enforce outside of the actor-training space. These tools can be used to tap into the queer imagination and create a point of relatability between the actor, the self, and the character to alleviate any negative impacts.

The Magic IF: This is a tool created by Stanislavski to expand the horizons of the actor's imagination. It deviates from spectacle-based forms of acting and centers the actor into the reality of the character, blurring the lines between self and role. It allows the actor to have a sense of control, creative freedom, and liberatory exploration. For example, *what if I was actually my character? What if I was married to someone who did not love me? What if I am being deceptive at this moment? What if I lost my passport at this moment?* The benefits and power behind this simple, 'what if' framework are huge and deserve further exploration inside a queer temporality. "This word has a peculiar quality, a kind of power which you sensed, and which produced in you an instantaneous, inner stimulus" (Stanislavski, 56). The power of the word 'if' halts our normative temporality and provides a bridge to explore alternatives.

The Magic IS: This connects the open explorations of The Magic If to the plausible liberation and realities of queer space and time. 'What if' must turn into 'it is' in order for the actor to thrive in a space of queer possibilities. The 'is' implies truth and acceptance, allowing the actor to more concretely explore an alternate reality and invest belief. This provides a gateway for the actor to leave a heteronormative temporality and begin to unravel a new reality that operates under queer time and space. This exercise can be used in one of two ways: the actor can use

it to explore the horizons of their queerness and strengthen their understanding of the self, or it can be used to explore queer possibilities of a role. The Magic If does a great job at setting up the actor to be imaginative in their character work. The Magic Is specifically allocates space for queerness and removes taboo connotations around it. The sentiment, 'what if I was queer?' still denotes a feeling of hesitation or a sense that queerness can only be valid in a far-off space. The Magic Is intervenes and allows queer possibilities to be valid and 'truthful' in the now. The Magic Is can also be used in two ways. The first way allows the actor to create 'is' statements about their character. For example, start with the IF: *what if my character is only assumed heterosexual because of her marriage to a man?* Then create a new reality with the IS: *My character is pansexual and her marriage does not erase this.* The second way allows the actor to create 'if' statements about the self and then explore them through 'is' statements. By utilizing this present-tense exercise, the queer actor is able to rewrite the rules of their reality and directly counter society's anti-queer microaggressions.

Character Ex: <u>We start with the IF:</u>

What if my character was nonbinary?

<u>And it turns into the IS:</u>

My character is nonbinary and I am free to explore this truth.

Or

Actor Example: <u>We start with the IF:</u>

What if I could express a more masculine part of myself?

And it turns into the IS:

I am a person with masculine attributes and any impulse that may arrive as a result is valid.

The Fundamental Questions: This is another basic tenant of the Stanislavski System. These are questions that are meant to probe the actor's psyche into thinking deeper about who they are playing and help them create a fully realized world to step into. "Art is a product of the imagination, as the work of a dramatist should be" (Ibid., 64).:

- Who am I?
- Where am I?
- What time is it?
- What do I want?
- Why do I want it?
- How will I get what I want?
- What must I overcome to get what I want?

The Fundamental Truths: The actor should ask themself these questions in terms of their queerness and of their ideal state in which they can be authentically themselves. Allow the actor to imagine a perfect, liberatory reality. Any remnants of heteronormativity or compulsory heterosexuality must be tossed away during this exercise. Encourage the actor to say these statements out loud, this will engage both the psyche and the body, honoring the System's psychophysical nature. The actor can use this as an opportunity to try out different pronouns, labels, or impulses. Once the actor feels they have a concrete grounding in the answers that relate to the self, they can then also apply this exercise to the character and identify any similarities or

differences. Here is an example of the exercise being used to connect with the self:

Ex: **Who am I**? *I am a trans-femme, bisexual woman.*
Where am I? *I am surrounded by my chosen family and my partner.*
What time is it? *It is nighttime, I feel calm at night. Night is when the heteronormative world sleeps and I come alive.*
What do I want? *I want to be out to those who mean the most to me. I want to hold my partner's hand without fear, they are my safety.*
Why do I want it? *I have never been able to live in my truth before.*
What must I overcome to get what I want? *The pressures that society has set up for us to conform to. I must remind myself that my queerness is a beautiful portion of my person. It remains in me as I work on my craft. I want to inhabit my role fully therefore, my queerness must remain within them, as well.*

This dialogue can be ever-changing to align with one's queer fluidity. Mentally removing the constraints of heteronormativity is key.

Emotional Memory: This is a Stanislavski practice that allows the actor to recall an emotion/situation that closely relates to that of their character. Lee Strasberg has altered his technique in an exercise he refers to as, Sense Memory. The actors then recall what they saw, heard, felt, smelt, and tasted at that moment.

> ...although our feelings and emotional experiences are changeable and incapable of being grasped, what you have seen is much more substantial. Images are much more easily and firmly fixed in our visual memories, and can be recalled at will. (Ibid., 75)

This connects the actor to the 'truth' of what they experienced and, hopefully, provides them with the tools to live in the 'truth' of their character blending the self with the role.

Empowered Memory: This exercise builds upon Emotional Memory. So far, we have worked heavily in the imaginative realm of queer possibilities and ideals. This exercise has the actor identify a real moment in their life, one where they felt empowered, liberated, and uninhibited in their queerness. After identifying this

moment, the actor should then recall the corresponding senses.

Ex: *I felt the most liberated in my queerness last summer at Pride. I heard the laughter of my friends, I could smell popcorn nearby, I saw flashes of rainbow colors, I could taste the dryness of my mouth in the heat, I could feel the sweat on my palms from dancing.*

This should conjure an emotional memory and allow the actor to bring queer imagining into their own lived experiences. Holding onto this moment of queer liberation is key in connecting the actor to the self. Identifying these senses that are tied to their own authenticity will promote this same inner-connectedness to their queerness in the space. Allow the actor to perform a piece of text before doing this exercise. Then, allow the actor to undergo this exercise and instruct them to hold onto this feeling of inhibition in their next performance attempt. After all, if the actor wants to embody a character, they must understand what liberates the self before they understand what liberates the character.

Text Analysis: This is another major exercise an actor will most likely encounter, especially in different forms. Traditionally, the actor goes through the text, analyzes meanings, subtext, and puts these lines into their own words. "'In the beginning his understanding of the inner significance of a play is necessarily too general. Usually he will not get to the bottom of it until he has thoroughly studied it by following the author took when he wrote it" (Ibid., 281). Stanislavski took this a

step further in his Active Analysis exercise. He would instruct the actor to improvise their scene, without any reference to the script. This gave the actor a heightened ability to live in the reality of the scene and to listen to the inner impulse of the self.

Liberatory Analysis/Queer Imaginings: The actors should perform text analysis before doing liberatory analysis. This analysis involves queering the character or a specific piece of text. It is simply a queer imagining, not a re-write of the script.

For example: *Instead of Viola being shocked at Olivia's romantic feelings for her, she is shocked because it is revealing inner, homosexual desires for her.*

These homosexual desires are not explicit in the text. However, it queers the character of Viola enough for the queer actor to find a place of relation. It also gives the actor this beautiful, queer truth they can carry in their back pocket while they perform. No one needs to know but the actor. Oftentimes, queer people hold their queerness as a beautiful secret in their back pocket. Their character's experience should do the same. The aim is to have the actor feel liberated by queering a role that may or may not already have queerness. To heighten the personal connection between actor and character through queer imaginings. After either writing or thinking about these possibilities, the actor should be encouraged to speak about their imaginative queerness as their character. Similar to Active Analysis, this allows the actor to respond to the reality of the text and to the reality of the queer self simultaneously.

Silent Études: This exercise is based on impulse work. The actors stand across the theatre from each other. They silently draw near. When they become close, they then initiate a form of physical contact based on their inner impulses. This can either be actor-to-actor or character-to-character.

Vocal É**tudes:** This is an exercise that the actor cannot utilize alone. Great care and attention must then be placed onto the shoulders of the actor-trainer. It is crucial to be aware of the pairings you assign in the classroom. If you assign an overwhelming amount of cis-heteronormative pairings, cis-heteronormative results are likely to ensue. Similarly, the actors stand across from one another. Initially, it is done actor-to-actor. As they slowly draw near, they should be given the freedom to vocalize their inner monologues or have the choice to remain silent. Queer people are not always able to choose when they are and are not silent. The ability to speak, but also to withdraw, is giving the actors the ability to not only liberate but reclaim an otherwise negative experience.

Ex: *I am nervous. They are drawing closer. I don't know what to do. I feel excited. They are wearing blue. I feel tension in my feet. I want to embrace.*

This ability to bring the inner thoughts into the space allows the actor to actively tap into their own inner impulses. More importantly, it allows the queer actor to have a voice. One that, historically, has been silenced.

Once the actors are close to one another, they must decide how to conclude

the exercise. Whether it be a final statement, a physical connection, or mere silence- the choice is up to them and their own impulses. This is in an attempt to eliminate compulsory heterosexuality in the space. Instead of feeling a need to reach out and make a romantic gesture, the actor can decide their own boundaries, impulses, and endings.

Once this is done, the actor will hopefully have a greater insight into the self, the true, uninhibited self while also building honest connections with those in the space. The environment is a huge portion of what can liberate or inhibit an actor's experience. The exercise can also be done character-to-character. With the same principles, the actors will perform the exercise as their role.

Ex: *Let's say we have two characters who are friends. They would verbalize based on their character's inner monologue. If they want to explore queer possibilities between characters, this is also acceptable. 'I have feelings for her. I wish I was presenting more masculinely. I want to know him more*

This is all to: give queer performers a voice, eliminate forced heterosexuality, and establish a greater knowledge of the self and the self of the character. The space of connection between the actor and the role is key.

Liberatory Leadership: This is a tool that guides the actor-trainer on how to generate a liberatory environment for their actors. It is imperative to note that the instructor does not have agency over their queer actors' liberation. However, they can give their students liberatory tools and create an environment that allow their queer

actors to have agency in their liberation. A beneficial way to start is with a simple introduction. If the instructor is comfortable disclosing their queer identity, that will allow their queer students to find a place of commonality and acknowledge that they are in a safe space. However, this acknowledgement of one's queerness is fully at the discretion of the individual. One does not owe their students the emotional labor of coming out. If the instructor is not queer-identified, or does not wish to disclose, this is a great time to acknowledge that queerness is acceptable in the space, both inside and outside of acting exercises. Let this act as a segway to student introductions and encourage them to disclose aspects of their identity, only if they are comfortable doing so. This will create a sense of community and vulnerability, both of these qualities are crucial to have amongst the students, as it will enhance the effectiveness of the intended exercises. Whether they want to share pronouns, gender identities, racial identities, or sexualities-it sets a very vulnerable tone for the class, one that reflects the complex, intersectional experiences of the world at large. This discussion of queerness as a valid means of existence is the first step in creating a liberatory environment, one that counters the implicit nature of heteronormativity that occurs when left unacknowledged.

While Stanislavski's exercises number far beyond the scope of my reimaginings, these few exercises act as a catalyst for a paradigm shift in the way we engage with actor-training. It models Stanislavski's desire to rehumanize the role of the actor and to engage with the psychophysical nature of the craft. By building upon his widely successful techniques, these exercises address the nuance of the queer

experience in the acting studio. Think of this section as something akin to *An Actor Prepares.* In written form, it informs the actor on how to strengthen their craft and lose themself in the art. What comes next must be the work put into practice.

CASE STUDY: THE WORKSHOP

As part of my research, I selected three of these queered exercises to put into practice. To test the viability of these purposed exercises, I held a workshop with two queer-identified actors, who expressed previously feeling alienated in their queerness in the actor-training space. In the best interest of anonymity, the participants have decided on pseudonyms that I will use going forward, Jess and Claire. These exercises could be interpreted differently had I utilized more actors, with varying identities, in my workshop. Additionally, due to COVID-19 restrictions, my workshop was conducted on the Zoom platform. These exercises can be modified to work online, but they are intended to be done within the physical space of the actor-training studio. This could also lead to alternative outcomes. If allotted the necessary time and resources, these techniques would be tested on a large pool of actors. Jess and Claire are a small sample size and cannot provide a comprehensive, conclusive report on the success of these exercises. However, as performers, we heavily engage with the self as part of practice-as-research methodologies. The mind, body, and spirit can allow us immense insight into what we are experiencing during our acting. Narrative responses, therefore, can be extremely valuable and legitimate methodology. What is lacking in the quantity of this workshop research (partially due to time constraints) is accounted for in the authentic, lived narrative experiences of

my two participants. Heli Aaltonen and Ellen Foyn Bruun legitimize this claim in their article, “Practice as Research in Drama and Theatre: Introducing Narrative Supervision Methodology,” stating, “Since the 1960s, narrative thinking has been introduced as a useful tool in qualitative research and other contexts that deal with interaction and communication” (2014, 56). The lived, narrative experiences of myself and of my participants provide nuanced insight into the need for and effectiveness of queer actor-training. “... narrative research methodology is suitable for negotiating the specific and multi-layered, experientially lived world. Stories are multiple, polyphonic, and inter-textual” (Ibid., 56). Aaltonen and Bruun's emphasis on multi-layered narrative space centers the responses and experiences of Jess and Claire within larger discourse on actor-training.

The actor uses the self as a tool, the work of the actor is their practice, and their lived experiences provide the research. If my techniques can create, even in a small way, the feeling of liberation in terms of their identities in connection to their work as actors, then I feel that these exercises are worth pursuing. In addition to the workshop, I sent out a pre-workshop survey and a post-workshop survey, to inquire about their experiences as queer actors, as well as their experience with my exercises. These surveys were sent with a consent form to be participants in this research and emphasized the terms they were not obligated to fill out the surveys, they could answer or not answer any questions at their discretion.

Claire is a 24-year-old theatre artist who identifies as a cis-female bisexual. Jess is a 23-year-old actor who identifies as queer and bisexual. Both of these

performers have acting experience and hold theatre degrees. In the pre-workshop survey (appendix A), I asked the two participants to detail their experiences as queer actors in the heteronormative actor-training space. Jess wrote:

> "I think my actor-training has suppressed my queerness. So much of acting is based on boxing someone into a type based on their look. I've always been casted [sic] in hyper-feminine heterosexual roles because that's how others see me. Although there have been times where I did want to identify openly as queer, I felt that it might change the way people saw me or casted [sic] me. In addition, actors are always taught to lean into their assigned "type" and embrace it, which did in turn suppress who I feel I truly am."

Claire expressed that being a femme-presenting person has presented her with challenges in the training space moreso than her queerness. However, she clarified, "Coming from a country where same-sex marriage is a hugely devising [sic] issue (not becoming legal until 2020), I feel pressure to 'mask' until I am sure the space I am in is safe and not likely to turn hostile." Claire also mentioned that she had previously worked under an openly queer theatre practitioner and reaped the benefits of it, "Yes, it ignited my desire to succeed as it was visibly possible."

Their sentiments further ignited my drive to pursue these exercises and informed how I led the workshop. I began the workshop with an open discussion of my queer identities and gave them space to discuss theirs as well. We exchanged coming out stories, pronouns, and deeply intimate discussions on queerness in the actor-training space. I informed them of my plan to lead them through queered Stanislavski-based techniques, specifically: The Magic Is, Liberatory Analysis, and Empowered Memory. They were asked to come prepared with a familiar monologue,

in order to apply these exercises to text. The following excerpts [11]recount what the actors created with the exercises and their verbal feedback on effectiveness.

The Magic Is: The participants were instructed to complete a journal entry where they used their imagination to explore an ideal queer reality, free from heteronormative pressures, to envision what that version of the self might look like. While this can be used between actor and character, I wanted to encourage my participants to focus on the self. As previously discussed, one must know the self before they can know the character. This exercise is an example of how the Magic IS can be used to promote an actor's understanding of the 'authentic' self. They were then asked to paraphrase their writing verbally, if comfortable. Jess and Claire demonstrated to me the power removing heteronormative constraints from one's concept of the self:

> Jess: "I think I am a people pleaser. I think if I lived for myself and there were no barriers, I wouldn't have to think about that. I would just be able to say whatever I wanted. I wouldn't have to worry if I sounded dumb or if I sounded like I didn't know what I was talking about because I'd just have that confidence in myself in a world that would understand me and wouldn't judge me by what I am saying. I wouldn't ever have to look in a mirror because the idea of what I am supposed to look like would never even cross my mind. I am constantly thinking about what is empowering to me. Is it wearing makeup? Is it not wearing makeup? Is it showing skin? Is it not showing skin? And I feel sometimes trapped because I feel like there's nothing I can do that will actually be empowering because all of these constraints don't allow for that. I wouldn't have any fears. I would take every opportunity and I would just live for myself every day. And, sometimes I feel like, as a woman in this world, I have to be very defensive, and I always have to feel like people are going to hurt me or objectify me, I always feel very angry. I think without that anger, I could just focus on myself and my happiness. Also, something very important to me is when I would create art, it wouldn't be like a way of thinking, oh this has to be better than this person's, or this has to be impactful, or this has to change the world. It would just be art that is for me and that brings me pleasure."

> Claire: "I think I would be less likely to say sorry before I even expel an idea into the space. In a lot of workshop settings, I will almost apologize for having an idea and I think I wouldn't

[11] These excerpts have been edited for clarity. To see the full, unedited transcriptions reference appendix C.

> do that. I also think I would be taller, just-I think I would. I think I wouldn't be limited with ambition in spaces, I would be far more willing to say the idea and get it out there. Rather than hoping someone else says something similar that I can tangent to a better idea. Rather than just letting my ideas exist as themselves in their own space."

My further development of this exercise occurred after this workshop. Had I done this exercise again, I would ask the participants to turn these statements from hypotheticals to factual statements. For example, *I wouldn't have any fears* turns into *I have no fears*. However, this iteration of this exercise allowed Jess and Claire to envision a world where they did not alter their authenticity to the heteronormative standard. For me, this served as a necessary reminder that queerness is layered. One's experience with gender informs so much about how the world will perceive and treat them, actor-training space included. The roles one gets typecast into can reinforce this concept of how the world views them and how they should present themselves. For Jess, heteronormativity set up so many standards for her femininity that she was no longer able to discern what she was doing to please herself and what she was doing to please those around her. As another femme-presenting person, Claire envisioned a world where she would never be afraid to act on impulse and speak her mind. These experiences highlight the rigid boxes that the world puts us in, they alter how we see ourselves and remove us from inner 'truth.' To hearken back to Zarrilli, we can never have a predetermined idea of who we should be or what we should be doing, it removes us from the craft. By identifying these idealistic states, Jess and Claire are one step closer to letting queer temporalities become reality in their training.

Empowered Memory: The participants were instructed to recall a memory in which they felt completely and totally liberated in their queerness. Once they

identified this moment, they were then asked to live in the memory and recall the taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight they associate with this memory. Their responses transported them back to a lived experience where their queerness was liberated. This is what they shared:

> Jess: "I basically wrote about a moment when I was a freshman in high school, it was outside my theatre classroom. We were sitting outside. It was me and this girl. She was openly a lesbian. We were sitting down talking. I remember sitting on the cement, feeling it on my fingers, it was rough. We had our backs against the wall. You can see the traffic going by. So we're sitting outside and I was listening to her voice and the sound of other people rehearsing, my teacher talking in the background. In that space, together with her, that was the first time I ever said out loud, "Oh, I think I like girls." I felt like it was just us two out there in that little space, I could say whatever I wanted. She was so receptive of it and accepting of me. It made me feel like I can tell other people and it's a good thing, it's a beautiful thing. I could taste my mouth being dry from nervousness and the smell of gas and exhaust from cars going by. So yeah, that's a good memory for me."

> Claire: "Mine was a Panic! at the Disco Concert. It was me and my best friend from school and my best friend from university. It was a whole queer group, gaying about, having a gay old time. It got to the "Girls / Girls /Boys" song. Before we went in, there were girls handing out little colored hearts based on what section you were going to be standing in. So whenever it came to that song, everyone put them up and there was a rainbow flag going around the stadium, and everyone was screaming the lyrics. No one was being like, I don't want to sing this song because it's the gay song. You could smell people spilling their beer. You could feel the crunch of the confetti and smell the really horrible t-shirt smell of new merch, that and beer and cigarettes, it was incredible. The screaming of everyone saying the lyrics at the same time and no one being weird about it, it was an amazing experience."

In the previous exercise, Claire and Jess took the first step towards queer liberation in their training. Their experience in the Empowered Memory exercise provides a method for them to tap into the queer liberation that already resides within. This moment they both identified elicits queer euphoria. By identifying all five senses, they experience what Strasberg intended, a full embodiment of a memory that can then be transported into text. These provocations in the mind awaken the imagination, they manifest in the physical and emotional response within the actor. Now that Jess and Claire have undergone this euphoric, psychophysical experience,

they can hold onto this feeling as they navigate their role. To understand what liberates the self will provide a roadmap to understand what liberates the character, when they meet in the middle only magic can ensue.

Liberatory Analysis/Queer Imaginings: The actors were instructed to perform their chosen monologue. Jess chose an Ophelia piece from *Hamlet*. Claire chose a Martha piece from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? Then they were instructed to come up with an imaginary, queer 'truth' about their character and to explore those possibilities. After sharing with the workshop, they were then instructed to perform their monologue again. This time with two things in mind: their queer imagining and the sense of liberation they conjured up with the empowered memory exercise. This exercise allowed Jess and Claire to connect to their heteronormative roles while still honoring their personal queer identities:

> Jess: "I have always felt very connected to Ophelia, I have never been sure why exactly that is. I think part of it has to do with how much she gives herself to the people in her life. She is completely surrounded by men and would do anything for them. In the process, she suffers greatly and is used over and over until her death. I feel like she's isolated by Hamlet, by her father, by her brother and when I was doing this monologue, it's the one where she's mourning Hamlet. *This great man, this amazing man, this man everyone admires has completely lost it and he's lost to the world and he's lost to me, as well.* I was thinking about what her life would be like if she were able to be free if she were able to have women around her that were friends, or lovers and that could show her that love is not about suffering. She could live for herself and claim agency and strength. Instead of seeing Hamlet as an amazing person, she could think about what is my own potential. *Why am I suffering by being weighed down by him?* What if she's seeing his downfall and instead of empathizing with him and further entangling herself with him, she could run away. There could be a happy ending and she can choose however she wants to live.

> Claire: "Martha and George are a married couple in it, but she assumes very much the stereotypically masculine role in the relationship. Her father owns the university that her husband works for, that's how she got him the job. She sets him up for everything, he's just too creative to be held down by things. It's the 60's, everyone hates women and all that fun stuff. They've just come back from a party where a new faculty member had just brought his new wife. She's trying to get a feel of the wife, where she's standing with the husband. They all leave her for a while and she's annoyed they've all left and they come back and say it was a joke. I sort of imagined what if Martha and George were almost beards to each other, in a

> sense. Both of them wanted to stay in the communities they were working in but knew they couldn't if they were othered. So they worked together to have a presentably, heteronormative relationship. There's this whole thing about, do they or do they not have a child? The child is there as a grounding of, look at this kid, we are so straight. The reason why she's pressing the wife so hard, is to be like, *are you, also...? Do we have an understanding here?* Whenever everyone is out of the room, she can actually take a moment to chill and take the masks off and be as batshit as she wants without having to have different faces on for each person in the room. It's flipped from annoyance to relief."

When Jess and Claire performed their monologues initially, I was quite impressed. They both have had several years of theatre-training, so there was a clear mastery of language, emotion, articulation, and nuance. Yet, when I saw them both perform after completing their Liberatory Analysis, I saw them move from educated recitation to 'truthful' living in the text. Knowing that Ophelia now had this desire to leave her state of toxic masculinity and surround herself with feminine companions provided Jess with intensity and emotionality I had not previously witnessed. I saw the threads of Jess' Magic IS exercise bleed into Ophelia's strife and was taken on a journey of painful yearning. With Claire, she really lost herself in Martha, in the best sense of the phrase. The second time around she let out unrehearsed, maniacal laughter, differentiated the volumes at which she spoke, and spoke through the gritted teeth of a closeted woman begging to be set free.

I collected feedback from the actors both during the workshop and in the form of the post-workshop survey (appendix B). Both actors expressed that these exercises were unlike any actor-training they had undergone before. They were able to connect how the suppression of their queerness in the studio was putting a block in the way of fully inhabiting a character Claire noted, "I feel like I understand how to root my queerness into queering practices if that makes sense. I've always understood my

queerness, and theatrical practice- two separate entities. But this allowed me to see queering as a creative bridge of the two." Jess wrote, "I feel that this queered version has awakened something in me. Stanislavsky is what I've worked with for the majority of my training and it already has begun to feel repetitive and tired. This queered version actually helped me see new possibilities and I found it more effective." For me, I was thrilled to see the actors discuss issues of their gender identity in the exercises, as well as their sexuality. This acts as a reminder that one's queerness is oftentimes multi-layered, complex, and subject to change. These exercises have the potential to liberate the many, intersecting facets of one's identity and place the actors back into a place of unmediated, unfiltered impulse. By honing in on the 'truthful' aspects of Stanislavski's original works, we are able to strip the queer actor away from their 'heteronormative persona' and allow the role to blend with the self, the unmasked one. This is what creates dynamic performances, this is the recipe the actor can use to generate believability and find connections to their roles they never would have before. The enhanced performances of Jess and Claire provide evidence that there is some serious work that must be done to tap into the queer actor's liberation. This is how queer people can finally feel welcomed in the actor-training space and repurpose a System that was never created with them in mind. There is so much work still to be done to cater to queer performers, but these exercises hold the potential to act as a catalyst for a queer actor-training revolution.

CONCLUSION:

Stanislavski's works have had a revolutionary, widespread impact on the way

we experience US actor-training. Many practitioners have been inspired by his innovation and passion for authenticity, prompting them to expand upon his techniques to develop their own. Other actor-trainers have taken a conscious approach to identify the problematic aspects of Stanislavski's works, while simultaneously yielding impressive success from his techniques. I have sought to extend this work by adapting it for the queer actor.

Given the oppressive history of queer performers in the industry, any form of actor-training that leaves queer people feeling silenced, even as an unexpected side effect, only adds to microaggressions that remain after years of queer struggle. While other scholars identify the multi-layered elements of queer alienation in the actor-training space, my queer reimaging of Stanislavski joins this discourse as a viable means of healing. Not only do these techniques aim to mimic the Stanislavskian passion for realism, innovation, and enhanced art-they also stand in as a tool to liberate the queer actor, after years of painful silencing and othering. The flexibility of these tools allows the actor trainer to implement them in the classroom and the actor to hold them in the toolkits, whenever they may find themselves in a heteronormative training environment.

While my thesis focused on queer relations to actor-training, further study must be done to assess other intersecting identities such as race, disability, and class. Going forward with this project, my techniques must be put into practice with a larger group of queer actors, ranging in identities. This would allow for a more concrete, generalized idea of how my techniques work. The training must also lead to a

performance, this will be the only way that both actor and actor trainer can assess the techniques' benefits in terms of enhanced storytelling.

Yet, my research displays several, narrative accounts of queer actors feeling inhibited in the actor-training space. This illuminates the dire need for reform in the way actor trainers facilitate their spaces and implement 'tried-and-true' techniques that ultimately only cater to those who do not deviate from heteronormative standards. In the scope of this thesis, I was able to test my techniques and find success with two participants. The success of these techniques demonstrates not only the need for a queering of Stanislavski but a queering of all modes of actor-training across the board. However, my techniques act as a stepping stone towards a world where the normative standards of actor-training expand to include 'truths' of all marginalized identities. These Stanislavski-based techniques give queer actors tools, created by the queer for the queer, that allow them to flourish in their craft and produce dynamic, intimate performances where the self and the role become one. Stanislavski writes, "But if you are sure of the limits of true art, and of the organic laws of nature, you will not go astray, you will be able to understand your mistakes and correct them" (1936, 24). Thus, we must correct our mistakes and revive true art by allowing the queer actor to prepare.

Appendix A:

Pre-Workshop Survey

What is your desired pseudonym? (fake name used to keep your identity anonymous) Ex: Tim, Jane, Susie, Paul, etc…

Jess

How old are you?

23

How do you identify in terms of gender/sexuality? Ex: trans, lesbian, queer, nonbinary, etc…

Bisexual, Queer

What kind of theatre artist are you?

Actress

What drives you to be a performer?

I have always been drawn to stories and making meaning out of them. It teaches me what it is to be human and how to understand others who are different than I am.

What kinds of actor training have you done? Ex: Meisner, Viewpoints, Suzuki, etc…

Meisner, Viewpoints, Suzuki, Laban, Stanislavsky, Rasas

Do you have any experience with Stanislavsky-based actor training? Was it positive or negative? Elaborate

Yes. I would say the experience was mostly positive. However, it also is one of the most commonly taught methods of actor training so it has become repetitive and not as useful as other methods may be to me.

What method of actor training resonates with you the most and why?

Laban movement actor training resonates with me the most. I believe that in acting the body and the mind must be fully connected in order to fulfill a role. Personally, I have trouble with feeling comfortable in my body and Laban movement helps me to release any tension or self consciousness. It gives me a freedom in both body and mind to explore a character and their surroundings.

Have you been able to be openly queer in the actor-training space?
No, I have never felt comfortable openly identifying as queer in an actor-training space.

Has your actor-training ever enhanced or suppressed your queerness? Elaborate
I think my actor-training has suppressed my queerness. So much of acting is based on boxing someone into a type based on their look. I've always been casted [sic] in hyper-feminine heterosexual roles because that's how others see me. Although there have been times where I did want to identify openly as queer, I felt that it might change the way people saw me or casted [sic] me. In addition, actors are always taught to lean into their assigned "type" and embrace it, which did in turn suppress who I feel I truly am.

During acting exercises where you are paired with a member of the opposite gender-expression, do you feel pressured to perform heteronormativity? Why or why not?
Yes, I feel that performing heteronormativity is ingrained in me at this point. Even in acting or improv exercises, so much of it is gendered where everyone should be male or female/husband or wife. Scenarios and given circumstances often revolve around a nuclear family or a heteronormative relationship. It feels uncomfortable to rebel or question these constraints. It's easier to simply perform how I'm expected to than to question it and be seen as difficult.

Do you feel seen as a queer-identified person in the actor-training space? Why or why not?
No I don't, and I feel that part of that is my own fault for not asserting myself more forcefully as a queer person. But I also question why I even have to have the responsibility of doing so when non-queer people don't have to worry about being seen or represented. Before I can even be seen, I wish I could feel safe in the actor-training space and I haven't ever really felt that before.

Have you ever felt pressured to perform heteronormativity in the actor-training space? Why or why not?
Yes. I feel that the kind of roles I want to play - complex, multi-dimensional leading women - require me to perform heteronormativity and perform it better than others do. There simply aren't enough queer roles being written that carry the same kind of weight and complexity. The queer roles that are available are largely used as side characters or comic relief rather than fully fleshed-out beings. Heteronormativity is

rewarded in theatre and in acting, and unfortunately stepping outside of that changes the way I am viewed and casted [sic].

In terms of your personal identity (sexuality, gender, race, etc), do you see these parts of yourself being enhanced by your actor training? Why or why not?
No. Rather, I see those parts of my identity either being repressed or commodified. As a woman of color, I have never felt my ethnicity being enhanced. Instead, I feel tokenized and stereotyped. It's familiar for people of color in acting to be told that we are lucky because our backgrounds are becoming more popular in casting and media. When race and ethnicity is viewed as a trend to capitalize from, it feels uncomfortable to be complicit in that. In terms of gender and sexuality, I also feel largely repressed. There is pressure to perform as a feminine straight woman even if I do not identify that way.

Have you worked under any openly queer theatre practitioners in your actor-training? Did this change your experience?
No

What allows you to feel liberated in the actor-training space?
Trust between all actors and mentors/directors. Part of that trust is knowing that everyone respects my identity, space, and safety. Mutual respect is of the utmost importance and allows me to feel most liberated.

Have you and your queer identity felt liberated in the actor-training space? Elaborate.
No, I haven't felt liberated while identifying as openly queer. I have felt liberated as a woman or as a person perhaps, but never as a bisexual Latina woman. Liberation can only be achieved for me through a sense of safety and respect. I've never felt fully safe or respected in an actor-training space to feel liberated in all of my identities.

Pre-Workshop Survey

What is your desired pseudonym? (fake name used to keep your identity anonymous) Ex: Tim, Jane, Susie, Paul, etc…
Claire

How old are you?
24

How do you identify in terms of gender/sexuality? Ex: trans, lesbian, queer, nonbinary, etc…
Cis female bisexual

What kind of theatre artist are you?
Absurdist

What drives you to be a performer?
Storytelling through a medium designed to cultivate conversation

What kinds of actor training have you done? Ex: Meisner, Viewpoints, Suzuki, etc…
Beckett (voice training etc), viewpoints, and Brechtian techniques

Do you have any experience with Stanislavsky-based actor training? Was it positive or negative? Elaborate
One tester class, trigging [sic] to mental health issues, never went back

What method of actor training resonates with you the most and why?
Commedia dell'arte as leading with intention and having an archetype to improv around is resonant with me having a basis as a writer

Have you been able to be openly queer in the actor-training space?
Yes

During acting exercises where you are paired with a member of the opposite gender-expression, do you feel pressured to perform heteronormativity? Why or why not?
Has your actor-training ever enhanced or suppressed your queerness? Elaborate
Enhanced in the sense I lean on queer identity to push further issues into narratives

Do you feel seen as a queer-identified person in the actor-training space? Why or why not?
Yes, but still being female presenting and at that femme presenting leads to issues of being taken seriously far more than queerness has in my experience..

Have you ever felt pressured to perform heteronormativity in the actor-training space? Why or why not?

Coming from a country where same sex marriage is a hugely devising [sic] issue (not becoming legal until 2020), I feel pressure to 'mask' until I am sure the space I am in is safe and not likely to turn hostile

In terms of your personal identity (sexuality, gender, race, etc), do you see these parts of yourself being enhanced by your actor training? Why or why not?
I feel my femininity is suppressed as it is often linked to comedy or youth, presenting as more masculine in acting spaces means I can switch tone as needed in life for safety or to be heard

Have you worked under any openly queer theatre practitioners in your actor-training? Did this change your experience?
Yes, it ignited my desire to succeed as it was visibly possible

What allows you to feel liberated in the actor-training space?
Clear boundaries being established upon entering

Have you and your queer identity felt liberated in the actor-training space? Elaborate.
Not that I can recall

Appendix B:
Post-Workshop Survey

What is your pseudonym? (Claire or Jess)

Jess

What were your thoughts/feelings like going into the workshop? (nervous, excited, confused, etc..)

I felt a bit nervous and unsure what to expect.

Did anything about the workshop surprise you?

What surprised me about the workshop was how comfortable I felt. It was very different from other workshops or classes.

Did you have an enhanced understanding of yourself (or your queerness) after the workshop? Why or why not?

Yes I felt very accepted and my queerness felt celebrated. It was very freeing to experience and acknowledge that.

Did you learn anything about yourself (or your queer identity) during the workshop?

I've learned that talking about my queer identity is necessary and healing for me. I have spent most of my life feeling repressed and not wanting to express my queerness in case it made others uncomfortable. However, during this workshop I felt like my authentic self and I want to bring that into my daily life.

In your opinion, would you like to see these exercises implemented in a classroom/training setting? Why or why not?

Yes. I think it would be helpful for all actors and it would create environments that truly are safe and accepting for all.

Which exercise (s) did you find to be the most effective/impactful? Elaborate

The exercise that I found most impactful was when we journaled using the Stanislavsky "What If" technique. It was so powerful for me to use this technique and ask what I would want if I could have anything. It showed me the many minute ways in which I limit myself and my queerness and how I can work to eliminate those limitations.

Which exercise (s) did you find to be the least effective/impactful? Elaborate

I would say the exercise in which we remembered a moment in which our queerness was celebrated. I still found it to be extremely powerful but if I had to rank them it would be in that way.

Did you feel liberated during the workshop? If yes, what allowed you to feel liberated?

Yes I felt very liberated. I think the environment just felt very safe and like there was no pressure to be or perform a certain way. There were no expectations of me. It felt like I was acknowledged and celebrated and that helped me feel liberated.

Did you feel inhibited during the workshop? If yes, elaborate.

No.

If these exercises were done in the actor training space at large, would you feel safer to explore queer possibilities in your acting?

I do think it may be intimidating at first in a larger group but it would help me feel safer to explore queer possibilities. Once these exercises are implemented and seen as a standard, everyone would be open to explore including myself.

What would you have changed about the workshop/exercises?

I feel like more knowledge about the research on Stanislavsky and other techniques would be helpful

What were your thoughts/feelings like after the workshop?

I felt very happy and pleased to discover new things about myself.

How was this workshop different from the actor training you have received previously?

Actor training in the past has always felt rigid, stressful, and full of expectations I felt pressured to meet. Because of that I am always tense and apprehensive. This workshop was different because it felt like I could simply be who I am and that was enough. I was able to explore without fearing failure and it was beautiful to experience.

Do you believe this queered version of the Stanislavsky System would be more effective to your liberation as an actor than the original method? Elaborate

Yes I feel that this queered version has awakened something in me. Stanislavsky is what I've worked with for the majority of my training and it already has begun to feel

repetitive and tired. This queered version actually helped me see new possibilities and I found it more effective.

How would you describe the workshop/training environment? (uncomfortable, friendly, hostile, clunky, etc.)
The environment was extremely calming and accepting.

What will you take away from this experience, if anything?
I will now feel more free to express my queerness and celebrate it rather than hide it away. I won't limit myself in daily life or in acting.

Post-Workshop Survey

What is your pseudonym? (Claire or Jess)
Claire

What were your thoughts/feelings like going into the workshop? (nervous, excited, confused, etc..)
Very nervous are [sic] performative spaces intimidate me

Did anything about the workshop surprise you?
How comfortable I was! Sam created a safe and peaceful environment from the get go

Did you have an enhanced understanding of yourself (or your queerness) after the workshop? Why or why not?
I feel like I understand how to root my queerness into queering practices if that makes sense. I've always understood my queerness, and theatrical practice- two separate entities. But this allowed me to seeing queering as a creative bridge of the two

Did you learn anything about yourself (or your queer identity) during the workshop?
I feel like I understand how to root my queerness into queering practices if that makes sense. I've always understood my queerness, and theatrical practice- two separate entities. But this allowed me to seeing queering as a creative bridge of the two

In your opinion, would you like to see these exercises implemented in a classroom/training setting? Why or why not?
Yes! It grants queerness an academic space that is not exploitive or purely theory based. Practical queering

Which exercise (s) did you find to be the most effective/impactful? Elaborate
Reimagining the monologue with a queer backstory was fantastic. Very similar to the backwards to forwards writing style in the sense a whole persons being is distilled into a moment

Which exercise (s) did you find to be the least effective/impactful? Elaborate
Probably the silent time to collect within ourself as I find that sort of excersise personally triggering in terms of mental illness but not in an uncomfortable sense that I could not have voiced it would that it get too much

Did you feel liberated during the workshop? If yes, what allowed you to feel liberated?
Yes, I felt a sense of validity in my stance and my approach to character that allowed my queerness to interact with my art far more openly

Did you feel inhibited during the workshop? If yes, elaborate.
Not at all actually.

If these exercises were done in the actor training space at large, would you feel safer to explore queer possibilities in your acting?
Absolutly[sic] without question

What would you have changed about the workshop/exercises?
Had multiple! Or used the same monologue with a handful of actors. If you were interested in the dramaturgy or queering then perhaps inviting gender identity into the space more- choosing a monologue of a character to whom you do not share a gender identity

What were your thoughts/feelings like after the workshop?
More confidence in the self and a genuine sense of ease in moving forward with my craft

How was this workshop different from the actor training you have received previously?
I have no actor training, apologises

Do you believe this queered version of the Stanislavsky System would be more effective to your liberation as an actor than the original method? Elaborate
Oh absolutely. Taking from a writer's perspective you have this whole world of a character and you show 40 mins of them to the world. You the audience don't know their favourite flavour of tea, or which order they pack the cutlery drawer because that's how their grandparents did it- this version of the excersise felt like that. Life into a character rather than the standard Stanislavsky which can feel a little disingenuous

How would you describe the workshop/training environment? (uncomfortable, friendly, hostile, clunky, etc.)
Friendly and inviting

What will you take away from this experience, if anything?
How to use one's own queerness to develop a character in new readings not first seen

Appendix C:
Unedited Transcript

The Magic IS:

Jess:

"I think I am a people pleaser. I want to please people. I want to fulfill their needs, rather than my own needs. I think if I lived for myself and there were no barriers, I wouldn't have to think about that. I would just be able to say whatever I wanted. I wouldn't have to worry if I sounded dumb or if I sounded like I didn't know what I was talking about because I'd just have that confidence in myself in a world that would understand me and wouldn't judge me by what I am saying. I also feel like I wouldn't ever have to look in a mirror because the idea of what I am supposed to look like would never even cross my mind. I feel like growing up, and even now, as a young adult, I am constantly thinking about what is empowering to me. Is it wearing makeup? Is it not wearing makeup? Is it showing skin? Is it not showing skin? And I feel sometimes trapped because I feel like there's nothing I can do that will actually be empowering because all of these constraints don't allow for that. I wouldn't have to think about that in a world where I can just be free. That's the main take-away from this, I would just be free. I wouldn't have any fears. I would take every opportunity and I would just live for myself every day. And, sometimes I feel like, as a woman in this world, I have to be very defensive, and I always have to feel like people are going to hurt me or objectify me, I always feel very angry. I think without that anger, I could just focus on myself and my happiness. Also, something very important to me is when I would create art, it wouldn't be like a way of thinking, oh this has to be better than this person's, or this has to be impactful, or this has to change the world. It would just be art that is for me and that brings me pleasure."

Claire:

"I think I would be less likely to say sorry before I even expel an idea into the space. In a lot of workshop settings, I will almost apologize for having an idea and I think I wouldn't do that. I also think I would be taller, just-I think I would. I think I wouldn't be limited with ambition in spaces, I would be far more willing to say the idea and get it out there. Rather than hoping someone else says something similar that I can tangent to a better idea. Rather than just letting my ideas exist as themselves in their own space."

Empowered Memory:

Jess:

"I basically wrote about a moment when I was a freshman in high school, it was outside my theatre classroom. We were sitting outside. It was

me and this girl. I was a freshman and she was a senior. She was openly a lesbian. So we were supposed to be rehearsing our scene, but we were not. We were sitting down talking. I remember sitting on the cement, feeling it on my fingers, it was rough. We had our backs against the wall. Outside the theatre classroom, there's the parking lot and grass and a fence and on the other side, you can see the traffic going by. So we're sitting outside and I was listening to her voice and the sound of other people rehearsing, my teacher talking in the background. But, in that space, together with her, that was the first time, I ever said out loud, "Oh, I think I like girls." I felt like it was just us two out there in that little space, I could say whatever I wanted. She was so receptive of it and accepting of me. It made me feel like I can tell other people and it's a good thing, it's a beautiful thing. You could hear the cars passing by. I could taste my mouth being dry from nervousness and the smell of gas and exhaust from cars going by. So yeah, that's a good memory for me."

Claire:

"Mine was a Panic! at the Disco Concert. It was me and my best friend from school and my best friend from university had gone. It was a whole queer group, gaying about, having a gay old time-if you will. It got to the "Girls / Girls / Boys" song. Before we went in, there were girls handing out little colored hearts based on what section you were going to be standing in. So whenever it came to that song, everyone put them up and there was a rainbow flag going around the stadium, and everyone was screaming the lyrics. No one was being like, I don't want to sing this song because it's the gay song. Everyone was just in it and fully screaming, going for it. You could smell people spilling their beer and going all over the place. You could feel the crunch of the confetti and smell the really horrible t-shirt smell of new merch, that and beer and cigarettes, it was incredible. The screaming of everyone saying the lyrics at the same time and no one being weird about it, it was an amazing experience."

Liberatory Analysis/Queer Imaginings:

Jess:

"I have always felt very connected to Ophelia, I have never been sure why exactly that is. I basically wrote that I think part of it has to do with how much she gives herself to the people in her life. She is completely surrounded by men and would do anything for them. In the process, she suffers greatly and is used over and over until her death. I feel like she's isolated by Hamlet, by her father, by her brother and when I was doing this monologue, it's the one where she's mourning Hamlet because she has just been in a scene with him where he has just gone crazy on her. She says this great man, this

amazing man, this man everyone admires has completely lost it and he's lost to the world and he's lost to me, as well. I was thinking about what her life would be like if she were able to be free if she were able to have women around her that were friends, or lovers and that could show her that love is not about suffering. She could live for herself and claim agency and strength. Instead of seeing Hamlet as an amazing person, she could think about what is my own potential. Why am I suffering by being weighed down by him? What if she's seeing his downfall and instead of empathizing with him and further entangling herself with him, she could run away. There could be a happy ending and she can choose however she wants to live."

Claire:

"Martha and George are a married couple in it, but she assumes very much the stereotypically masculine role in the relationship, Her father owns the university that her husband works for, that's how she got him the job. She sets him up for everything, he's just too creative to be held down by things. It's the 60's, everyone hates women and all that fun stuff. They've just come back from a party where a new faculty member had just brought his new wife, they're freshly married, still in the honeymoon phase. She's trying to get a feel of the wife, where she's standing with the husband. They all leave her for a while and she's annoyed they've all left and they come back and say it was a joke. I sort of imagined what if Martha and George were almost beards to each other in a sense. Both of them wanted to stay in the communities they were working in but knew they couldn't if they were othered. So they worked together to have a presentably, heteronormative relationship. There's this whole thing about, do they or do they not have a child? The child is there as a grounding of, look at this kid we may or may not have, we are so straight. The reason why she's pressing the wife so hard, is to be like, are you, also...? Do we have an understanding here? Whenever everyone is out of the room, instead of being annoyed everyone has left her, she can actually take a moment to chill and take the masks off and be as batshit as she wants and unwind without having to have different faces on for each person in the room. It's flipped from annoyance to relief."

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