



Playing with Reality:
Method Acting in Theory and Practice

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Introduction

Lee Strasberg once said: “Human beings are affected unconsciously by a variety of impulses going on inside them: to express one of them can lead to a moment of reality on stage. How ticklish, sensitive, wonderful our impulses are: how can we make the bird do what we want?” (qtd. in Hirsch 131). He further emphasised: “Acting is the most human of the art.” Method acting involves an actor personally in the art of acting, creating a link between the fictional character and the real human being in order to express reality on stage. This humanity on stage is what transforms a play into reality before the eyes of the audience.

While this aim is universally agreed upon, the means by which it is reached vary. The chasm between theory and practice is even further widened by scholarly misinterpretations: The original Russian work, which provides the basis of the Method, is often only dealt with in translations, and those in turn are often shortened. Method acting, as presented by scholars, does not necessarily have to coincide completely with the actual approach by actors. After all, despite there being a common method to it, acting is a highly individual art, of which some aspects cannot be generalised easily.

Such problems will be dealt with in this paper, which proceeds along two different types of research. The first and considerably larger part deals with the theoretical framework of Method acting. The development of Method acting and its underlying theory is analysed on the basis of secondary sources, i.e. scholarly interpretations. It also includes a historical approach to the foundations of the Actors Studio, the school that is mainly credited with teaching Method acting nowadays. The theoretical approach is followed by an analysis according to primary sources, i.e. the Method as it is understood by students of Method acting and the way professional Method actors implement the theory in their daily work. The methodology in the first part is thus based on theoretical research using secondary sources

and, later, primary, i.e. more subjective sources. It is guided by the main research question of the paper: What are the characteristics of Method acting and its relationship to Stanislavsky's original System as characterised by secondary sources, and how is Method acting actually approached in practice?

The second part is based on empirical research which deals with a sub-question resulting from the main research: How is Method acting approached in regard to Shakespearean plays, and is it suitable for performance based on poetic, formal language? In other words, this part analyses the relationship of a script's use of language on the overall credibility of the performance and determines whether or not the Method's aim can be fulfilled regardless of this particular language. This is especially significant for the practical approach to Method acting. The tradition of the Actors Studio does not include Shakespeare for various reasons; however, it is questionable whether this tradition is justified. This then represents the empirical part of the study, based on the theory of performance analysis in *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies*.

Part I: Theory and Techniques of Method Acting

Stanislavsky's System

Contemporary Method acting, as taught and practised by the Actors Studio, originally stems from Stanislavsky's System. Caught in the conventions of early 19th century Russian theatre, he longed for an entirely realistic acting style. By systemising what he saw in great actors, he hoped to develop a method that every actor, not only the most talented ones, could use in order to excel at their work and in order to make the audience believe in what they see on stage. This "scrupulous realism in performance and production design would issue a challenge to the artificial conventions that were strangling Russian theatre" (Hirsch 20) with its "[c]ommercial glossiness, theatrical fakery, [and] narcissism" (25) at the time he started developing his System. His theatrical revolution would occupy him for the rest of his life. It gained exceeding importance after the Moscow Art Theatre was founded by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko: "In less than a decade, and certainly by the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, they had evolved into theatrical elder statesmen temporarily overshadowed by upstarts who denounced them as dry-as-dust conservatives" (41).

The Russian audience was especially susceptible to such new theatrical conventions after the revolution, since they "looked to the theatre for something other than entertainment or temporary relief, wanting instead to confront, through the mirror of dramatic art, their own deepest impulses" (49). In the uncertain and new society in post-revolutionary Russia, theatregoers thus perceived theatre as more than just pure entertainment. Stanislavsky's newly proposed system, against the grain of theatrical conventions, fit quite well into the general atmosphere of the country. The audiences were more open towards it because "Russian theatre [...] was as polarized as Russian politics: the forces of the old and the forces of the new faced each other behind a volley of theory and pronouncement" (47).

It is difficult to put Stanislavsky's System into exact words and there are undoubtedly many different interpretations of it. This is partly due to the fact that Stanislavsky himself "never deemed his System or his books complete; they remain dynamic, experimental explorations of the unique communicative power of theatre" (Carnicke 16). However, it is commonly agreed that Stanislavsky works on the grounds of two major assumptions.

Firstly, he believes "that mind and body represent a psychological continuum" (ibid). Mind and body work together in various ways to achieve perfection. As a consequence, the body has to function perfectly, without any tensions whatsoever, in order for the mind to work properly as well. On this basis, "[p]erformance demands a state of physical relaxation, in which the actor uses only enough muscular tension to accomplish what is necessary" (17).

Secondly, he points out "that successful acting places the creative act itself in the laps of the audience" (ibid). This suggests that it does not rely only on the actor. Instead, it is his responsibility to create and maintain a proper relationship with the audience by "remain[ing] essentially dynamic and improvisatory during performance." This state of acting, which he calls 'experiencing', is related to states of mind such as "'inspiration', 'creative moods', the activation of the 'subconscious'" and stresses the importance of the actor's living through and feeling the character he is portraying. This means that the actor does not only have to portray the character, but, in order to portray him realistically, needs to actually live and experience what the character is experiencing as a real person. Stanislavsky's whole System essentially centres on this state of experiencing, as he considers it the most essential part of the art of acting.

The System can then be divided into two main categories: techniques to create and maintain the state of experiencing, and techniques for character creation and work on roles.

In the first category, “[t]he actor develops a theatrical *sense of self* by learning to control the skills of *concentration, imagination and communication*” (18). To develop such a sense of self, one first has to train those three areas.

This process of concentration begins with maintaining “total mental and physical concentration on stage”, a state that he calls “*public solitude*” (ibid, emphasis in the original). This psychophysical process relies on the sharpening of the actor’s senses. Next to the physical senses – the visual, aural, tactile, olfactory and gustatory parts – Stanislavsky also includes an affective sensory aspect. Actors need to be trained to be consciously aware of their sensations. For this purpose, he develops a number of exercises that supposedly help an actor develop a sensory awareness and, by this, improve his concentration. Another method to train the actor’s concentrations is called “*circles of attention*” (20, emphasis in the original) of varying sizes. This consists of the actor’s focusing only on the objects that can be found within a specific circle that has been determined beforehand. At the early stage of the exercise, the circle of attention is small, but is expanded as the exercise progresses and the actor’s concentration improves.

Imagination encompasses “an actor’s capacity to treat fictional circumstances as if real, to visualise the details of a character’s world specifically, and to daydream or fantasise about the events of the play” (ibid). Visualisation, then, is the core element of imagination. This process is trained “by strengthening inner vision” and by employing what Stanislavsky calls “the *magic if*” (21, emphasis in the original), a mind experiment that relies on the actor’s relationship to objects, real and imaginary. This relationship is changed by adding a different component to the object which, then, affects the direct relationship between actor and object.

Communication is essential to Stanislavsky’s action theory. It is concerned with “interaction amongst scene partners and between actors and audience” (ibid). Such interactions are fed by words, but also by the play’s non-verbal subtext “that describes

anything a character thinks or feels but does not, or cannot, put into words.” Unlike dialogue, subtext is communicated “through non-verbal means (body language, the cast of the eyes, intonations and pauses.” To train this communication, Stanislavsky emphasises the importance of “rays of energy that carry communication” and trains actors to recognise as well as manipulate those. Non-verbal communication is also trained using silent improvisation, i.e. improvisations of “situations that involve naturally silent moments.” Those are later followed by improvisation on verbal moments.

The second group of character creation is divided into techniques focusing on “imagination and intellect” (23) and techniques that “rely on physicalisation.” However, all those can only take place after careful reading of the whole play.

Imaginative and intellectual techniques involve “*affective cognition and the scoring of actions*” (ibid, emphasis in the original). Affective cognition is a “cognitive analysis” that requires a collective approach – i.e. the play is divided up into several elements which are discussed by the whole cast – and an individual approach, i.e. the “actors work individually by visualising distinct moments from their characters’ lives, thus imaginatively emphasising with them.” The collective approach always precedes the individual approach.

Physical techniques involve “*the scoring of actions*” (ibid, emphasis in the original). Because physical action is the basis of a play and depicts the character’s motivation, the actors first have to learn to make a distinction “between actions and activities and [learn] to execute them” (24). To do this, the actor has to break the play into ‘bits’, wherein “each bit embodies a single action and begins whenever the action of the scene shifts, not with the playwright’s division of the play. For each *bit*, the actor first examines the given circumstances and describes the character’s situation in an adjective.” Working with his notion of his psychophysical continuum, Stanislavsky assumes that emotions are the natural consequence of action. If an actor focuses on executing the single actions defining his

character in the play, “the character’s emotions [arise] as a result.” The actor’s focus clearly has to lie on the actions instead of the result, the emotions. Following up on this, the actor has to “[discover] and then [perform] the logical sequence of physical actions necessary to carry out the inner, purposeful actions of scene” (26). This sequence is called ‘score’. One needs to distinguish the score of physical actions and the score of actions: “*The score of physical actions* includes the many external moves and strategies that the actor needs to carry out the overarching purposeful action, that has been identified as necessary to the scene. The larger *score of actions* gives all the inner and purposeful actions that the character carries out from the beginning to the end of the play.” Again, Stanislavsky works with non-verbal acting in order to physicalise a scene, which is not to be confused with pantomime.

The last part of character creation is the active analysis. Here, the actor has to identify the bare bones and structure of the play by “[reading] a play as if it were a system of clues that imply potential performance” (27). The facts derived from such an analysis may be obvious, but they may also require a skilled in-depth literary analysis. In active analysis, “the actor learns to read each line not only for semantic meaning, but also for style, literary images and rhythms, which betray the action of the scene and the personality of the character.” Those facts form an event, which in turn consists of “*action* (that *incites* or moves the scene forward) and the *counteraction* (that *resists* the scene’s forward momentum” (28, emphasis in the original). Active analysis, however, is actually meant to be active: the actors have to “test their understanding of how characters relate to and confront each other through improvisations of scenes in the play.”

To summarise, Stanislavsky’s system consists of intellectual as well as physical elements. It features concentration, imagination, communication, and – partly intellectual, partly active – literary analysis.

The Different Approaches to Method Acting

Scholars generally recognise three branches of Method acting, after the three teachers that are mainly recognised as having developed a certain standard in this type of acting. Those approaches are “Strasberg’s emphasis on the psychological [aspect], Adler’s on the sociological, and Meisner’s on the behavioural” (Krasner 129). The following section discusses those approaches on the basis of secondary sources; an in-depth analysis of Method acting according to primary sources is discussed in a later chapter.

While the three approaches to Method acting differ in some aspects, certain fundamental principles to define any kind of Method acting are generally agreed upon.

Vineberg compiled a list Method acting conventions in the following tenets:

1. The Method sees as the actor’s essential task the reproduction of recognizable reality – verisimilitude – on stage (or screen), based on an acute observation of the world.
2. The Method seeks to justify all stage behavior by ensuring that it is psychologically sound ... providing a unifying motivation for [a character’s] behavior.
3. It places a high premium on the expression of genuine emotion.
4. It identifies the actor’s own personality not merely as a model for the creation of character, but as the mine from which all psychological truth must be dug.
5. It encourages the use of improvisation as a rehearsal aid, and even in some cases as part of the performance, in an effort to keep acting spontaneous (and therefore lifelike).
6. It promotes intimate communication between actors in a scene, and therefore moves toward the performance ideal of a true ensemble.

7. It stresses the use of objects both for their symbolic value and as emissaries from the solid, material world.

8. Finally (though this last consideration is more often implied than stated), it demands an almost religious devotion on the part of an actor, based on ... the power of truth in acting. (qtd. in Bandelj 393)

This is reflected by David Krasner in the article “Strasberg, Adler and Meisner: Method Acting”, but he also pays attention to areas Vineberg does not mention. According to Krasner, the actor first of all has to be able to justify relationships. This is done by identifying the character’s motivation, which can be found through “*objectives, actions and intentions*” as well as “the character’s *super-objective*, or ‘*spine*’” (Krasner 131, emphasis in the original). The latter must be urgent and includes creating obstacles to the objective. This “must emerge from *relaxation, concentration* and the *creative selection* (choices) of objectives.” The subtext serves the objective. An emphasis has to be put on “the specific *given circumstances* of the play, everything from period style and social fashion to the way a character behaves, lives and relates to other characters and situations.” The actor’s imagination is an important part of character creation. Method actors in general have to emphasise truthful behaviour and work “*moment-to-moment on impulsive*, talking and listening as if the events on stage are actually happening in the immediate present.” This means that “characterisation is not fixed, but a fluid and spontaneous response to events on stage.” Rehearsals require improvisation exercises, and the actor eventually has to “[*personalise*] the role, i.e. [he] draws from the self, from his or her emotional, psychological or imaginative reality, bringing into view aspects of one’s memories, life experiences and observations that correlate with the role” (132).

In Lee Strasberg’s approach to Method acting, he places his major focus on three of Stanislavsky’s principles, namely relaxation, concentration, and affective memory (134). The

actor has to work extensively on his internal skills using those principles. According to Strasberg, any blockage of expression or emotion the actor may experience will eventually be removed. This can only be achieved through continuous work and perfection of relaxation techniques. Concentration, another major focus of Strasberg's, relies mainly on exercises in sense-memory. In those, "[t]he actor recalls important events in their life, and then tries to remember only the sensual facts: touch, taste, sight, etc. The ability to recall senses stimulates the body rather than the mind, giving the actor greater visceral awareness and experience." Sense-memory exercises emphasise the recall of past experiences or even everyday activities. However, instead of simply imitating those, the actor has to "find the psychological motivation underlying the experience" (135). Another Strasberg exercise is the private moment, an exercise that trains the actor to publicly "experience feelings that, owing to inhibitions, they would otherwise not share." This private moment can have a decisive effect on the actor's performance. As Krasner puts it, "Strasberg uses an example of an actress whose voice was monotonous. In doing her private moment, he discovered that she enjoyed playing music when alone and would dance with 'abandon'. He then had the actress play the music she liked, and dance wildly on stage." This public experience of a private moment changed the actress's behaviour and voice permanently.

Affective memory deals with the actual release of emotions on stage. However, Strasberg points out that this is mainly "not emotional recall but [...] the actor's emotion on stage should never be really real. It always should be only *remembered* emotion" (136, emphasis in the original). This is to give the actor more control over the situation, since actual emotions can be very impulsive and unreliable and might lead to unintended consequences. The remembered emotions are past emotions. Therefore, affective memory preparation remembers specific past experiences in a manner that actually evokes the emotions of the given situation. The emotional reaction may have changed, but with the build-up of many

different remembered emotions “the actor becomes emotionally available, prepared to respond instantly and expressively with feelings and passions.”

Stella Adler emphasises “a play’s given circumstances, the actor’s imagination and physical actions” (139). This essentially means that “the source of inspiration is not purely psychological or past experiences (as in Strasberg), but the actors’ imagination as they relate to the given circumstances of the play.” This approach can be implemented by trying to understand a characters’ life. The actor has to do research concerning the circumstances within the play – time period, character’s profession, etc. – and by this get a feeling for the character. The background and the circumstances of the role have to appeal to the actor intellectually, but mainly emotionally. In order to achieve this, “if the actions, words or events of the play seem lifeless to the actor, then the actor must create another set of circumstances that correspond to the events of the play, but create excitement and passion internally” (140).

Adler suggests several techniques for personalising a role. Those include “to personalise the experience” (ibid) and “paraphrasing the text” (141). Stella’s source of inspiration does not come from the actor’s personal life, but from “the world of the play itself”, thus placing an emphasis on the given circumstances of the play. Adler also incorporates a method from Stanislavsky’s later work, “the method of physical action.” In this, the actor has to “[draw] from the active doing and performing of actual tasks.” Again, the actor has to find the justification within the given circumstances and the play’s ruling idea. Not only actions, but basically all “the things said and done on stage” have to be justified in such a manner.

Sanford Meisner, on the other hand, focuses on “behaviour, relationships and the reality of doing” (142). In this sense, he stresses the reality of action and reaction: an actor must not only act out or imitate his behaviours; he must actually carry out the actions as if they were real. To teach the actors to find such an emphasis, he uses repetition exercises in which the actors “verbalise what they perceive in the other actor”, i.e. the other actor’s action or reaction. This is one starting point of the actor’s complete understanding of the relationships on stage because they soon start to “observe the scene-partner’s emotions, feelings and thoughts” (144).

The next stage includes improvisatory exercises. In those, one actor has a real “independent activity.” The other actor has to have “an ‘objective’ that relates to actor A.” This leads to the actors’ reading each others’ behaviours, thus reacting to them. Meisner puts a strong emphasis on impulses, which “is a response to internal or external stimuli. As the actor receives the stimuli, they then feed it to the imagination and personal associations. The actor responds by acting on the stimuli, creating an ‘impulsive’ behaviour that emerges truthfully and spontaneously from reactions rather than from pre-planned behaviour” (145). The impulsive is then the cause of all truthful behaviour and interpretations that might result from them. His exercises are designed to establish real relationships between the actors on stage.

Both Adler and Strasberg stress “the belief in truthful behaviour, self-exploration (whether psychological or sociological) and respect for acting as art” (142), whereas Meisner’s main emphasis is the reality of actions. However, although all use quite different approaches, they “search for the reality that must underlie a quality performance” (147). The different aspects of Method acting do not exclude each other; they can function together. Krasner concludes that “Method acting, when properly used, is holistic, enabling the actor to perform on several levels with conviction and confidence.”

Historical Development of the Actors Studio

The Actors Studio in New York is the place that is most associated with the development and teaching of Method acting. Stanislavsky's influence, however, did not only take place in a theoretical sense: It was Stanislavsky personally who showed the American population the need of having Method to stick to in theatre.

Stanislavsky came to America in the 1920s, and the overall situation there made the people very susceptible to his words. At this time, there was a flourish of original American arts, including "writers, composers, and painters [...] discovering distinctive American style and subjects" (Hirsch 51). However, there was still a certain cultural inferiority to European art. Despite America's flourish of arts in general, they hadn't been very established yet. The American theatre was finally able to rely on "authentic American originals" (52), but without "a true repertory company, a band of players who had the benefits of similar training, years of practical experience in working together, a body of distinguished plays to draw from, and agreed-upon aims and ideals" (53). The only companies that might have come close to a repertory company were the Provincetown Players and the Theatre Guild. However, at the time, the Provincetown Players dissolved, and the Theatre Guild had "no fundamental, sustaining ideas about theatre."

Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre then came to such a susceptible environment, where arts gradually gained more importance in society. The Russian actors had clear advantages over the American ones: "Stanislavsk[y] had been instructing his actors in his System for over fifteen years and so the performances Americans saw had an even greater stylistic consistency and a deeper and more secure inner life than the premiere performances of these plays had had" (54). They played with "vitality and spontaneity", and the characters they presented were "wracked by neuroses – characters with inner lives far richer and more troubled than any that had yet appeared on the American stage" (56f).

The Moscow Art Theatre had a very different attitude towards acting in general. The Theatre Guild, admittedly, had great actors, but their flaw was that they were more focused on themselves, their progress (53). They were thus more devoted to themselves than to the art of the theatre. To the Russian actors, on the other hand, "a repertory theatre meant not [...] a

company of commonplace actors who couldn't make it on their own, but [...] a company where every actor [...] performed with authority" (55). Lacking such a repertory company, America might have had good actors, but they all had very individual, different styles; American actors lacked the Russians' uniformity.

Needless to say, the reality of the Russians' performances amazed and excited the American audiences. After two seasons of performing in such an inspiring, susceptible environment, however, the Moscow Art Theatre had to return to their country. Only two remained to teach Stanislavsky's System to the American actors.

Richard Boleslavski was the main figure to instruct American actors in the System. At first, this happened in the American Laboratory Theatre, originally called the Theatre Arts Institute, aimed at "translating Stanislavsk[y]'s ideas into an American idiom" (59). When Boleslavski was approached to teach at this school, he agreed upon three main principles upon which it was to be based:

1. This theatre must grow here by itself and must get its roots into American soil.
2. It must begin slowly, training young Americans for the stage in all its departments.
3. It must be recognized and organized as a living social force, recreating itself each generation from the thoughts and material of its own times. (59-60)

The studies at the American Laboratory Theatre were divided into two clear stages. The first stage included "diction, voice production, and body rhythm. Only after a year of classroom exercises and practical study did the school evolve into a workshop of scenes and play production" (60). The school's broad curriculum, designed to stimulate the actor on both a physical and an intellectual level, also included "art, music, speech, phonetics, ballet, and the history of theatre" (63).

Boleslavski himself focused mainly on lectures, leaving the practical classroom teaching to the other teachers. He focused on “[c]oncentration, memory of emotion, dramatic action, characterization, observation, and rhythm” (ibid), acting upon the principle that “acting is a high and exacting art that demands control of the body, the will, the intellect, the emotions, and, crucially, the soul.” By developing soul, or imagination, exercises which were based upon “relaxation, concentration, and training [of] the affective memory” (64), he stressed the connection between “the actor’s internal and external tools.”

Already at the beginning of his teaching career in America, Boleslavski had emphasised that there were fundamental cultural and social differences between the Russian and the American theatres, and that therefore “American actors could not become like the Russians they had admired merely by studying Stanislavsk[y]’s System” (59). Nevertheless, he managed to bring the System closer to the American actors, and thus gave them a unified method of preparation to work with. However, the American Laboratory Theatre still “presented plays by foreign playwrights acted by students trained primarily by Russians” (65). The theatre therefore failed to become a truly American theatre, i.e. a theatre that had its roots in American society. Boleslavski later left the Laboratory Theatre for a mediocre Hollywood career. Where the theatre might have failed in achieving and establishing Boleslavski’s original principles, it still served as an inspiration for certain actors to start anew, to finally found “a theatre devoted to the production of new, socially significant American plays of literary merit performed by a company of actors trained in an American adaptation of Stanislavsk[y]’s System” (66).

To establish a common basis of acting, inspired both by the Moscow Art Theatre and the American Laboratory Theatre, the Group Theatre was founded in 1931 by Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford and the man who is nowadays mostly associated with Method acting: Lee Strasberg (71). They combined their three very individual, different and difficult personal styles and personalities into one group, complementary to teach other: “Clurman’s brashness balanced by Strasberg’s and Crawford’s soberness, his public personality in

startling contrast to the privacy of theirs.” Due to their different temperaments, they all had different areas to focus on:

Clurman [...] became the Theatre’s spokesman, its chief public relations officer; given his academic background, he was its literary adviser, too, casting the deciding vote in the selection of plays. Strasberg, intensely interested in acting problems and in interpreting Stanislavsk[y]’s System, was placed in charge of actor training and directing. To Cheryl Crawford fell [...] the day-to-day administration, raising money, negotiating for theatres, and running interference between her to colleagues. (72)

The members of the Group Theatre were not chosen on the basis of auditions, but on the basis of personal interviews, emphasising the actors’ personalities rather than their abilities. The Group Theatre was primarily meant as “a theatrical experiment whose rules had not yet been clearly defined” (73). As a collective of different actors, different styles and different personalities, the Group had to face many problems on the way to, and while, working on their aim. The Group Theatre’s main focus then was on “developing a common technique through Strasberg’s instruction in Stanislavsk[y]’s System” (74).

Strasberg, as he was responsible for the training of the actors, put his main focus on affective memory and improvisation. This partly resulted from his own source of information concerning Stanislavsky’s System. He had attended the American Laboratory Theatre on an irregular basis, and therefore his focus was on Boleslavski’s lectures between 1923 and 1924. At this time, Boleslavski had still put a very strong emphasis on affective memory (75). He changed his focus in the years to come, when Stanislavsky himself had changed his focus from affective memory to the given circumstances, thus emphasising the play’s circumstances rather than the actor’s (64). However, Strasberg’s own experience with the

System was confined to the period where affective memory was the main focus of the System, which influenced his interpretation of the System enormously.

Affective memory and improvisation, for Strasberg, “[were] to liberate the actors from the text, to stimulate their imagination, and to coerce them into examining *their own feelings*” (76, emphasis added). Despite his enthusiasm for affective memory, many Group members criticised it strictly. Some saw it as a method that was extremely harmful for the psychological wellbeing of the actors, as it included sometimes painful digging into one’s past and, to their minds, did not always fulfil its purpose (77).

In the first year after founding the Group Theatre, Strasberg’s emphasis was on the actor’s preparation, i.e. “how the actor uses his past to place himself in the right mood for his role” (ibid). Those preparatory methods included sense memory and work on emotions. A year later, he emphasised “the play’s circumstances rather than the actor’s.” As a supplement to his own work, “gesture, mime, and the use of the voice and body were taught by experts.” On an ideological basis, the Group members were soon divided into “those who believed in the value of the inner work that was Strasberg’s specialty, and those primarily interested in training their voices and bodies to project their roles. Borrowing from Stanislavsk[y] the concept of the actor as his own instrument, the Group began to be divided about how that instrument could best be tuned” (77-78).

Those ideological differences were decisive obstacles to producing a company of actors that excelled in uniformity. This developed into a bigger problem when Stella Adler and Harold Clurman, at that time married, paid a visit to the country of origins of the method they used in the Group – and met Stanislavsky himself. Clurman soon went back to America, but Stella Adler remained in Russia “and, in the chance of a lifetime, studied with Stanislavsk[y] daily for a period of five weeks” (78). What she learned from Stanislavsky personally clashed extremely with Strasberg’s ideas since his focus had changed from

affective memory to the play's given circumstances. Stella Adler, quoted by Hirsch, says that Stanislavsky emphasised "the method of physical actions: how starting from the outside, from creating the outer line of a role, planning it in terms of a series of actions, would take you inside a character's mind. He led me to use the physical stage, the physical circumstances."

This System, unlike Strasberg's, proved to be far more effective to Stella Adler than the way the System was taught at the Group Theatre, and it was especially this studying under Stanislavsky personally that influenced the approach she later taught herself. After those five weeks with Stanislavsky, Adler was convinced that his actual approach to the System was the right one, which proved to be one of the most decisive clashes in the history of the Group Theatre. As Hirsch presents it:

Like an apostle to the Gentiles, Stella Adler returned to the Group to share what she had learned. "Stanislavsk[y] said we're doing it wrong," she announced, in what was to prove a historic confrontation.

"Stanislavsk[y] doesn't know," Strasberg bellowed. "*I know!*" (79)

There were, then, two sides the Group members could choose from: Adler's and Strasberg's, and taking a stand managed to alienate a lot of the members: "being on opposite sides of the affective memory standoff was enough to sustain a lifetime of animosity" (ibid). Despite those differences, the Group members, at least for a while, still managed to work together towards developing a realistic acting style. It was recognised in its full intensity by the public in 1935, when the Group had a breathtaking performance of *Waiting for Lefty*, written by Clifford Odets, one of the Group members. Unlike any performance in the past, the actors managed to seize the people in the audience in a way unparalleled before, inducing the audience to eventually leap to their feet and, just like the actors, cry for a strike (81). Odets, then, "was the first Group writer who really answered Clurman's call for socially alert

plays of literary value” (87), demanding “acting in which psychological realism is pushed to the heights of a lyric intensity” (95). This was exactly the kind of acting the Group has aspired to develop under Strasberg’s guidance.

Other plays by Odets followed in the years to come, but none of them as successful and intense as the plays he had written in 1935. With the 1935 plays, though, “the Group set a performing standard against which excellence in the American theatre continues to be measured” (99). Odets soon left for Hollywood, and the Group Theatre gradually began to dissolve. This, as well as frustration and anger resulting from strong, personal criticism with which they were attacked, eventually led to Strasberg’s and Crawford’s resignation in 1937 (105). Until 1941, Clurman still struggled to keep the Group Theatre alive. However, eventually it had to be closed due to “[financial] defeat; an erratic literary record; no big stars except for John Garfield; bitter internecine warfare about acting and politics; failure to establish a repertory structure, or a true theatre collective” (108). In the end, the Group Theatre failed on many levels, but it had managed to produce devoted and talented acting teachers that kept the Method alive:

Generation after generation, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner, Robert Lewis, Elia Kazan, and Morris Carnovsky have passed on to their students a deep regard for the actor’s art that they themselves acquired as part of their experience as Group members. Various interpretations, the spirit of the Group continues, in the classes of Stella Adler at her Conservatory, at the Neighborhood Playhouse which Sanford Meisner has directed for nearly fifty years, in the Strasberg Institutes in New York and Los Angeles, and in that most famous of all American acting places – where both the ideals of the Group and the lessons of Stanislavsk[y] are intently, passionately honored – the Actors Studio. (108-109)

The Actors Studio was not the immediate result of the Group's break-up. Yet another link was necessary between the Group Theatre and the foundation of the Actors Studio. This was Erwin Piscator's Dramatic Workshop, which was meant to be "a theatrical nucleus of course work and productions that perpetuated the Group's idealism" (118). The workshop involved many debates and a confrontation with different approaches to acting, such as Strasberg, Meisner and Adler, with whom Piscator thoroughly disagreed. Nevertheless Piscator instructed his students in his own acting theory. He had been largely influenced by working together with Bertold Brecht, whose ideas naturally clashed with Strasberg's. This Dramatic Workshop was very much unlike the Group Theatre: "In the Group, actors had been trained to work on their inner lives in order to animate their characters, and thereby to fulfill the playwright's intentions. Piscator, however, believed above all in a *director's* theatre" (119, emphasis in the original). Brecht's theory of alienation and Stanislavsky's System could not be combined in one workshop, and therefore Strasberg and Adler both left Piscator to instruct actors in the System. The Workshop, however, kept alive the spirit that had fuelled the Group Theatre, and eventually resulted in the foundation of the Actors Studio.

The Actors Studio, throughout the first eight years without a permanent location, first opened in September 1947 (121). The Actors Studio, as it has survived until today, "was founded by three Group Theatre alumni as a workshop for professional actors" (117). Those alumni were Elia Kazan, Cheryl Crawford, who had already been one of the Group founders, and Robert Lewis. Kazan and Lewis focused on teaching two different classes, based on the actors' experiences, while Crawford once again took care of administrative matters (122). At first, the main focus was not on scenes, as it came to be known for, but on exercises, with a strong focus on action. The experience-based division of students was dropped when Lewis left the Studio after the first year. There had been differences over the Studio's function, as it

was intended as a workshop rather than a producer. Those differences eventually made Lewis quit. This, in turn, presented a huge problem to Kazan, who was also a working director and was unable to teach full-time at the Studio. First having numerous other directors help him out temporarily, he soon invited Lee Strasberg to teach at the Studio in 1949.

The Studio soon became Strasberg's personal teaching domain, becoming Artistic Director in 1952 (158). However, he emphasised in all his thirty-five years of Studio work that "he was not a teacher but a moderator working along with Studio members in a close study of actors' problems. [He] made it clear that the Studio was not a school but a lab for actors who have already had voice and body training and who were now ready to do inner work on themselves" (124). His sessions would take place twice a week, and the emphasis would be the work on scenes, the development of the actor's inner work. Hirsch makes clear that Strasberg, more than anyone else, "has had a resounding impact on American acting, in films and television as well as theatre. Under Strasberg's artistic leadership, the Studio popularized the revolution in American acting that had begun in the Group and established a style that has come to be identified as quintessentially and uniquely American." In addition to the Actors Studio in New York, another Studio was established in Los Angeles (235).

The Actors Studio, just like the Group Theatre, naturally faced many problems, but managed to overcome them. One of the main problems was Strasberg's reluctance to allow other moderators in the Studio. This had devastating effects: when other moderators were asked to cover for Strasberg when he was ill, he was offended immensely. Soon, due to time constraints because of his own career, he eventually agreed to have guest moderators cover for him (170). However, none of them had Strasberg's authority, and it was obvious that they were only guests, not the original moderator. Strasberg chose the guest moderators with care:

At the time of his death, there were fifteen people Strasberg had approved as moderators, among them Shelley Winters, Frank Corsaro, Arthur Penn, Estelle

Parsons, Ellen Burstyn, Eli Wallach, Lee Grant, Vivian Nathan, and Elia Kazan. In Los Angeles, at Actors Studio West, there was another list, including Martin Ritt, Sydney Pollack, Martin Landau, Bruce Dern, Joanne Linville, and anyone from the New York list. These were the best and the brightest, the people who talked Lee's language, speaking the words he wanted spoken. (171)

All those moderators, again, had quite personal, different styles, but nonetheless they were most suitable to replace or supplement Strasberg during his absences.

Unlike the Group Theatre, with only a relatively short life span, the Actors Studio is still in use today. This is mainly because of some fundamental difference between the Group Theatre and the Actors Studio: "The Group produced plays, whereas the Actors Studio was intended as a workshop only, a place for actors to practice their craft apart from production concerns. [...] While the Group became the focus of the professional and personal lives of its members, the Studio was to be a place where actors could come and go as they pleased" (120), independent from the members' careers. However, even the Actors Studio launched an attempt in production with the Actors Studio Theatre, with its first performance in 1963 (265), which Strasberg was pointedly opposed to, partly because of personal differences between Kazan and him (262). Eventually, though, it failed in production. According to Hirsch,

The Actors Studio Theatre failed because it didn't show a profit, and in the American system there has almost never been room for an organization that can't pay its own way. And it failed because, after the Ford Foundation [its sponsor] withdrew, Studio members weren't willing to do what had to be done to save their Theatre. [...] It failed, too, because it didn't build a subscription

base that would have assured some continuity, and instead presented its shows on the open market [...] looking like any commercial producer. And it failed because the Studio had waited too long and started too big. (267)

Luckily, this commercial failure did not harm the Actors Studio substantially. Where the Group Theatre emphasised the work of the ensemble, the Actors Studio continues to emphasise the work of the individual actors even nowadays. After Strasberg's death, a permanent Writers Unit, which he had been opposed to, was established at the Studio, as well as a Directors Unit (229), thus covering more areas than it was able to cover under Strasberg's guidance. However, there have been some changes in the Studio's organisation in the meantime. Nowadays it also includes "a three-year MFA program called the Actors Studio Drama School" at which "actors, writers, and directors take many of the same courses, but also work separately on their disciplines; in the third year, the students present their work to the public in a repertory season at the Circle in the Square Theatre on Bleecker Street" (343). Thus, the Studio's original spirit is still alive today, and today as then, "[it] is a place where its members can work on their craft in an environment in which actors' problems are treated with reverence and addressed in the language of the Method as it evolved during the long tenure of Lee Strasberg" (341).

In-depth Analysis of Method Acting

This section focuses on the theory of Method acting not in a scholarly, but in a practical sense. It mainly draws on the theory as explained by Edward Dwight Easty in his book *On Method Acting*, which is the Method as it was interpreted and taught by Strasberg. Easty's source of information is Strasberg's acting classes in the Strasberg Institute, independent from the Actors Studio.

Easty stresses that there is a clear need for the Method in acting, but he also emphasises that many people, even some actors, do not see such a need. This is because many people “seem to think that an actor should be empowered with a special native ability that sets him apart from other members of the human race, and which will automatically produce whatever emotion, characterization, movement, or truthful action is called for in the script, performance after performance” (Easty 6). Easty defies this paradigm, but emphasises that an aspiring actor “cannot depend upon the Method alone to achieve the ultimate in his art, for the actor must certainly possess the qualities in his soul that are inherent in all art.” Those are qualities such as sensitivity, awareness, concentration, intelligence, and “the ability to communicate these qualities to the audience.” Likewise, he stresses that acting is not imitation, but gives a practical definition of the art of acting in general: “*The ability to create complete reality while on a stage*” (14, emphasis in the original). An actor must therefore “create a living human being on stage with all the complexities of the character: his behavior, thoughts, emotions and their subsequent transitions” (15). This, then, is the true, practical aim of Method acting as it was intended by Strasberg.

Although the different stages of the Method rely on each other and do not necessarily depend on a certain order, Easty makes a clear division in his book. The following analysis of his interpretation of the Method sticks to his division.

Sense Memory

According to Easty, Sense Memory is vital for a truthful performance on stage and absolutely necessary in order “to create a stimulus that sets off that reaction to objects on stage in a way that is real and believable” (24). It is also the very basis of Stanislavsky’s System (25). It relies on the training of all five senses to consciously remember things in a sensory way. While actors might say that their senses work fine in real life, one has to take into consideration that, despite the attempt to be as realistic as possible, stage life is not real life. The actor is not actually in the situation his character is in: “In life, one’s senses remember all by themselves. On stage, they have to be trained consciously to function as they do in life. Also, they will never get to the point of functioning by themselves on stage without conscious effort being applied at *every* performance” (28).

Sense Memory exercises rely on absolute relaxation and concentration on the actor’s part. In the exercises proposed by Easty, the actor recreates everyday activities, such as drinking a cup of coffee, without the object, i.e. the cup of coffee (28). To do this, the actor has to recreate some, and later all sensory impressions connected with it. Here, the actor has to rely on all five senses in order to recreate the activity realistically. The actor must not try to explicitly show what he is doing, but simply try to experience it himself. By experiencing it, the action becomes more believable to the audience as well. Drinking a glass of beer, for instance, has a different effect than drinking a cup of coffee. The substance has different effects on the body, and the actor and his senses have to be aware of this. By training one’s senses, such activities can be recreated realistically even when only drinking apple juice instead of beer. If successful, the audience will know what effects the substance has simply by watching the actor recreate the task.

The second exercise he proposes recreates the sensation of sunshine on the whole body, the third recreates a physically painful experience. Here, the actor works without an

object, but has to focus enormously on the experience to actually have his senses react to the sunshine. In all those exercises, it is very important that the actor focuses on the specific places where the sensory experience takes place because “generalizations have no place whatsoever in sensory exercises” (34). If applied correctly, Sense Memory creates a believable atmosphere on stage, and “[the] author’s lines are just as believable to the audience as if said in life, for the actor has created the reality of the situation out of which words are derived” (35).

Easty appeals to the actor to consciously avoid any pantomimic gestures in his work. This has to do with his definition of acting:

Pantomime is, by definition, a dumb-show imitation of life. This is clearly not acting. Pantomimic gestures are each carefully plotted out and rendered with redundancy; whereas, actions or gestures on stage should be natural and believable with the same wonderful simplicity of life. [...] The actor-artist should be able to draw forth from his reservoir of life’s experiences, from his observation of life’s natural laws, and from his own emotions to produce reality in the true sense of the word and not be a surrealist attempt at imitation. (41)

In order to present such actions realistically, the actor has to create the motivation of the action. With this motivation, the action itself is created and modified.

Affective Memory

Actors have to create reality on stage: They have to act realistically, and they have to deliver their lines realistically. This reality depends on the psychological impact of what is acted: “When a line in a play, whether consciously or subconsciously, coincides with something real in our past, we may either express the line with a very truthful reading or be

inhibited by it, depending upon its relation to and impact on our personal feelings” (44). Affective Memory, then, is “the conscious creation of remembered emotions which have occurred in the actor’s *own* past life and then their application to the character being portrayed on stage.” Therefore, “[in] order to make a character come *alive* on stage, the emotions, thoughts, and feelings of the character must be real to the actor” (45, emphasis in the original).

Affective Memory trains the actor to align his emotions with the character’s emotions as they are called for by the playwright and the director. Easty emphasises that “[every] emotion that has been utilized in his life can be recreated on stage with all or part of its original depth of feeling” (46). However, it is crucial that the experience to be recreated is at least seven years old; it must not be an experience that is still fresh and to which the actor is still highly sensitive. By experimenting with such past experiences and recreating the desired emotions, the author builds a repertory of emotions that can be constantly used on stage. The difficult part is actually recreating the emotion: it cannot be recreated simply by remembering it, but “can only be reproduced by concentrated effort to remember *each circumstance* and *each sensory step* that produced the emotion originally” (48). Since every single detail of the original situation is crucial to evoke the desired emotion, Sense Memory is an inherent part of Affective Memory.

Because Affective Memory can evoke emotions that have blocked the actor for a long time, there can be a “therapeutic after-effect to the Narrative Affective Memory exercises, especially after deeply personal experiences have been recalled and brought to the surface” (52). In the exercises proposed by Easty, the actor first begins by describing the sensory impressions that accompany the remembered situation. It is an in-class exercise that takes place under the supervision of the teacher. The second exercise adds a physical action to the Affective Memory, and the third adds some dialogue to it. The combination of these three

areas is crucial, for the actor has to learn to evoke the desired emotion while doing or speaking other things on stage.

Relaxation

Relaxation is the basis of all other exercises. Sense Memory and Affective Memory both depend on the actor's tensions being released because any kind of tension "interferes with his inner life, inner feelings, his five senses, and it has a destructive influence on his emotions and creativity" (64). Tension can be either physical or mental, and both kinds are connected with the other: "Mental anxiety can cause physical contraction in the body, and, conversely, the relief of one can bring about the relief of the other" (65). In order to relieve any unnecessary physical tension, the actor then has to, firstly, be aware of its existence and, secondly, be aware of its specific location in the body. Based on this awareness, the actor can then train to relieve any tension that is interfering with his work.

Since the other aspects of Method acting rely on the actor's physical and mental state, it is absolutely necessary that the actor is relaxed both physically and mentally. The actor has to be especially aware of this because "the rigors and mendacious qualities of modern society transform [the people] into a permanent state of tenseness" (70). As an object of study to raise the actor's awareness of his own tensions, Easty proposes careful observation of animals, especially cats, which embody the very idea of relaxation: "Where the human being tends to use all of his muscles in a physical task, the cat will leave every part of his body that is not in actual use, relaxed" (71). Actors therefore have to try to appropriate such behaviour as much as they can, relaxing every part of the body that can possibly be relaxed.

Concentration

Concentration is directly connected to relaxation: “An actor needs relaxation to achieve stage concentration and he must certainly concentrate on either mental or physical exercises to promote relaxation” (73). Concentration, then, is “the act of centering one’s attention on an object in order to condense it into a smaller but stronger quantity.”

Easty states that “[stage] fright is a direct result of lack of concentration” (76). In order to be able to concentrate fully, the actor has to be able to “obliterate the audience by creating mentally an additional wall to the stage setting” (73), the so-called Fourth Wall. Its construction depends on Sense Memory, and it enables the actor to expel the audience from his consciousness. He has to be able to focus on the events on stage to provide a realistic performance.

In a concentration exercise that Easty proposes, the actor is given a certain amount of time to study an object. He then has to describe the object, in as many details as possible, without looking at it. When the actor’s concentration improves, more details will be noticed and remembered, and he will need less time to perform this task. Easty also refers to Stanislavsky’s Circles of Attention, but he also states its impracticality in Western theatre due to the time restraints of putting on a production. However, with its help the actor “can learn to create a Sensory Circle which can remain and be utilized even during a performance” (79).

Improvisation

Improvisation is often neglected in Western theatre. However, Easty stresses its importance as a rehearsal technique. Improvisation, according to Easty, is a valuable resource for the actor because of “the knowledge to be found, the insight, the familiarization with a role, and the freshness acquired” (111).

According to Easty, there are two types in which improvisation normally takes place: “The first is for the actors and director to choose circumstances that are similar but not the same as the situations in the play. [...] The second [...] has to do with the actors continuing the logical sequence of events and the actual meaning of the play as set down by the author” (111f). Improvisation does not only have to be based on situations, but also settings. It provides fresh, individual interpretations of, for instance, a play or a scene, and can provide a unique view on the character or the play as a whole.

Easty emphasises that improvisation in general “serves to keep the bindings of theatrical conventionality [...] from even appearing and to lend the lifegiving freedom of personal expression to a role” (115). In his view, it is a shame that so little emphasis is put on improvisation in Western theatre, as it provides exactly the kind of fresh, realistic acting style that is commonly labelled American.

Justification

All action, in real life or on stage, has a purpose; every action is the consequence of something. In order to show realistic actions on stage, those actions need to have a purpose as well. This is why justification is an inherent part of Method acting. As Easty puts it, “[it] is the circumstances that have happened before that we must create on stage and let the end results produce themselves” (116). Establishing a reason, a justification for every single thing said and done on stage automatically leads to the natural expression of the act itself. The play might not supply this necessary justification, and therefore the actor has to use his own imagination to search for it. It “is applied to every part of a play beginning first with the author’s concept of the story line and continuing through to each actor’s motivation for what he does on stage” (119).

A motivation can be found by applying what Stanislavsky calls the ‘magic if’. Actor and director have to decide together which factors, or ‘adjustments’ contribute to the situation of the play. They have to establish a common idea behind each scene or situation. However, Stanislavsky’s own exercises to work with justification, such as “striking any spontaneous physical pose with the body” (120) and then trying to figure out what kind of justification could be found behind such a pose, were unsuccessful and unpopular in America: “I know of only one Method teacher who uses this phase of Stanislavsky’s system in her teaching. Her own method of teaching has always included the more physical and outward phases of his system, leaving the students to find their own way of working on the inner self.” Easty does not mention any names, but considering the different approaches of Method acting, it is reasonable to assume that this teacher is Stella Adler. If at all, Method teachers apply the notion of the ‘magic if’, but even at the time of writing, Easty points out that even Strasberg has placed it outside of his main focus (121).

The justification of an action, then, is the essence of making this action believable to the audience: “Every stage action, every word, every situation, and every task must be done because the actor believes in it and because he has created his own truthful justification” (122).

Imaginative Personalisation and Substitution

Inspiration is the foundation of any actor’s creative work. Easty writes that there are two phases of the Method “where his imagination is not merely stimulated but actually created consciously to produce original and likely results” (124). Those are Personalisation and Substitution.

Personalisation requires the actor to create a direct association with the play’s experiences or relationships. Those are created “by finding a common ground with our own

life's desires, relationships, and involvements" (ibid). By establishing such a personal link with the play, the resulting actions or circumstances become more real to the audience as well, simply because they are more real to the actor. It is only this phase of Personalisation that does not rely on Sense Memory, like all the other areas, "[unless] the parallel personalization contains an outstanding sensory object important to its existence" (125). To fully understand the character, the actor therefore has to personalise his circumstances and experience, make them his own, and therefore incorporate the character to some extent within the actor's instrument.

Imaginative Substitution, on the other hand, "is a mental means whereby a stage property, an object or a situation, even another actor, can seemingly be 'transformed,' literally substituted, for someone or something else" (127). The foundation of this, again, is Sense Memory. Even a lifeless object, such as a baby doll, can be brought alive before the eyes of the audience by the way the actor relates to it. Focusing on mentally substituting the doll with a living human being, "the audience will be seeing not just an actor in a role but a live human being who relates in a very human and natural way" (129). It also gives a unique, personal quality to the acting, as "no one reacts in exactly the same way to an object." This does not only concern lifeless objects, but fellow actors as well: by mentally substituting the actor for someone else, one is able to relate to him differently. Exercises in Personalisation and Substitution include "taking an inanimate object such as an old pillow and treating it as a live object such as a small dog or cat" (132).

All those phases of the Method have to be merged to achieve a realistic performance on stage. Once understood and practised individually, they are all combined in Physical Exercises and Animal Exercises. The former is a depiction of a physical condition, for instance an injury, which the actor has to present realistically. This involves Sense Memory as well as Justification. The latter can best be described as animal characterisations. Its

purpose is “(1) To assist the actor in a more complete understanding of his fellow man in order to portray him more truthfully on the stage, and (2) To use the animal characterizations, partially or even totally, in an actual role” (145). Animal exercises first require a preparatory step, i.e. the actor has to study the animal that he wants to characterise very carefully and in great detail (147). After studying the animal’s behaviour and mood, often for several days, the actor “distinguishes the basic differences between the animal’s body and his own” (149). After all this preparatory work, the actor eventually has to perform the Animal Exercise “using either an imaginary surrounding or the reality of the stage itself” (150).

Inner and Outer Character

After thorough training of the actor’s instrument, he has to rely on all the preceding phases of the method to create a role’s Inner Character. This can first be done by “simple and direct character analysis using the awareness of his own instrument to accumulate information about the character which must then be regarded as fact” (158). A full character analysis gives the actor a complete understanding of the character, his motivations and habits, and eventually result in “relaxation, an easy response of the senses, and concentration” (159). This has to be applied to any character, no matter whether it is a minor or a lead role.

The Outer Character is an extension of the Inner Character. Easty describes it as “the culminating factor of all the mental and physical problems that have finally yielded to the actor’s instrument and are now presented visually to the beholder” (174). To externalise the Inner Character, one has to find contrasts in real life: “Only by contrast, and not playing only one aspect of the character, will his role become alive and fairly breather truth on stage” (181).

Social Mannerisms

Lastly, Easty writes about Social Mannerisms, which are also essential to the successful creation of the character. The actor has to develop a new awareness “to analyze his own actions and gestures (whatever they are and no matter how trivial and at any time)” (191). The actor therefore has to become aware of the reasons and motivations of his own actions. He can use this to create the character, but also has to apply it to correct “enigmatic, cacophonous *social mannerisms*” (192, emphasis in the original) that might be inherent to the actor himself, but distract the audience from the actual character. This is especially important to accurately portray emotions on stage, since “[the] slight, almost imperceptible gesture is sometimes a dead giveaway to a person’s inner feelings” (193). The actor has to be consciously aware of the mannerisms that are inherent to himself and consciously work to avoid them. Work with social mannerisms therefore relies on a very thorough self-analysis on the part of the actor himself.

The approach to Method acting as Easty describes is in overall accordance with the Strasberg’s approach as described by Krasner. However, Easty gives a more detailed and more diverse account of the different aspects than Krasner does. Especially the last point – social mannerisms – seem to have been neglected in the secondary source, although this phase is just as crucial as the others. The thorough self-analysis on the actor’s part eventually gives him the possibility to give up his own personal mannerisms on stage for the sake of the character’s mannerisms, and is therefore important for the proper creation of the Outer Character.

Method Acting in Practice

It is one thing to explain the theory as Method actors are instructed in it, but quite another thing to actually apply those in everyday acting instead of exercises at the Studio. This section focuses on the documentary *Inside the Actors Studio*, hosted by James Lipton. In particular, it examines the interviews with Al Pacino and Robert De Niro who talk, among other things, about their actual experiences with the Method.

In his interview, Al Pacino points out that the Actors Studio was of great importance and influence to him: “It’s a place I believe in, and – because for one, it’s free to actors, it’s free to writers, producers. It’s a place where people can come and develop themselves and their work away from the spotlight, free to exercise and exercise”¹ (2007 *Inside the Actors Studio: Al Pacino*). For Al Pacino, the Actors Studio has fulfilled exactly the kind of role it was originally meant to have. He describes being accepted by the Studio as a kind of “identity moment.” When asked, specifically, for two things that Lee Strasberg has taught him that he uses in his work nowadays, he answers: “One big thing he says is: Learn your lines. Sounds crazy, but it’s very effective. He also taught me something that I don’t do enough of, and I think it’s a value, and I forget it sometimes. I wish he were around to remind me. He says: Sometimes don’t go as far as you can go. Stay well within yourself.”

In the interview, it becomes clear that Lee Strasberg certainly has had a big influence on his way of acting, his way to approach acting. However, he only adapts certain parts of Strasberg’s teaching and does not incorporate all of them. On the use of Affective Memory, for instance, he admits:

¹ Quotations in this section are my own transcripts of the interviews. Although I have tried to stay as close to the original words as possible, some changes in the transcription from spoken to written language had to be made.

I rarely use it. Over the years I've developed a way of working which is, that's my idea of acting anyway, I think everybody develops their own as they go on and experience things. The whole idea being personal is very important. And Affective Memory really is digging up something that brings you to a certain place, that's helpful for the scene or play. It's extremely good to do. I think it's really helpful.

Although he does not use it very often himself, he clearly stresses its importance here. This stands in a strong contrast to the heavy criticism of Affective Memory by, for instance, Stella Adler.

Acting, despite having a Method that can help the actor through his work, demands a highly individual approach. The Method is a method, but how it is implemented in the actor's practical work is his own decision. In *The Godfather 2*, Al Pacino acted together with his teacher, Lee Strasberg himself, and gives quite interesting conclusions from this experience. Lipton asks him whether or not Strasberg lives by his rules when he acts, and Pacino replies: "No. He's one of us, you know. [...] He recognised that he was some, you know, a kind of acting guru, whatever, but he just put it away 'cause he had so much experience in the theatre, he was an actor himself. And he put all of that away and was one of us." This clearly exemplifies that even Strasberg, who instructed students in Method acting for more than thirty-five years, is only able to incorporate some of his rules, if at all; it depends largely on experience.

Al Pacino points out very clearly what kind of acting he is guided by: "I believe strongly in acting from the unconscious. That's my belief, I believe that what you hope happens is that your unconscious is freed, if you're relaxed enough, if you're into it." Here, Pacino stresses many things at once: first of all the importance of the unconscious in the actor's work. In addition, he emphasises the importance of relaxation, concentration, the

involvement with the material in the actor's work. Later in the interview, he also stresses the importance, and usefulness, of improvisation to get closer to a character.

When working on a character, Al Pacino's first step is getting impressions of the character and everything surrounding him. About his role of a blind person in *Scent of a Woman*, for instance, he explains how he asked his three-year old daughter to play a blind person for him, which she did without any problems at all. He got other impressions through actual experiences with blind people:

And I visited the blind, and I worked with blind people. And I looked at films of real blind people and decided not to use any prosthetic, just do it, do it blind. You know, close my eyes and do it, and then open my eyes and do it. [...] So what it does, it helps you, it frees you in some strange way. It frees you, it takes away any self-consciousness because you're focused on other things.

He emphasises the same approach with the role of Michael Corleone in *The Godfather*: He got his first impressions of the character from the hypotext, the novel itself. Al Pacino also emphasises: "Michael was a very difficult character in that he starts one way and transitions to another. [...] So what I thought of was to low-key it early on, hoping that a character would emerge that surprised you. And I thought that was the key to the character. [...] So it has a kind of enigmatic quality to it." He is most clear about this enigmatic quality when explaining his preparation of the role of the devil in *The Devil's Advocate*:

He was so much fun to play. [...] I went on and on about finding out what was going on in the *Origins*, *Paradise Lost*, and getting involved again in all these things [...] That's what I mean about osmosis. You go into a thing and you just try to get as much stuff into you [...] so you get further and further away from the words and into the behaviour and the stuff that is there. And it comes

into you and it seeps into your unconscious and [...] hopefully, when it connects, it finds a way out.

This, then, is the essence of Strasberg's approach to Method acting: to personalise the character, incorporate him into one's personality, find equivalents from one's life. He makes this clear when asked by a student about his characters: "I tell you, the truth is they're all a part of me and myself is in them. [...] They're impressions that I have of something, and it's what I see, so I paint it, and it has a sort of, its own stand, which is my stand."

Unlike many other actors, who try to avoid the playwright, Al Pacino actually enjoys acting Shakespeare. For instance, he played Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and directed as well as acted in *Looking for Richard*. This shows how there is a difference of opinion concerning Shakespeare's accessibility to actors. Unlike many others, Al Pacino thinks Shakespeare is very suitable for Method actors: "Why I always thought Shakespeare had to be an actor is because he wrote in such a way that, if you just do his words, follow it full out [...] all those words are there to help you through the transitions." In his opinion, Shakespeare might be a challenge to actors, but not an impossible obstacle because of its accessibility from an acting point of view. However, he stresses that one certainly has to address the language as language, "working with the iambic pentameter. You need an appetite, an appetite for words."

Robert De Niro has quite a different approach to the Method. This is mainly because Al Pacino bases his acting on Strasberg's teaching, while Robert De Niro names his studying under Stella Adler at her Conservatory as one of the most important influences on his acting life. She taught him: "It's about the character and about doing that first, the tasks of the character [...] without going about it as if it's all about you [...] It's more about the character and being faithful to the text, the script" (2007 *Inside the Actors Studio: Robert De Niro*). His

approach is therefore radically different since Strasberg and Adler, as already established, take quite different stances on Method acting.

At some point, Robert De Niro joined the Actors Studio as well, eventually studying under Strasberg himself. While Al Pacino praises his work very highly, Robert De Niro says about Strasberg's teaching:

It was beneficial and helpful, but I focused better when the director would come up and do a session, because the director had a mixture of experience and practical doing. [...] And the sooner you get to knowing that you gotta get up and do it, the quicker you'll do it [...] I mean, not to be critical, it's just that I had this problem too when I was afraid to make a move, you know, "Oh I have to feel it, I have to do this..."

This suggests that for Robert De Niro personally, Strasberg's approach was too intellectualised, too conscious. De Niro's problem seems to have been that Strasberg's teaching left him with a certain expectation as to what to do exactly in order to have a realistic performance of the character. For him, however, the more physical approach he had learned from Adler – first approaching the work physically, and then working backwards – was more useful. He also stresses the importance of justification: "You have a reason for what you're doing, and you rationalise and justify it." De Niro also puts a strong emphasis on improvisation, just like Al Pacino. This was encouraged very much in his work with Martin Scorsese.

Apart from this, however, his approach to a character seems similar to Al Pacino's: you have to research the character to come as close to him as possible. For his work in *Taxi Driver*, for instance, he drove a taxi for a few weeks and isolated himself a bit to identify with the character's loneliness, and in his preparation for *Raging Bull*, he had to gain 60 pounds. However, Al Pacino has a more intellectual approach, whereas Robert De Niro has a rather

practical attitude towards the research on the character. His work is especially guided by three main questions: Does it feel right, what is the scene about, and what is the purpose of the scene?

Robert De Niro clearly sees a need for having such a Method: “Let’s put it this way: if you don’t have it, you’re missing something. [...] You can have great instincts, but if you had the formal training it gives you an overview of things, kind of where you fit and what you want. It’s important to have that.”

From those two interviews, one can conclude that while the Method is an inherent part of an actor’s work, the approaches to it are very individual. The actor chooses the phases of the Method that seem most useful for his work, and works on the grounds of those. It is suggested that the Method, in all its phases, might be impractical for use in everyday acting, but it is a good starting point to develop one’s individual approach to it. Actually applying the Method seems to take place on some intuitive basis, but it is also guided by making conscious choices. The Method in practice is not as formalistic and strict as it is presented by scholars, but guides the actor through his work to realistic, natural acting, and thus only presents guidelines, tools the actor may or may not choose to use.

Part II: The Relationship between Shakespeare and the Method

Statement of the Issue

According to Hirsch, Stanislavsky “stylized foreign plays by Goldoni, Molière, Hamsun, Hauptmann, Ibsen, and (never successfully) Shakespeare” (Hirsch 43). At the Actors Studio, “[there] are a few rules for auditioners: no monologues, no Shakespeare, no scene longer than five minutes” (224). This is not to say that Shakespeare hasn’t been approached by Method actors, but the Studio’s reluctance to deal with Shakespeare is clearly emphasised. According to an anonymous actor that Hirsch quotes, Strasberg had a certain “fear of Shakespeare. He was insecure, and so he avoided the language. [...] He never simply said that he couldn’t deal with Shakespeare, which was really the truth, and this was irresponsible because he was so powerful” (200). Because Shakespeare’s language is a dominant part of the beauty of his plays, “[t]oo often reality is discarded for voice, diction, stance, movement and other superficial aspects of the characters” (Easty 178). Many actors simply seem not to know how to create reality in Shakespeare’s plays.

However, there are also positive thoughts concerning Shakespeare in the Actors Studio. Ellen Burstyn is quoted by Hirsch, saying, “Lee [Strasberg] felt our internal way of working could bring a whole new value to Shakespeare. We get worried about our accents, but in Shakespeare’s day they spoke more like us. [...] To treat Shakespeare in a literal way is to cheat Shakespeare. He is livelier, deeper, richer, more fun than we think” (Hirsch 199f.). Estelle Parsons eventually makes clear what kind of value can be found in Shakespeare: “Words come out of emotion in Shakespeare. They come together. *It’s in the word in Shakespeare, it’s not in the subtext.* Action lies in the word” (202, emphasis in the original). Nevertheless, Shakespeare has been consciously placed out of the Studio’s tradition. As Stella Adler has a different approach to Method acting, she is quoted, too, stressing the

importance of Shakespeare in the world of the theatre: “There’s nothing more important than Shakespeare: he’s God, darling!” (219)

There is no doubt that Shakespeare has played an important role in theatre tradition, and since he is such a crucial figure, it is important to examine whether the controversy with Shakespeare in the Actors Studio is justified. Does the Method only work for scripts that use modern everyday language, or is it also possible to apply it to Shakespeare’s very poetic, formal language? Many Method actors try to consciously avoid dealing with Shakespeare. However, Al Pacino denies this absolute difficulty. Shakespeare, according to Pacino, simply demands a slightly different, more language-based approach, but can still be approached in the boundaries of the Method.

Not only the way the actor approaches the character is important in Method acting, but the reception of the audience is just as important. The goal of Method acting is to act realistically, and this reality effect can eventually only be determined by the audience itself.

This problem is approached in this empirical research project. It bears great significance in order to give an appropriate answer to the questions raised between the connection of Method acting and Shakespeare’s work. The experiment that is dealt with in the next sections tests the individual spectator’s reception of a performance of a Method actor, Al Pacino, and establishes whether there is a difference in perceiving his performance as being realistic when it deals with Shakespeare’s poetic language.

Methodology

The study included a sample of 30 participants between the ages of 18 and 54 years, of which the majority was between 20 and 23 years old. The participants were chosen from quite different backgrounds: Although the majority consisted of Roosevelt Academy students, a small minority of non-Roosevelt Academy students participated in the same experiment in Germany.

The experiment itself consisted of the viewing of two film fragments – one from *The Merchant of Venice* and one from *The Devil's Advocate* –, with the focus on the acting of Al Pacino in each particular fragment. The fragment from *The Merchant of Venice* shows Shylock's famous speech about Christian injustice and their unjustified treatment of Jews (III.i. 38-69). The fragment from *The Devil's Advocate* is taken from the end of the movie, when John Milton reveals himself as the devil and philosophises about God's and his relationship to humans. (A transcript of both fragments can be found in appendices A1 and A2.) Both fragments present a monologue by Al Pacino in which the characters talk themselves into a rage. Because the emotions that are depicted in the fragments are similar, they are comparable for the purpose of this study. *The Merchant of Venice*, a close adaptation of the play, uses the original language from the play and is therefore representative of Shakespearean poetic language. To avoid a significant difference in Al Pacino's acting experience, which might influence his performance, the chosen movies were published only eight years apart.

The participants were divided into two groups of 15 people each: Group A first watched the fragment of *The Merchant of Venice* and then *The Devil's Advocate*, whereas Group B watched them in reversed order. A short questionnaire (Appendix B) was handed out to the participants before watching the fragments, of which the participants were asked to read the first page before the actual experiment started. Group A had to read the first page,

whereas Group B had to read the second page first, according to the order in which the fragments were shown. This questionnaire mainly dealt with questions concerning performance analysis, in particular the actor's performance, based on Pavis (qtd. in Balme 141). About half of the participants took the experiment individually with the researcher. When a bigger group was available for the experiment, the participants were split into two groups and took the experiment in two different rooms simultaneously under the supervision of either the researcher or the researcher's assistant. After each fragment, the participants were asked to fill out the corresponding page of the questionnaire.

After the collection of the data, the participants were sorted by subgroups on the basis of the following characteristics:

1. Group A or Group B
2. Native English speakers and non-native English speakers
3. Theatre and Media experience on the basis of whether the participants had participated in the Roosevelt Academy courses of A&H 134 (Introduction to Theatre and Media Studies), A&H 337 (Film & Text), and A&H 343 (Current Developments in Theatre and Media Studies). This was not included as a question in the questionnaire to avoid a bias on the participants' part, but was indicated by the researcher on each questionnaire immediately after the experiment took place.

The differences between those different subgroups are crucial to the evaluation of the experiment. First of all, the effect of the order in which the fragments are viewed has to be examined. The difference between native and non-native English speakers is crucial, too. The initial hypotheses are formulated as follows:

1. As a Method actor has to internalise any language that is used in the performance, the overall performance of *The Merchant of Venice* has the same reality effect as the performance in *The Devil's Advocate*.
2. Native English speakers, because they grew up with the language, are more susceptible to any changes in the English language than non-native English speakers. Therefore, the overall performance will be perceived as being less credible for native English speakers due to the unrealistic language.
3. Theatre and Media experienced people are consciously trained to analyse performances. They are therefore more aware of the technicalities, and more aware of the artefact level. Therefore, they will perceive any performance as less realistic than people who are not trained to do so.

The participants were randomly assigned to Group A and Group B. However, the overall sample was not chosen randomly, but by convenience sampling because of the accessibility of participants as well as the researcher's limitations. Therefore, the design used for this project is a Static Group Comparison Design. This means there is the possibility that factors other than those tested might influence the results and the differences between the groups. This might decrease the internal validity of the project.

There are also some random errors that might influence the results of the experiment. The experiment took place in many different environments and under many different circumstances, and in some cases the different participants were not tested by the same person. Many participants were tested individually in the researcher's personal environment, and therefore the atmosphere was quite different to the in-class experiment, in which one group was tested by the researcher and the other group by the assistant.

Results

This section will not provide a full statistical analysis. Instead, the analysis will be based mainly on graphs of descriptive group statistics as well as a graphical presentation of ANOVA results. Between the groups, the following variables are tested on a five-point scale of 0 to 4:

- MQ01: the credibility of the overall performance in *The Merchant of Venice*
- MQ06: the credibility of the use of language in *The Merchant of Venice*
- DQ01: the credibility of the overall performance in *The Devil's Advocate*
- DQ06: the credibility of the language in *The Devil's Advocate*

The analyses of *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Devil's Advocate* can be summarised in the following table, which gives the means of the different subgroups. The original SPSS output that was used for this analysis can be found in Appendix C.

Means of between-group comparisons for the different subgroups						
	Theatre & Media experience	No Theatre & Media experience	Group A	Group B	Native English speakers	Non-native English speakers
Number	20	10	15	15	6	24
MQ01	2.85	3.00	3.40	2.40	3.67	2.71
DQ01	2.65	2.90	2.87	2.60	3.00	2.67
MQ06	1.90	2.60	2.73	1.53	3.00	1.92
DQ06	2.65	3.40	3.47	2.33	3.83	2.67

This table suggests that participants with Theatre and Media experience found both the overall performance and the use of language in *The Merchant of Venice* less credible than the participants without Theatre and Media experience. The same trend is visible in *The Devil's Advocate*. However, both groups found the overall performance in *The Merchant of Venice* more credible than in *The Devil's Advocate*. Both found the use of language more credible in *The Devil's Advocate* than in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Group A scored higher than Group B in all four variables. This means that Group A, who first saw the fragment of *The Merchant of Venice*, found the performance as well as the language in both fragments more credible than Group B, who first saw *The Devil's Advocate*. The use of language was for both groups more credible in *The Devil's Advocate*. However, Group A found the overall performance in *The Merchant of Venice* more credible than *The Devil's Advocate*, while Group B found the performance in *The Devil's Advocate* more convincing.

Native English speakers scored higher on all four variables as well. This means that native English speakers perceived the performance as well as the language as more credible or realistic than non-native speakers. For both groups, the language in *The Devil's Advocate* was again more credible than in *The Merchant of Venice*, but the overall performance of *The Merchant of Venice* was more credible than in *The Devil's Advocate*.

The graphs in appendices D1 to D5 compare the influence of the difficulties the participants had with the language on the credibility of the overall performance and the use of language in particular in *The Merchant of Venice*. From the graphs, one can conclude that participants with Theatre and Media experience found the credibility of the overall acting not dependent on how difficult they found the language of *The Merchant of Venice*, whereas people with less Theatre and Media experience did. The difficulties with the language had a

negative effect for both groups on the credibility of the language, for participants with less theatre experience slightly more so than for the experienced.

For Group A and Group B, the trend is more or less the same. People with no language difficulties at all found the overall performance more realistic. This decreased the more difficulties they had. However, when they had many difficulties, the credibility of the performance increased again. For both groups, the credibility of the language in general decreased the more difficulties they had with the language that was used in the fragment.

For the native English speakers, the credibility of the performance went down drastically the more difficulties they experienced with the language. This is only partly so with the non-native English speakers: If they had a lot of trouble understanding the language, the credibility of the performance in general increased again.

The graphs in appendices D6 to D11 compare the same influence for *The Devil's Advocate*. For people with Theatre and Media experience, any difficulties they had with the language had no influence on the overall credibility of the performance. When the people had no Theatre experience, the overall credibility increased when they had some difficulties, and decreased when they had more difficulties than before. For both groups, the same trend can be seen in regard to the credibility of the language: The more problems they had with the language used in the fragment, the less did they find the use of language realistic.

For Group A, the credibility of the performance increased when they had some difficulties. For Group B, the overall performance increased somewhat. For Group A, the credibility of the language decreased only slightly with more difficulties. Group B indicates the same trend as before.

The native English speakers didn't have any difficulties with the language used in the fragment at all. For all of them, the performance was realistic. For the non-native English

speakers, one can see the same trend as before. Concerning the language itself, the credibility of the language in the fragment was even higher than the credibility of the overall performance. For non-native speakers, one can detect the same trend as before.

As the tables in appendices C7 and C8 and their corresponding graphs in appendices D12 and D13 indicate, the effect of the credibility of the language in *The Merchant of Venice* on the credibility of the overall performance is not significant for the whole sample in general. However, the credibility of the language in *The Devil's Advocate* on the credibility of the overall performance is indeed significant.

Discussion

The initial hypotheses of the experiment were:

1. The overall performance in *The Merchant of Venice* will be perceived as realistically as the performance in *The Devil's Advocate* because as soon as the language is internalised, it will supplement the actor's performance
2. Native English speakers will perceive the overall performance in *The Merchant of Venice* less realistically than the non-native English speakers due to their higher sensibility towards the language
3. Theatre and Media experienced people will perceive both performances less realistically than people without Theatre and Media experience.

The statistical results from the experiment confirm the third hypothesis, but not the first and second hypothesis. Indeed, the results confirm that Theatre and Media experienced people found both performances less credible than participants without this experience.

However, the overall performance in *The Merchant of Venice* was, for all participants, more credible than in *The Devil's Advocate*. Furthermore, the native English speakers found the

overall performance as well as the use of language more credible than the non-native English speakers. They also found the use of the language in *The Devil's Advocate* as being more realistic than the performance itself. The last statistical analysis indicates that there is no significant negative effect of the credibility of the language on the credibility of the performance for *The Merchant of Venice*, while *The Devil's Advocate* indicated a significant effect of the language on the performance.

As stated before, there are several influences that might falsify the results from this experiment. Those include convenience sampling, different environments and atmospheres, and testing by two different people. Furthermore, there are only six native English speakers in the sample, so the results cannot be said to be representative for all native English speakers. The external validity of the study is not very high due to the relatively small sample.

However, putting all these influences aside, there might be several explanations for the results. Al Pacino's overall acting in *The Merchant of Venice* was generally seen to be more realistic than his acting in *The Devil's Advocate*. Most of the participants had not seen either movie, and although the different fragments present an emotionally similar scene, the acting can be seen as being slightly different. This, however, is in accordance with the character Al Pacino portrays. In *The Devil's Advocate*, he plays the devil himself, whose explanation of his philosophy almost bordered on ecstasy, which is in accordance with his character. The participants, however, had no information whatsoever about the character to avoid a possible bias. From the fragment, it becomes clear that the character is actually the devil. This might have resulted in a more realistic performance. However, it also presented a highly unlikely situation, a very unrealistic situation so to say, which might have decreased the general credibility of the character. Such factors might have had a significant effect on decreasing the credibility of the overall performance as it was perceived in *The Devil's Advocate*. Al Pacino's movements are very exaggerated in this fragment, simply because it

was in accordance with the character, but the participants who had not seen the movie before had no way of knowing this. Nonetheless, the results show that the acting in *The Merchant of Venice*, despite of Shakespeare's poetic language, was indeed perceived as being realistic and indeed supplement Al Pacino's acting, even though the use of language itself seemed less realistic than in *The Devil's Advocate*.

Another limitation here is presented by the choice of film fragments. Although they were both comparable, both dealt with monologues. The credibility of Method acting, however, also relies heavily on interaction between the actors. Therefore the fragments might not be completely representative of Method acting since there is only little interaction with other actors.

Contrary to the initial expectations, the native English speakers, who were more susceptible to the poetic changes in the language, found the overall performances more credible than non-native English speakers. This confirms the hypothesis that Shakespeare's poetic language does not influence the overall perception of the acting negatively. Instead, it suggests that the language, instead of seeming completely unnatural, supplements a Method actor's performance if applied correctly and in accordance to the character.

Finally, Theatre and Media experienced participants indeed perceived the performance as being less realistic. This can have several reasons, first of all the ones already included in the initial hypothesis. People who study Theatre and Media studies are used to performance analysis, and therefore they are more aware of the artefact level than people who do not have such a technical understanding of acting and simply watch and get involved in a fragment. This seems like a logical influence on one's perception of a performance. However, a further influence might be that most of the participants with Theatre and Media experiences were students of the A&H 343 course for which the research project was carried out in the first place. This means that, due to previous discussions, they were already aware of the

purpose of the experiment, which might have created a large bias in their performance reception. In general, the study might be a good starting point to redefine Shakespeare's value in Method acting. For further research, a more detailed experiment of the same kind is proposed. However, the sample would have to be significantly larger to be able to generalise the results to a more general population.

Concluding this experiment, one can say that, indeed, Shakespeare is suitable for Method acting if the actor knows how to internalise Shakespeare's language. As Al Pacino puts it, one needs to have "an appetite for words." Shakespeare's language in the sense of the Method has to be approached differently than everyday language, but, if successful, it results in a performance just as realistic as other performances by Method actors. Therefore, the hesitations of the Actor's Studio towards using Shakespeare are not justified; the actor simply has to learn how to implement the language in addition to implementing the character. However, since this is only successful after some training in the Method, it might be justified not to allow Shakespeare for initial auditions. In general, however, Shakespeare and his language work well with Method acting, as Al Pacino's performance in *The Merchant of Venice* proves.

Conclusion

Recreating reality on stage is the major aim behind the Method. The comparison of secondary and primary sources regarding the actual approaches to Method acting show that scholars tend to intellectualise the Method too much. They present it as a more fixed, formalistic system rather than what it actually is: a tool for actors to use and to deal with certain problems on stage. It is an inherent part of the actors' work, but the actual approaches to the Method are highly individual. They are based on the Method, but the way each actor deals with it is different, depending on the specific personalities and acting problems.

Both the secondary sources and Easty very much emphasise the conscious approach to all phases of the Method. While this might be true in some cases and for some phases, the interviews with Al Pacino and Robert De Niro suggest that implementing the Method also takes place on a rather intuitive level and is therefore not only guided by conscious choices. Perhaps studying the Method requires the actor to consciously apply the different phases, but those phases might eventually be used intuitively. In general, it can be concluded that the Method is not as formalistic and strict as it is often presented by scholars, and that it only paves the path for the actors to perform naturally and realistically. Which of the tools the actor chooses is entirely up to the individual actor, and the approaches differ from individual to individual.

The same can be concluded about the problem of performing Shakespeare. Many Method actors avoid his work because the approach to Shakespearean plays differs significantly from the approaches to other plays. While it might demand a different approach and a different starting point, the Method can be used in regard to the bard's plays as well: when used correctly, a Shakespeare performance can be just as credible and realistic as any other performance, independent of the unrealistic language. Either way, character creation in Shakespeare's plays also depends in some respect on approaching the language differently.

This in some parts language-based approach might not be suitable for every Method actor, depending on his preferences and personality, just the way some phases of the Method are not suitable for every kind of actor. Shakespeare can be approached and performed very well by Method actors if they know how to apply the Method in this specific case.

However, it needs to be stressed that the empirical research supporting this conclusion has certain limitations and cannot seem to be representative of a certain group. To draw more specific conclusions about the audience's reception of Shakespeare as performed by Method actors, further research is recommended, including a more representative sample. The research design of the questionnaire is overall suitable for such research; however, more attention has to be paid to random errors, and within the wide range of movies Al Pacino (or any other Method actor) has participated in, more accurate fragments could be chosen. Special attention has to be paid to the problem of the audience's previous knowledge about the specific situation. A strong criticism of the questionnaire that was used can be seen in keeping the audience uninformed about the character or the storyline to avoid possible biases. However, such information is crucial in determining whether or not an actor portrays the character realistically. The empirical study can therefore provide a good starting point for further research, but conclusions drawn from it cannot be generalised or presented with certainty.

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Word Count: 16735

Appendices

Appendix A: Transcripts of the fragments used in the experiment

A1: *The Merchant of Venice*

SALARINO: Tell us, do you hear whether Antonio had any loss at sea or no?

SHYLOCK: Let him look to his bond. He was wont to call me usurer. Let him look to his bond. He was wont to lend money for Christian courtesy. Let him look to his bond.

WOMAN: Hello, Jew!

SALARINO: I'm sure if he forfeit you'll not take his flesh. What's that good for?

SHYLOCK: To bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what's his reason? I am a Jew! Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands? Organs, dimensions? Senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food? Hurt with the same weapons? Subject to the same diseases? Healed by the same means? Warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge? If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute. And it shall go hard, but I will better the instruction.

A2: *The Devil's Advocate*

MILTON: Who are you carrying all those bricks for anyway? God? Is that it? God? Well I tell you, let me give you a little inside information about God. God likes to watch. He's a prankster. Think about it. He gives man instincts. He gives you this extraordinary gift, and then what does He do, I swear, for his own amusement, his own private, cosmic gag reel! He sets the rules in opposition. It's the goof of all time. Look, but don't touch. Touch, but don't taste. Taste, don't swallow. And while you're jumping from one foot to the next, what is

He doing? He's laughing his sick, fucking ass off! He's a tight-ass, he's a sadist! He's an absentee landlord! Worship that? Never!

KEVIN: "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven," is that it?

MILTON: Why not? I'm here on the ground with my nose in it since the whole thing began! I've nurtured every sensation man has been inspired to have! I cared about what he wanted and I never judged him! Why? Because I never rejected him. In spite of all his imperfections, I'm a fan of man! I'm a humanist. Maybe the last humanist. Who, in their right mind, Kevin, could possibly deny the twentieth century was entirely mine? All of it, Kevin! All of it. Mine. I'm peaking, Kevin. It's my time now. It's our time.

Appendix B: Questionnaire

Please read the first page of the questionnaire briefly before watching the fragments. Fill in your answers in between the fragments.

Age: _____

Please indicate your mother tongue(s): _____

How much experience have you had with Shakespeare so far? Tick the appropriate answer.

<i>Movies (adaptations)</i>	<i>Performances</i>	<i>Plays read</i>
None 1-5 More than 5	None 1-5 More than 5	None 1-5 More than 5

Fragment A: *The Merchant of Venice* (2004)

1. Have you seen the movie before watching this fragment?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Did you have difficulties understanding the language Al Pacino (as Shylock) uses in the fragment?

None at all | Hardly any difficulties | Some | Many | Very many |

3. How much do you agree with the following statements:

	Totally disagree 0	Disagree a little 1	Agree somewhat 2	Agree 3	Agree very much 4
The acting is overall realistic.					
Al Pacino uses his voice appropriate to the shown situation. (intonation, volume)					
Al Pacino's body language is natural.					
Al Pacino's accent has a negative effect on the accurate portrayal of the character.					
Sometimes I forgot that I was looking at an actor playing a character. <i>If agree: At which moments was that?</i>					
The use of language seems natural/normal to me.					

4. What was the emotionally strongest moment in the fragment for you?

5. If you think the acting is not convincing, which factors contribute to this perception?

6. If you think the use of language isn't natural, which factors contribute to this perception?

Fragment B: *The Devil's Advocate* (1997)

1. Have you seen the movie before watching this fragment?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Did you have difficulties understanding the language Al Pacino (as John Milton) uses in the fragment?
 - None at all | Hardly any difficulties | Some | Many | Very many |

3. How much do you agree with the following statements:

	Totally disagree 0	Disagree a little 1	Agree somewhat 2	Agree 3	Agree very much 4
The acting is overall realistic.					
Al Pacino uses his voice appropriate to the shown situation. (intonation, volume)					
Al Pacino's body language is natural.					
Al Pacino's accent has a negative effect on the accurate portrayal of the character.					
Sometimes I forgot that I was looking at an actor playing a character. <i>If agree: At which moments was that?</i>					
The use of language seems natural/normal to me.					

4. What was the emotionally strongest moment in the fragment for you?

5. If you think the acting is not very convincing, which factors contribute to this perception?

6. If you think the use of language isn't natural, which factors contribute to this perception?

Appendix C: Tables (SPSS output)**C1:****Group Statistics**

	TheatreExp	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MQ01	YES	20	2,85	,745	,167
	NO	10	3,00	1,155	,365
MQ06	YES	20	1,90	1,071	,240
	NO	10	2,60	1,174	,371

C2:**Group Statistics**

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MQ01	A	15	3,40	,632	,163
	B	15	2,40	,828	,214
MQ06	A	15	2,73	1,033	,267
	B	15	1,53	,915	,236

C3:**Group Statistics**

	NativeEng	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MQ01	YES	6	3,67	,816	,333
	NO	24	2,71	,806	,165
MQ06	YES	6	3,00	1,265	,516
	NO	24	1,92	1,018	,208

C4:**Group Statistics**

	TheatreExp	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
DQ01	YES	20	2,65	,875	,196
	NO	10	2,90	1,101	,348
DQ06	YES	20	2,65	1,182	,264
	NO	10	3,40	,966	,306

C5:**Group Statistics**

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
DQ01 A	15	2,87	,915	,236
B	15	2,60	,986	,254
DQ06 A	15	3,47	,915	,236
B	15	2,33	1,113	,287

C6:

Group Statistics

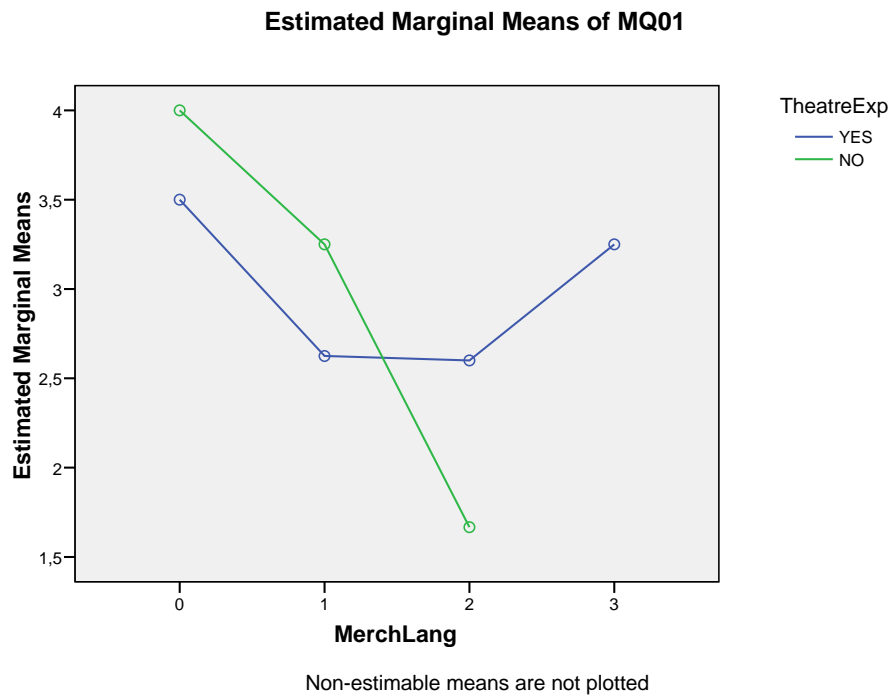
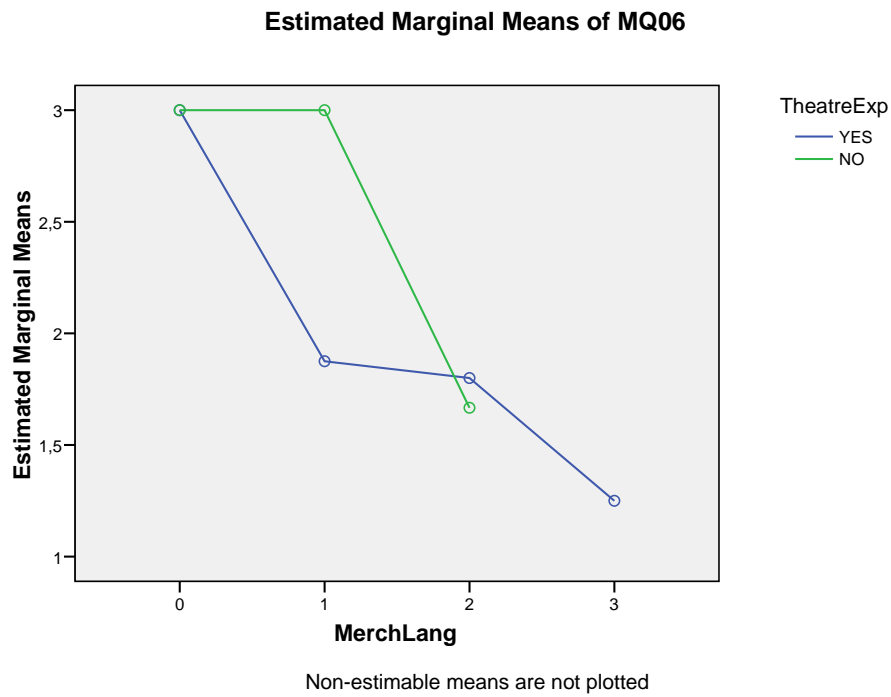
NativeEng	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
DQ01 YES	6	3,00	1,095	,447
NO	24	2,67	,917	,187
DQ06 YES	6	3,83	,408	,167
NO	24	2,67	1,167	,238

C7:

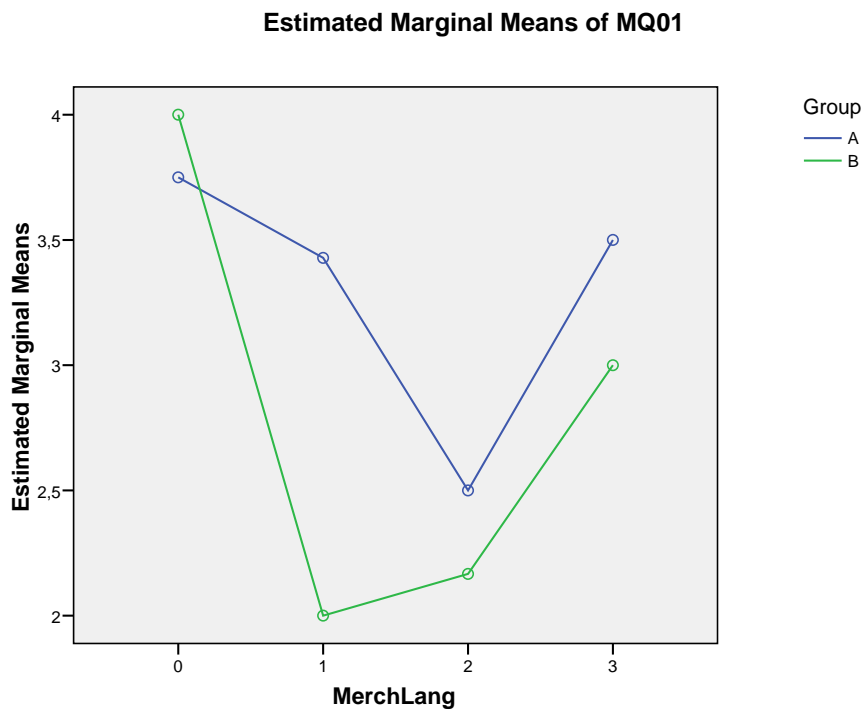
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5,718	4	1,429	2,104	,110
Within Groups	16,982	25	,679		
Total	22,700	29			

C8:

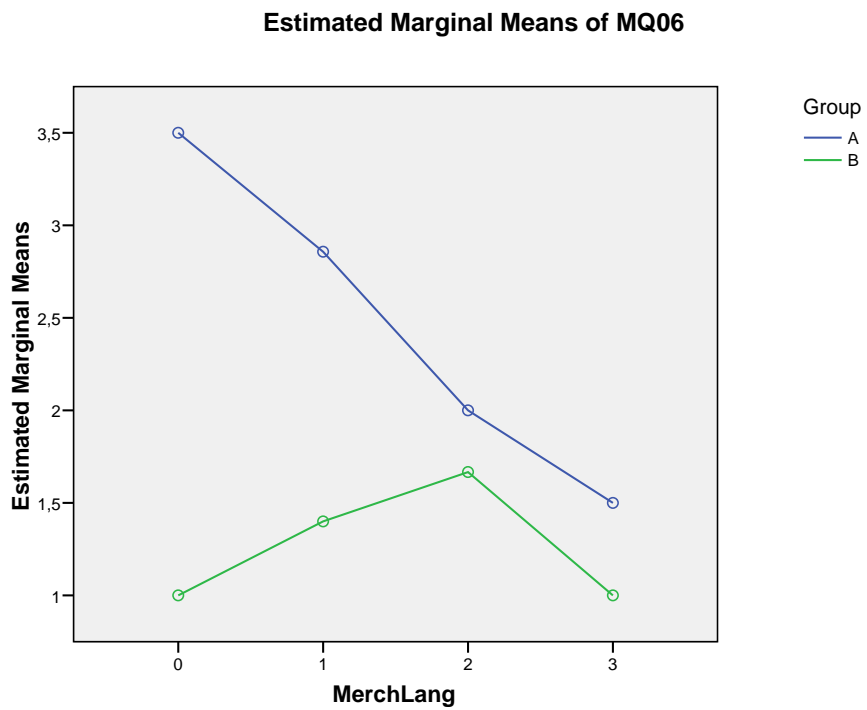
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9,177	4	2,294	3,437	,023
Within Groups	16,689	25	,668		
Total	25,867	29			

Appendix D: Graphs (SPSS output)**D1:****D2:**

D3:

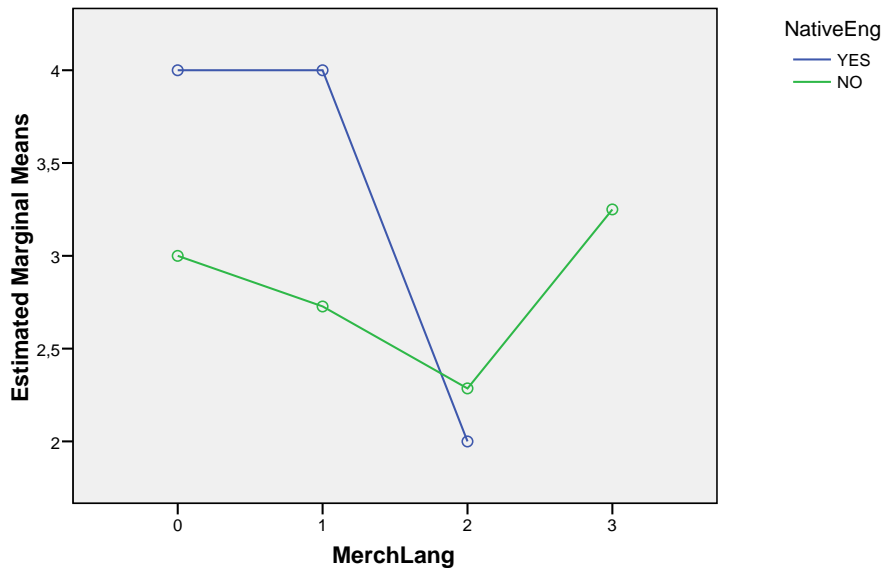


D4:



D5:

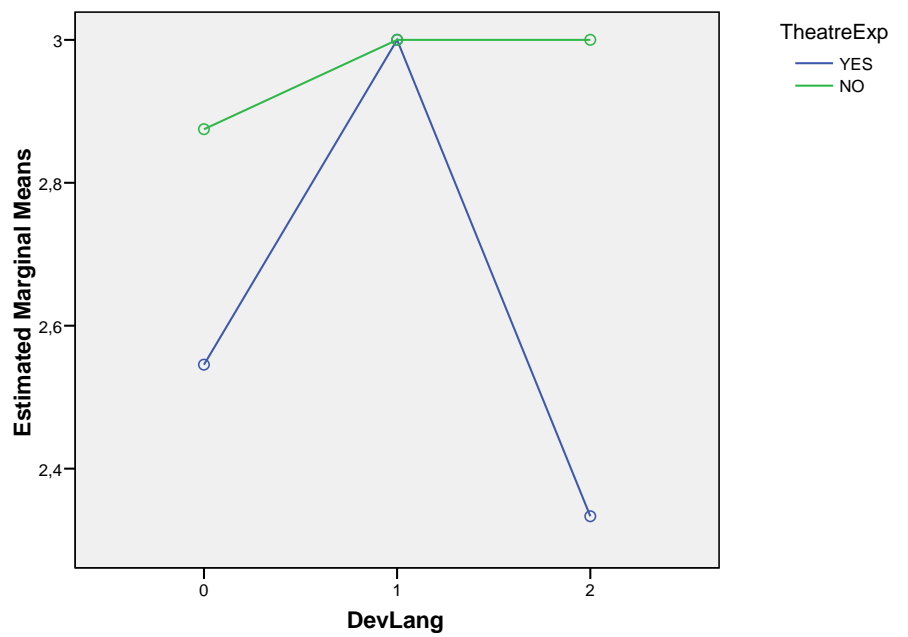
Estimated Marginal Means of MQ01



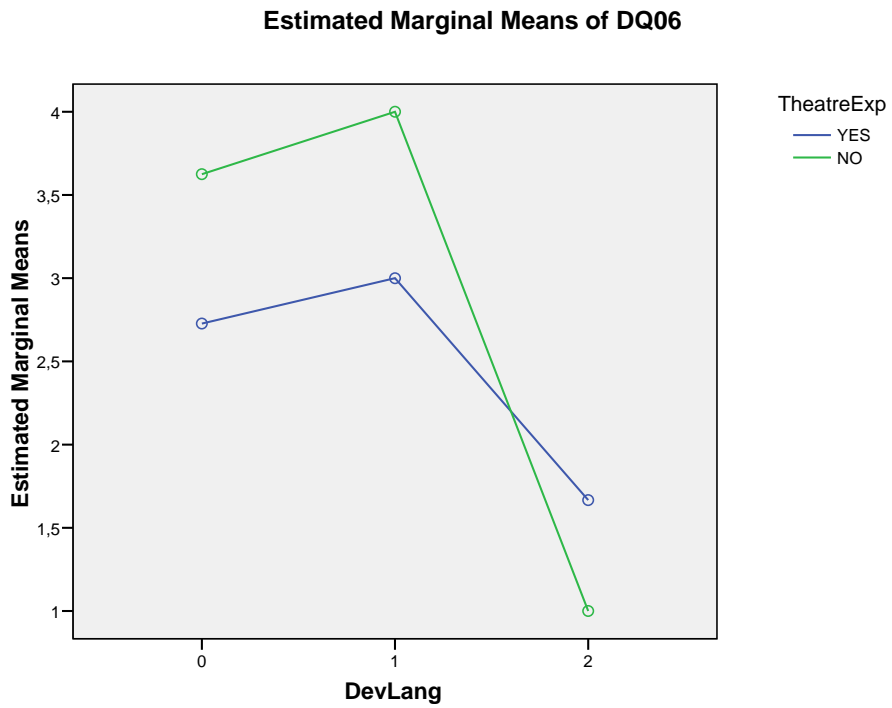
Non-estimable means are not plotted

D6:

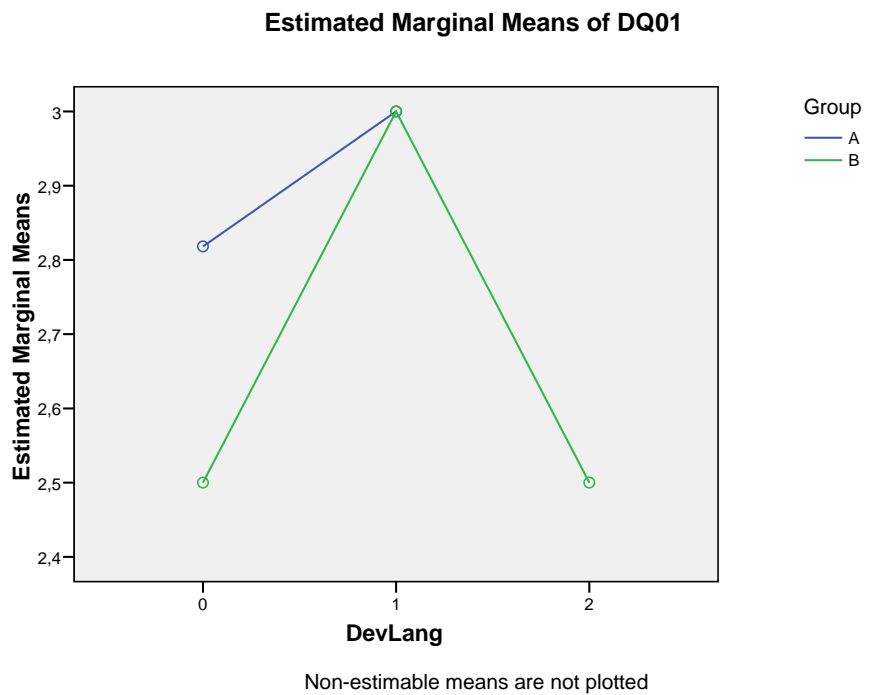
Estimated Marginal Means of DQ01



D7:

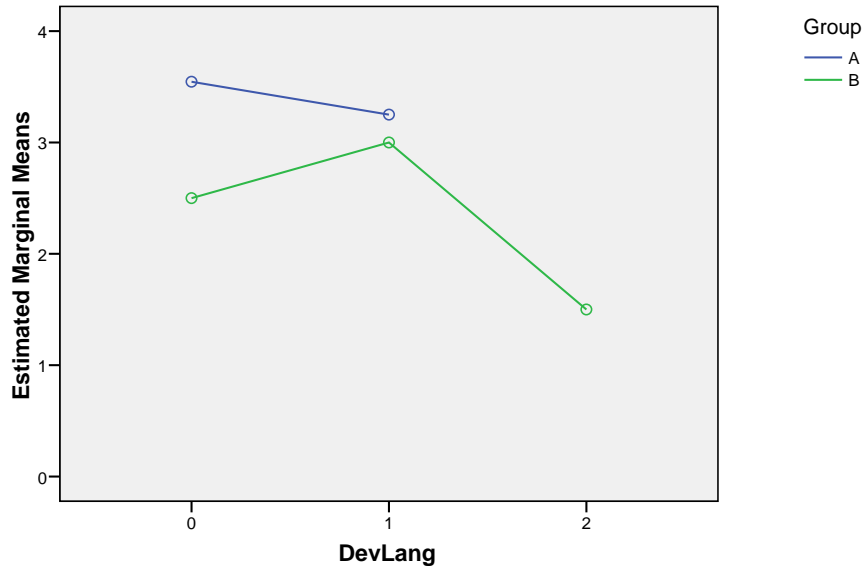


D8:



D9:

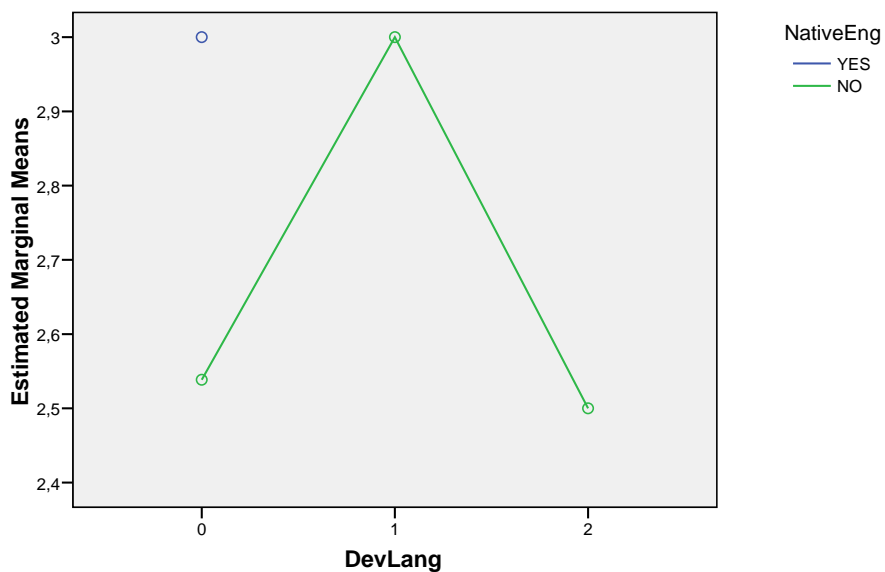
Estimated Marginal Means of DQ06



Non-estimable means are not plotted

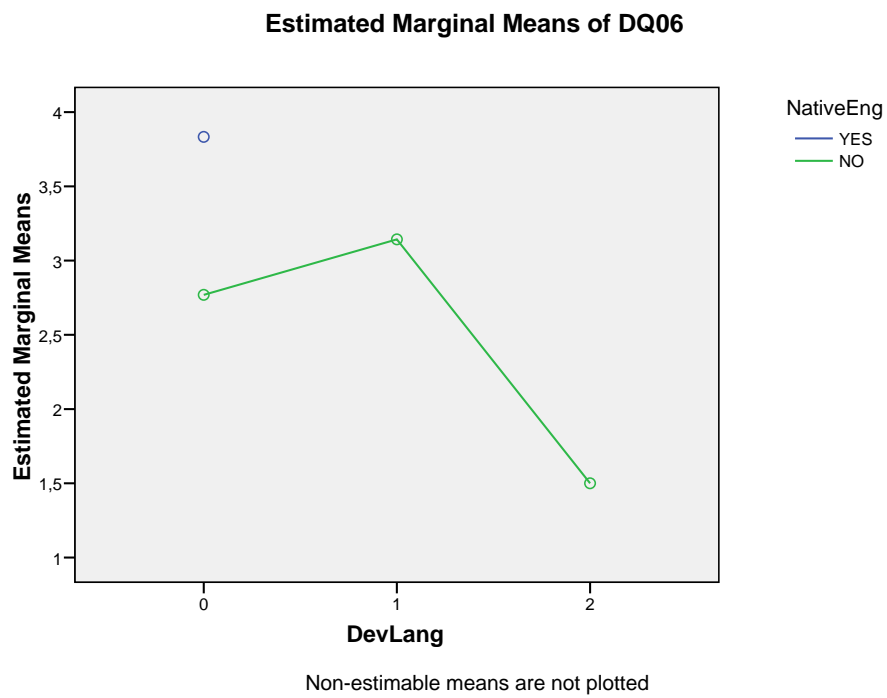
D10:

Estimated Marginal Means of DQ01

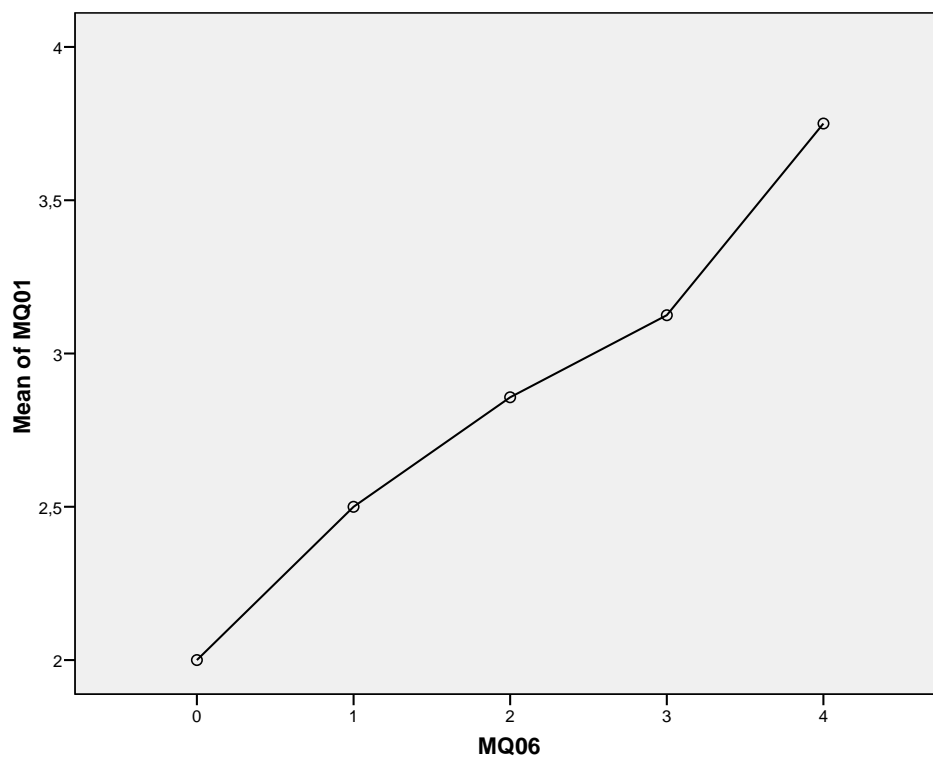


Non-estimable means are not plotted

D11:



D12:



D13:

