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Stanislavski on Stage: The Benedetti Legacy

By Joseph Dunne

ABSTRACT The foundation in 2007 of The Stanislavski Centre, the parent organization of the *Stanislavski Studies* journal, came about directly through the work of the late Professor Jean Benedetti (1930–2012) which originated when he was the Principal of Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance from 1970 to 1987. Starting with the publication of *Stanislavski: An Introduction* in 1982, and culminating in the editing and translation of the new Routledge Stanislavski editions, published in 2008 and 2009, with much additional work in between, Benedetti became established as one of the world's most influential Stanislavski scholars. As founding Patron of The Centre, Benedetti witnessed its inaugural event, the Stanislavski on Stage exhibition of photographic material from the Centre's archives, at London's National Theatre in 2008. To mark the 150th anniversary of Stanislavski's birth in 1863, the exhibition was re-staged at Pushkin House in Central London, accompanied by a short lecture series. The opening night of this exhibition was designed to celebrate Jean Benedetti's life and work. Under the chairmanship of the College's current Principal, Professor Michael Earley, the Head of the Centre, Dr Paul Fryer, assembled a panel of leading Stanislavski experts and practitioners, several of whom had direct experience of working with Benedetti himself, and many of whom have contributed major publications to the current scholarship. Their discussions, debates and deliberations are published here for the first time, not only as a fascinating exploration of Stanislavski's approaches and the way in which they are taught today, but also as a memorial to Jean Benedetti, whose pioneering work opened up an entirely new level of understanding for English-speaking readers. **Keywords:** Benedetti, acting, directing, Russian theatre, Stanislavski's system
A panel discussion that took place at Pushkin House, London, January 2013, as part of the Stanislavski on Stage exhibition.

Participants:

ME Michael Earley

PF Paul Fryer

KK Katya Kamotskaia

AH Anthony Hozier

MS Mark Stephenson

BM Bella Merlin

JG John Gillett

JB Jonathan Brill

ME: Thank you all for coming. This is a very special evening because we are in the midst of celebrating Stanislavski's 150th anniversary. The biggest celebration is in Moscow this week, and I am going to Moscow tomorrow morning for two days for the big events at the Moscow Art Theatre, but we are starting here, in London. Before I introduce the guests this evening, who will speak about not only Jean Benedetti's work but the direction of Stanislavski's studies in general, I would like to introduce Dr Paul Fryer, who is the director of our Stanislavski Centre. It was Paul who mounted this wonderful exhibition based on some of the material in our unique archive. Paul, perhaps you could tell people about the archive and what these photos represent, please.

PF: Thank you, Michael. The work that you see here tonight comes from our special collections at Rose Bruford College, which includes a substantial amount of Stanislavski-related material – not only the photographs, of which we have around about 200 in total, but you will only see forty-six here today, otherwise I think we would have used every single space in the building. The photographs represent the very first attempt anywhere in the world to document the work of a theatre company; The Moscow Art Theatre, founded in 1898, was the first theatre company to ever keep a photographic record of every single one of their performances, which they still do today. The collection that you see here was purchased quite some time ago; our principal at the time, the late Professor Jean Benedetti, was developing a specialism in Stanislavski's work, and of course subsequently became one of the world's great authorities on Stanislavski and the Russian theatre. He had an idea to set up a centre at Rose Bruford College to help to promote Stanislavski's work but this did not happen during the time that he was here – actually it didn't happen until 2007, when the notion came to us that we had this wonderful material that no one ever saw, so we founded the Stanislavski Centre. We started public events in 2008 and we now try to share our material with as many people as want to see it. This includes international scholars who travel to us for research, our own students who make use of the archive, students and academic staff from other institutions, and also theatre enthusiasts – people who just love the history of the theatre. As well as the photographs, we have a very large book collection: the late Professor Benedetti left us his entire research collection when he died, which is about to be catalogued and will therefore soon be available to everyone. So, just to finish, what I have to say this evening is: please come and visit us in Sidcup and see the wonderful wealth of Stanislavski and other theatre-related material that we have in our special collection. You are welcome here tonight and you will always be welcome at the Stanislavski Centre.

ME: Thank you Paul. I am very pleased with the group we have assembled here tonight, because not only do they represent the new scholarship being done on Stanislavski, but each of them in their own way is also a theatre practitioner. All of them have taught and are teachers. Jean Benedetti's work started in some ways with his great biography of Stanislavski, the only English language biography of him that exists, which went through when I was his publisher at Methuen. I think we were in the fourth edition, so he was endlessly revising it and bringing it up to date. And then, of course, his great life work: the wonderfully massive and fabulous volumes, *An Actor's Work* and *An Actor's Work on a Role* that came out towards the end of his life. They replaced, in part, *An Actor Prepares*, which my students over the years have always called *An Actor Despairs*. Jean spent a lot of his years working on these books and turned out a rather rich and new view of Stanislavski that was (a) more coherent; (b) more humorous, rather than humourless; and (c) restored the changes that Stanislavski made to his original work, published in English in 1936. Stanislavski made these changes as he continued to work on his views about acting and acting techniques right up until his death, none of which had ever been translated before. All of the people here represent taking this work in a new direction and rethinking it and adapting it for contemporary times. I'd like to introduce Professor Tony Hosier, who was a Vice Principal at Rose Bruford College when Jean Benedetti was there, and also the academic leader at the college for many years. He has written widely on a number of subjects, most recently on Brecht, and is somebody who I think will have quite a lot to tell us about the inception of some of these books and what they mean. Bella Merlin is Professor of Acting at the University of California, Davis, who will talk about her two books – which have really redefined in many ways acting approaches to Stanislavski – *The Stanislavski Toolkit* and *Beyond Stanislavski*. Katya Kamotskaia is from the Royal Scottish Conservatoire, where she teaches acting, and who also provides insights for us tonight because she worked with Jean Benedetti on all of these translations. Katya trained in Moscow and worked there as a teacher for many years. She trained originally as an actress at the Vakhtangov School, so what she has to tell us about the drift from the Russian version of Stanislavski into the new English versions will be very interesting. Mark Stevenson is primarily a director but also acts, and is from the Royal Scottish Conservatoire who uses some of this work in his own directing and is probably taking it in a new direction. Last but not least, I am very pleased to have John Gillett with us. John has many guises, as an actor, director, and writer. He's also teaches at a number of drama schools, including East 15. John's book is called *Acting on Impulse: Reclaiming The Stanislavski Approach*, which is already going into a

revised edition in 2014.

ME: Jean Benedetti was a unique person; he was a great translator, he was multilingual – he could speak French, German, Greek, Russian, and other languages. He was the last of a dying breed – a kind of Renaissance man. He was a great actor, a musician, and a writer; to sometimes take the pressure off the Stanislavski work, he'd just go off and dash off another book over the course of a month or two, such as *The History of Acting*. One day he was sitting in my office, telling me about the letters between Anton Chekhov and his wife, the actress Olga Knipper, and I said, "They're fabulous – they'd make a fabulous book." A month later, a manuscript arrived on my desk, *Dear Actor, Dear Actress, Dear Writer*, which were the letters between them. But the Stanislavski project must have become a major preoccupation for him Tony?

AH: Yes. I knew him first in – dare I say it – 1976, when he brought me into Rose Bruford College, and he started the first degree in acting in the UK, something which has now become common currency everywhere; this not only influences theatre schools but also influences drama departments in universities. I remember a lot of in-fighting and external fighting with the university sector and the new NCDT sector – the National Council for Drama Training – because there were some people who thought, "How on earth can you develop ideas and analyse and research ideas through practice instead of reading a book?" Some of the discussions we had in those days were pretty primitive. But it was the first intake that had Gary Oldman as one of our young actors, and we broke new ground. We had a lot of fights, not with Norman, actually – by the way, we knew him as Norman, because that was his first name before changing his name by deed poll. To us he was Norman, and to the outside world, professionally, he was Jean. In those early days we were trying not only to get this course going, to get it recognized, but also to find a way of teaching it and a new way of thinking about how to approach pedagogically a degree level of training. There are probably people here now who teach acting from the same sorts of issues. I took over the course after the death of the first course director, Maxwell Shaw – who was one of Joan Littlewood's actors and died in I think 1985 – and ran it until it finished in 1992. It was during this period that Norman started to work on Stanislavski. He became Chair of the ITI, the International Theatre Institute and zoomed around the world. We sometimes didn't know where he was; we wondered just how we managed without him, and there were times when he came back with new ideas from the people that he met. The first fruit of this work was his little book called *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, which came out in 1982, and was revised in 1989 and again, I think, in 1991 or 1992. He was gradually confronting the fact that the translations we had inherited

– the Hapgood translations and the Robbins translation of *My Life in Art* – were unacceptable: they were distorted reality, they were badly translated and badly expressed and a radical job needed to be done to bring all of that into a contemporary frame of reference for actor training. And so he increasingly became involved in a dialogue with the staff about Stanislavski, which was really the germ of the translation work.

ME: Now tell me, Katya, because you worked on these volumes, what did he do to change the shape of what had previously been written about Stanislavski and the Elizabeth Hapgood translations?

KK: The main difference is that this translation is more precise, and there are nearly no cuts in it at all; also because Jean was an actor, and Elizabeth Hapgood, as far as I know, wasn't a practitioner, this meant that he saw this work from the inside. We had some disagreements – I am a professional who was brought up in Russia and he was a British practitioner; this was not about the translation of words, but in their meanings and this, for me, is the main difference.

ME: How does it redefine the method, the techniques, the System itself?

What are some of the phrases that seem different or more precise?

KK: Well, in the afterword of *An Actor's Work*, Smeliansky said that Stanislavski has to be translated from Russian into Russian, and I think for anybody who reads it in Russian this is clear, because it can be confusing as it is. So, to be very precise and very particular with how you put it together in English is very important, and Jean was trying to make it close to what Stanislavski tried to deliver in acting. Stanislavski was the first person, in Russia at least, who took acting as a profession and not just some kind of strange job to entertain people, but because he was the first one to do this it was very difficult to cover everything and to be clear about it.

ME: Mark, tell us a bit about how this work is used in the work of a contemporary director now. Is it still used?

MS: Yes, I think it absolutely is. I don't think you can get away from it – I don't think you'd want to get away from it. I think it provides the absolute bedrock of actor training and directing, certainly. But I think it's an interesting point that you made about modern actors, whether they have study skills or not, whether they find it easy to dive into it or to read through it or to take from it and I think it needs reinterpreting again for them and for their own practice. It provides the absolute basis but I think it always needs that extra step.

ME: One of the things I know Jean did in this translation is to take it back to the original Russian version, where it's more of the diary of a student vis-à-vis his teacher, because Stanislavski in a sense was both, wasn't he? He was that student, learning.

KK: Yes, because the student was obviously Stanislavski himself in his later ages.

ME: So it's a kind of autobiographical book, in some ways?

KK: Well, he started as an amateur actor; he was torturing himself in how to make himself as an actor, how to be a good one, and he was questioning this always, which is why he wanted to create an easier way for other students. But originally translating or decoding Stanislavski needs to be done, more or less, every twenty years, I think, because every new generation takes something different from it.

ME: Now, Bella, you have written two very important books that are used a lot by students. Is your work a jumping-off point from this?

BM: I have to say that the Stanislavski Toolkit² came out in 2007 and the new translations came out in 2008 – so instantly I was embarrassed at how out-of-date the Stanislavski Toolkit felt. Thankfully Nick Hern agreed to republish the Toolkit this year because there's some really wonderful terminology in the new translation. Not least things such as "Task" rather than "Objective", and "Bit" rather than "Unit". Katya and I would talk a little bit or email each other and discuss things while she was working with Jean on this, and sometimes we would talk about the absolute nuances of a word. Two of the words that came up were "Concentration" and "Attention" – Hapgood uses "concentration of attention", whilst the new translations use "concentration and attention". At one point we discussed what the difference is between "concentration" and "attention". In the Russian language, attention is outer and concentration is inner. So, for example, if you do training in yoga, concentration is that kind of inner focus, whilst attention is when you attend to people around you, so for me they are two absolutely different words.

MS: But is it the same word in Russian?

KK: Well, in Russian we have both words, and they mean two different things. I had a little battle with Jean, because I thought when Stanislavski says "attention" you can't use both "concentration" and "attention", or you can say "concentration of attention" because it's more focused, but you can't replace "attention" because "attention" is a very specific word, especially acting-wise. For me, concentration makes you totally separated from the partner – if you're concentrating then you are not attentive.

JG: Bella's book came out just before *An Actor's Work* was published, and the same thing happened to my book, which came out a few months after Bella's.

But I'm not so much concerned about the specific translation of particular words like "bit", "unit" or a "dash", a "problem", "task" or "objective" or whatever, but I did look at Benedetti's book *Stanislavski and the Actor* when I was working as an actor, and as a teacher, and as a director – and I would just like to elaborate on that a little bit because, unlike most of the people here, I didn't meet Benedetti until about 1979 or 1980 when I was working at

Rose Bruford. When I was working there I was doing it in between finalizing work on what became *An Actor Prepares* and so on. But he also included in that an account of the “method of physical action”, “active analysis”, and “analysis through action”, which clarified for me what I’d read in *Creating a Role*. I’m not so concerned about the terms themselves, but what I am concerned with is how the basic concepts are put into practice. For me, the major thing that Benedetti did as a practitioner, rather than as an academic, was bringing together the course of training, which is internal, imaginative and intuitive – the process of experience, together with the physical characterization, the work on the voice and the body, and that was the first time in English, I think, that this had come together. I think it had been done in Spanish or French, but in English that’s the first time. And that is incredibly important, because it emphasizes that Stanislavski’s process is far more holistic than was originally thought back in the 1930s and 1940s when *An Actor Prepares* came out on its own in 1936. And I think the fact that that came out on its own was the crucial problem, rather than the specific interpretations of words in it. Personally, I’m glad Elizabeth Hapgood translated that book – it meant we had some grasp of Stanislavski through those periods. *Building a Character* didn’t come out until 1949, but, I think, however flawed it is in some of the literal translations, if you read it carefully and objectively without prejudice, what you see is very clearly an emphasis by Stanislavski on action, imagination and experience, and not on emotional recall. At that time the release of the book was corroborating this notion that Lee Strasberg’s *Method* was the same as Stanislavski’s *System*, but quite clearly it isn’t. That’s the importance of these new volumes. But the small books, I think, are invaluable, particularly for students, because they are so accessible and practical. Benedetti’s legacy that I find most important is as a practitioner, because he knows what he’s talking about – he’s primarily an actor, he was an acting tutor, and he was a director as well as a head of a drama school, and you can see that practice and embodied experience come through on every page.

ME: We should mention that Stanislavski’s work was divided mainly into these two books, *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*, which came out after a long interval. He always meant them to be together as one, and this volume joins those two up. In fact, when Elizabeth Hapgood translated *Building a Character* she thought it was an entire revision of *An Actor Prepares*, and she didn’t treat it as a continuation or, as it were, the refinement of a system moving from the psychological to the physical, joining the two together into, as you say, the psycho-physical.

JG: Stanislavski was very ill at the time and didn’t have the documents together, so it wasn’t possible to bring them together.

ME: That’s right. And this third book, *An Actor Works on a Role*, is a

combination of Stanislavski manuscripts and material he didn't get to publish in the end, so in a sense it's a clarification of some things as well, is it not?

KK: I also think that what's important about these books is they give a bigger overview of everything that Stanislavski scholars and practitioners in Russia used to think about Stanislavski's system. Stanislavski is supposed to write, according to one book I have, one extra book about drill in acting, and according to another book it's about ethics and aesthetics, so it's kind of starting from the first steps in acting only and then going into a director's view about ethics and philosophy in theatre; it's a system of a lot of other things, rather than just the first book. So I totally agree, and I totally agree about the words. Words are sometimes not important if, let's say, we can agree on what we're talking about and what you can use – even if I don't know a word, such as "apple", but as long as we're absolutely clear on what we mean. But I think if you mess up with words throughout the book it might cause some problems.

ME: Tony, what was the teaching of drama like before and after Jean started doing these works, say at a place like Rose Bruford – was there a shift?

AH: That I can't speak of because he was already the principal when I joined the college. When he appointed Maxwell Shaw as the Programme Director of the acting programme, the foundation year was based on what we understood at the time to be Stanislavski, and in that sense it was systematic in its approach. Max had worked with Joan Littlewood, who was eclectic in her methods but did use Stanislavski; there were other elements in the programme too, including a lot of Laban work. But. I think it depends on the teachers you bring in subsequently to run a programme – obviously when the programme directors and acting teachers changed, then the methodologies changed. One of the things that strike me is that you've got to be sure about what the process is and the processes involved in teaching acting and bring it out in the students. But all of us know when you are in rehearsal or a classroom for a long period then you begin to evolve your own jargon, and it's like a family thing; you work together and you have your own common words and shared experiences. But then the issue really becomes how you make sure you don't drift away from the concepts and that you're still in touch with the real processes that you were taught and have learned. The ground is always shifting in rehearsals and classes and it's the core concepts, and not really the words, that matter.

BM: To link what Tony and John have said, one of the things that I feel is very important about what Jean had in common with Stanislavski was this tripartite identity of being a teacher, director and actor, and one of the things that I found particularly provocative when the new translations came out was how, inevitably, when you are

talking translation you are talking words. When you're talking words and a system of some sort, then you're talking terminology, so you have to deal with the terminology you've got. In each of those different modes – be it actor, teacher or director – my attitude towards terminology shifts. If I'm the teacher I think, "Okay, we've got to keep this simple, we've all got to understand what an Objective is, what an Action is, because we are all learning a system", and particularly at the University of California Davis which is a science campus where students are predominantly used to being told, "This is an atom, this is a molecule", therefore, "This is dual consciousness, this is emotion memory". However, as a director, I find myself somewhat shifting in my terminology because all I really care about is "Am I bringing it out of the actors?" And as an actor I don't care what I call it as long as I tell the story – let's get on and do it! That was what provoked me in the new translations and how I felt it was useful. As Katya said, Jean was a practitioner, but a practitioner from three very specific and distinct but interwoven avenues.

JG: In the end of that little book I mentioned before, Stanislavski and the Actor, there's an appendix where he puts down all the different terms that Stanislavski used at different times. The words for "unit" or "fact" or "event" or "task" change according to whether he was in a practical, teaching, or directing situation with students, or whether he was writing in the Russian version, so they all change, and as practitioners that's exactly what we find. You get into a set of given circumstances imaginatively and you encounter a problem, then you have to deal with it so you get a task to deal with and then you have what Stanislavski called the "impulse to action", which he put in terms of "I want", and that's quite well represented by what Hapgood used, which was an "objective": an immediate attempt to fulfil a desire in the moment. So we can use all of these things, and not necessarily in conflict. I think it's important when you read these books that they are part of a course of training, because I don't think I would have necessarily understood *An Actor Prepares*, which is quite obscure in places. But then there are obscurities in the new version as well, which are not quite resolved when you look at things like "super-objective" or "super-conscious", for example. There are still ambiguities, but it becomes clearer when you're actually doing it and you're doing it with somebody who's got experience and they know what they're talking about. It's very difficult if you just pick up a book and try to implement it, in the same way it is if you pick up a voice book or a book on movement – you always find ambiguities. It's incredibly difficult to write about an artistic process, particularly one that's involving the subconscious, imagination, spontaneity and release, which are very intangible concepts.

ME: Mark, as a director, how do you deal with this in a rehearsal room?

MS: It doesn't matter that the student or the actor knows what the word is because you have to learn the concept first. I think you almost need to read these books after you've done your studying, after you've trained, to actually go, "Oh, that's what that is!" It actually puts it into some kind of understanding for you. I think we use active analysis a lot, which John was talking about, but I don't know how widespread that is in the UK.

ME: Could you tell everybody about active analysis?

MS: Well, again, it's an interpretation, and there are lots of different ways of doing it. The way that Katya and I work is that you do your round-table analysis of a play but then, in terms of actually trying to embody the information that you've dug up, you put a lot of the work into improvisation or "études" so that the information doesn't remain as totally cerebral, but that you understand it with your body. I think it's also based, as the translation talks about, on the multi-storey "ifs". Say, for example, an actress is playing a woman in the nineteenth century who behaves in a particular way, has a certain set of morals, and lives in a particular place; for a modern actress there is an incredible amount of information to try to digest in one go if the director tells her to act that – it's incredibly difficult. I think active analysis is a very useful way of gradually moving towards a character: you merely start off with an improvisation that's based in the twenty-first century but has some relation to the circumstances that you're asking the actor to play, and then gradually through the improvisation method you move closer and closer to the character, by complicating the circumstances each time. Active analysis purely means – and I think we probably all do it – actively analysing the text, actively digging out the information, actively embodying rather than just sitting round a table and talking about it, because at the end of the day it's practical work we do, isn't it?

ME: And this is the area of Stanislavski's studies where there's lots of debate and, as you say, lots of different approaches. When we were in Russia in October this was the big topic amongst various Russian teachers of acting – how do you use it and understand it Bella?

BM: I use and understand it as I learnt it from my teacher in Russia, Katya Kamotskaia, combined with two other actor trainers, Albert Filozov and Vladimir Ananyev, and also as I understood it from the reading I did. I didn't know I was doing active analysis at the time – I'd never even heard of it. So it was only really when I came back and started doing the research and realized it was the simple approach: you read a scene, you discuss a scene, you improvise a scene, starting with silent improvisations; you then discuss the improvisation, what you've discovered about the character from being in a space with somebody else and connecting and communicating with them, and then you reread the scene, you discuss where

your improvisation uncovered something and where you actually need to go on a slightly different tangent with the script. The image I tend to use is a train with the ivy round the trellis; bit-by-bit, you get to a dead-letter perfect production. It's an incredibly scary way of going about it, yet terribly liberating. I remember reading *Crime and Punishment* with Katya when she said, "Right now, get up and do it," and I thought, "I don't know, we haven't got enough information now, how can we possibly do this?" and she said, "Well, just try it." Sure enough, the imagination kicks in, the physical contact with the other partners kicks in, and lo and behold you're giving lines dead-letter perfect that you didn't even know you knew, because you're trusting the space, your partner, your instinct, your imagination. At the same time it's bizarrely time-efficient: you can get very far very quickly, even though somebody perhaps hearing about this process, having never done it, would say, "Well, why on earth improvise? Why not just learn the lines and get up and do it?" In fact, you're learning. Your body learns the lines, the space learns the lines, the lighting design, the props – it all helps you create.

JG: I think Stanislavski started off as quite an autocratic director, with the classic director-designer concept into which the actor would be fitted like a pawn; you tell the actor where to move, and you give them bits of business and give them line readings. I'm sure any actors here have been through that quite a lot in British theatre. He then went on to try to incorporate the actors into the process more. He went through this big prolonged, protracted round-table analysis, which could go on for months, and he found that the actors were getting incredibly cluttered, the classic "I'm stuck in my head," and were actually being cut off from their intuition and imagination and their subconscious, which were the very things he wanted to release. My experience is exactly the same as Bella's; experience enables the actor to incorporate in rehearsal all that organic training; it is acting based on natural processes. I experienced this back in 1982 when I was in a production of *The Daughter-in-Law* by DH Lawrence; we had a three-week rehearsal period, and we had to work in the evenings through to ten o'clock to try to extend it to four weeks, and we went through the process that Bella describes. I didn't know what it was called at the time, but we did the improvisation on the units and bits. We got to the end of an act, the director got us up on our feet, we improvised the whole act, and then we got to the end of the play and improvised the whole play. Now, this was incredibly liberating, because what it did was to throw you as actors onto your intuition and imagination, it forced you to connect and interact with other people in the moment and the play. What you want is to create the narrative line of action, the effect of finding this freedom within a discipline, which is what I think Stanislavski was really trying to get to – a

flexibility within a structure, freedom within a discipline, from conscious to subconscious. It closes the gap – particularly in the short rehearsals we have in British theatre – between the actor and the text, the action and the circumstances; it arouses the creativity of the actor and places the actor bang in the centre of the theatrical process, which used to be the case right from the early days of theatre. We like doing it because it's liberating for actors and for directors, but I don't think there are many directors who actually use it. The last time I did was with Mike Alfreds, who wrote *Different Every Night* and so shared that experience, but I don't think many other directors actually use this process – in drama schools, perhaps, but not a lot in British professional theatre. Maybe Katie Mitchell does some of this, but many people don't.

KK: Active analysis is really important because it does two other things. First of all, the actor finds an individual way towards the character – because it's not about achieving the stage performance immediately, but it's as if every time you try you find your own way to figure out what does and doesn't suit you as an actor; you're really not forcing it because you are giving space to find your own journey. The other thing is that if you absorb information from a play, level by level, through active analysis, it becomes – well, maybe we think it's a mistake – but we call this “emotional memory”, which is not remembering how at fifteen I burst into tears because of my dead cat or something; that doesn't work. But if the actor builds their experience on stage with their partner, looking into his eyes, not another person's eyes, then they remember it and don't have to think about it. It's about the actor turning into the character, not pretending they're turning into the character and not remembering who they are, but being a slightly different person.

JG: It's all about exploring. You use rehearsal as an exploration. Some people in Russia and Germany talk about rehearsals as a probe, an exploration, and a discovery, not just a repetition. You don't just get up, learn the lines and trot them out in a particular way; I think this is very important. The more you explore in that way the more you connect with the people who are actually in front of you on that stage or in front of the camera; you have something that's dynamic and entertaining and alive and challenging – and without that, you've got deathly theatre. Active analysis is just one way of doing it, but it's a way that connects the actors.

ME: And tell us, when Stanislavski was actually working on this active analysis, was this very much near the end of his life? If you go to Stanislavski's house in Moscow there's a theatre in the house that he used as a laboratory in a way that a scientist might have a laboratory down the hall. He would work with young actors – the Opera Studies work was done there. Is this where, as it were, the more simplified approach started?

KK: As I understand it he introduced the concept and probably used it in his everyday rehearsal life, but theoretically it was properly established by Knebel, his student.

ME: Irina Brown is working on Knebel's book now, and it was a book that Jean was supposed to be working on towards the very end of his life, but probably only got so far with it. What does the Knebel book that you're working on tell us? What it is about?

IB: I am working on a version that Anatoly Vasiliev put together, who was Knebel's star pupil and was one of the most important directors that we've had in Russia; he took all of the "Soviet-speak" out of the book. Knebel is an extraordinary influence on the post-war generation of actors, because she is a living witness. She was a student of both Stanislavski and Michael Chekhov, and she learnt everything from the horse's mouth and passed it on to her students – it was an oral tradition. Brown's book is a combination of a number of different books by her and is called Active Analysis.

KK: Many of the directors in Russia used so-called active analysis because it had an oral culture, although it has had many faces through many different directors. I think Vasiliev is, well ... even to call him a star is not enough; he's an extraordinary director, and he took active analysis to a different stage, to philosophy, even, and if another wonderful director in Russia used active analysis then it looked absolutely different. The tradition, the method, was developed over the years, but it went in so many directions it's quite difficult to capture.

ME: You mentioned something there that I want to mention to everybody, and Jean Benedetti mentions it in his introduction: the way that Stanislavski's work got "Sovietized". What do you mean by that? Because there was a period when he was almost living under a kind of polite house arrest, which he lived under for the rest of his life after he came back from the great American tour after Russia had changed and all of a sudden things that he might have said in this book about the life spirit and so forth became, as it were, compromised.

KK: Stanislavski was under this arrest you mentioned after his death as well. I do have to say, being a student in Russia, it was difficult to find the book, and we were not taught Stanislavski's System by that book. We were asked to read it – somehow! – but our teachers never checked if we read it or not. Never mind the collection, but just the book on acting as well.

ME: Basically, the Soviet system tried to usurp the talent...

KK: Yes.

ME: ...and mould it in its own way; not mould him, but mould the information about him. Anybody in the Soviet Union who wanted to publish a book had to substantiate their thoughts with quotes from Marx and Brezhnev and Khrushchev. And it wasn't a choice; the book was first published in 1956, I think, but still people didn't

have a choice. There was already a force that was starting so you were allowed to actually write it down, but otherwise I think the oral tradition was the strongest thing that saved and, thanks to Knebel, preserved this work. But I was just thinking that etude doesn't quite mean the same thing as improvisation.

MS: I suppose the focus, as you were saying, is more of a probe. There is a sense improvisation is to entertain, whereas the etude is purely for the actors to understand something for themselves. So it's less for an audience – it's purely a practical exploration. I suppose that's the difference.

ME: I was interested in that because I've battled with this question for many years; nobody knows what you're talking about when you say etude.

KK: But you mentioned that the words are not so important. For example, "improvisation" – different directors use it with a different meaning, so that's why we start to use etude, which is probably in English language quite strange, but Stanislavski used etude, and the stranger the better with these concepts. And the same with "objective": if you mean a straightforward line, a very particular meaning, then it works, but if you mean a little bit more than that, then it doesn't, so sometimes you have to invent some words and not be absolutely fair to Stanislavski's System. He's absolutely right, but I think in order to follow the concept you have to change the words sometimes.

BM: There are two points that I want to pick up on that are going to seem a bit different but they are connected. One is that Jean brought humour to these new translations, and that is so important – we have such a stereotypical vision in the UK, and perhaps in America as well, of this person who was so austere and tall with the big moustache and heavy eyebrows, etcetera. But Stanislavski was a very playful man. The idea of improvisation for me is connected with a constant state of playfulness, of inner improvisation; that everything you do in a performance is going to be different, therefore everything I do will have to be different because how can I know if my partner is going to constantly be giving me something new? That ease or what I call a "willing vulnerability" has to be trained. The idea of improvisation for me is that the text can always be the same, the *mise-en-scène* can always be the same, but within it you never quite know what the nuances are. That was something I had never really contemplated until I'd gone and done the training in Russia where I realized how nervous my acting had been prior to that; I needed to know the answers, I needed the form, I needed to do it every single time. For me, a great performance was a performance that hits the mark each time exactly and to trust that. Mike Alfreds takes it to another extreme, where he'll say as long as you know which entrance you come in on and which exit you go out

on, do whatever you like in-between – this has its own excitement.

ME: It would make it different every night.

BM: It certainly would. Improvisation is useful in terms of inner-improvisations; etude is useful in terms of just disconnecting from the idea of “We are going to be entertaining” as in “Improv Troupe”.

So we have different nuances of the word, both in the UK and in the USA in terms of external improvisation or inner improvisation.

KK: But also in improvisations you can find some new relationships in the play. When we worked with Bella on *The Seagull* in America, we did improvisations around the family relationships that are not written in the play – they don’t have any scenes or anything – but it’s another human being on the stage, in the same room, so it’s quite important for actors to know how characters feel about others. So this improvisation or etude brought us to...

ME: ...a deepening of the roles.

JG: I think the idea of improvisation is often associated with books of games and improvisations of texts and characters, whereas this type of improvisation is very much improvising the action of the play in order that actors can really connect with it as you in the circumstances of the character, putting it into your own words and then gradually coming to the words of the writer. Now, obviously Stanislavski had a much longer rehearsal period – it took about six months to a year. Maybe some people don’t want that luxury but three or four weeks rehearsal is very tight if you’re trying to go through an organic process. But that’s the difference between the two versions of improvisation.

I think the playful aspect is incredibly important because it was only with directors such as Mike Alfreds that I was able to do with other actors what I was trained to do, where you have this open process of interaction. And I think this is where another Stanislavski concept is very important, which is that of adaptation – he’s got whole chapters on this, where there is a free adaptation between what is happening between two people in a set of circumstances with a particular impulse, like an objective or an image or whatever, which is very different from the idea of determining in an intellectual fashion what you think your actions are on each beat of the text in the first week of rehearsal. This can be a very sterile process if it is a purely intellectual thing, which it sometimes is, because then actors are going through their performance thinking “What is my action? What is my objective?” and actually cut themselves off from the action because there is no interaction, no dynamic with the people they are working with, so I think these directors are very important. Bella, you’ve had the good fortune to work with Russians in Russia and had it at the source, which is terrific.

AH: I was just thinking about the potential clash in this country – partly related with what John’s talking about – which is with the looking for transitive verbs in every line of the text, which is very popular

in this country, based mainly on Max Stafford-Clark. But that can take ages and it's almost counter to the way in which we're talking about the method of physical action.

BM: But having worked several times with Max I'd have to support him. It's not fixing it – it's beginning to lay down a road map so you can begin to understand where you're going; or, as Max would say, you are starting to build the launch pad from which the rocket then goes. So in performance, you are not worried about "Am I playing this?"

AH: Actors can spend two weeks sitting down around a table actioning every line, and that can be a slow process.

BM: Max intersperses it; you'll do that for maybe a couple of hours in the morning, and then you'll do a mass improvisation where the whole building is turned into a pub or something, whatever is relevant to the play.

ME: But active analysis seems like liberation, a very interesting liberation, whereas for generations oftentimes *An Actor Prepares* was a kind of a straitjacket for the actor, or something very difficult to accomplish. Bella, you're talking about a freeing-up, which someone like Max would use, and probably –

JG: – uses it in different ways. Mike Alfreds uses it in different ways according to the company he is with. When I worked with Mike Alfreds he didn't do that, but he does do that with some other companies on different types of plays. But I don't think he does it in such, what shall I say, a formal way – I think there's more flexibility in the way he deals with that.

ME: Obviously Stanislavski is not the be-all and end-all; acting moved on from his work. He had as his students and young actors Vakhtangov, Michael Chekhov, Meyerhold – what did they do that was different from what he was teaching, or did they do something that was more dynamic? We know that Grotowski claims Stanislavski was his great inspiration, yet we wouldn't think of a Grotowski actor that would be "Stanislavskian" in that way, so what's different? Did Stanislavski lay down certain foundations here that you can use in new techniques of acting, new techniques of directing, and new techniques of stenography?

KK: Because I was trained in Russia in a particularly limited Stanislavskian system I didn't believe in it, and it didn't work for me when I was an actor. After my third year when I was nineteen I went to Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory in Poland and took part in a workshop, and it was extraordinary – for the first time in my life I actually felt I could do something as an actor, not just kind of following an objective or whatever. After the first shock of this discovery I realized that Grotowski was following Stanislavski's System without trying to force you into it. When I came back I tried to teach Grotowski, not Stanislavski, and tried to forget about

Stanislavski completely, but whatever you are doing, you go back to Stanislavski in a different way. So as Stanislavski himself said, I don't invent anything, I just use life laws, and that's what you discover when you actually try to achieve something. So, in trying for years to go away from it, I went back to it.

ME: As Meyerhold seemed to do – coming back to Stanislavski at the very end of his life.

BM: I've heard it said in the past that Stanislavski is like high school and Michael Chekhov is like university, and there's sometimes been a slightly pejorative overtone in that. My personal response would be, well, yes, you can't go to university until you've been to high school, so there are things in Michael Chekhov that are incredibly fun, freeing: he emphasizes the role of the clown, he emphasizes quality of ease, playfulness, the imagination, the physical body, but I think it was only as a result of his work and struggles with Stanislavski. They didn't really see eye to eye at that point on emotion memory, but Stanislavski then evolved his use of emotion memory, so I don't think we can say "Emotion memory doesn't work", because it sent Michael Chekhov into a nervous breakdown. I honestly think that Stanislavski's work is embedded: most of us in life are going, "What's my situation, what do I want, how am I go about getting it, what's blocking me, how do I feel if I'm blocked and how do I feel if I'm successful?" That's so fundamental, and it really is all you kind of need to know about Stanislavski. In every other system – even in post-dramatic or post-modern plays – actors are still playing with or obeying those human roles; the actor's objective is to take an audience on a very strange, postdramatic experience.

JG: I completely agree with that. There are so many myths about Stanislavski in British culture. One key thing is about it being geared to naturalism – whatever that means. I mean, for me it's a style of theatre, it's not a style of acting. People like Grotowski, Chekhov, Vakhtangov, and Boal have used Stanislavski as a basis because it is so universally applicable to any type of work, whether you are looking at Beckett, which is about real human beings in a strange absurd situation, or Shakespeare or Brecht. You can still use Stanislavski providing you are finding a form of reality that fits with that style or genre of theatre. But Chekhov – I'd just like to say a little thing about Chekhov, because I'm a great admirer of Chekhov and I've trained in it as well. There's a current view in America, and also in London to some extent with Chekhov practitioners who are more Rudolf Steiner-based practitioners, that he is nothing to do with Stanislavski, that there is this major breach, and his work is completely different. I completely disagree with that. If you read his autobiography you'll learn that he is absolutely rooted in the Stanislavski approach, but he took it in different directions, emphasizing

imagination and transformation, and using certain techniques such as “psychological gesture”, which had been suggested by Stanislavski and Vakhtangov, so I think you can use the two together. Grotowski is known for working on impulse and physical action; there is a Thomas Richards book [At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions] that is purely on that aspect, but he looks at it from a different perspective. Why? Because he is a different director in a different culture, and he has different ambitions and aspirations, as we all do – but the root of it is very much a Stanislavski process. MS: I’ve recently been doing some work with Chekhov techniques, and some of the students – these were second year students, who had been through their foundation in acting, which is wholly Stanislavski/Lecoq-based – and a lot of them really loved it and it really spoke to them. I think we have to recognize that each actor is building their own method and their own toolkit. And I think we have to train adaptability, we have to train actors that can work with different directors, work in different genres, but have their own ways. So I absolutely agree, and I agree with what you’re saying about the foundation in Stanislavski and then other practitioners, other methods can be applied, which suits some actors and not others.

AH: The first year of the curriculum in so many drama schools is based on the naturalistic repertoire, and I think the great risk is the confusion of naturalism with Stanislavski – and Stanislavski: An Introduction, which Jean started writing in the 1980s, was invaluable in demystifying naturalism and showed you can’t have naturalism as a style of acting; it’s truth from within, and the reality is created by the actor.

JG: Stanislavski actually turned his back on it, didn’t he?

AH: Indeed, yes.

JG: When you look back on productions such as *The Seagull*, which are full of naturalistic detail, with people using toothpicks to get dirt out of their teeth and so on, he thought it was actually obscuring what he really wanted to do, which was to get the essence of reality – you know, a recreation of human experience – and he thought too much obsession with that detail was getting in the way.

ME: When you look at a lot of these photographs they’re highly melodramatic, aren’t they? When we had the Russian *Uncle Vanya* in London in November, and the British one playing down the road, there was a heightened truth to the Russian production.

JG: The style of it was very non-naturalistic, but the reality of those performers and the way they connected with the pain and the boredom of those characters was fantastic, I thought.

BM: And the comedy –

JG: And the comedy, very funny.

ME: And the acrobatics, almost, the use of the body was very free – the

use of the body to express themselves. The British actors' performances were pretty much from-the-shoulders-up acting, and it was a very good illustration of that Stanislavski and that Stanislavski – the two were very different. What damage do you think the Americans did? I'm interested because I'm American. Do you think they only got part of the story?

JG: Strasberg is only one practitioner, and he wasn't the person who'd set up the Actor's Studio. It was set up by Robert Lewis, Elia Kazan and Cheryl Crawford – Strasberg took over in 1951. He had been running actor training in the Group Theatre during the 1930s, which had partly led to a conflict with Stella Adler about the whole nature of the acting process. There was this conflict of view between what I call "emotional recall" and the notion of imagination within the given circumstances – that was the main difference, I think. But he was only one practitioner – if you read people like Robert Lewis and Adler and Uta Hagen, they distance themselves from what he was doing. Now, having said that, I'm sure some fantastic things happened at the Actor's Studio, and they produced – I mean, I say "they" because that's very controversial – but some great actors have come out of there, and American cinema has transformed Western film acting. But when you go beneath the surface you find that people such as Marlon Brando didn't study with Lee Strasberg, he studied with Stella Adler, and this was often the case. Strasberg was a great self-promoter: he did very well promoting the Actor's Studio, but a lot of the people who were lauded as "Method actors" had actually been trained by other people. Al Pacino might have gone through the Actor's Studio, but he also went through the Herman Berghof studio as well. I guess the damage would be the emphasis on using emotional recall as a central aspect of the process, rather than looking at the given circumstances. Crucially, in the Method, actors bring their character to themselves and their life, their personal experiences, their circumstances and particular life choices. With Stanislavski, you're required to go to the character to transform from your own human makeup, your common humanity. So you're working from your real self, your potential self, rather than a particular life choice at this stage of society.

BM: I would say that many of Meisner's techniques are very, very similar to active analysis techniques, and I would also say that at the time we begin actor training – when you've just left home at eighteen, nineteen, or whatever – and suddenly you're in an environment where your emotions are given some validation, you can explore this strange terrain that's come out of your puberty, and trying to find out who we are as adults... it's sexy and exciting. I find that young actors want to go to that place. So there's a sort of sense of having to acknowledge the value of expressing emotions and not just insult it; at the same time, it's about then understanding that

emotion is a physical, physiological thing, and that the idea of sitting down trying to remember when your cat died when you were eighteen is not how human emotions work – they are physiological responses to actions, and reactions in other people and situations. However, rightly or wrongly, a part of me thinks there is a need for young actors to be given the space to explore whatever they need to explore in connecting to that emotion centre, which might have been very closed for much of their growing up depending on their culture, their environment, etcetera.

JG: There are ways of doing it, aren't there? An Actor's Work is full of references to emotion; there is as much in it or more as in the Hapgood version, and that is because Stanislavski is quite clear: feeling is such an intrinsic and deep part of the whole process of experience, so getting to what he called the life of the "human spirit" of a role is very important, but the point is how you get there and he offered different processes. And emotion memory, of course, is what we all have – we all have a store of emotion memory. But the point is whether you think of a specific situation or whether you work from a more organic process, interacting with people in the imaginary given circumstances, allowing things to tap into your conscious experiences.

In An Actor's Work he talks about crystallized, distilled emotions, a whole bag of painful things we have, or angry things, or joyful things, which we tap into at every point of our lives, whether it's a phone call or meeting a parent. I think there's a difference between talking about emotion memory, which is part of our humanity and happens organically, naturally, spontaneously in a situation, and talking about a specific technique, which is emotional recall, and that's really what I think Strasberg is getting at – that's what he used primarily.

ME: Tony, you worked a lot on Brecht. I was always intrigued when I worked with Jean as an author how he managed to get into the Soviet Union at various stages and get so much material out, because as Paul said earlier the Stanislavski archive we have is based on a vast amount of books and articles and manuscripts. Do you know how he operated as an author?

AH: I think a lot of it must have been through membership of the ITI, the International Theatre Institute.

ME: He travelled a lot, didn't he?

AH: Enormously. And sometimes, as I said, we couldn't find him. But you mentioned Brecht; the interesting thing is that after lots of discussions with Norman about this there is quite clearly no contradiction between Brecht and Stanislavski – it's a complete myth that is propagated by our educational system and our theatre system. It's an absolute nonsense. Brecht was not an acting teacher, he was a writer, a playwright and director, and I think that false contradiction also had a benefit on Stanislavski. "Stanislavski is about emotion,

Brecht is about reason” – it’s absolute nonsense. But Norman and I had a very useful dialogue about that over the years.

ME: This is the final question before we open this up to the audience – are we in some kind of post-Stanislawski age? Are we in an age now where we can look at this stuff in a fresh new way, and actually find a new kind of richness in all of it?

JG: Well, hopefully we see it in a flexible and open way, a more holistic way, and we don’t cut off voice training and movement training from the acting process, for example. We see it as a holistic thing and also that we can take it in different directions and don’t see it as a rigid system.

BM: I’ll be honest and say I think we might be on the brink of a crisis in terms of young people using their imaginations, because so much information now comes from this little thing that we hold in our hands. I was on a bus recently where the whole bus was absolutely silent. At one point, a young girl put her phone down and said, “Well, I’ve looked at everything on my phone, now what do I do?” and I thought “Oh my goodness, there’s a countryside out through that bus window, there’s a person I could talk to, there’s a book in my bag I could read”. I actually think that this system could be even more useful than it’s ever been at any other time, because of the young person – this is a broad generalization, I’m sure people would shoot me down in flames – but there is a bit of a slowing down or a diminishment of how individual imagination is working.

MS: I think it’s still absolutely relevant. It still, for me, has to remain the first steps of certain drama training where we’ve got scared young people who have got into an institution but aren’t sure that they should be there. I think one of the absolutely key aspects of it is this tiny step-by-step approach, if it’s handled correctly, so that each actor builds on the last thing and therefore builds their confidence and in success over a period of months or years. I think Stanislavski remains absolutely key.

ME: It’s very interesting that Jean Benedetti’s translations include a preface that was never published in the American edition all those years ago, which was found after his death, and it is so clear that this book is a manual. He says acting is really hard, it’s a lot of drudgery, but if you suffer through the steps you will get there; it’s very refreshing, it’s very simple, it’s almost like the simplest thing he wrote about acting – and you think, “My God, this is amazing, it could have been written yesterday” – so I think it brings it very much up to date for us and lets us return to the work in that way.

Can I open this to the audience now? You must have lots of questions that we have been raising
Question 1 (audience member): I wanted to make an observation – it’s quite

interesting talking about terminology, because one of the things that we face here is a basic cultural problem, because acting by 99.9% of the world is seen as

some form of covering up of the truth, but most actors see it as completely the other way. So everybody comes into it from society believing that that's what it is, that we're hiding something, we have a mask on, we're not actually bringing anything else – so that's a big fight for a start. I came into the theatre because I loved Brecht, and I thought, "God, this is what it could be about – that is amazing". I think Brecht and Stanislavski were saying and doing exactly the same thing, they were both finding a way to reveal truth. And if you look at it in cultural and historical contexts, I think Stanislavski was working against the very melodramatic, heightened Victorian theatre, and that's where the naturalism, if you like, comes in; he was trying to make it more truthful in his context. Brecht then took it a stage further, as in "I don't want the toothpicks and the corsets and whatever", and as we've seen from that wonderful Uncle Vanya you can strip all of that away and have the fundamentals. We're all doing the same thing, but doing it in a different time and in a different period and in a different historical context. I think there's a problem when academia leeches into practicality. And let's face it, most actors do degrees because it's the only way they get funded; acting can become very set in stone and not seen as practical and not looked at within its own context. So you do have a bible – "I'm a Method actor, that's my bible, I read this, I do it" – rather than seeing it where it's at, and the chance to practise it, of course, is like that.

ME: Thank you. Are there any other observations or questions?

Question 2 (Phil Robins): My name is Phil Robins, I'm a former principal of Rose Bruford and I was in the privileged position of being number two to Norman for five years. And yes he was absent a lot and – looking for a cheap sound-bite now – it would be that I ran the college and he wrote the books. But that would, honestly, be to quite misunderstand both the relationship between he and I and, more importantly, the relationship between his writing, the Stanislavski work and the development of the degree work in acting and beyond, as it were, other disciplines. John, for example, discussed finding the empathy between the practical and the intellectual, whilst Bella spoke about the importance of Jean being a director, actor and teacher. That's got something to do with Rose Bruford's roots, I think. I first met Norman in 1976, when he invited me to the college – I was a stage manager and production manager at the National Theatre, and I was thinking of leaving because the new building was about to open and it looked to me like a play factory, so I was looking for other opportunities. Norman's first question to me was, "We're thinking of starting a stage management course at Rose Bruford – is this something that might interest you?" And I said, "Yes, it would interest me," and he said, "Well, we've got a course written – it's on two sides of A4. Take it away, tell me what you think of it." I didn't think much of it. When we had another discussion, his question to me was, "What do you consider the most important thing that a stage manager should learn?" and I said, "The most important thing a stage manager should learn is that the actor is the most important thing in any production." He smiled and offered me a job. Now, I think that was a flippant comment, but I am trying to make a point that Norman's understanding of the importance of the actor in the process, the balance of the practical with the intellectual, was a kind of flag

that he flew, not just through the work on Stanislavski but through the college as well. For example, he told me a wonderful story about going to the Council for National Academic Awards, and the models he was looking at for degree course development were the design areas, and he thought quite seriously that if you could have an honours degree in textile design you could have one in acting. He told me that he went to a meeting at the CNAA [Council for National Academic Awards] with a group of people where he first put to them the idea of a degree in acting; I asked, "And how did it go?" and he said, "Everybody smiled, but nobody laughed." There was something in that. I mean, Norman was also a man of great fun and playfulness as Bella mentioned, and this kind of reflects through the writing about Stanislavski and through the college in terms of the developments within the college. He could also be extremely naughty; there was an intention of Norman's during this period to be absent – yes, there were student jokes about developing conversations with Tashkent Polytechnic, because we were deep in merger negotiations with lots of other institutions because the funding bodies didn't believe that Rose Bruford could continue to exist on its own. This was before mobile phones, so we didn't know where he was. But when he came back there was always a very direct link between the work that you've all been discussing tonight and the developments that were going on at Rose Bruford; I think it's important that people go away tonight actually knowing that about the man. He was naughty in lots of other senses – when he finally retired, I told him I was not interested in the number one job, I didn't think my five years was a good enough apprenticeship – and he very sneakily leaked me the names of the people who were applying for the job with a note at the bottom saying, "You can either be number two to these people, or you can throw your own hat in – up to you," and I did throw my own hat in. I was appointed, and I've always been convinced that that had a great deal to do with Norman and the way he supported me. Norman believed in a holistic approach to all of the degree work that we were doing at Rose Bruford, that stagecraft was something that had to be understood – whether you were a stage manager or an actor or a director or a costume person, you had to understand the whole process. And in a way, Rose Bruford has perhaps always been guilty of that. Norman was a former student, I was a former student, we were both taught by Rose, we were both taught in a way that led us at the end of the programmes not to know whether we were teachers, actors or directors – perhaps we were all of them. And being all of them, I think, is what made Norman a first-class writer and translator, but also somebody that could feed that back into a training process he passionately believed in. And so we owe Jean Norman Benedetti an enormous amount, not just because of the things we have been discussing tonight, but also because of the way that his work reflected back into the college. As absent as he was during those days, the legacy of the collection now being at the college is something absolutely fantastic, of which the college should be very proud. And we owe that to Norman and his sneaky ways of getting stuff out through the ITI, whatever they were. I've laughed in his presence more than I've laughed in anybody else's, especially when he did impressions of various people, including some in this room who I won't name. He was also a very, very good friend.

ME: Very good, thank you.

JB (from the audience): Can I just follow Phil on that and say that Jean brought fun into his work, but also into the austere world of the Council of National Academic Awards, where I worked at the time. He would love this evening; it is something that he would revel in, partly – and this is a real compliment – partly because there were times when he thought the college didn't "get him", he didn't think they understood him, and when he retired and worked there it wasn't always that comfortable. If I got a little bit pushy during a governing meeting there would be a cry from the principal's table, where he would refer to me as "The mistress of the novices is talking again," and it kind of brought that irreverence right down to where it should be.

ME: Jean, as some of you may not know, died in April, and a number of us here were at his funeral, and we all had a different name for him; as it turned out, as I wrote an obituary about him, he had a number of different pseudonyms in research. He was an extraordinary man, who could control this whole process from afar, but always seemed to be the one who pulled the strings together. He was an extraordinary guy in that way. I should have mentioned, too, that not only did he do the Stanislavski books, but in the period when I certainly was working with him as an editor, he produced a number of other books – A History of Acting, a book about David Garrick; they were books he was writing that he was either building up to do or hadn't quite got the go-ahead to do these new translations. These translations hit quite a big political snag for quite a long time: Routledge in New York had bought the copyrights, for a sizeable sum, of all the Stanislavski work, and had put together a kind of committee to have them translated, headed by a linguist who wasn't necessarily a theatre person. She gathered together a whole group of translators – Jean was one of them – and this went on for about three years without a word getting translated. So it was a long, laborious process, and the fact that he could stick with this process for so long always kind of amazed me, because the elegance of these translations, and the loquaciousness of some of them, is very much like the man himself. He had a quiet simplicity and was a great master of aphorisms; he could spin those things out, put you in your place, as you said, Jonathan, very quickly and very easily. He kept telling me during the translating process how funny Stanislavski was, and I said, "Funny? Have you read this?" – from what I knew it never seemed to me to be funny. But he said, "No, no – there's a humour in it". Stanislavski wasn't a very good writer by nature, so there was that side that he had to deal with too. My Life in Art has about 89 chapters; it's kind of a terrible book, and this is the book he wrote in America to order, as it were – they wanted a biography of the great Stanislavski, so he said "I'll give you a biography!" There's no sense of self-editing, so the whole editing process is a doctoral thesis in itself for somebody to pick up on. Benedetti cut to the chase in these, and got it down to something that sounded very much like him and very much like

Stanislavski. Benedetti's different personalities came out in his work as a translator. He was also a gifted dramatist; he did a lot of radio plays, and took over from Dudley Moore in *Beyond the Fringe*, so he was that kind of an actor too – and he was a great pianist.

AH: He could also be a very good friend. In the last few years when he went into a kind of Stanislavski-like exile because he was in poor health and wrote at home we'd always communicate by email and phone. I worked very closely with him on some written modules he wrote for an MA programme, some of which ended up in books like *The Art of an Actor*, and it was just the pleasure of chatting to him on the phone – he'd feed you ideas. I've got a lot of his notes that I have to do something with, because they are so rich as a mine of ideas on acting. So we miss that.

Question 3 (from the audience): Fascinating evening. I'm not in the theatre, but I love it, and now I know why. I wanted to see that Russian production – I couldn't get to it. Could you suggest any films, or any kind of recording, because I'd really like to experience this intensity you're talking about.

ME: Well, you can see large sections of the Vakhtangov theatre production on YouTube, and when the Vakhtangov Theatre brought over their *Measure for Measure* last summer to the Globe it was all captured on film and is still available on the Globe Theatre website.

Question 4 (from the audience): I think the easiest thing is to get a ticket to Moscow and go to see it there, because they are two different directors. The person who directed *Measure for Measure* is not the person who directed *Uncle Vanya*, and I think that what we're talking about, the person who directed *Uncle Vanya*, is a very great director and the director of *Measure for Measure* is his disciple.

ME: Yes, and there are lots of good productions on now. There's a new generation of directors who've come through and others who are really worth seeing. Unusually, not so many women are being allowed to take over in quite the same way... But when you go to Moscow and see theatre you say, "Oh, so that's Stanislavski, that's not what I've been seeing in the British theatre all these years". Any other questions?

Question 5 (from the audience): I have a question on active analysis. You spoke about doing it for adding bits in to it to get to a particular character, and then you seemed to refer more to it as a holistic process, so I assume you can work with it for both, whether you are wanting to work on details to all of the scene or you work specifically with a particular individual? And then the next bit to add on to that is: how do you know when it's done, and do you end up with an endless rolling? You sort of answered a little bit, saying the *mise-en-scène* is set, and this is set, and here's the play.

MS: I think Katie Mitchell's book is really useful – although you might kill me for that [to Katya Kamotskaia] because she hasn't said "thank you" to Stanislavski enough. It depends on how long you've got. You asked how long to spend on it: I had a five-week rehearsal process – well, performance in week five – and spent three weeks doing-the-table and active analysis, and then we just did a

read-through on our feet and after we'd been through that process the actors basically knew exactly where they needed to be. Everybody did a personal silent improvisation based on a situation their character might have been in before the play began; we looked at a particular moment prior to that for actors to build their own emotional memory. We then did some improvisations around scenes; the play, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* was set in the 1930s, but we set improvisations in the present. Once we'd done an improvisation based on that scenario we could then ask, "Okay, so what's the difference? This is how I behave in those circumstances as me, now, but how does the character behave? What's the difference historically? What's the difference in terms of character? How does the character behave in those circumstances?"

Question 6 (from the audience): Are you as a director looking for a point when you can say "That's the performance I want"?

JG: No, not at all. Like Mark, I'll probably spend about two weeks during a five-week rehearsal period where you might have several attempts at a particular block of units and bits, for example – but you don't stop where you think, "That is the final performance. They've got the character here," because you start with, "I am the circumstance of the character building up a sense of psycho-physical action", and that gives you the basis of the character, which you then embellish through the imagination. But you would then move onto another set of units, because if you work all the way through the play then by the time you get to the end you're informing what happens at the beginning as well. But you would stop, I guess, where you find that the actors are actually connecting, when they understand the bit of action you're looking at, in part bringing it to life, when they're engaging their imaginations and they have a sense of fluency in what they're doing, and you move on.

ME: Or you can come to drama school.

MS: It's about what feeling the actor gets – it's not for the director. For example, we set an improvisation as a scene in *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* where two actresses have to come in and are morally outraged that there's a dance marathon going on: the actresses had no idea how to connect to that because they are not morally outraged that there is a dance marathon going on, so we had to draw it down to what is the basic emotion, which was "Not being able to control something", for example. I got into trouble with the authorities at the college because I went to all the actors in the group, "Go crazy!", and they were throwing chairs and hanging off monkey bars and whatnot, and then the two actresses had to come in to try to control it. And from that improvisation they just got that tiny sensation of "I'm frustrated and I want to control something," and so they have a connection to what happens in the scene, they have an emotional connection to it. And then you actually put

that into the scene, and they go, "Oh, that's where it is!" Then they are connected to it; whatever words they have to use, the words from the script, they have a direct relationship with it – not in their heads, but in their bodies – with what that character is feeling and wanting to achieve; their objective, their task. So you have to be quite clever, either as a director, teacher or actor, as to what you need, what you're struggling with in the scene, what you can't connect to, and therefore you set an improvisation to try and find that. If you trust that it's there, it's there.

KK: It's memory.

ME: It's embedded.

JG: So it will come out in different ways when you do it in different phases, because that's only one phase of the whole rehearsal process.

ME: Interestingly, as Jean Benedetti says in the introduction, the book was the basis of a three-year actor training course, and you can see how the building blocks go towards that freedom, Are there any other questions or observations? Yes, Jonathan Brill.

JB: Thank you – I just hope that in the next intake to the college you look for actors with imagination and instinct. That's all.

ME: Imagination, instinct: two very important qualities that Jean Benedetti was looking for in a performer.

JB: I'm really here because of the Jean Benedetti Trust, which has been established, painfully, over the last six or seven months. Trustees include Michael Earley, of course, and Professor Leon Reuben from East 15, and John Colclough who, like the cavalry in the First World War, will add a little bit of tone and colour. The bulk of the money is now ready and established, and the trustees have agreed that it will go to students of exceptional talent who are either coming into Rose Bruford College to pursue an undergraduate degree in directing and acting and/or who are perhaps leaving Rose Bruford College to pursue acting or directing elsewhere, or who are coming to do directing in Rose Bruford College should the offer at that time permit that. We're pretty clear about the sort of students that will be interested in this and will be able to benefit from it; our work will be enhanced by the tutors of Rose Bruford College, who will select the final few for the trustees to give their consideration and make the award. It's not a huge amount of money, but a student will get £5,000 coming into the college to do what they want with. We are making two awards a year, and we've got enough money to keep going for a good few years yet. That's not to say that "We've got enough money and we won't be looking for more" – of course we will. But somewhere there are students out there who are going to benefit from Jean Benedetti's enormous generosity and commitment to acting and directing, and for us as trustees it's going to be a very exciting time to find and discover and give them a little head start.

ME: Thank you, Jonathan, that's brilliant. The college has, wonderfully I think, over the past six months, raised over a quarter of a million pounds in new bursary money for students. It's a tough time for students. It's a tough time to be a student, with the new fees and so forth – it's always a tough time for drama students, because of the commitments they have to make, the number of hours they are taught and have to work – so being able to help them in this way is great for the college. And so we want to thank Jean Benedetti for leaving that money in his will for us, along with others who have contributed recently. We are going to try to continue to raise money to keep that fund up so we can do that work. On that note I think we are about ready to close, so thank you all very much for coming. I want to thank Paul, and Nigel Hook who designed the exhibition as well, and of course I want to thank Pushkin House for making this space available to us, for working in partnership with us on celebrating this very important occasion – two anniversaries, really, the anniversary coming up of Jean Benedetti's death, and of course the 150th birthday of Constantin Stanislavski. Thank you all for coming tonight.

Notes

- 1 Professor Anatoly Smeliansky, Dean of the Moscow Art Theatre School.
- 2 Merlin, Bella: The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit, new edition, Nick Hern Books, 2014
- 3 Gillett, John: Acting on Impulse, Methuen Drama, 2007.
- 4 Benedetti, Jean: Stanislavski and the Actor, Methuen Drama, 1998.
- 5 Alfreds, Mike: Different Every Night, Nick Hern Books, 2007
- 6 Richards, Thomas: At work with Grotowski on Physical Actions,