Good Acting: A Tragedy in Higher Education

Stanislavski and Habitus: Why we need a new technique.

(A Play for Reading in Two Acts)

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Prologue (Abstract):

A university room with timeless, muscular furniture, a fireplace and thousands of books.

Murmuring conversations off-stage. Occasionally laughter and distinguishable words like "ethnography" "epistemology" "ontology".

A large, ornate clock ticks steadily.

Schubert's second impromptu in E flat major plays on a gramophone. Perpetua moto of scurrying triplets starkly contrasts the room.

Two professors:

Professor 1: (*outraged)* A theatre play!?

Professor 2: Just read the abstract!

P1: As *academic* writing?

P2: Please!

P1: (*In a huff)* Fine! (*reads out in perfect Received Pronunciation, perhaps as a notion of educatedness)*.

"This thesis examines the acting curriculum of drama schools from a Bourdieusian perspective via Stanislavski's trilogy of acting books. It aims to apply the concept of 'habitus' to the curriculum and coins the term "curricular habitus" used first by Asghar and Shehzad (Asghar & Shehzad, 2018) but remains undefined in their paper and also for higher education. It differentiates curricular habitus from internalized dispositions of a discipline or profession on *individuals* (disciplinary and professional habitus) (Lambrecht, 2018; Bendix, 2020; Allison, 2017) or the habitus of an institution (institutional habitus) (byrd, 2018; Celik, 2020; Wright, 2008). Curricular habitus is the habitus of the curriculum, with its history, background, key texts, key informants, teaching, learning and assessment practices and dispositions, and treats *curriculum* as the owner of the habitus, a character, independent of but created, influenced and reproduced by those who engage with it, in return inculcating itself on them as disciplinary, institutional or professional habitus. Curricular habitus of acting offers a plausible explanation of the mechanisms of domination of the elite in acting vis-à-vis actor training in Federation of Drama Schools where Stanislavski's texts, and definition of acting remain the foundations of the acting discipline just as much it does in the profession. It further analyses the relationship between the

profession of acting and its training in higher education (De Bernard, et al., 2023) and attempts to provide alternative definitions of acting, in an attempt to find ways of mitigating the effects of class differences. The thesis aims to redefine acting, not as art created by the actor but as a socio-cultural temporal object created by the spectator. By doing so, and utilising findings in emerging cognitive science it redirects the actor training's attention from the actor (Blair, 2008) to the spectator in line (McConahie, 2008) subverting the curriculum away from its habitual position. It also exposes the place of actor training and its teaching practices within the neo-liberal landscape of higher education in the UK as a mismatch."

What a load of pretentious, non-scientific - - -

P2: (*interrupts)* Carry on!

P1: "It is written in play form to capture the narrative results and the hermeneutic, qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019) to not find but create data, interpreting and re-articulating curricular texts and more importantly simulating interviews. The play is an object of knowledge an research, placing the author in the centre of the reproduction of the curricular habitus of acting (as an actor, spectator and teacher) and thus engaging with autophenomenography" (Strand & Rinehimer, 2018); (Allen-Collinson, 2011); (Gruppetta, 2004)."

Please, spare me!

(*Professor 1 goes to a record player and turns up Schubert's impromptu in Eb.*

BLACKOUT)

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Acknowledgements

I dedicate this to my family and to all my friends who have been hugely supportive of my work; Mualla, Leyla, Carol, Anil, Ipek, Bugra, Esra, Ayca, Bilgen, Dave, Paul H. and to all my past and future students of acting. I would like to thank Paul Ashwin who has been exceptionally supportive, open minded and kind during the entire process of this project.

Author's declaration: I declare that the thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Signature .....

Playwright's notes:

This play is an object of knowledge. It is not a personal narrative. It (re)constructs evidence-based knowledge gained from hermeneutic analysis of curricular texts.

Some moments in this play may seem they are transcriptions of actual events; they are not. They are, however, constructed by dramatizing elements of knowledge gained by analysis of the curricular texts in question. References ensure that the research evidence is traceable. The scenes, the stage directions, facial expressions of characters are both data and interpretations of data.

You may not be able to make sense of a scene or a line because you don't know a particular (musical, theatrical or academic) reference in it. Student actors face this every time they read a play or prepare a character. This experience is part of their curriculum which is what this thesis is exploring.

Theatrical plays don't always give brief definitions of the names, titles, objects, words mentioned. An actor must have experience and/or knowledge of the world of the character to play that character. If they do not have the knowledge, they must acquire it. Once they have the knowledge, they then are asked to embody the knowledge, within weeks or even days.

The characters in this play do not exist. They are all written by me. This illusion introduces limitations, but it also provides an opportunity for me (the researcher) to voice opposing views and multiple interpretations of the data. These opposing views are constructed through systematic research and analysis too. It is also a genuine attempt to challenge confirmation bias.

Not everything is where you would expect to be in a traditional thesis. For example, there are traces of literature research right at the end where it feels most relevant for the discussion. Likewise, there is some analysis right at the onset because some particular data helps set the scene.

Finally, the thesis is constructed so that you will feel things as well as understand them. The feeling of the interpretation of the data is as important an outcome for this text as much as the intellectual debate and is inspired and based on various philosophical discourses in educational research and constitutes part of the authophenomenographical aspect.

Acting students experience the acting curriculum in many different ways. They are instructed to "feel". The imagery in acting books is rich; maybe too rich.

Authors of acting training books, by their own admission, are not scientists, they haven't studied the human nature formally and they are not writing to instruct. Yet, these books are at the core of the UK Higher Education curriculum of drama schools.

Perhaps PhD theses are not to be enjoyed per se, but I truly hope you will enjoy reading this one not least because this will mean the methodology is sound.

List of Figures:

Act I

Act I Scene I "Research Question, Writing Style and Methodology"

(A university office that looks like somewhere between a mansion's drawing room, a gentlemen's club and a library. Furniture, an infallible index of personal taste, (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 50) *is heavy, dark, solid oak majestic, powerful and rigid* (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 543) *and leather; almost 'muscular'* (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 265). *No Ikea furniture. One or two old bits…a Louis XIII (or any other ex-royal) convent table perhaps (*ibid. p 287*).*

Books as a measure of middle-brow culture (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 258) *everywhere: where you would normally expect them (bookshelves) but also on and under the tables and chairs, propping plants, under glasses and teacups (not mugs), on sofas; everywhere.*

An afternoon in early summer somewhere around London, within the Golden Triangle (where else?) (Bradley, 2017) (Davies & Donnelly, 2023) (Davies, 2023).

Although it is bright and crisp outside, the atmosphere in the room is dark and heavy. Curtains are half-drawn. A couple of small upright lamps are on. A faint noise is coming from a small television.

Professors 1 and 2 are ageless souls: both young and old. They look distinguished and speak in perfect Received Pronunciation (RP) perhaps as a notion of their educatedness (Mugglestone, 2010, p. 54). *Professor 1 is reading a transcript, occasionally grunting and sighing; focused, yet with an air of ease. Professor 2 is sitting in front of the TV gazing at it absentmindedly.*

On the TV is Barbara Windsor on the Mrs. Merton Show. Merton, played by Caroline Aherne, speaks in a Northwest UK accent. Her "safe and unthreatening accent [allows] Caroline Aherne's character […] to ask the most outrageous, below-the-belt questions of her guest stars." (BBC, 2005)

> *"That's what I love about you Bar'bra. You're one of us. You are. In't she girls? You know you're like a big film star but you're still common as muck"* (@ErnestMaples (You Can't Do That On Television), 2011)

We hear laughter. "When it comes to being funny it's not just what you say, but the way you say it and if you can say it in a North West accent, then you may just be onto a winner.

But what is it about the accent that the nation seems to find so amusing?" (BBC, 2005)

TV channels change.

Now, it's Shrek 2's "Awkward Dinner Scene" (Movieclips, 2019). *Shrek is having dinner at Princess Fiona's parents' (the King and Queen) castle.*

Professor 2: *(to no one)* An ogre… At dinner with his in laws…
An ogre at the royal table …

Professor 1: *(annoyed, starts reading out loud)* "This explains why, […] symbols of distinction, which can vary widely depending on the social foil to which they are opposed, are nonetheless perceived as the innate attributes of a 'natural distinction.' (*Looks at Professor 2 who is oblivious to this. Even louder)* "whether they be […] table manners or ethical dispositions, resides in the fact that, given their expressive function…" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013) !!!

(Waits. Nothing from Professor 2. Fed up)

Can you please turn that off? I need to finish reading this before my student gets here.

Professor 2: (*absent*) Hm?

Professor 1: (*pointing to the TV*). Could you turn that off? What is it anyway? (*Leans over to get a better look. Surprised*) *A cartoon*?

Professor 2: (*defensive*) Animation! (*Turns it off. Stands up)*

What are you reading?

Professor 1: A thesis, but it is not very… academic. I'm not sure whether it will …

Professor 2: Pass?

Professor 1: … stand the scrutiny of a panel (*sighs).*

Professor 2: (*glances over Professor 1's shoulder, slowly)* Oh-nure? Strange name.

Professor 1: Turkish… Anyway, he's writing his thesis as a play *(rolls eyes)*.

Professor 2: A theatre play?

Professor 1: It's only on the page and not for the stage (The Writing Centre, 2021).

Professor 2: A play for *(gestures air quotes) "reading"!*

Professor 1: Please don't do that.

Professor 2: Do what?

Professor 1: (*gestures*) *"*That*"*. It "irritates more than it amuses". It also makes you look less credible (The Independent (Ireland), 2008).

(*A knock on the door. Professor 1 goes to the door and opens it. At the door is a very young, fresh-faced student).*

Student: (*very timid)* Excuse me, is this the finance office?

Professor 1: (*gestures broadly into the room)* Does this look like the finance office? (*Brusk)* Turn left, the second corridor, third door on the right.

(*Slams the door, returns to the transcript).*

Professor 2: What is it about?

Professor 1: Oh, some student was looking for the finance office.

Professor 2: Not *that*. The play you are reading.

Professor 1: Well, the first scene appears to be about us.

Professor 2: (*surprised*) Us? Does he know us?

Professor 1: Not us *personally*. It is about academics and academia. Or how he *perceives and constructs* us as academics (Allen-Collinson, 2011).

Professor 2: I beg your pardon!?

Professor 1: His *lived experience* of us. (*Groans*) He claims his approach to be autophenomenographical (Strand & Rinehimer, 2018); (Allen-Collinson, 2011); (Gruppetta, 2004) but I'm not convinced.

Professor 2: But how can he have a "lived-experience" of us without knowing us?

Professor 1: In this context (*refers to the transcript)*, we are not actual people. The characters and in fact all other elements of the scenes are representations of his lived experience and perception of the phenomena of academics and academia. He is providing a kind of visual representation of us as academics (Deng, 2022). He is making data (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 86) almost by reversing Visual Analysis (Goodwin, 2001).

Using findings from his research and analysis of curricular texts, he is creating "visible phenomena that the [readers] are attending to [..]" utilising "visual phenomena in the production of meaningful action" for the reader. (Goodwin, 2001, p. 158). He is using his lived experience to shape these scenes which is when autophenomenography comes in.

Professor 2: But why?

Professor 1: I guess “Writing [this section], and in particular choosing images [..] and then discussing them in certain ways, is a small exercise of power.” (Lister & Wells, 2001, p. 65).

He is also establishing his research question, methodology and writing style and like James Kelman he is rejecting the “tastes and norms of [the crowd] he is “’supposed to please” (McGlynn, 2002, p. 51).

Professor 2: Id est…

Professor 1: -(*teasing)* Oooh Latin?

Professor 2: -(*playful)* As a strategy of cultural distinction (Gerhards, 2021) -

Id est, he is trying to please you and I.

Professor 1: (*as if to a child)* “Say it again darling, I didn’t understand you” (Bernstein, 2003).

Professor 2*: (shrugs)* He is trying to please you and I.

Professor 1*:* You and *me;* not you and *I*. He is trying to please you, and he is trying to please *me,* not I.

(Professor 2 says nothing. Big silence. Walks away). (Bernstein, 2003).

Oh, don’t be like that. I knew what you meant!

(*Dramatic, playful)*

Stay; give me drink. Hamlet, this pearl is thine;
Here's to thy health. (*Grabs a crystal tumbler, downs its contents – probably alcoholic- throws the manuscript down)*

Anyway, so far, he is not pleasing anybody

(*Sighs, as if “it’s over”.*

Awkward silence. Professor 2 is thinking, stares at Professor 1).

What?

Professor 2: …

Professor 1: (*frustrated*) Well, *what*? Surely you don’t believe a theatre play -not even a theatre a play - a play for reading can be <u>*academic*</u>?!

Professor 2: Is it impossible? (*picks up the manuscript).*

Professor 1: *Is* it possible?

Professor 2: What about Sousanis?

Professor 1: (*more frustrated*) What *about* Sousanis?

Professor 2: In Unflattening (Sousanis, 2015) he repositions "image" to heighten the meaning of the text (Sousanis, 2015, p. 54), also challenging the medium of thinking and breaking conventions (Sousanis, 2015, pp. 3-18).

Professor 1: But these are not images; these are just words.

Professor 2: I do not wish to get into a semiotic or semantic argument with you this afternoon but look at the stage directions at the start. Those directions construct *more* than an image. They create a spatial and temporal image of the phenomena both for and out of himself, and for the readers. The text makes us feel and experience things as we are forced to imagine it, hear it and see it in our heads. So, perhaps a play can show, in its own right "how an initial research question informs the writing of plot, characterisation, setting, dialogue and more, and how the knowledge produced by exploring that idea permeates every aspect of the play." (Baker, 2018, p. 176). He is making *his readers* create the play.

Professor 1: (*ignores this)* But he doesn't even start with a research question. I just don't know how to read this.

Professor 2: Just start. It'll show you everything all at once, including images that can be created only by you, images at which you arrive through your embodied dispositions, your habitus, which is how students read Stanislavski's acting books. And other acting books. And it is also how they read and rehearse plays.

Professor 1: What do you mean?

Professor 2: (*gentle, firm, not patronising)* Look; these professors at the start of the play, us. Are we white? Are we disabled? Are they, *we*, male?

P1: Aren't they! (*pause)* Aren't we?

P2: Where does it say that?

P1: (*Shuffles pages)* Pronouns… I'm sure I have seen them somewhere…

P2: (*Points to the tv)* What was I watching a moment ago?

P1: Oh that… cartoon… animation…Shrek!!!

P2: And a comedy sketch just before that. Who chose those? Those particular moments in the film and in the sketch?

P1: (*unsure)* Nobody? They were just on TV? *You* chose them. (*beat)*

Didn't you?

(*Professor 2 says nothing. Beat)* Wait a minute!

P2: They were not chosen by me, although it may feel like that to the reader. Moreover, they were chosen knowing that the reader could only make sense of his discussion if they knew those scenes. If readers don't know them, they should do as acting students are expected to do and watch them, then read the play again, and again, and again every time they run into a new knowledge hurdle. He is asking the reader to acquire knowledge so that they, while reading the play, can experience what acting students are asked to do as part of their training at drama school.

P1: Why on earth do I need to know Shrek to understand his argument?

P2: You don't. You might instead know My Fair Lady or Keeping Up Appearances or another show, sketch, novel which might represent the phenomenon he is discussing but ultimately you *must* know one. If you don't know any of them, then you will be stuck. Maybe I should have been changing channels to go through all of those (*laughs)*. But this chap must have thought that scene perfectly captures Bourdieu's discussion of the perception of symbols of distinction as innate when in they are relational and contextual. And perhaps, he thought Shrek would be the best known by his target readers (*indicating P1)* but if that's the case he has another think coming (*supresses a giggle)*.

P1: We don't exist! Do we?

P2: Not until the reader constructs us.

P1: Don't you mean the author?

P2: No, I mean the reader. It is ultimately the reader that constructs the characters, and the play.

P1: (*scribbles on the text)* He will need to add an author's note for the readers. Otherwise, they will have to do too much work to find a research problem to be identified clearly as a theme of the thesis.

P2: Or "these themes are apparent to readers and audiences whether or not they are aware of the research question or idea informing the writing of the play" (Baker, 2018, p. 176).

P1: (*stands up, struggling to come to terms with it grabs the manuscript*) This is ab*surd*. How can a theatre play be a "knowledge object"? (p. 176)

P2: By initiating a certain number of processes in the reader, including, but not limited to “experience of pleasure or dissatisfaction” (p. 177)

P1: (*throws down the manuscript in despair*) Dissatisfaction Indeed! (*Mocking P2)* And look *who’s* gone all twenty-first century.

(*Goes to an old-fashioned drinks cabinet. Decants a small glass of something -possibly alcoholic- into a crystal tumbler).*

P2: Think of it this way. You said we were not *actual people* in this play.

P1: We are not *(takes a sip of the drink).*

P2: So, these characters, we, they, don’t exist.

P1: They don’t *(another sip).*

P2: But I bet you had a reaction to them.

(*Professor 1 freezes before a third sip and considers this).*

You, perhaps, liked or disliked a character? Felt something about what they’ve done or not done? Or about how they have done a particular thing?

P1: Well, I thought “This is nonsense” because the way he writes about me has nothing to do with me (*downs the drink, goes to pour another).*

P2: But it has everything to do with how he sees, or better yet how he experiences academia and then how he constructs a setting or a character based not solely on his lived experience but also his research. He is not writing to show how he perceives *you* but to bring to life the phenomena based on his research, the knowledge he gained from that research, his relevant lived experience both as a student and then as a lecturer.

P1: (*scrunching his nose)* Do you mean there is a bit of himself in us?

P2: How he perceives himself as an academic, yes (Rosewell & Ashwin, 2018). He is communicating a sum of his data and research findings, shaped by his personal experiences by structuring settings, characters, moods, voices, facial expressions, actions in other words images or scenes for the reader which are heightened, illustrated, coloured, structured -much like Sousanis’ images - to give the reader a sense of his findings, his and others lived experiences and the phenomena.

P1: Lived experience is enough for rigorous educational research or analysis!

P2: He is constructing the scenes not *just* from his lived experience but also from his research. Look back and see how much he has referenced so far. He has presented evidence of research on methodology, perception of academics and academia, even coding and Bernstein but it is threaded through the writing. Your irritation at my air quotes gesture, you correcting my grammar mistakes; even your drinking is constructed using evidence (Awoliyi, et al., 2014) (Thoreson, 1984) (Pereira, et al., 2022).

He is constructing, narrating and inflicting the phenomena he is investigating based on evidence and analysis, some I guess will be revealed later. Not all the images, scenes in the play come from his experiences. In fact, they mostly come from evidence. The interpretation of that evidence is then formulated to a narrative (Krippendorff, 2019, pp. 69-70) to heighten the meaning of the text, using his personal experience like Sous-----

P1: (*irritated)* SOUSANIS! Yes, we know!

P2: He is doing this by creating a "the conceptual structure that a text invokes in particular readers, the worlds they can imagine, make into their own, and consider real" (pp. 69-70) and (*teasing)* it looks like he is succeeding as his depiction of you has clearly bothered you.

P1: (*defensive)* It has not *(Downs the drink)*!

(Goes to pour another, thinks better of it.

A knock on the door).

P2: *(As he walks to open the door)* You are already having a reaction to his representation of phenomena. He is using the play to present a three-dimensional, unflattened image – a la Sousanis- of his research, which includes but is not exclusively his lived experience. The play is a representation of his understanding of phenomena, the first one being academia.

(Opens the door. Bright sunshine, birdsong, a gentle breeze and tones of green and orange burst into the room. Onur, the author of the transcript is standing at the door. He is casually dressed: a t-shirt and shorts in bright block colours. The way he appears contrasts starkly with the room. It's like Shrek at Fiona's Castle. Unlike Shrek, he speaks in almost perfect RP even though once a BBC employee commented that they would "of course" would not employ a Turkish person if they were looking for perfect RP).

Onur: Good afternoon. I had a meeting with Paul?

P2: (*smiling)* Oh! So, we *are* male.

Onur: Excuse me?

Paul 2: *Professor* Paul?

Onur: Yes.

Paul 1: *(leaves his tumbler on the drinks cabinet.)*
Oh Oh-nure come in. We were just talking about you.

P2: (*correcting)* Not *you,* your writing.

P1: Nice to finally meet you Oh-nure.

Onur: It's honour actually.

P1: Beg your pardon?

Onur: My name. Pronounced honour; as in… honour. And it means honour. I'm from Turkey, the country not the animal, hence the strange name.

(His joke doesn't land. An awkward moment).

Paul 1: Right. Sure. Yes. Do please come in and sit down. This is my colleague, Paul.

Paul 2: *(to Onur)* Doctor. Doctor Paul.

(*whispers to Paul 1)* You could put *some* respect on my name! (Sydney Freeman & Douglas, 2019)

Paul 1: *(whispers back)* Once "doctor" meant something; What does it mean now (Gilman, 1885)?

Onur: Charmed, I'm sure (Hogan, 2007).

Paul 2: *(surprised and with a hint of moral judgement* (Savage, 2015, p. 290) You handle English well! How do you know that phrase?

Onur: *(hesitates)* It's a line from 'A Brief Encounter'. The film?!

Paul 2: (*astonished)* Your English is very good (Rahman, 2023) (Kubota, et al., 2021)!

Onur: Thanks. I hear that a lot. (*Beat)*.

Paul 1: *(diffusing)* So, it's a play.

Onur: Yes, for reading.

Paul 1: *(leading) Doctor* Paul was wondering if you could elaborate more about your writing style.

Paul 2: (*off-guard)* Was I?

Onur: Well, as Sousanis-…

Paul 1: *(interrupting)* – we've already been through Sousanis! Maybe, update us on your research question first.

Onur: Actually, I don't think I have a question.

Paul 2: Oh?

Onur: I have more of a hypothesis that I want to test. Maybe not even a hypothesis: I intend to test and elaborate on a particular tradition. (Trowler, 2016, p. 31).

Paul 1: And what tradition would that be?

Onur: The curriculum of acting in UK drama schools.

Paul 1: And?

Onur: (*picks up The Class Ceiling book)* The profession of acting is dominated by the elite (Friedman & Laurison, 2020). And there is a relationship with school education and financial success of actors. In 2019, 44% of the wealthiest actors were privately educated (Sutton Trust, 2019). There is emerging research about "The role of higher education in class inequalities in the cultural and creative industries"[…] "and the need to decolonise the curriculum to offer a less westernised and privileged knowledge bias" although this is primarily from a race perspective (O'Brien, et al., 2024). Also "The UK's HE conservatories across music, dance and drama present a significant barrier to diversity within creative HE. UCAS reports demonstrate the majority of conservatoires are made up of privately educated students from the most advantaged backgrounds" (Comunian, et al., 2023). Reports are also focusing on access to creative access subjects and widening participation (Holt-White, et al., 2024).

Paul 1: If all this is known, how exactly are you contributing to this existing knowledge?

Onur: Currently, none of the discussions address the nature of acting as an artform, discipline, subject or curriculum contributing to the role of higher education in class inequalities. I hypothesize that the nature, character, dispositions of acting curriculum is a significant contributing factor in

class inequalities in acting training and profession. I posit that no matter how much access is given, no matter how wide the participation is, the nature, definition and teaching and learning praxis of acting within drama school curricula is one that requires a high volume of capital and as such can be achieved and subsequently transformed into success *only* by those who come from elite backgrounds.

Philosophically I theorise that acting, good acting actually is not something that can be *done by the actor*. Good acting can be achieved much more easily and simply almost without the actor. There is good *theatre,* which is skill based but acting as an object of evaluation or assessment (as good or bad) cannot exist without context. Therefore, it is not something that can be taught or assessed. I also have some empirical evidence supporting this.

Paul 1: So, what is acting then?

Onur: Acting is a result.

Paul 2: Of what?

Onur: Spectators' construction of what they perceive in time and space. Acting involves employing a set of skills to help achieve good *theatre -or film*. But it can only be arrived at within a context and only by the spectator and not the actor. What the audience sees, appraises, rewards as (good) acting is not independent of its context and from the cultural and neurological consciousness of the audience.

Good acting in my living room for my family in Turkey does not necessarily translate to good acting on a big stage in the UK. Acting requires a completely different set of skills and approaches for differently set up shots of the same scene in a film.

As an object, since acting is not something that an actor does, it cannot be taught as a discipline. Perhaps it can be taught as a set of skills, which may enable the actor to successfully exist in a production's context.

I hypothesise that if we defined acting not as "art" but as craft, its curriculum would change and this in turn would challenge class inequalities. Also, I hypothesise that what is being taught to achieve good acting is unnecessarily demanding of high capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

And dare I say, if we do that, we realise that acting doesn't belong in higher education *(Pauls' eyes widen)*.

If you insist on more traditional PhD questions my main question would be:

Does the inherent nature or disposition of the Stanislavskian curriculum for acting within UK drama school programmes constitute a significant source of class inequalities in the acting profession and higher education?

My supplementary questions would be:

- In what ways does the current pedagogical emphasis on acting as an "art" rather than a "craft" contribute to the exclusion or marginalization of individuals from underprivileged backgrounds?

- Can a fundamental reconceptualization of acting (as "craft") within this curriculum serve as a viable strategy for mitigating such inequalities?

- What specific elements within this curriculum implicitly or explicitly indicate significant financial, social, or cultural capital from students?

- What would a curriculum grounded in acting as a "craft" entail, and how might such a curriculum redefine the requirement for embodied and material requirements for good acting (*Alternative ways of achieving "good acting")*?

- What are the potential impacts of a craft-based acting curriculum on accessibility, diversity, and social mobility within the UK acting profession?

Paul 2: (*to Paul 1)* Is he trying to examine the relationship between the surface, deep and implicit structures of the signature pedagogy of a profession?

Paul 1: (*to Paul 2)* It fits in with Bourdieu too as "pedagogical signatures can teach us a lot about the personalities, dispositions, and cultures of their fields" (Shulman, 2005). Is he exploring a habitus of a curriculum?

(*back to Onur)* But Stanislavski's texts have been around for a long time. There must be existing research into and critique of his work.

Onur: There is but not to enquire about it as a curricular object of analysis or a factor for social inequality in higher education.

Paul 2: Are there no alternatives to Stanislavski in acting?

Onur: There are. Some.

But very few critiques exist of his technique from a social class perspective. And Michael Chekhov, Grotowski, Meyerhold but they are all somewhat rooted in or related to Stanislavski – Meyerhold was asked by Stanislavski to run the laboratory in acting - (Shevstova, 2020) and the likes of Stella Adler, Uta Hagen, Sanford Meisner and of course Lee "The Method" Strasberg who are all in drama school curricula are iterations of Stanislavski. There is a torrent of discussions around acting as a *profession* being elitist. These include intersectionality in race, gender and so on but there is no discussion around how the core of the technique is, in its nature, exclusive by means of demanding a high volume of capital from its participants. There is certainly no discussion around manifestation of this in Stanislavski's books.

There are some papers investigating tensions between institutions such as higher education institutions and performing arts (Camilleri, 2009) but as far as I can tell there is no discussion around the content and nature of acting curriculum and social class. However, there is emerging research in classical music. Bull's 'Class Control and Classical Music' in its introduction states "[...] despite decades of investment in outreach programmes and education schemes intended to broaden its appeal, classical music in the UK remains predominantly a taste and a practice of the middle classes" (Bull, 2019, p. xii). Then there is Green's Chapter on "Music Education, Cultural Capital, and Social Group Identity" in The Cultural Study of Music (Green, 2011) but theatre and social class is never discussed in the framework of actor training and what training involves or how the training or curriculum defines acting or good acting and what students need or have to do to achieve it. Instead, it is acknowledged that there is a need for "a cultural class analysis of theatre." But look at this (*shows on his mobile)*

> *"*This begins with the occupational approach to understanding class origins to show the nature of the problem. It then moves to analyse the nature of the artform itself, to ask whether theatre is, as an industry, capable of, or even interested in, making the changes necessary to address exclusions and discriminations. This cultural class analysis might conclude that the reality is a theatre industry that needs to rethink its aesthetic hierarchies, social status, and claims to representativeness. In doing so the theatre and performance industries might be honest about both their political economy and their purpose." (O'Brien, 2020).

(*Pauls look at him as if to say "So what?")*

There is no mention or suggestion to examine actor training in higher education. There is no capability consideration of higher education in making changes to address exclusions and discriminations. While research shows that "Working class 'always less likely to get into acting and film making', and that "creative occupations have always been characterised by over-representations of those from privileged social origins, with little evidence of a classless meritocracy" there is no indication of further research into *why* this is. The same research also shows that "Education could reduce but not end the disparity – a graduate whose parents were in the highest managerial and professional class was nearly twice as likely to gain creative work as a graduate from working class origins." (British Sociological Association, 2019). I say, if we (re)define acting as a result based on context, reception, spectating, skill and meritocracy, and challenge its purpose and its position as a higher education subject and as a profession, we might challenge its habitus and make it more inclusive.

Paul 2: (*meaning The Class Ceiling)* Isn't this about economic capital and those who need to do acting requiring the bank of mum and dad (Friedman & Laurison, 2020, p. 87)?

Onur: Partly. But I posit that the nature of acting as a concept, profession, or as a higher education subject or curriculum, a field, by its nature, excludes those who lack large amounts of social, cultural and educational capital and not *just* economic capital; what O'Brien calls as aesthetic hierarchies (2020).

Paul 1: (*half laughing, closes the manuscript)* So, if Stanislavski has been researched, and if there are alternatives it looks like the problem is solved. What makes your research significant?

Onur: Drama schools still utilise Stanislavskian notions as foundations for acting and neither Stanislavski books as curricular texts, nor texts of other practitioners have been investigated as a possible source of and solutions for social inequalities in actor training and acting. Bella Merlin, a Stanislavski scholar warns us "to be mindful of the reverberations of racialised, sexualised or ableist power dynamics when we're actor training" but not elitist or socio-cultural dynamics (Merlin, 2024, p. 29). I am therefore analysing "familiar material but adding new interpretations" (Thomas, 2016, p. 27).

Paul 2: Who would this topic be of interest to? I mean a particular academic readership…

Paul 1: To whom!

Paul 2: Hm?

Paul 1: *To whom* would this topic be… *(gives up)* Never mind (Trudgill, 2000, pp. 35-36)! (*hands the manuscript to Paul 2)*.

Onur: To research institutions who aim to tackle inequalities in creative industries, like The Sutton Trust. Then, to higher educational researchers who may wish to investigate the nature of a subject, curriculum or discipline in higher education to expose social phenomena, treating the curriculum as an object of analysis with approaches and views akin to and inspired by Vygotsky's (1999) holistic and meaning making, Bernstein's coded socialization (2003 (1975); 1990 (2003)) , Pinar's lived experience (2015), Wheelahan's social realist argument in sub-ordination of knowledge to the broader purposes of education (2010), Giroux's social construct and the complexity of higher education research (and the critique of positivism in doing so) (2011), Barnett's philosophical expression of curriculum 'pedagogical responsibility' and imagination (2022), Ashwin's transforming and transformative nature of curriculum in revitalising the purpose of higher education (2020) and Boud et. al.'s view on experience shaping learning and the curriculum (1985). Finally, and more specifically, those who teach, assess, design curricula for acting in UK Drama Schools with a view to help them understand that the dispositions or the habitus of acting, its curriculum are important to consider when tackling social inequalities, access barriers and exploring alternatives and solutions. To acting teachers who wish their work to be "informed by an emancipatory interest" (Grundy, 1987, p. 99). And of course, professional and student actors who feel the social inequalities that acting and acting curriculum induce on them.

Paul 1: *(bursts out laughing, tries to speak, coughing out of breath)* That is one way of illuminating some aspect of social reality (Trowler, 2016, p. 31). (*Composing himself)* I'm sorry. Something…something in my (*coughs)* throat… carry on. (*He goes to the drinks cabinet upstage, pours another drink and with his back turned, stares out the window as he sips)*.

Paul 2: But what's that got to do with Higher Education?

Onur: I am examining UK Drama Schools listed on the Federation of Drama Schools (FDS), and by that, I mean conservatoire style training.

Paul 2: …and not drama departments at universities?

Onur: The development of “drama” as a degree is separate to that of the performing arts. The lineage is different. While drama degrees come from English literature, performing arts degrees came from scratch (Kleiman, 2003, p. 131). Yet, FDS schools operate within the UK Higher Education system. Their curricular choices, their teaching and learning practices are highly relevant to how (good) acting is defined, taught and assessed both in higher education and in the profession.

Paul 2: But aren’t you supposed to do educational research? So why exclude other educational institutions?

Onur: There is a tension between drama schools’ vocational nature and Stanislavski. FDS brings together schools that provide “excellent training for the contemporary *profession*” (emphasis mine) (2025). However, the Stanislavskian pedagogical approach to acting treats and defines it as *art* in no uncertain terms in the preface to his first book (Stanislavski, 2016, pp. xxv-xxviii) and throughout his writings.

LAMDA has a BA in *Professional* Acting (*emphasis mine)* (2025). Yet Stanislavski says “‘How are we to get rid of these shop owners, these bank clerks and small-business men? Where do we find people who understand and, most important, feel what a real actor’s work is like, and know how to deal with it?” (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 569).

Paul 2: (*to Paul 1, admitting)* This kind of tension is noted also by Bourdieu.

Onur: Yes! While for Stanislavski “disavowal of the 'economy' is placed at the very heart of the field” of acting (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 79), RADA says “Our practical training in acting and theatre production prepares you for a *career* in theatre, film, TV and radio.” (RADA, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, 2025). “The 'profession' of […] artist is one of the least professionalized there is […] This is shown clearly by (inter alia) the problems which arise in classifying these agents, who are able to exercise what they regard as their main occupation only on condition that they have a secondary occupation which provides their main income (problems very similar to those encountered in classifying students).” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 43).

Paul 2: So, maybe there is tension between the educational and professional habitus of acting but how is that relevant?

(*this peaks Paul 1’s interest, he turns around)*

Onur: A 2018 Advance HE report notes UK Government's Industrial Strategy and the higher education sector's position within it. Higher Education Institutions are seen as…

Paul 1: (*jumps in, quickly, casually)* "source of research expertise that can, in closer collaboration with industry, generate world-class innovation" (Coonan & Pratt-Adams, 2018). And?

Onur: I think drama schools had to position themselves on the side of careers, profession and employability (as opposed to art) to get funded by the government. They can't admit "A Philistine cannot be an artist worthy of the name. But the majority of actors are precisely that —Philistines, making a career for themselves." (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 227) while claiming to "train people to follow [their] aspiration and make a living from it." (LIPA, 2025).

My focus is not the history or funding structures of UK drama schools but what and how they choose to teach as they stand today. Because I think there is an illusion there.

Paul 2: Illusion?

Onur: Yes. Stanislavski's acting curriculum state actors "can only work creatively in the right context and anyone who stops [them] establishing it commits a crime against art and society, both of which [they] serve." Yet drama schools claim they prepare actors for sustained work (LIPA, 2025). In reality, only those who can already afford to live can choose acting as a profession as Bourdieu suggests (1993, p. 43).

Paul 1: (*losing hope again)* And how do you intend to research all of this? I mean, it doesn't sound very systematic.

Onur: Well, by looking at…

Paul 2: … looking at?

Onur: Investigating?

Paul 2: Try again.

Onur: Examining?

Paul 1: *(Pleased)* Better.

Onur: I examine the curriculum for acting fundamentals FDS drama schools, which is essentially based on Stanislavski.

Paul 2: Now make it more specific.

Onur: Analysing Stanislavski's books and using my professional and teaching learning experiences of acting I will lay out how acting and good acting are defined, described, taught, experienced, and assessed within the curricula of FDS schools.

Since most other practitioners in the curriculum are based on Stanislavski in one way or another, often by their own admittance, I examine the elements within Stanislavski's books on the curriculum which implicitly or explicitly require significant financial, social, or cultural capital from students in Bourdieusian terms.

Paul 2: (*relishing)* Bourdieu! Carry on!

Onur: And I will demonstrate ways the current pedagogical emphasis on acting as an "art" rather than a "craft" contributes to the exclusion or marginalization of individuals from underprivileged backgrounds.

I have a hunch that the very *nature, disposition* of acting and its curriculum is elitist. Definition of acting, good acting and the origins of today's FDS curriculum lie in Stanislavski who was a posh, white, middle-aged man. Through drama schools the definition of good acting has been "reproduced" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 2006; Nash, 1990) through practitioners, teachers, students, professional actors (socially and culturally) and through higher education, including myself.

Paul 1: (*unimpressed)* So, you point out the problem. (*testing)* But what about those solutions you mentioned earlier?

Onur: (*caught off guard)* Solutions?

Paul 2: (*trying to help)* Well, for example, what would a curriculum grounded in the concept of acting as a 'craft' entail, and how might such a curriculum redefine the requirement for embodied and material requirements for effective acting?

Paul1: What are the potential impacts of a craft-based acting curriculum on accessibility, diversity, and social mobility within the UK acting profession?

Paul 2: And is it possible to reduce the capital required for good acting?

Paul 1 and 2: *(in perfect synchronicity)* Can you offer alternative ways of achieving good acting?

Onur: *(hesitant)* Erm… yes, I *think* I can. But I don't need to.

There are practitioners such as David Mamet (Mamet, 1999) and Yoshi Oida (Oida & L., 1997) which I think drama schools should teach more of as fundamentals and not as *alternatives*. And of course, there is Diderot with his famous paradox (Diderot, 1883). There are elements of Michael Chekhov which offer strong alternatives to Stanislavski and more recent researchers like Konijn (2000) has a lot to offer. There are Enactive Approaches to acting like that of Zarrilli (Zarrilli, 2007) and rare but emerging notions of the importance of the spectator in acting not only socio-culturally (Benett, 2001; McConachie, et al., 2016) but also cognitive scientifically (McConahie, 2008). There are theories from Eisenstein (Mirrer, 2012; Gaudreault, 1987) too.

But in terms of education, until we reframe how we define acting, what acting is, nothing will change.

Paul 2: "Not only does it become increasingly clear that what we call reality is a function of particular interpretations; but it also becomes evident that we must attend to the origin of those interpretations" (Greene, 1983, p. 1).

(*pause)*

Paul 1: (*considers all of what he's heard. Looks at Paul 2, then at Onur, then at Paul 2 again. Finally caves in. Grabs the manuscript from Paul 2).*

Ok, let's start with the status quo.

Onur: The definition of good acting was, is, created and re-created by.. (*hesitates*) upper or upper-middle class people or rather upper or upper-middle class thinking, composition, characteristic, 'habitus' after Stanislavski. This idea of class permeates and gets reproduced through the curriculum of actor training in higher education. I propose that the characteristics, the nature of fundamentals of Stanislavski demands a high volume of capital from those who engage with it from candidate to student actors all the way to the acting teacher. A high volume of capital indicates a higher position in Bourdieu's chart of the space of social positions (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), pp. 122-123) and that's why the profession is dominated by those who are high on that chart.

Paul 1: What do you mean by capital? And Habitus?

Onur: I use Bourdieu's defin-

Paul 2: (*to Paul 1)* Shouldn't he define curriculum first?

Onur: The five-component approach defined by The Higher Education Academy in the UK is perhaps the most comprehensive and one that suits my

examination the best: 1) What is being learnt 2) Why it is being learnt 3) How it is being learnt 4) When and where it is being learnt 5) The demonstration that learning is taking place (Hicks, 2018, p. 9).

Paul 2: You can't be focusing on all of these.

Onur: I intend to focus on 'what is being learnt', the technique itself and I want to see if that '*what'* has inherent, embedded characteristics of social class and whether social class is innate in the technique. I guess I'll slightly cross over to '*how'* it is being learnt because it is a highly practical subject and the artistic nature of it also relates closely to practices of teaching acting including assessment and the act of teaching does contribute to the definition of the curriculum as a dynamic process.

Paul 1: A la' Grundy's praxis (1987).

Paul 2: Or Pinar's lived experience or an ongoing conversation (Pinar, 2015, p. xii).

Onur: True but I separate the notion and the dispositions of the curriculum here from those who engage with it, so I treat the curriculum as … (*hesitates)* a person, a character.

Paul 1: (*sceptical)* A character?

Onur: Yes, and combined with Bourdieu's reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 54), these dynamic, dialogical, experiential definitions of curriculum can exacerbate the violence of the reproduction as the praxis of teaching acting is highly personal and it depends on how the teacher (actor) interprets the acting and how the dialogue between a lecturer and a student always bends towards the view of the lecturer.

Paul 2: Why?

Onur: Because ultimately, the lecturer watches and assesses a student's performance and decides whether the acting was good or not. Just like Stanislavski does in his books.

Paul 2: Assesses?

Onur: Well, yes. Ultimately, acting students, or more precisely their acting must be assessed for their degree. In the curriculum the foundations for *(gestures air quote)* "good acting" (*Paul 1 winces)* comes mainly from Stanislavski especially in the earlier years of acting programmes in drama schools. I guess that narrows my focus mostly to what is being learnt because I postulate that the content of the curriculum *itself* has dispositions which unfold through the practice of teaching and learning.

And an audition in the professional world is an assessment. However, I think there is a hidden mechanism there too. In Bourdieu-

Paul 1: (*getting frustrated)* You still haven't defined capital or habitus.

Paul 2: (*with big eyes)* So, are you hypothesising, that acting itself is elitist?

Onur: Yes, and its curriculum in drama schools.

Paul 2: Because of Stanislavski?

Onur: Well, in his books he speaks "of art and creative work exclusively on the basis of [his] feelings, and the things [he] has learned in a lifetime of experience" (Stanislavski, 2016, p. xxv) thus from "a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception".

Paul 2: His own 'habitus'... (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 86).

Onur: Yes! He even has a book called "My Life in Art". Notice how the title is *not* "My Art in Life" (*Paul 2 looks at him quizzically)*.

Paul 2: Do you mean that acting has a hidden curriculum (Giroux & Purpel, 1983), or maybe its curriculum has a hidden agenda that favours the upper classes?

Onur: Maybe favour is not the right word. I argue that the nature of Stanislavski's acting technique presupposes or requires that its participants have a large volume of capital, a higher position in Bourdieu's chart and that Stanislavski's definition of 'good acting' can only be achieved if the (student) actor has a large volume of capital. Additionally, Stanislavski sees acting as "art" and not as a job or career even though the FDS schools are vocational. He sees it as a passion project which to me implies that he supports acting is for people who do *not* need to earn a living through it -or earn a living at all. So, it is more accurate to say that the technique is created with those who come from middle or upper middle-class backgrounds or habituses in mind (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). Having a large amount of capital allows actors to practise the ideas introduced in Stanislavski more easily and ironically, that would make them better actors and thus more successful in the business. Having a large amount of social capital also helps professional and educational success.

And all of this is not so much hidden as a curriculum as it happens in plain sight (Margolis, et al., 2001, pp. 3-4). No matter what we do there will always be a hidden curriculum "because the truth is never fully or completely revealed; that is, there is no end to ideology. To be liberated means not only being savvy and aware but also being in touch with potential" (Giroux & Purpel, 1983, p. 278). And by re-defining acting, I hope I can be savvy and tap into that potential.

Paul 1: (*has stopped listening. To himself)* Habiti?

Onur: I'm sorry?

Paul 1: Habituses or habiti?

Onur: …

Paul 2: And can you elaborate what you mean by it?

Onur: The definition of habitus is spread across Bourdieu's writings but essentially it is "the organizing principle of [agents'] actions, and [...] this *modus operandi* informing all thought and action (including thought of action) reveals itself only in the *opus operatum*." (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 18).

Paul 1: And the curriculum operates to transmit not only explicit knowledge but also implicit rules and expectations about social order, power, and behaviour (Bernstein, 2003).

Onur: Indeed. By interpreting Stanislavski's books used in actor training curriculum from a Bourdieusian perspective, I bring out the elements within them which implicitly or explicitly require acting students to have a higher place within the world of "cultural goods, [..] because the relationship of distinction is objectively inscribed within it, and is reactivated, intentionally or not, in each act of consumption, through the instruments of economic and cultural appropriation which it requires." (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 224)

Paul 1: Including teaching and learning.

Onur: Yes. Because characteristics that these books imply are reproduced over time (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), in the future, even though those characteristics may change aesthetically or even socio-culturally.

Paul 2: What do you mean by that?

Onur: "[C]ulture is a site of conflict over value, values, and hierarchies, none of which are static." (Brook, et al., 2020, p. 108). Aesthetic demands and

cultural definitions of (good) acting between cultures and over time might change. But the way that it changes cannot escape its own nature because of the shared or rather 'reproduced' habitus of the acting curriculum's agents, gatekeepers of acting; teachers, assessors in higher education, audition panels in the profession, operate -with ease- to an elite norm.

Paul 2: But not all those gatekeepers can be elite by birth?!

Onur: No. In those cases, they acquire and try to embody capital and a new habitus through studying at drama school (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), pp. 74, 438); or through further studying and being an academic, like me; or through being an actor, on the job, and mixing with the right circles. Education also provides them with the social capital that they need to succeed (Savage, 2015, pp. 110-127). But acquiring capital is one thing and embodying it is another. Embodiment requires time. (*He looks at himself, his clothes and then looks at the room.)*

Paul 1: Potentially longer than three years.

Onur: "...the actor has to deal with [...] the entire programme we have taught in this school. That doesn't end when the course ends. Its lasts for the whole of an actor's career. And the older you get, the more you need a developed technique" (Stanislavski, 2016, p. p567).

Paul 2: So, acting curriculum extends beyond the drama school.

Onur: And learning and embodying the technique is slightly different to embodying the social and cultural capital.

Paul 1: How so?

Onur: Skill, or a systematic way of working can be embodied as a craft although it still requires resources like time, space etc. which can be attributed to capital. However, embodying a habitus to be accepted in a field as an actor is very different. Being one of *them*. Name dropping; referring to famous actors as "familiar individuals, known and frequented, belonging, like neighbours and cousins in the space of a village, to the world of mutual acquaintance." (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 444). Or showing other signs of belonging to the field of acting. Acquiring the social capital. And turning it into success!

Paul 2: Exchanging Social Capital with Economic Capital.

Paul 1: But surely, any acquired Capital should be equal for everyone who graduates from a drama school.

Onur: Unfortunately, class origins are important here too. For example, “those from senior managerial family backgrounds are more likely to know higher-status people and to participate in highbrow cultural capital than others among their elite peers.” (Savage, 2015, p. 157).

Paul 2: So, before, during and after drama school they’re already at an advantage.

Onur: Indeed. Further, upward mobility “creates emotional challenges and costs which might explain why some people may prefer a less competitive outing.” (Savage, 2015, p. 161). So actors from working class backgrounds don’t always completely feel at home in their newly acquired capital or their new habitus and they report a feeling of estrangement even if they gain status and money i.e. acquire capital (Friedman & Laurison, 2020, p. 182).

If they fail to embody the capital then they fake it, which kind of works because they are act-Ors. (*laughs)* Just as suggested by the head of policy and Social Mobility and Child poverty in 2014: (*puts on a voice)* “Poor children must ‘act posh’ to get ahead” (Graham, 2014).

(*Laughs*.

Pauls don’t.

Serious again)

Actors born into theatrical or artistic families will have access to social and embodied capital. They will have spent evenings talking about plays, stage craft, they will have met actors, designers, they will know the lingo, the jargon, they will learn to call each other d’ahling, they will know what they have to do if they accidentally mention Macbeth in a theatre and so on. Actors spawning actors. Literally.

Paul 1: (*getting even more frustrated)* You still haven’t defined capita-

Paul 2: How does Stanislavski tie in with all this?

Onur: FDS Schools use Stanislavski as their fundamental approach to actin…

Paul 1: (*Almost shouting)* He has already done that. Can you PLEASE establish what you mean by capital? (*Pause. Onur and Paul 2 look at him. Paul 1 realises he looks deranged and trying to diffuse this he speaks almost too normally)* I mean of course *I* know what you mean but you need to define your terms for your readers -audience - readers.

Onur: (*startled)* Of…course. I am using Bourdieu's definitions: **Economic Capital, Cultural Capital** in three states: embodied, objectified and institutionalised, and **Social Capital** (Bourdieu, 1986). I also refer to **Educational Capital** which is Cultural Capital in its certified form (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 285). And I think these definitions still hold in the twenty first century UK.

Paul 1: (*restrained)* Finally! Thank you.

Onur: **Economic Capital** is what it says on the tin and is quickly exchangeable or acquirable especially when compared to other forms of capital.

Embodied Cultural Capital has various aspects but what's most relevant to my analysis is that it is in the body in the form of culture, cultivation and Bourdieu's recognition that it costs time and labour to be embodied; time which must be invested personally, like for the acquisition of a muscular physique (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244). In its embodied state cultural capital remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition such as speech accents of a class or region and it can be disguised as merit.

Paul 2: Disguised? What does that mean?

Onur: Because the transmission of it is hereditary and because it starts as early as childhood, **Embodied Cultural Capital** can be recognized as legitimate competence rather than inherited capital. So, it operates as **Symbolic Capital** (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 168) and any given cultural competence, for example being able to read in a world of illiterates, yields profits of distinction for its owner (Bourdieu, 1986). In acting, I guess one could say disguised as *talent* instead of merit.

Paul 1: What about **Objectified Cultural Capital**?

Onur: That is more about the objects of culture such a collection of paintings, but Bourdieu argues that owners of such objects can profit from them well only if they can appreciate them, know about them or use them as intended, thus only if they have the embodied capital relating to them (Bourdieu, 1986).

Paul 2: And the **Institutionalised Cultural Capital**?

Onur: That's what I'm trying to gain by what I am doing right now.

Paul 1: (*Looks blank)*

Onur: My PhD, a certificate of cultural competence, I hope, will confer on me a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture. (Bourdieu, 1986). The process is the same for students of FDS Schools or

any higher education institution for that matter. They graduate from these schools so that they can say they are, for example, a graduate of RADA (*pronounces it ra'DAH!)* at their next audition. And because they have to acquire their degree, their capital, in just three years, it can alienate them, or they may not be able to embody their acquired capital. As Bourdieu argues, it is difficult to acquire cultural capital in an embodied way in a short amount of time.

Paul 1: **Social Capital?**

Onur: I'll quote this verbatim as I think Bourdieu (1986) describes it clearly: "...the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition -or in other words to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity - owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (Bourdieu, 1986). Or schmoozing.

Paul 1: Schoomz...what?

Onur: (*slowly)* Schmoozing: (*at pace)* networking, friends of friends (Ispahany, 2019). Darlings, luvvies... There is a crossover or transaction between Institutionalised Cultural Capital and Social Capital for acting graduates as acting schools literally, open doors for their students by exposing them to casting agents, directors either as part of their curricular activities such as end of year shows, public shows, competitions and showcases or by extracurricular activities. So, by attending a drama school an acting graduate gains not only **Institutionalised Cultural Capital** but also **Social Capital.**

Paul 1: Wait a minute. Did you say *extra*curricular activities?

Onur: (*hesitant)* Yes. Sometimes -- (*stops dead in his tracks. Goes to say something. He thinks better of it).*

If you know a famous director or if such and such -especially famous- actor dined at your table, then you must be talented or good. Like Russell Crowe who was (*ironic) wooooooonderful* in Les Mis! So, in acting Social Capital too can be disguised as merit. And then there is nepotism.

Paul 1: That's massively speculative.

Onur: I wish but Russell Crowe was *most certainly awful* in Les Mis.

Paul 1: No not that! The nepotism...

Onur: “The [arts] industry is often built on nepotism, and secret nods and handshakes, and unpaid internships.” (Davies in (Healy, 2024) (Brown, 2017) (Stephenson, 2024). I witnessed this in higher education too.

Paul 1: How?

Onur: We used to select students for competitions and scholarship auditions with no criteria to select them based on any kind of merit. Thus, whoever was liked the most by the most powerful member of the department would inevitably get chosen. What’s worse, students knew about this, and they tried reporting …

Paul 1: Ok. Enough with the gossip.

Onur: I profited from networking in professional acting myself. Most of the work I got as an actor was because I knew someone or someone knew me or someone recommended me to a director. And we all hear about actors being born into theatrical or artistic families. Did you know for example that Emma Thompson’s dad was on ‘Play School’ and that he also narrated the magic roundabout? (BBC, 2022) Her mother was also an actress.

Paul 2: Wasn’t she married to Kenneth Branagh at one point?

Onur: A prisoner of luvviedom (The Independent, 2003).

Paul 1: Back to capitals! Please.

Onur: So, perhaps **Social Capital** is not reducible to or from **Cultural and Economic Capital**, but it is not completely independent of them. You may be a good actor, even the best actor in the world but if no one knows about you…

Paul 2: (*Jumps in)* I mean who *is* a good actor? The one that graduated with top marks? The financially successful actor, the actor that works continuously, or the best known? The actor that the reviewers praise but the public hates? Good according to whom? Is it the actor who wins an Oscar? (*condescending)* I mean Cher of all people has an Oscar (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 2025).

Onur: On her Cannes award, Bogdanovich says she can’t act. He’s shot a lot of close-ups of her because she’s very good in close-ups.

Paul 2: You can’t create award-winning performance with close-ups.

Onur: “Oh yes, you can” (Bogdanovich, 2022).

Paul 1: (*heavy)* Wait a minute. Shouldn't assessment take care of that in higher education by being "[...] valid and reliable, supported by clear criteria for marking and grading, which are provided to students" (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2019, p. 12)?

Onur: It should but Stanislavski provides no explicit, transparent criteria by which to assess his students apart from his own approval. Transparency is the first condition cited by Office for Students in Securing student success: Regulatory framework for higher education in England. (Office For Students, 2022). It is "ubiquitously cited as a virtue in assessment practice".

Paul 2: Yet inconsistently defined and applied "in achieving assessments that are both transparent and fair" (Gonsalves & Lin, 2024b).

Onur: And for subjects like English, assessors attempt "to make qualitative judgements on subject matter in which the extremes of the quality range are insecure territory. Judgements can be made as to the relative quality of submitted works and excellence can be recognised, but assessors do not use the top of the scale since this has implications of perfection which may be hard to defend." (Bridges, et al., 1999).

Paul 1: In other words, there is no perfect acting!

Onur: Exactly! So, I thought if we can redefine acting and aim to create criteria for relevant skills, as objective as possible and document it, we might get closer to hard pure subjects where there is more confidence in using percentage grading (Bridges, et al., 1999).

Paul 1: Hold on. "Transparency in assessment is a complex, multifaceted concept that goes beyond clear documentation" .

Onur: I agree. And thus, through this research I am trying to have a dialogue - literally- "actively engaging with stakeholders through dialogue and interaction." (Gonsalves & Lin, 2024).

Paul 1: Onur, transparency has myths too (Bearman & Ajjawi, 2018).

Onur: I know, I know but I think I can rebut at least some of them. Students who already have a high amount of capital have a head-start over those who may not have it. They "vibe" with the lecturers (*Paul 1 winces)*, then agents, then casting directors the dominating elite of the profession. Because in the real world, acting assessments can happen in the context of auditions and award judgements.

Paul 2: Like BAFTA!

Onur: “As of October 2023, 19% of BAFTA members are from lower socio-economic backgrounds – the national population is 39%” (BAFTA, 2024). And of course, they have a widening participation scheme, but the newcomers would have to embody the taste of the existing elite to be accepted. Remember Savage’s argument of the emotional struggles of upward mobility.

Paul 1: Speculating again.

Onur: Ok then something a bit more tangible: “In a high school production of Streetcar, [...] spectators may prefer to see much more of the Stanley of? Williams’s script than to focus on the untrained, unthreatening, and probably unsexy student actor playing the part. They will likely add a teaspoon of “actor” to a cup of “character” to create a believable actor/character blend for themselves for much of the performance.” (McConahie, 2008, p. 44).

Paul 2: (*remembering)* The spectator creates the acting and the spectator decides whether the acting is good or bad.

Onur: Indeed! Like the readers are creating this play as we speak. It’s the same in assessing acting in higher education where the spectator is crucial in the evaluation of the performance (Till, 2016).

Biggs and Tang briefly discuss assessing creativity and they say it is possible to assess using criteria, but they also acknowledge the importance of interpreting the criteria in the light of the work and also the importance of connoisseurship (Biggs & Tang, 2009, pp. 228, 229) which implies taste which then takes us back to the habitus, especially of the assessors. The fairness of performing arts assessment can be problematic even with multiple assessors (Amuah & Osei, 2018), it can end up being subjective because the programmes are based on industry standards and “even desires of the current faculty (Ozaki, et al., 2015)”. A small-scale study suggests “the assessment of [...] Drama is currently under scrutiny, with concerns being raised about internal assessment being prone to bias.” HEIs provide stringent procedures to ensure that Drama students are graded fairly on their performance: two or three markers for all performances, plus external examiners to further moderate the marks. But vocational schools reported not attaching much value to the numerical marks given for the practical assessments anyway. (Carroll & Dodds, 2016, p. 26).

Paul 1: I think you are conflating assessment in higher education with professional judgement in the industry.

Onur: Yes! And I think FDS Schools do too by building their curriculum on theatrical innovators and not skill or merit -or at a higher-level criticality-. So, it's a curriculum issue. Because theatrical innovators like Stanislavski do not usually explain what they do in wholly rational terms when they are trying to persuade us that their approach is the "true" way to creativity. They construct an aesthetic vocabulary validating the process it describes (Gordon, 2006). Therefore, the disposition of the curriculum based on that vocabulary is suitably vague and self-justifying for those who benefit from it the most: the elite.

Paul 1: (*beat. He is thinking)* Which schools use Stanislavski?

Onur: The FDS schools are *(reads from a list on his smart-phone)*

1. Arts Ed London
2. Bristol Old Vic Theatre School
3. Drama Centre London – although they are not currently recruiting for conservatoire performance programmes.
4. Drama Studio London
5. East 15
6. Guildford School of Acting
7. Guildhall School of Music and Drama
8. Italia Conti
9. LAMDA
10. LIPA
11. Manchester School of Theatre
12. Mountview
13. Oxford School of Drama
14. Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA)
15. Rose Bruford College
16. Royal Birmingham Conservatoire
17. Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
18. Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
19. Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (Federation of Drama Schools , 2022) (Federation of Drama Schools (FDS), n.d.).

Onur: ALRA, The Academy of Live and Recorded arts was also on this list until it closed in 2022 (Federation of Drama Schools , 2022).

Paul 1: Only five “royals” there.

Onur: Yes. (*proving he’s done the research)* The “Permission to use the title ‘Royal’ is granted by the Sovereign, acting on the advice of her Ministers”. (Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, 2017). The original purpose of the Royal Charter was to create public or private corporations, and to define their privileges and purpose. (Privy Council Office, n.d.) And some of these schools gained the title relatively recently. For example, Birmingham Conservatoire got the Royal title in 2017 (2025) and Central got it in 2012 (Shepherd, 2025).

Paul 2: I bet RADA hated that (*Pauls chuckle)*.

Onur: (*blank)* Oh?

Paul 1: (*explaining)* “The **symbolic capital** of those who dominate high society [...] is the sublimated form taken by [...] flatly objective realities as those recorded by [..] titles of [..] nobility”.

Paul 2: (*completes the argument)* “Any unequal distribution of goods or services tends thus to be perceived as a symbolic system” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013) “Guided by the sense of social realities which enables them to assess the proprieties and improprieties of social logic, the respondents match people with objects, [...] according to their rank in the distributions, making marriages which are immediately perceived as well-matched by all those who possess the same practical knowledge of the distributions.” (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 553).

Paul 1: “The sum of these socially pertinent distributions sketches the system of lifestyles, the system of differential distances engendered by taste and apprehended by it [...] as titles of nobility capable of bringing a profit of distinction all the greater when their relative scarcity is higher”

Paul 2: “or as a mark of infamy.” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013, pp. 296-298). *(They both laugh again. Onur still doesn’t get it.)*

Paul 1: Do they all teach Stanislavski?

Onur: Seventeen of them explicitly state Stanislavski somewhere in their course documentation. Either directly on their website, their prospectus or in their acting module specification documents including reading lists. Bristol Old Vic doesn’t mention it in Level 4 but at Level 5 Bella Merlin – a Stanislavski Scholar- and Meisner are in the reading list. Meisner was one

of the original members of the Group Theatre (Merlin, 2024, p. 75) and "The young artists who would make up the Group Theatre were highly influenced by the foundation Stanislavsky provided." (Sostarich, 2014). So, even if these schools are using other practitioners, Stanislavski's influence on them are significant. While I don't examine those texts directly, I use them as supporting evidence.

Paul 1: Did you work in any of these schools?

Onur: I worked at three of them at various stages of my career all of which taught Stanislavski. In fact, I was tasked with teaching Stanislavski as part of one of my roles.

Paul 2: Which Stanislavski texts will you examine?

Onur: The famous trilogy of 'An Actor Prepares' (AAP), 'Building A Character' (BAC) and 'Creating a Role' (CAR). Benedetti's translation brings the first two together to make An Actor's Work (AAW). The fundamentals are laid out in the first instalment and that's my primary unit (Krippendorff, 2019). It is also the book that concerns itself the most with the dispositions of the actor before launching into more technical elements of acting. The second and third instalments go further into detail of developing the character and a role, in line with their titles.

Paul 1: Why specifically those?

Onur: Because I believe that those key texts provide the origins of the definition and pedagogical approach to acting.

Paul 2: You could have looked at Merlin's The Complete Stanislavski Toolkit for example. It's a more modern interpretation of Stanislavski.

Onur: I did. Merlin states that the aim of her book is "to take the basic elements of each of the three books and re-integrate them into one user-friendly volume." (Merlin, 2014, p. 20).

Paul 1: Let's go back to your style. Why are you writing in play form?

Onur: Primarily to mirror Stanislavski's style of writing, especially in 'An Actor Prepares': a semi-fiction form disguising his players' names and embedding his own experiences of acting into the book (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936)).

Paul 1: Is it written as a play?

Onur: Not quite. It's more like a novel with some scenes written in dialogue form. Telling the story of the fictional character Kostya joining Torstov's acting school.

Most other more contemporary western, English language acting books have similar styles with fictional or quasi-fictional students, tutors or rehearsals depicted, as in a novel or a theatre play with characters speaking to one another, with their actions and their environment described in detail, or they speak directly to the reader. Unsurprisingly, those are also by practitioners who fundamentally use Stanislavski for their basis of their own technique.

Paul 1: How is that relevant to your research though? Are you writing your own experiences?

Onur: Oh no, no and neither did Stanislavski.

Though he admits he constructed the books from what he "learned in a lifetime of experience, during which [he has] listened keenly both to [himself] as an artist, while [he] was active, and to others, as director and teacher. Only this material and the conclusions he has drawn from his experiments, his own work, his observations and his practice, are of any interest either to professionals, i.e., actors, directors and others active in the arts or, possibly, men of science, if they want living material, drawn from day-to- day experience for their research into theatre practice." (Stanislavski, 2016, p. xxv).

Paul 1: But that doesn't fit with Bourdieu…

Paul 2: (*to the rescue)* I think it does. The pleasure derived from high culture is rarely, if ever, just about the intrinsic qualities of the art itself. Instead, it's profoundly shaped by social recognition, shared codes, and the subtle affirmation of one's place within a privileged cultural elite, defined by who is "in" and who is "out." In the actor students' case, replace pleasure with recognition of learnedness (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 500)**.**

Onur: (*lost)* So?

Paul 2: So, maybe, students or actors being in the know of Stanislavski's texts by reading or consuming it, derive the pleasure from being "in" by sharing the same codes, especially when they meet other actors and gatekeepers in front -or behind- the audition table in and out of higher education. (*gesturing from one to another)* Educational to Embodied to Social to Symbolic to Economic Capital? "[C]reative arts students consider social

capital as a key to employment success." (Cheng, et al., 2022). ? All intertwined!

Paul 1 & Onur: (*get it)* Ah!

Onur: And it gives me a chance to assume Stanislavski's place as a cognitive device to infer his intentions and what he stood for and hoped to accomplish (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 147).

Paul 1: How do you intend to apply content analysis?

Onur: Not so strictly unitised and not quantitatively (Weber, 1990). I use a thematic approach (Krippendorff, 2019) teasing out themes, images, suggestions that are present in the trilogy as primary source of data (and other Stanislavski based practitioners' books) and finding out what these themes, images and suggestions *might* reveal or imply about the overall capital of students, whether intentional or not.

Paul 1: (*abhorred) Might?*

Onur: "Creating questions abductively entails imagination. Abduction is not about what *is* (either empirically or logically); it is about what *might be*." (Gillespie, et al., 2024). In a way I could reword my main question as "*Might* the inherent nature or disposition of the Stanislavskian curriculum…"

Paul 1: *(unimpressed)* So not quantitative.

Onur: (*brave)* "[…] quantification cannot be a defining criterion for content analysis. Text is always qualitative to begin with, […] and a content analysis may well result in verbal answers to a research question. Using numbers instead of verbal categories or counting instead of listing quotes is merely convenient; it is not a requirement for obtaining valid answers to a research question." (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 91)

Paul 2: (*trying to help)* But how will you design your study?

(*Suddenly, the stage goes dark. Flickering letters appear like fireflies and start forming a figure)*

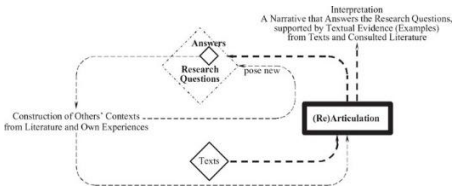

Figure 1. Qualitative Content Analysis Design

(Krippendorff, 2019, p. 93)

(*The figure disappears. The room is visible again)*

Paul 1: I understand the hermeneutic design applied to content analysis. But why do you need the personal experience?

Onur: I am actively looking at the curricular texts and my own personal relationship with them to see if there are ways to reduce the class inequalities in acting. By interpreting the books from a new perspective, I am in pursuit of new information. And that leads to an internal debate, where I force myself to challenge my own established ideas and practices. This self-critique then sparks new insights and challenges for how I approach their teaching. Which is also why I'm writing in play form. "Interpretation of curriculum has existential ramifications for the lives and identity of teachers" (Hodge, 2023). I am examining Stanislavski's system and…

Paul 1: He never sought to create a 'system' (Donellan in (Stanislavski, 2016, p. xii)).

Onur: His intention was "to provide an accessible account of the 'system' for actors in training without abstract theorizing" (Benedetti in (Stanislavski, 2016, p. xv).

Paul 2: This is the tension that you were talking about earlier, isn't it? Between art and profession; higher education and employability; context and purpose…

Onur: Yes! Even though they may live in the same body -poet and prose writer- their economic implications require the same person operate differently; write poems for art, write articles for a newspaper for money (Bell-Villada, 1986, p. 434).

Paul 1: (*half joking)* Is this a challenge against higher education?

Onur: There are systematic reviews of those (Tight, 2023) and a plethora of texts all the way from the Robbins Report (1963) to Grant's blog on rediscovering the social purpose of higher education (Grant, 2023). From Ashwin's Manifesto (2020) to The Higher Education Policy Institute's 20th year publications (HEPI (The Higher Education Policy Institute), 2023). LSE's "50 Years After Robbins" (London School of Economics (LSE), 2014) to the UK Parliament's research briefing showing "Students are concerned about the value for money of their higher education experience" and that "students of medicine and law achieve very high returns on average, while those studying creative arts gain significantly less from their degree in

financial terms." (Atherton, et al., 2024) which all set the scene for me if you like. And differentiate between higher education (of an actor) and university (drama school) (Barnett, n.d.).

Paul 2: I hope you won't be "wearing your scholarship lightly" like him. (Barnett, n.d.)

Paul 1: Like he *does*.

Onur: Like he *is*. Wear-*ing!*

Paul 2: (*smiles)*

Onur: Anyway, Higdon argues "The British government should take heed of students' *qualitative* reflections on teaching, learning and work." (2016).

And Krippendorff suggests analysts can justify their inferences by means of extrapolations from systems and that social systems can be quite complex.

Paul 2: But Bourdieu clearly states that a field is not a system (Thomson, 2014, p. 88).

Onur: Ok then, drama schools are systems, Stanislavski *has* a system, and both are within the field of education. And the corpus of evidence I present allows me to be grounded in knowledge of a society's transformations, which enables me to extrapolate features of the system beyond the time and space of available texts—but always within the domain of the system's description (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 55). Content analyses are more likely to succeed when they address phenomena that are of a public, social, or political nature or concern phenomena of individuals' participation in public, social, or political affairs and I argue that teaching is a public affair (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 82). Thus, I am examining the experience of this phenomenon personally -

Paul 2: - or autophenomenographically -

Onur: - interpreting texts now and having done so in the past as a student and as a lecturer. I personally contributed to curricula, defining expectations, assessment criteria, definitions of acting, choosing exercises to teach based on these texts; sometimes taking Stanislavski's characters as somatic norms. I have been keeping a reflective journal as I'm re-reading Stanislavski books. I've also been keeping "head notes" (Allen-Collinson, 2011, p. 198) from my classes, workshops from years past. And finally, of course, I reflect on how I work as an actor and what I watch as an

audience member. In that way I am inevitably a fully immersed insider to my research (Mercer, 2007).

Paul 1: But no real data! No interviews, or data from "informants beyond [your] self"? (Anderson, 2010, p. 375)

Onur: True. But even Bourdieu relies on himself in his research and is open about his origins and that he was a "scholarship boy" (Thomson, 2009). My main data is Stanislavski's books. How he defines, describes and tacitly assesses acting, how he expects his students to experience it.

Paul: 1 So you claim your research is about the curriculum and not yourself.

Onur: Yes. I am after "a methodological approach to curriculum making and implementation" (Hodge, 2023).

Paul 1: But no statistical data from the text either.

Onur: "In qualitative research, samples may not be drawn according to statistical guidelines, but the selective use of quotes and examples that qualitative researchers present to their readers are intended to serve the same function as do samples. Quoting typical examples in support of a general point implies the claim that they are fair representations of the phenomena of concern." (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 89) and is a more efficient representation than a tabulation of all occurrences. "[I]n many statistical techniques for aggregating units of analysis—correlation coefficients, parameters of distributions, indices, and tested hypotheses—information is lost. In qualitative pursuits, rearticulations and summaries have similar effects: They reduce the diversity of text ideally to what matters." (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 89).

Paul 1: I disagree with auto-phenomenography then. I think your methodology lies somewhere between phenomenology and auto-ethnography. (Daniel & Harland, 2017, pp. 50-57). It is *definitely* not phenomenography as you are not identifying qualitative different experiences and understandings of a particular phenomenon among a particular sample of the population. (Cousin, 2008, p. 183) and this focus on variation lies at the heart of phenomenography (Baughan, 2018).

Onur: Maybe. But my experience including feelings, emotions and perceptions (Cousin, 2008, p. 53) of Stanislavski's curriculum.

Paul 2: Isn't that more auto-ethnographic then? In a way you are writing to explore your own experiences and connecting these to the wider cultural or societal question (p. 54) and you are also examining significant

experiences from your own standpoint, unearthing subtle layers of meaning which an outsider looking in might miss (p. 111)?

Paul 1: Isn't *this* a narrative, your narrative?

Onur: Actually, no. Not least because I don't want to run the risk of being self-indulgent or even narcissistic (Ryen, 2008, p. 85) I am only narrating the results of my research (Krippendorff, 2019, pp. 404-406).

My experiences are a part of my public affair (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 82) and not a chronology. They serve to analyse the text and not the other way round.

Paul 2: (*to Paul 1)* Then perhaps analytical autoethnography? His research fits all five key features of it: (1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher's self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2010, p. 375)

(*Onur tries to interject, fails.)*

Paul 1: Although he's missing number four.

(*Onur tries again, fails. The academics are at full pace. He gives up.)*

Paul 2: Yes. But some of those dialogues are embedded in his personal experiences with students, colleagues, professional actors and so on. Also, the information he has from articles in the public domain, like newspaper and magazine articles and social media!

Paul 1: Random!

Paul 2: Remember "content analyses are most likely to succeed when analysts relate textual matter [...] to social realities that enact them in their daily life." (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 83). And abductively inferring contextual phenomena from texts moves an analysis outside their data. It bridges the gap between descriptive accounts of texts and what they mean, refer to, entail, provoke, or cause." (p. 89).

Paul 1: This seems very messy to me.

Paul 2: I would agree and typically so.

Paul 1: (*scrunches his nose)* That's not very scientific though, is it Onur?

(*Onur says nothing. Grabs his copy of An Actor's Work, opens the preface and hands it to Paul to read the first line)*

"My book has no pretensions to be scientific." (Stanislavski, 2016)

(*Onur then hands him Uta Hagens book. Turns to page 10. Points to a section. Paul 1 reads)*

"I am not an authority on behaviorism or semantics, not a scholar, a philosopher, nor a psychiatrist" (1973, p. 10)

(*Onur takes out a third book. It's Meisner. Paul reluctantly takes it. Onur points to the 3rd paragraph of the book)*

"One can use standard principles and textbooks in educating people for law, medicine, architecture, chemistry or almost any other profession but not for the theater." (1987, p. xvii)

Yet all these authors are in acting curricula.

Even with Marx, the push of science to replace philosophy (Wendling, 2009, p. 70), and his insistence in his later years that his own philosophy was indeed science (but not necessarily deterministic) (ibid.), reflects his experience of the socio-political pressures created by the alleged and conjectured supremacy of the quantitative, which are paralleled in the documentation of the expansion of higher education in the UK (Wendling, 2009, p. 70). Marx had Engels to make him a scientist (McLellan, 1981) but I only have myself.

Paul 2: To be fair, Vygotsky says "Not eternal and unchangeable laws of the nature of actors' experiences on the stage, but historical laws of various forms and systems of theatrical plays are in this case the controlling direction for the investigator." (Vygotsky, 1999).

Paul 1: I didn't know Vygotsky wrote on actor training.

Onur: And I should know about *real* science because my first degree is in Physics (*immediately regrets saying this but it's too late. He opens his mouth to say something else but almost swallows it back. He slowly sits down in a chair slightly to the side of the room and looks at the floor).*

(Pauls consider this. A short silence. They glance at each other.)

Paul 2: (*Sincere)* Why?

Onur: Why what?

Paul 1: Why do this?

Onur: Throughout my teaching career I found that criteria for "good" was almost impossible to pin down (Yorke, 2008).

Paul 1: So, is this all about assessment?

Onur: (*getting worked up through this section)* Not *all* about assessment but there is no way of talking about "good acting" without assessment of it. Even when we go to the cinema, we are assessing an actor's acting or attributing merit to them by simple phrases like "She is such an incredible actor" or "He won an Oscar last year". An audition is an assessment, in and out of training. It is a selection process, there is a panel and they *judge,* they *assess*. I will try to use the term criteria carefully, but in a professional audition criteria are practically non-existent anyway. I will do my best to refer to *definition of* good acting but using the word criteria is inevitable.

However, I am focusing on *what* good acting is and according to whom in the curriculum and not singularly on its assessment. Although, if you read the Stanislavski books it's almost like one long book of Torstov assessing students for three years!

Incidentally "drama school" and "Stanislavski/y" search terms have zero returns in the Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education journal (*makes the shape with his hand)* Ze-ro! (Taylor and Francis, 2025; 2025). And I really could have benefited from such research when I was asked to devise criteria for acting modules in a drama school!

(*Takes a deep breath. Exhales. Calmer)*

Firstly, acting books and their authors and in turn the acting curriculum make demands from their students that can only be met by those who share their elevated positions. Like knowledge or experience of Hammacher Schlemmer knives, Tiffany Ashtrays or antique chandeliers.

Paul 2: I beg your pardon?

Onur: For "Substitution", a technique to endow props with real-life qualities of objects they represent on stage, Hagen refers to her "previous knowledge of elegant ashtrays", specifically from Tiffany (Hagen, 1973). In 'Endowment', she states she would handle a knife bought from Hammacher Schlemmer differently to a knife bought from Woolworths. A seven-piece knife set from Hammacher Schlemmer is nearly $300 today (Hammacher & Schlemmer Company Inc., 2020). These instances reveal her higher economic capital and push her closer to the top of the space of social positions, (Bourdieu, 1984, p128) stretching the distance between not only herself but also the technique and any working-class readers. This is a concept introduced in Stanislavski. Although his example was of an antique chandelier which one of his students fails to identify as

genuine antique. (Stanislavski, 2016, pp. 642-643; Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 97)

Needless to say, I've never held or seen a Tiffany ashtray or a Hammacher Schlemmer knife in my life.

Paul 1: Neither have I.

Paul 2: Neither have I.

Onur: According to Stanislavski, this kind of embodied knowledge and/or experiences are requirements of good acting. These kinds of instances are instantly recognizable in his books in various forms.

Secondly, these acting books demand from the student actor to do things that can only be done by those who are in an elevated position. And those things, again, I posit that are not always necessary for acting. However, these requirements are embedded in actor training, from admissions to professional auditions.

Paul 1: Such as?

Onur: Let's take speech. Imagine two students asked to perform a scene, where the assessors will look for "The ability to access and communicate inner thoughts, feelings, and action as appropriate" (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, 2022-2023) - in RP one with their native accent as RP, who grew up in an RP household and the other not.

Paul 1: RP?

Onur: Received pronunciation: "standard speech used in London and southeastern England. [..] traditionally [...] associated with the middle and upper classes and as a mark of public-school education." (Payne, 2023)

Paul 1: I see.

Onur: **Thirdly**, positions of power and gatekeeping recognise the type, kind, norm of the person who would be a good actor. This is a not-so-hidden mechanism in which there are no merit-based criteria for a student and professional actor, and the definition of and requirements for a good actor remains in the hands of the elite. A somatic norm (Brook, et al., 2020). I have witnessed resistance to changing this many a time in higher education from colleagues and students.

Paul 1: Resistance?

Onur: Yes. I didn't think Gillian Anderson's performance in Streetcar (Internet Movie Database, 2014) was particularly good. When discussing this in the classroom, the students gasped and said "But she's an amazing actress!". There were no criteria to assess, evaluate her acting in Streetcar. Eventually I managed to ask students whether they were moved by her performance. None of them could say that they were moved by the play or her performance. They thought she was good because…

Paul 2: They were *told* she was good.

Paul 1: By whom?

Onur: By the press, by their parents, by their peers, by the Academy, by Bafta, by other lecturers! I also witnessed so many incidents of this phenomenon of division, exclusion and then transformation that I wanted to know what was going on.

Paul 2: So, your interest *is* personal.

Onur: Of course, but I am not intending to tell my own story. I believe that if we can reframe acting, we could challenge its position and curriculum higher education, which in turn would challenge elitism.

Stanislavski was an amateur. "[…] and he came into the theatre rich" (Mamet, 1999). He was the son of a very rich family, haute bourgeoisie (Benedetti, 1995, p. 3). In Russia at the time of Stanislavski's youth, "acting was not considered to be a suitable profession for respectable middle-class boys". (Shevtsova in (Cleaves, n.d.). The very nature of performance and content of plays are very closely related to how classes were depicted on stage at the time of Stanislavski developing his technique. "Stanislavski's system is nothing less than a way of cultivating the habitus of art." (Matern, 2013, p. 39). Maybe Stanislavski wanted to see more of his own habitus reflected on the stage, not just as a subject matter but as a process. He wanted to make acting a suitable profession for respectable middle-class boys! (*shrugs.)*

(A moment of silence).

Paul 1: *(caving in, but still hesitant)* Where do we start?

Onur: We already have. And even though I have already presented a substantial amount of literature review, traditionally that would be the next stage.

Paul 1: (*smiles and with a wink)* Then (*gestures air commas)* "the stage" is yours.

(*Blackout)*.

Act I Scene II – The Literature Review

(*The scene is the same. The establishment of equivalences between Onur and Paul 1 and 2's different divisions of the social world is noticeable by their body language* (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 477). *Upstage, Onur has taken out his papers, his laptop, his phone, some books, post it notes and is moving things around, examining a piece of paper, putting it down, switching to his laptop, then to a book. He has taken over the room. Paul 1 and 2 are whispering in a corner downstage left out of Onur's earshot, who is too busy to hear)*

Paul 2: Do you think he is aware of social mobility and higher education literature?

Paul 1: He hasn't even mentioned "The End of Aspiration" yet, where Exley shows "students from working-class backgrounds who make it to 'elite' universities found they had, in fact, 'developed almost superhuman levels' of resilience (they'd had to, to get to such a university at all), but despite this resilience, nearly all the working-class students interviewed 'had a crisis of confidence on arriving at university'." And how "Despite universities' promotion of the student experience as a 'chance to mix with a wider group of people', higher education experts recognise that in reality, students tend to gravitate towards people who are in their cultural or social 'comfort zone'." (2019, pp. 117-120).

Paul 2: Or Miseducation (Reay, 2017). I bet he is going to connect all of this to higher education being "enmeshed in, and increasingly driven by, the economy, rather than one that is capable of redressing economic inequalities. It is a system that both mirrors and reproduces the hierarchical class relationships in wider society." (p. 11)

Paul 1: And he is going to mention the widening participation to the highly hierarchical structure of higher education not being a feasible solution.

Paul 2: Oh yes. The importance of economic capital and things like higher education students being exhausted from part time work too. I wonder if he is going to clock that "setting and streaming and raising aspirations do not work, and collaborative learning does" in education and how that might be relevant to attainment and criteria in higher education? (pp. 175-196)

Paul 1: Or even that Reay through Savage (Savage, 2015) connects brightness and talent being cultivated rather than being from birth.

Paul 2: Economic Capital transformed into Educational Capital.

Paul 1: And embodied Cultural Capital via dance, drama classes.

Paul 2: And talent disguised as merit a la Bourdieu.

(*both are giddy and almost giggling with excitement)*

Paul 1: (*looks over his shoulder)* What *is* he doing?

Paul 2: Finishing "The socio-cultural and learning experiences of working-class students in higher education" (Crozier, et al., 2010) chapter in Improving Learning by Widening Participation in Higher Education (David, 2010).

Paul 1: Did *you* give him that?

Paul 2: Yes. Which will introduce him to the relational nature of the institutional practices and students' identities. It will show him that the institutions' inherent practices and spaces can indeed mobilise students successfully or alienate them.

Paul 1: Which will lead him to read…

Paul 2: (*completes his sentence)* Institutional Habitus and its relational nature and the potential positive aspects of it! (Crozier, et al., 2010) (*they giggle)* Which I think he is now doing. It might help him realise that in music education tutors and students can operate in different codes. "Code, […] extends to evaluative schema, approaches to acquiring and retaining musical concepts and material and recognition rules." (Celik, 2020; Wright, 2008) fitting with Bernstein.

Paul 1: Will he link defining acting and establishing it as a craft - or assessing it using skill-based criteria- to the assessment aspect of the Stanislavskian pedagogical approach to acting (as "art") within UK drama school curricula?

Paul 2: He might do if he recognizes that assessment can be defined as a form of symbolic capital (Wall, et al., n.d.) and as part of the inherent practices of the institution, its habitus.

Paul 1: Ah! But that's defined more for the institutional prestige, not for the students.

Paul 2: Still, successful, famous and award-winning graduates are marketing material for FDS schools as a way of showing student success, indicating their graduates can succeed at professional auditions -like assessments of the industry- which he has already linked to a somatic norm (Brook, et al., 2020). So, are these schools increasing their symbolic capital by

sticking to Stanislavskian practices which keeps the definition of and criteria for good acting vague and opaque? And even if they were clear and transparent, they still are less attainable by those who come from underprivileged backgrounds.

Paul 1: In essence, he is uncovering a mechanism of curriculum, defined as part but independent of the institution, serving not only the institution but its graduates, students and then its graduates, the professional actors who already are the dominating elite. **A curricular habitus?**

Paul 2: Maybe. But how can he discuss **reconceptualizing acting (as a craft)** mitigate these inequalities?

Paul 1: Maybe borrowing the definition of assessment as an Ethical and Value-Focused Social Practice and as "a place of inclusive, sustained, and informed dialogue, not one that is simply a technical and procedure process that strives for validity rather than purpose and transparency." (Wall, et al., n.d.).

Paul 2: But wouldn't that be too focused on assessment?

Paul 1: Not if he can rather focus on the definition of what acting is, "*what* is being taught" in the curriculum and link it to the demise of the learning outcome-based approaches to the educational system in England and the shift from the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) to Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF). So, he needs to remember that narrow and prescriptive occupational standards do not lead to better education even though it may reduce the class struggle for actors. Instead, he could borrow the differentiation that Wolf makes between initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET) and how this differentiation could help increase the market orientation of vocational qualifications (Winch, 2021).

Paul 2: So maybe IVET is craft and CVET is art? RQFs don't include acting though, do they?

Paul 1: They do. Up to Level 3 (gov.uk, 2025) so essentially A-level (Gravells, n.d.)

Paul 2: Do you think he will go all the way back "parity of esteem", the Norwood report, and link it to drama schools trying to make their training more like academic qualifications to gain more credibility (Baird, et al., n.d.)?

Paul 1: Oh, he only needs to go as far back as the Wolf report and how that still isn't resolved for the performing arts and the recommendation of creating vocational institutions like the BRIT School. (Wolf, 2011) and also, the low return on vocational qualifications-

Paul 2: -except for BTEC which includes performing arts.

Paul 1: True. (*glances behind to Onur who is still in hyper-focus)* Will he manage to link parity esteem to BAFTA nominees?

Paul 2: Excusez moi?

Paul 1: Of the BAFTA nominees between 2019 and 2024, 64% went to university. From those, while nearly 45% them went to a specialist arts university or conservatoire (which are reported together), 14% of those went to Oxbridge, (Holt-White, et al., 2024) which means the esteem of actors who went to Oxbridge is significant.

Paul 2: (*panics)* Those graduates wouldn't have studied Stanislavski!!

Paul 1: Maybe not formally but they might still be using the principles. And they would still be the perfect matches for the habitus of Stanislavski's curriculum: elite amateurs. And if a cult of amateurism is dominating the top ranks of British theatre (Holloway, 2011)...

Paul 2: ...and if amateurism can be a way to exploit art (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 35), then Onur might be on to something relevant there.

Paul 1: (*a moment of realisation)* Stanislavski admits every performance, inevitably, will have a bit of the art of experiencing (good) and the art of representation (bad) (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 35). While he was trying to protect the art from the clutches of capitalist theatre producers, he, perhaps unintentionally, created a monster for drama schools who are playing the role of universities in the neoliberal higher education in UK: a curriculum in his own habitus!

(Paul 1 turns around, opens his mouth to say something to Onur; Paul 2 stops him with a gesture to say, "Let me" Onur is unaware of this.)

Paul 2: (*coughs)* So, Onur?

Onur: (*doesn't look up)* Hm?

Paul 2: Can you elaborate more on the literature review?

Onur: (*automatic)* M-hm.

Paul 2: Where did you start?

Onur: (*automatic, looking down)* Google.

Paul 1: (*jumping in)* Google Scholar I hope!!!!

Onur: (*looks up)* Yes, I started with “Stanislavski” AND “Social Class”. Thankfully, the search returned both Stanislavsk*i* and Stanislavsk*y*.933 results came back, and I ordered them in terms of relevance.

The top listing has the term social class in the context of the characters of a play (Jones, 2020.).

The second result is an overlap of references listing Stanislavski and another article which uses the term “social class” so they’re not even in the same piece of writing.

Paul 1: (*rolls his eyes)*

Onur: The third was the most relevant for me where the author establishes a connection between Stanislavski’s “*perezhivanie*” of the actor and their social class.

Paul 1: Pere—what?

Onur: Perezhivanie. It literally translates to *experience*. For Stanislavski, it is the *feeling* of the actor thinking, wanting, aspiring, and acting on the stage in the conditions of the life of the role and in complete analogy with it, the actor getting closer to the role and starts to feel together (Marques & Moschkovich, 2023). There are issues of how it has been translated into English too…

Paul 1: We can get to that later. You said the third seemed the most relevant?

Onur: Yes, as it establishes a link between an actor’s experience of the character’s life and the actor’s social class is established but the article goes no further. I argue that Stanislavski was *the* person to define (good) acting for the Western World, from his own habitus and socio-historical position and thus good acting, no matter how removed from him we might be, is being reproduced still, today, by us; like a virus.

Paul 2: (*reigning him back in)* Ok, back to the searches.

Onur: Sorry! The fourth result was a chapter in classical acting and Stanislavski and only refers to social class in terms of access to classical languages (Dunbar & Harrop, 2018) which comes in handy when discussing drama schools demanding classical speeches from candida…

Paul 2: Back to the searches please.

Onur: Sorry! Then there is Shevstova referring to the habitus of the translators of Stanislavski’s work (Shevstova, 2020) but doesn’t go beyond establishing the link between the two (p. 108). *(excited)* By the way did you know that

Jean Benedetti one of the best-known translators of Stanislavski's work was not called Jean at all?

"[He] was born in Barking, Essex, as Norman Bennett. In 1965 he changed his name by deed poll to Jean-Norman Benedetti, reflecting his love for things French and Italian, though he used Jean for his work as a writer" (Earley, 2012).

Paul 2: Why is that relevant?

Onur: Because the translators and their habituses contribute to the nature of the definitions, instructions, exercises hence curriculum of acting and as much as they translate, they interpret. So even when reading Stanislavski in English, we are reading him through the lens of people like Benedetti. Or Norman!

Even as a lecturer I was always hesitant to pronounce his name (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 82) as I always thought he was French, and I don't speak French. Moreover, Hapgood and Benedetti choose some radically different words for the chapters in the first book. All of those are elements within the current drama school curriculum for acting contributing to (implicitly or explicitly) how students and lecturers interpret texts in terms of financial, social, or cultural capital requirements from students as well as definitions, concepts of acting – and 'good' acting.

Paul 1: Can you give an example?

Onur: Firstly, Benedetti presents AAP and BAC together as AAW. Hapgood sticks to AAP as a unit. Thus, Benedetti's text is already a larger demand on the actor. It eliminates the word "prepares" and launches straight into "work". Benedetti also calls BAC "Embodiment" and states that's Year 2, indicating that embodiment begins in the second year of training.

Paul 2: IVET and CVET?

Onur: Perhaps!

Paul 1: Yes, but Benedetti is not teaching acting in higher education, is he?

Onur: Oh, I'm afraid he is; was. He was the principal of Rose Bruford College and "could become fierce, narrowing his eyes and adopting an imperious tone when faced with bad acting or poor scholarship about the technique of acting." (Earley, 2012). So, he is part of the intellectual history of acting curriculum (Pinar, 2015).

Paul 1: (*prickly)* Continue with Google Scholar.

Onur: The other seemingly relevant result establishes a loose link between the actor and a character's social class but doesn't really discuss the technique itself and the social class or the habitus or the capital of the actor – or Stanislavski (Cojan, 2019). Mauro (2017) was discussing "realism as an expression of a social class, the bourgeoisie, and of its conception of the function of art in society. Its aspiration to watch its debates, conflicts and interests reflected, and to universalize them by means of tutoring sense, is in the basis of the normalization of the scenic and cinematographic components, among which the actor's presence is revealed as an essential element and, at the same time, as the most reluctant." (p. 540)

Paul 1: He seems to argue realism to be reducing the actor's presence, so the opposite of what you are claiming where the actor's capital defines good acting?

Onur: Yes, and the nuance is that realism's process of reduction can only work well if the actor has something to reduce, i.e. a large capital. Śliwińska explains this better:

> "actors, graduates of renowned schools, known from the most famous theatres and troupes (such as the Royal Court Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company or the Old Vic) end up in films, where they are supposed to play the characters from the lower social classes, speak their language and make reference to their own memories and background" (Śliwińska, 2016, p. 96).

(*pause)*

Paul 1: Is that it?

Onur: Is *what* it?

Paul 2: (*explaining)* Is that all the literature?

Paul 1: I hope you have at least searched the British Education Index…

Onur: (*panics)* British Education Index?

Paul 1: You haven't, have you? (*groans)* I don't know why I bother. (*Walks to a desktop computer, shakes the mouse.)*

I will do the search for you. Read those articles first and come back in a few weeks. *(He types. Stops. Grunts. Presses delete multiple times, types again. Looks at the screen, the keyboard, the screen again. Looks at Paul 2.)*

I am not sure if this is working.

Paul 2: What do you mean?

Paul 1: Well, I searched for “Stanislavski” and “Social Class” and it returned zero results. I then tried “Stanislavsky” and “Social Class” and zero results again.

Onur: (*Jumps up)* ZERO!!!!! (*supressing)* I mean, wow! Zero!?

Paul 2: Maybe the filters were on?

Paul 1: They’re not!

Paul 2: OK. Try the Academic Search Ultimate instead.

Paul 1: “higher education” AND “social class” AND “Stanislavsk*” ?

Paul 2: Sounds good! *(They watch the screen)*

Paul 1: Zero?!

Paul 2: What? No?! This time try ALL databases.

Paul 1: Even The Allied and Complementary Medicine Database?

Paul 2: Even that! Are you searching these terms in “Any Field”?

Paul 1: Yes! Still zero.

Paul 2: Try “Drama School” AND “higher education” AND “Social class”

Paul 1: Only 40 results! (EBSCO HOST - Acadedmic Search Ultimate, 2025)

Paul 2: Look! (*murmuring, reading)* Voice training and inclusivity approaching it from intersectionality including class, but it doesn’t approach it from a Bourdieusian perspective and doesn’t mention Stanislavski. (Boston, 2022)

Paul 1: But it does mention Pick’s Act As A Feminist: Towards A Critical Acting Pedagogy. (Pick, 2021).

Paul 2: (*face palms)* How did I forget Pick’s book?! It discusses alternative curricula or even abandoning curricula for actor training. It also discusses the definition of acting and the reproduction of the white, male, middle class curriculum, even discusses the hidden curriculum. Do you remember me asking Onur about Margolis? Pick approaches it differently and defines it as a tool to politicise the acting curriculum, albeit from a feminist perspective.

Paul 1: Can we just go back to this search?

Paul 2: Sorry! Yes! Try “drama school” and “social class”!

Paul 1: 715.

Paul 2: Ok that’s better. Now any in higher education subject limiter?

Paul 1: 4, removing exact replicates.

Paul 2: Anything useful?

Paul 1: Not really. One about a drama school in the Philippines, one in music conservatoire postgraduate, one in teaching methods in economics courses and the last one is about the decline of the arts in school education in New Zealand which is relevant in demonstrating how the arts are pushed aside as peripheral and removed from the true business of education. (O’Connor, 2016)

Paul 2: “Stanislavsk*” and “social class” ?

Paul 1: Two and nothing relevant.

Paul 2: Ok go back to British Education Index and search for Stanislavski only instead. (*by now they are all huddled around the computer. Paul 1 types.)*

All: FOUR?!

Paul 2: Try Stanislavsky, with a Y.

Paul 1: *(deletes, types again)* Same! Unbelievable!

Paul 2: But look one is about perezhivanie.

Onur: Oh yes! Actually, that was another that came out of the Google scholar search. It almost defines the term not dissimilar to habitus. But it’s a literature review and the word habitus doesn’t appear in it (McNamara, 2023).

Paul 2: (*like a game now.)* Try Stanislavski and Higher Education.

Paul 1: (*types) ONE!* And it’s not even about higher education. It’s about the performative aspect of teaching. What are we going to do now?

Paul 2: Ok! One last thing, try Project Muse with “Stanislavski/y” AND “social class” AND “higher education”

Paul 1: 56! (Project Muse, 2025)

Paul 2: Can you limit it to “education” keyword?

Paul 1: “In Defence Of Theatre” can be useful.

Onur: (*interrupting)* I reviewed that book. Indeed, it does mention aesthetic diversity in actor training, but it doesn't concern itself with social class and "taste" perhaps because authors are academics in Canada (Gallagher & Freeman, 2016).

(*cheekily)* I know it's not as systematic as your approach, but I have also been searching specific publications and publishers.

Paul 2: Why?

Onur: It was difficult to find anything through database searches as I kept getting very few returns or too many returns in keyword searches, and the actual pieces did not reveal any relevant content. It looked like what I'm investigating was almost non-existent, a bit messy and mostly hidden between the lines.

Paul 1: What do you mean?

Onur: My argument covers a wide range of ideas, some radically large. As part of my hypothesis, I think about whether acting is art or craft. I posit that theatre is the artform, but the actor is not the artist, much like a musici--

Paul 1: (*reigning him in)* OK. OK. One step at a time. Back to the literature.

Onur: I tried my best to find criticism of Stanislavski and his technique from a social class perspective and specifically in higher education and more specifically in Drama Schools. So, after more general searches, which as you can see did not reveal much (*coughs)*, I did some cross searching. I searched for the term Stanislavski/y in education and sociology journals, and terms higher education and social class and also Bourdieu in drama or theatre studies journals. What I'm looking for, apart from all the discourse on habitus, institutional habitus, social class, student experience is the notion of the curriculum and its origin, it's author, father -patriarchal I know but Stanislavski is the father of Western acting pedagogy. So, that's why I was focusing on his name and trying to find a… almost as an independent thing about his curriculum and its… personality… character?…I… like…

Paul 2: (*helping)* **Curricular habitus…**

Onur: YES!

Paul 1: (*tries to budge himself on a small part of an armchair)* May I…?

Onur: Sorry (*makes some space on the solid oak armchair. Then gears up. Shifts through papers, notebooks, then his laptop, like a Kafka character in a*

state office trying to prove his innocence. It is at best chaotic; at worst, desperate).

I started with The Stanislavski Studies: Practice, Legacy, and Contemporary Theater journal (Taylor and Francis Online (Informa UK Limited), 2023). I thought this would be the most relevant journal. I conducted term searches on their page.

Keyword and *title* searches for "social class" returned zero results.

Paul 2: (*surprised)* Zero?

Onur: I then searched for "social class" in *full texts*.

Exact match returned only two articles. One is the book review for Victor Simov: Stanislavski's Designer and it is mentioned as "The inevitable Marxist social-class-perspective of the author's analysis [...]". The second time it is mentioned as part of a description of a scene from a play (Jones, 2020.).

Paul 1: Any articles relating to Higher Education?

Onur: The term "higher education" returned 11 results, the most relevant being "Teaching Stanislavski" (Dacre, 2013). Dacre led a project to investigate how Stanislavski's ideas are taught to students in the UK. In the article there is no mention of social class. Although she mentions that "schools universities and conservatoires were still indeed today "Teaching Stanislavski" but [there is a] reluctance of conservatoire teachers to attribute their practices to him, or indeed to anyone. She mentions an "anxiety of influence" that sometimes accompanies actor training in Higher Education whereby the need to acknowledge a conscious debt to any predecessor can be seen to interfere with the personal engagement of the student." (Dacre, 2013).

Paul 2: Perhaps that's the conservatoires trying to hide the agenda in their curriculum (Margolis, et al., 2001; Giroux & Purpel, 1983, p. 10).

Paul 1: What agenda?

Paul 2: That Stanislavski knew "Specifications of the cultural concept of identity helped to determine who could and who could not serve as actors for the actor/character blends necessary to embody the play." (McConahie, 2008) which permeates all the way from entry to drama school to playing roles in training to profession.

Paul 1: Why the anxiety though? Stanislavski is on FDS School's reading lists, on their websites, course documentation, so it's not exactly a secret, is it?!

Paul 2: Maybe it's, as Pick (Pick, 2021) suggests, part of the resistance to define a curriculum and define acting as something that cannot be taught but can be coached. She sees this siding with feminism but…

Onur: I see it as elitist structures refusing to define acting or what constitutes good acting and define pedagogies, so they can hold the power by using social and embodied capital to decide who is a good actor. This is how I see Stanislavskian curriculum contributing to class imbalance.

Paul 1: Back to searches.

Onur: I then searched the journal for social class with Boolean operator 'AND' (implied). Since class alone can mean the classroom or the teaching activity, I thought searching with an OR operator would not be relevant enough. So that's the words 'social' and 'class' in the same article but not necessarily together.

Paul 1: And?

Onur: There are only hints of Stanislavski and his bourgeois origins, but I had to dig really deep into each article to find out what the arguments were. For example, Silberman states in his article "Brecht Encounters the System" how Brecht, upon reading Otto Gaillard's book on the Stanislavski system, saw "how Stanislavsky's system conserved the humanism of the progressive Tsarist Russian bourgeoisie but had no understanding of class struggle." and also in Messingkauf Dialogues…

Paul 2: Messingkauf?

Paul 1: Brecht's theoretical discussions on theatre (Brecht & Willett, 2023(1965)).

Onur: (*proud)* By the way, also written in play form.

Paul 1: (*moving on)* And?

Onur: Sorry. Brecht "historicizes Stanislavsky's contribution as "the last acting style in bourgeois theatre." Brecht's affinity with Stanislavski increased in time even though Brecht maintained some fundamental differences especially in the function of the play as the end product. After the Bolshevist Revolution in 1917 Stanislavski was seen as a model for bourgeoise humanist theatre artists. Silberman also notes how Brecht was not able to criticise Stanislavski in public in the 1950s (2021).

Paul 2: Why?

Onur: There was an anti-Brechtian movement because of political tensions relating to Berliner Ensemble not being quite in line with Russian socialist realist values (Silberman, 2021, p. 46).

Paul 1: And Stanislavski was!

Onur: Yes. All contributing to the intellectual history of the curriculum.

Paul 1: Anything else from the Stanislavsky Studies Journal?

Onur: There are articles about theatre aesthetics and society. This notion is peripherally relevant as it does imply how texts are interpreted in new ways and considering new aesthetics. But there are so many different interpretations that it was impossible to consider them all. Besides, these discussions do not relate to training, let alone higher education.

Paul 2: Any examples?

Onur: Ellwood considers a revised performance paradigm in the UK shifting from the parochial to what he describes as 'ludic' which does affect how theatre shows are directed (2018). The paper also challenges the importance given to Stanislavski's 'given circumstances' for example but does not delve into implications of actor training in higher education or drama schools and nor does it consider the implications of this from a social class perspective. This shift towards playfulness in a way is in-line with Stanislavski's active analysis: his later and more 'contemporary' approach even though he did not get a chance to write about it before his death (Merlin, n.d.).

Paul 2: (*already on his laptop)* But Ellwood does discuss the trainee director. Is research into theatre always this messy?

Onur: Let me put it this way, some of the early articles in the Stanislavsky Studies Journal have no references.

Paul 1: (*shocked*) What?

(Onur quickly moves on, shuffling through papers, his laptop and his phone in perpetual motion).

Paul 2: Here's one by Matthews and de Guevara (Matthews & Guevara, 2017) on 'Auditions and Stress' and they seemed to have captured an argument on candidates of drama schools.

Onur: Oh? (*Panics. Shuffles even more vigorously through his material. He has a sinking feeling that he's not read this or any article, or researched enough. He starts to perspire).*

Paul 2: (*As he reads the article, talking slowly and analytically)* They consider the "first call" (Matthews & Guevara, 2017, p. 218)?

Onur: (*jumps in)* The first round of auditions.

Paul 2: (*gets it)* Ah! They draw parallels to the first section of Stanislavski's AAP and they claim to be analysing "the social conditions of this particular stressful situation and their effects and not [...] making normative judgements about this event." and aiming to expose the meaning of the phenomena. (Matthews & Guevara, 2017, pp. 218, 220)

Onur: (*trying to catch up in reading the article, already pulled up on his own laptop)* But they "do not undertake to analyze the effects of [...]-social status on the attitudes of the applicants" and they do not limit themselves to FDS Schools (Matthews & Guevara, 2017, p. 218).

Paul 2: True. But they recognise two things: that Stanislavski being the dominant paradigm of actor training in the UK and that the social dynamics of the audition room "are [..] operative within an economy of imitation, central to learning but which functions with a particular currency in the specific case of actor training in the Stanislavskian traditions." (Matthews & Guevara, 2017, pp. 217, 218)

Onur: The normative judgements are there too. But they don't put two and two together to say that the stress inducing conditions or the stress itself are caused by the very nature or characteristics of that paradigm described in the early chapters of AAP.

Paul 1: That would be impossible to prove, scientifically.

Onur: (*laughs)* Scientifically! But they mention that institutions causing (mis)alignment of actors to the commercial and ideological values, and they also claim that Stanislavski is still the dominant culture for training but abstain from making a "normative judgement" about the process (ibid). As an aside, Leahy discusses the power process in Australian drama school auditions and defines the audition process as a microscopic 'social field'-

Paul 1: -As in Bourdieu?

Onur: -Yes! – a site of social and cultural exchange- and then goes on to say that outward presence had more currency than inner facility involving emotional connectedness or imagination (1996). Though sadly, she doesn't comment on the dominance of Stanislavski on Australian drama schools or specifically at National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA). So, you could say all the parts are there but there is no study attempting

to examine the contribution of Stanislavskian definition of and pedagogical approach to acting (as "art") within UK drama school curricula to class inequalities in the acting profession right from student admissions.

Paul 1: (*Serious, testing)* Onur you *are* aware that causality is difficult to establish in social sciences? (*Humorous)* After all, for example, we will never be able to examine a theatre school audition *without* Stanislavski's influence on the planet so it is impossible to determine what would have happened if your suggested cause was not there.

Onur: Yet, I can attempt to "provide *conceivable worlds,* spaces in which people can conceptualize reality, themselves, and others. An analysis of these re-presentations proceeds with reference to designated readers, the imaginability of actors and actions (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 70). At least, perhaps, these kinds of studies could seek to establish 'association' (Marini & Singer, 1988). It is possible to abductively infer that if the UK uses Stanislavski as a dominant culture in training, if his book depicts a scene with a student being stressed about the audition - he calls it the first test but anyhow - additionally if students are reporting stress at their UK Drama School audition, then…(*opens his hands to either side, sticks his head out. Paul 1 comes to a halt and is motionless. Onur realizes his bodily hexis* (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), pp. 312, 339, 426). *He slowly distorts himself to a more neutral pose which makes him look even more awkward)*.

Paul 1: (*coughs lightly. Looks away)* Any other journals? Articles?

Onur: (*sheepish)* I conducted some targeted searches on journals such as "Theatre, Dance and Performance Training" which publishes research on performance training by practitioners, academics, creative artists and pedagogues, including training processes and performance making (Taylor and Francis Online (Informa UK Ltd), 2023).

The exact term "social class" returned 13 results, two of which were somewhat relevant: one about vocal training and habitus and the other about decentring actor training pedagogies using Bourdieu-

Paul 2: (*Victorious)* A-ha! So it has been done!

Onur: Not quite. The latter is about representation in play-texts used in actor training and how Bourdieu's principles could be utilised to improve representation, but it is rather vague (Stamatiou, 2022). It is not a critique

or even analysis of the Stanislavski technique from a Bourdieusian perspective.

Paul 1: And the first one?

Onur: That *is* directly relevant to what I am trying to research. It draws links between voice and accent and Habitus analysing texts of voice practitioners such as Rodenburg and Linklater. Weston (2019) argues that voice is performed in accordance with sociological structures and recounts Rodenburg's anecdote of being stunned at the differences between Eton and a comprehensive school in South London.

Paul 2: Difference in *accents* (Mugglestone, 2010)? Because accent bias in the UK (Accent Bias Britain, n.d.) and specifically in higher education (Levon, et al., 2022) (Lourido & Snell, 2025) is well documented.

Onur: Not accents. Students at Eton had vocal release and freedom and "extravagant" range and confidence but students' voice at the comprehensive by comparison were held, tight and pushed. (Weston, 2019).

Paul 1: So, these schools are increasing their symbolic capital by sticking to Stanislavskian practices which even when the definition and criteria are clear and explicit, they still are less attainable by those who come from underprivileged backgrounds.

Paul 2: Is voice *that* important in acting that you can argue it can contribute to elitism?

Onur: "To be able to reflect a life which is subtle and often subconscious, you must possess an exceptionally responsive and outstandingly well-trained voice and body [...]" (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 20) "[...]the voice is the most important part of their creative ways and means." (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 383). So, if vocal release and freedom contribute to definition of good acting, then Eton students would be at an advantage at a drama school.

Paul 1: And are they?

Onur: Yes. Stanislavski refers to excessive tension as "the evil that results from muscular spasms and physical contraction" which in turn results in hoarseness or even loss of voice (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 104). Therefore, freedom of voice is a significant element of Stanislavskian definition of and pedagogical approach to acting within UK drama school curricula as requirement of "good acting" and those who already have it are at an advantage. "The sign-bearing, sign-wearing body is also a producer of signs which are physically marked by the relationship to the

body: thus the valorization of virility, expressed in a use of the mouth or a pitch of the voice, can determine the whole of working-class pronunciation." (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), pp. 190-191).

Stanislavski states "There can be no question of true, subtle feeling or of the normal psychological life of a role while physical tension is present" (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 121) and Bourdieu defines the more relaxed -but not sloppy- bodily hexis of the new bourgeoisie compared to the stiffness of the old bourgeoisie, as well as "the dominant aesthetic [...] proposing the combination of ease and asceticism, i.e., self-imposed austerity, restraint, reserve, which are affirmed in that absolute manifestation of excellence, relaxation in tension." (2010 (1984), pp. 172, 312). "Technique is worked on, certainly, but never at the expense of the relaxation that is essential for the harmony of the self" (p. 218). So, an actor/student must not only have the time, energy, space, financial security to work on his technique, but must also be relaxed about it!

Paul 1: (*Surprised, somewhat impressed)* Now you're starting to build some evidence but let's go back to literature.

Paul 2: Any other journals?

Onur: Theatre Research International journal full text search returned 271 results on 'social class' and only 29 results on Bourdieu. There were duplications on the searches as some articles, specifically book review articles, were indexed separately even though they contained the same full text.

The most relevant article on Bourdieu "addresses the relative absence of class-based analysis in theatre and performance studies" (Murphy, 2012). Murphy continues to propose defining class as a performance, similar to Judith Butler's definition of gender as performance. He sees agents of a particular class as "performers in the cultural as well as economic dimension, in terms of the emphasis on the lifestyles of individuals and groups regarding their relative access to cultural and economic capital." (p. 55).

Paul 2: What about 'social class' results?

Onur: None relating to Stanislavski and most of the articles were about performance and local cultural analyses.

Paul 1: Local?

Onur: A production of a play in a particular country, or aspects of performance and social class in a country. Filmer and Rossmanith discuss spatiality

and routine behaviour in the formation and to an extent trans-formation of performers as well as the semiotics of the theatrical space such as the hierarchy of dressing rooms by size and position but nothing specific about Bourdieu or training or social class. (2011). This is peripherally relevant as the lack of semiotic interpretation could be an indication of lack of embodied cultural capital in Bourdieusian terms, but the article does not discuss this explicitly.

Paul 1: So, there is no exploration of Stanislavski's technique or system and social class? Or his texts as drama school curriculum?

Onur: Well there is Pick (Pick, 2021), and Prior (Prior, 2012) that discuss acting pedagogy but not its curricular habitus in higher education. There are however books on Social Class and the acting *profession*. Friedman and Laurison's "The Class Ceiling" (2020) where they establish that the acting profession is dominated by the elite and "Culture is Bad For You" (Brook, et al., 2020) where the authors define a somatic norm in cultural and creative occupations that is white, male and middle class and discuss the precarity of the acting profession even for the relatively successful.

Paul 2: What does that mean for higher education though?

Onur: "Academia has traditionally been populated and led by middle-class white men. This demographic is changing but the influence of this legacy may linger on in curricula, and affect who teaches, what is taught, how teaching is done and how students are assessed." (McConlogue, 2020, p. 138). And acting curriculum is in close proximity with the professional aesthetic and cultural values both in Stanislavski's books and in real life.

FDS drama schools are geared for *the profession*. These schools provide "a thorough training for the professional actor, with an emphasis on preparing for work" (RADA, 2024) "developing [...] professional skills to work across theatre, TV, film, and audio in a devising mode". They are "about readying the performer of tomorrow". Provide "Extensive industry exposure" (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, 2025) allowing students to "Meet agents and casting directors for practice auditions and feedback" (Bristol Old Vic, 2025) and "transition to professional performer with a final industry showcase - with invited agents and industry guests." (Guildford School of Acting, 2025). They claim to create "graduates who are ready for a career in the industry" (Arts Ed, 2025), for "sustained work" (LIPA, 2025).

Paul 1: So?

Onur: To be professionally successful, actors must be in the norm or have a shared habitus with the professionals. In Stanislavski texts, these criteria are applied to the training actor too. Professional success also requires networking.

Paul 2: Social Capital.

Onur: But successful networking requires actors to have that shared habitus or embodied cultural capital, so it is a vicious cycle.

Paul 1: (*getting impatient)* So?

Onur: If these schools are training actors to be successful in the profession, they must be using the same notions used for professional success and aim to (re)produce students who would have or at least exhibit a shared habitus with those who would be considered successful.

Paul 2: (*gets it)* The elite.

Onur: But of course " [t]he first step is not to ask 'How can I be a successful actor?", you must overcome or ignore "the need to be successful" ((Stanislavski, 2016, pp. x, 252).

Paul 1: But don't let's forget he acknowledges the need for continued success of a theatrical production. (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 571).

Onur: Only to remind us that it's the stage, not the managers' office "society loves and the stage which makes the impression and has an educative meaning for society." And that theatre managers are "a terrifying evil in the theatre, they are the destroyers and oppressors of art." (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 571).

Paul 2: So, the graduates should "look like" good actors even if they're not.

Onur: And the elite have a way of achieving this. Especially "in all the situations which demand self-assurance or flair, or even the bluff which can cover lacunae" (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984)) And this, I propose, is because Stanislavski defined the good actor in his own image in the first place.

Paul 2: How Biblical!

Onur: Gatekeepers in acting profession and training recognise those who belong to the club. They are looking for those who "fit in the field of" the good acting easily, "the mondain , the effortlessly elegant". (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 63).

Brook et. al. also note that decisions are being based on intangible qualities (2020). Similarly, Orr and Shreeve discuss the ambiguity of the

arts and design curriculum and its teaching and learning practices including assessment, but not performing arts or acting (2017). That being said, Orr discusses the norm referenced assessment still being in practice despite it being considered outdated. I would go further and say that in acting pedagogies students are always compared not only to one another but also to established actors or established "good acting" to a norm of good acting in assessment, marking and moderation (Orr, 2007).

Paul 1: But the Enabling Social Mobility In Higher Education report suggests to improve differences in the degree classifications received by students on the basis of socio-economic status by "ensuring that assessment and marking practices are inclusive and do not disadvantage any particular student group" and by "ensuring that students understand what is expected and required of them academically, including on assessments, with particular focus on assessment guidelines and marking" (Universities UK, 2016).

Onur: (*without stopping, almost in one breath)* Indeed. But using Stanislavski's definitions of good acting it is impossible to provide clear expectations for the students. I mean, what is the expectation when a student has to pour their own human qualities into the life of the character (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 15) or when they must provide freshness in improvisation, or in feeling their part (p20)? What exactly is expected of the student actor when she's asked to "never allow [herself] to externally portray anything that [she] has not inwardly experienced" (p31)? Or what does the student think is expected of them when they read "there are actors whom nature has maltreated by endowing them with monotonous and insipid, although correct, powers of adjustment. They can never reach the front rank of their profession." (p 245)?

But most importantly, how on earth can I write the criteria for criterion-based assessments from his books which would allow "for more effective assessment of student attainment"? Where no student is prevented from achieving a mark or classification if they are able to demonstrate that they have meet the required learning outcomes? Where there is confidence that students are being assessed transparently, and that reasonably comparable criteria are applied reasonably consistently (Universities UK, 2018, p. 11)?

How do I develop "reasonably comparable" criteria and apply them "reasonably consistently" especially when something like opposing tastes in theatre can be used as a flexible tool for social and cultural differentiation, their meanings shifting depending on the context and the

group using them (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 472) when the profession and its tastes are dominated by the elite and Stanislavski's curricular habitus keeps reproducing and self-fulfilling itself by means of vague learning outcomes and vague criteria such as "truthfulness" and "believability" ? I mean he says "Whatever is subtle, truthful, is invariably of high artistic quality" (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 194) and he is the only one deciding what is truthful or not when watching his students' acting?

(*beat)*

Paul 1: (*condescending)* So that's all you've searched for?

Onur: (*sighs)* Well, I drew some blanks in some journals (*Paul 1 raises his eyebrows at this expression)*. I mean some search terms returned no results even in full text searches.

From Taylor and Francis:

- The Journal of Higher Education (Taylor and Francis Online (Informa UK Ltd), 2023)
- The Journal of Continuing Higher Education (Taylor and Francis Online (Informa UK Ltd), 2023)
- Learning: Research and Practice (Taylor and Francis Online (Informa UK Ltd), 2023)

returned zero results on Stanislavski/y.

Teaching in Higher Education (Taylor and Francis Online (Informa UK Ltd), 2023) returned zero results on Stanislavsky and one result on Stanislavski: an article considering how the performing arts integrate with research, learning and teaching (Mickel, 2021).

Performance Research (Centre for Performance Research, n.d.) returned five results on Stanislavski and zero results on Stanislavsky. Two were on artificial intelligence and one on photographs of Stanislavski – another article with no references. The other two results were duplications of these results.

Paul 2: Not a lot to go on there.

Onur: Sage publication returned five journals for 'higher education'

- Industry and Higher Education (SAGE Publications, 2023),
- Active Learning in Higher Education (SAGE Publications, 2023),
- Journal of Hispanic Higher Education – which I skipped as it was Hispanic specific-,

- Higher Education for the Future (SAGE Publications, 2023) and
- Arts and Humanities in Higher Education. (SAGE Publications, 2023)

I also took Sociology of Education and Educational Researcher into consideration and searched within those journals as well.

Industry and Higher Education and Higher Education for the Future returned zero results on Stanislavski/y. Active Learning in Higher Education returned one result, but that article was about creative employability and was referring to Stanislavski only for definition (Higdon, 2018).

Paul 2: Sociology of Higher Education journal?

Onur: On Stanislavski/y? Zero.

Paul 2: I can't believe that. Did you try any other search terms? Like acting?

Onur: Acting and actor were too common as they have different meanings in Higher Education research. But full text searches should have returned references and if any of these were analysing or critiquing Stanislavski his books would at least be mentioned in the references.

Paul 1: That's suspicious.

Onur: It is so I widened my search terms and tried 'performing arts' AND 'higher education' and that returned one result which was about high school students (Riegle-Crumb & Peng, 2021).

Paul 1: You must have had *some* returns in Arts and Humanities in Higher Education journal.

Onur: I did. Three mentioning Stanislavsk*i* (Freeman, 2006) (Oparaocha, 2018) (Weigel-Doughty, 2002) and two mentioning Stanislavsk*y* -one specifically analysing the theatrical rehearsal process yet not from social class perspective- (Rae, 2004) and only one relating to Stanislavski in actor training context which was about using critique in the rehearsal process, which is relevant to some extent as it is relevant to the power balance or imbalance in actor training and perhaps could be considered under assessment and feedback (Kornetsky, 2016).

Oh and of course the pre-cursor article to their book Friedman, Laurison and O'Brien's article on British acting and class origin is in Sociology (Friedman, et al., 2017).

Paul 2: *(teasing)* Anything from Oxbridge?

Onur: (*still sweating, getting more agitated with each question)* Oxford Academic had three journals on Education.

Health Education Research

The Journal of Deaf studies and Deaf Education

and Journal of Philosophy of Education.

In all those only three results returned for Stanislavski/y and they were about principles in education, not teaching Stanislavski.

Paul 1: (*makes eye contact with Paul 2. They're in on cornering Onur on his literature review, smiling. They are both bad cops)* Cambridge Core?

Onur: Cambridge Core had no journals specifically on higher education, so I ran Stanislavski/y under the education category of their journals which returned zero results.

Paul 2: (*still pressing. Onur continues to sweat. Pauls are enjoying this)* Nothing on sociology or sociology of education?

Onur: No educational journals under Sociology at Cambridge so ran "Stanislavski/y in all journals under sociology category - returned zero – (*feels a little lightheaded)* can… can we open a window? (*Looks around, desperate to get some fresh air, he stumbles up, drops everything on his lap, with blurred vision reaches in front him to find a window or a door. The walls of the room seem to be closing in again. Pauls are talking but the sound is muffled by a disturbing hum which grows into a rumble. The room darkens. As the noise climaxes he finally finds the door and with a bit of struggle manages to open it. The noise stops, the light comes back, the room opens up to its original size. Onur gasps for air. Pauls are chuckling at a joke that one of them must have cracked. They compose themselves before Onur turns around. He is pale.)*

I – I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me (*comes back into the room and sits down looking worn out and somewhat forlorn)*.

It is very difficult to prove the absence of research. Even though Stanislavski's bourgeois life story is very well documented, no-one seems to have made a connection between his habitus and the system he produced which has been adopted as drama school curriculum in fundamentals of acting.

Paul 1: I'd say that would be more of a leap of faith than a connection.

Onur: I don't think so. He himself claims in all his books that he has learned what he learned from analysing his own work and himself. And if we take Bourdieu's definition of habitus and then reproduction it is not that much of a leap.

Paul 2: Are you telling us that there is virtually *no* criticism of Stanislavski?

Onur: There is and actually Gordon's (2006) critique and criticism are excellent. His account of Stanislavski is especially helpful in dealing with "a curriculum grounded in the concept of acting as a "craft", and how might such a curriculum redefine the requirement for embodied and material requirements for effective acting (*Alternative ways of achieving "good acting")* as well as the potential impacts of a craft-based acting curriculum on accessibility, diversity, and social mobility within the UK acting profession.

Paul 2: How?

Onur: By using the notion of artist as a worker and the constructivist aesthetic of early… (Gordon, 2006)

Paul 1: (*interrupting)* Back to literature please.

Onur: But there is still not much on social class, higher education curriculum and Stanislavski as a combination. For example, Barclay examines the resistance in American Actor training but on sexuality and the element of power imbalance by how Stanislavsky embeds wilfulness in the actor (Barclay, 2019). This was in the Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism.

Paul 2: (*Is on his laptop*) Which incidentally returned 8 results in social class as a search term, none relating to Stanislavski. (*To Paul 1)* He might be right.

Onur: Look, I know it's hard to believe and even harder to prove but even though there are alternatives to Stanislavski, overt criticism of his technique as drama school curriculum is very nearly non-existent. I was so frustrated that I even did some random google searches with Boolean operators and all I could find was a few obscure pieces.

Paul 1: Such as?

Onur: There are two striking examples from the late 60s. The first one is from what one might call Maoist propaganda, and it is from the journal "Peking Review".

Paul 1: (*incredulous, almost squealing)* Peking Review?

Onur: Yes. There is an online archive of them from 1958 to 2016 on a website called the “Mass Line”.

Paul 2: As in Marxist mass line? As in “The mass line is not only more substantial than the 'correct" or "revolutionary" line but also unquestionably Mao's line.” (Hammond, 1978)?

Onur: That’s the one. *(Shuffles his material to find it. Still a little nauseous)*. The article is “Comments on Stanislavsky's "System" (Shanghai Revolutionary Mass Criticism Writing Group, 1969). It absolutely obliterates Stanislavski as a reactionary bourgeois art “authority” and inverted commas are *actually* in the text:

> “During the 51 years between 1877 and 1928, he played 106 roles, all of them tsarist generals, aristocrats, bourgeois elements or certain strata of townspeople. During the 57 years between 1881 and 1938, he directed 85 plays, the overwhelming majority of which were bourgeois "classics”. (1969, p. 8)

Paul 1: That *does* sound like propaganda.

Onur: I know. But the article nails on the head the issue of ‘the self’ being the core of Stanislavski’s system, him creating the system primarily by and from himself and that self being bourgeois.

Paul 1: In other words, Stanislavski’s system was built on his habitus.

Paul 2: His haute bourgeois habitus.

Onur: Correct *(hands the article to Paul 2)*.

Paul 2: *(Reads)* “A well-known saying of Stanislavsky's that has spread its poison widely and which he energetically publicized runs: "Love art in yourself, and not yourself in art." This is the best characterization of the philosophy of life of such hypocrites. "Love art in yourself" means to love the art that one uses as capital to obtain fame and to become an expert. In essence, it means to "love oneself." "Love not yourself in art" is no more than using "art for art's sake" as a cover-up to gain more capital to become famous and an expert.” (1969, p. 9).

Paul 1: Poison?? Talk about bias! (*snatches the article from Paul 2*)

Paul 2: What was the other significant article?

Onur: (*producing a physical copy)* It is Duncan Ross’ paper for the International Conference on Theatre Education and Development in 1968. I managed to find the conference proceedings (Bogard, 1968) which contain Ross’

paper “Towards an Organic Approach to Actor Training: A Criticism of the Stanislavski Scheme”.

Paul 1: (*throws the Peking Review away, grabs the Ross article)* Finally.

Onur: Yes (*seems to have gotten his energy back. Excited)*. The report of the proceedings written by Ralph Allen notes about part I of the conference which was titled ‘Stanislavski Re-examined’.

(Points to the article).

Paul 1: (*Reads out loud*)

> “As might be expected of a group of actors working in traditionalist and eclectic theatres, the visitors to the United States unanimously cited the theories and practice of Stanislavski as the foundation on which their art was built. This nearly unanimous allegiance to the principles of psychological realism went unchallenged [...]” (Allen, 1968, p. 249)

Paul 2: Ok. So what?

Onur: Then, there is a paragraph confirming that “the principles of Stanislavski are useful even when an actor prepares a Brechtian role”. Sound familiar?

Paul 1: Silberman and the Brechtian criticism!! So, wait a minute: Berliner Ensemble adopted Stanislavski?

Onur: Not exactly. Allen reports that there were no delegates from the Berliner Ensemble, but the European delegates suggested the above. By the way, there were no delegates from the UK in this conference.

(*Beat.)*

And only one paragraph later Allen writes:

“Only the Anglo-American, Mr. Ross, offered a challenge to the Stanislavski approach, but that challenge amounted to a complete denial of the premises of the Russian system.” (Allen, 1968, p. 250)

Paul 1: So, his was the *only* criticism in a part of a conference that was supposed to re-examine Stanislavski?

Onur: Yes. Ross critiques Stanislavski with some sound arguments including how fragmented the system is and how the then contemporary scientific knowledge would render Stanislavski’s principles inaccurate, just like Gordon (Gordon, 2006). And now, I posit that these actually are embedded in the curricular habitus of actor training.

Paul 2: Surely there must be more modern criticism or critique of Stanislavski.

Onur: I'm afraid not much has changed since then. In research terms there is a lot of praise and reverence for Stanislavski but not much criticism. And there is no hint of criticism or even acknowledgement about his bourgeois existence or bourgeois habitus unless it's someone like David Mamet but his views are often branded as controversial or ferocious (Viagas, 1997).

I was recently at a symposium on Stanislavski and my practical session was the only session with a criticism of any kind let alone in social class terms of Stanislavski and his system. And the symposium was titled "The S Word: Stanislavsky - Director, Trainer, Pedagogue" (Fryer, 2023).

Paul 2: And?

Onur: My general impression was that the practitioners were now leaving the old Stanislavski behind and that they were trying to make the new Stanislavski the norm, claiming it was more inclusive.

Paul 1: Old Stanislavski?

Onur: Yes, the one that implies affective or emotion memory or perezhivanie and what actors would call table work which is sitting around a table and discussing the play and the characters, dissecting the play into small chunks called units, deciding on the objective of characters etcetera.

Paul 2: And the new Stanislavski?

Onur: Active analysis, which was not published by Stanislavski himself and is more closely related to an active, improvised exploration of a play. The presentations at the symposium were almost all about how the system had changed over time and how Stanislavski had changed his mind about many of his initial ideas and concepts but hadn't had a chance to write about them. It sounded like they were trying to excuse him for having gotten it wrong, without admitting he got it wrong. There is always defence that Stanislavski *wanted to* say certain things, but he wasn't allowed because of the socio-political circumstances of his time. Merlin summarizes this well in an interview by saying how the Russian regime crushed Stanislavski's ideas, how he wasn't allowed to talk about spirit which curtailed his ideas which were supposed to be more holistic (Merlin, n.d.).

Paul 1: Are you sure you're not missing anything in your literature search?

Onur: I keep thinking the same but there really is no substantial or substantive criticism of the technique; definitely not from a social class perspective

and definitely not in the realm of how it permeates or gets reproduced in higher education. But there is ample discussion around acting and social class in the UK in the last 10 years or so. Some more formal research some in the news.

Paul 1: Examples?

Onur: (*shuffles through more papers, stuff on his laptop, notebooks, newspaper clippings etc. almost shouting out the titles.)*

"Only 10% of actors are working class" (Snow, 2015).

"James McAvoy: Dominance of Rich-Kid Actors in the U.K. Is "Damaging for Society" (Rahman, 2015).

"Why working-class actors are a disappearing breed" (Cadwalladr, 2016).

"Class act: Are posh actors given more praise than working class stars?" (Garrido, 2017).

"Does a silver spoon help you win a Bafta? The class gulf in British acting…" (Thorpe, 2017).

"[…] the truth is as an actor you're only going to be doing some really great work if you can afford to be out of work and take the good stuff" (Hayes, 2019). This was by the actress Zawe Ashton by the way!

"Working class 'always less likely to get into acting and film making', says new research" (Trueman, 2019).

"Social class must not be a barrier for actors" (Lawrence, 2022).

"Acting has been hijacked by the privileged as upper-class stars are given lower-class roles, historian says" (Wilkes, 2022).

"Only 8% of UK Artists Come From Working-Class Background" (Velie, 2022).

Paul 1: Wasn't there "a golden age' of opportunities for working-class actors and artists that began in the 1960s with the rise to prominence of figures like Rita Tushingham, Michael Caine and David Hockney?" […]

Onur: In reality "[…] there was no 'golden age' of classless access to creative employment." (Brook, et al., 2022). And none of these discussions actually discuss *why* this is except some formal research and some newspapers tying it into nepotism (Halls, 2023; Brown, 2017) and in some cases and to socio-economic factors but I think there is a bigger argument to be had in terms of curricular habitus defining the acting

discipline, good acting and its explicit criteria in line with current higher education assessment framework of grading and degree classification no matter how problematic those practices may be (Yorke & Bridges, 2000) (Yorke, 2007).

Paul 1: How do you mean?

Onur: For example, this research report on tackling class inequality in the UK Screen Industries not only examines the class inequality but proposes some suggestions or priorities all of which, in one way or another, aims to improve upward mobility of participants from less privileged backgrounds (Carey, et al., 2021). And they are not focusing on acting but in the case of actors, if upward mobility is required, then I argue that the success of the upwardly mobilised participants will depend on how well they fit in the established norms of the field of acting, based on Stanislavski's curriculum. In other words, I argue that as long as we teach Stanislavski as the fundamentals of acting, no matter who gets into drama schools or how fast, we are still reproducing the definitions, values, notions, characteristics of acting rooted in Stanislavski's white, male, heterosexual and haute bourgeois habitus. And I'm surprised that not many scholars or artists or educators are talking about this.

Paul 2: Except for Chinese propaganda and the report on Teaching Stanislavski (Dacre, 2013) and Pick!

Onur: (*Exhausted but relieved)* And Gordon, And Mamet, and a few others but not many.

Paul 1: Books? No books?

Onur: In this recent symposium I attended two books were launched "Stanislavsky and Race" and "Stanislavsky and Pedagogy"

Paul 1: (*excited, victorious)* See!

Onur: But guess what: the term social class does not appear in the book on pedagogy. And the first chapter is titled "Teaching Stanislavsky' Core Approach of Action, Imagination and Experiencing:"

Paul 1: That's ok, isn't it? It could still provide a critique?

Onur: (*continues)* "And why it is still relevant for Acting Students and Professionals" (Gillett, 2023).

Paul 1: Oh!

Onur: And the rest of the chapters provide no critique of the system. Two are on zoom and the pandemic era, one is about opera, one is about application of Active Analysis and another chapter about Argentine Tango and how it is "two partners improvising through listening" (Aquilina, 2023).

Paul 2: Higher education?

Onur: The term does not appear in the book.

Paul 1: Drama school?

Onur: It appears once. In the first chapter (*Half laughing)* which begins with how much it costs to become an actor, how little work there is available for an actor, drama school audition and training fees - -

Paul 2: So, there *is* criticism.

Onur: And ending with "[...] anyone choosing performance as a career, [...] actor [...] needs to be resilient, dedicated, optimistic, and independent but with good support networks -

Paul 1: Social capital....

Onur: - and have self-belief and confidence in their ability -

Paul 2: Embodied Cultural Capital...

Onur: - understanding of their craft -

Paul 1: Institutionalised Cultural Capital...

Onur: - and a strong wish to develop their potential as an artist." (Gillett, 2023). But with no explanation as to how to do that with so many barriers that Gillet lists in the first place. Barriers, if I may add, based on the Stanislavskian curriculum.

Paul 1: And its habitus.

Onur: Then he goes on to say "my creative work, and what I teach and how, comes inevitably from my own experience and that of the people who influenced me" (Gillett, 2023). In the rest of the chapter, he just describes how he teaches acting.

Paul 2: Cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) of his own and the curricular habitus!

Onur: Violently so! I have also found that social class gets discussed at the same time as race. The recent book "Stanislavsky and Race" is another

example of how class gets mentioned as part of race critique of Stanislavski.

Paul 1: That's no surprise as "those whose experiences are unique because their cultural identities cut across the margins of other broad social groupings (e.g., gender, class, religion, disability status, sexual orientation)." (Jogie, 2021)

Onur: So, in that way, Stanislavski gets a critique from scholars but only recently and only from few. Landon Smith argues for actor training to venture beyond Stanislavski (2022) and also has a chapter in Stanislavski and Race titled Creating and Inclusive Rehearsal Room Beyond Stanislavski. (Landon-Smith & Hingorani, 2023). Social class is also discussed as intersectional in Race and Racism Report on Britain's Audition and Casting Process for television and film (Rogers, n.d.); for example, how the social class of people in production roles affects the representations in the cast.

Paul 2: And Rogers points to your argument of gatekeepers selecting those who mirror themselves. (Rogers, n.d.)

Onur: "A White, male actor, with a received pronunciation accent, is assumed to be the default. He is capable of playing any role. This is the somatic norm for actors" (Brook, et al., 2020, p. 194).

Paul 1: So, there is some discussion emerging.

Onur: Yes. But it is mostly attached to race; class comes secondary. Also, the discussion, even in Landon-Smith and Hingorani's chapter is more about representation. I understand the argument about representation and agree with it to a certain extent, but my argument is about the *nature* of the technique and not about representation in a play or the representation in a classroom. I mean, yes, students from backgrounds with low capital may be able to get into the classroom but what they are expected to acquire then is a huge amount of capital in three years and I find that to be---

Paul 2: (*interrupting)* I think you'll have to come back to that Onur. It's getting late and this chapter-

Onur: -act-

Paul 2: -act- is getting too long. If there was an audience, they'd be asleep by now (*they all laugh).* Perhaps that might find its way to your analysis.

Onur: I think it's going to come in after that when … (*hesitates)* if…. (*hesitates again)* if and when I get a chance to offer some practical solutions towards the end of the play.

Paul 2: Paul? … Professor?

Paul 1: I think we can call it a day.

(*Outside it is dark now. We can hear a gentle wind rustling the leaves of an oak tree. The evening atmosphere is enhanced by the darkness of the furniture. He goes to a cabinet to pour a drink, stops. Instead moves to his collection of records.)*.

We will see you in a few weeks' time.

Onur: Oh, ok, yes of course (*He starts to pack all his clutter, books, papers, his laptop, notes etc. Paul 1 now has chosen a record. He puts it on the gramophone. Within seconds)*. Impromptu in E flat. Schubert?

Paul 1: (*surprised)* Yes!

Onur: It always suffocates me.

(*The piece is light but has perpetual motion which doesn't allow a breath. He takes his belongings, loads his backpack adjusting it on his back.)*

Thanks for today. Oh, and just before I leave, whoever is reading this section, will only be able to make sense of it if they already know the Schubert impromptu or if they stop reading and find it and listen to it. They may also need *have the embodied cultural capital of* "moto perpetuo". That's another reason why I decided to write this thesis as a play. Because the Stanislavskian curriculum operates at that level of cultural demand.

Paul 1: That's not why I chose it.

Onur: I know. Because *I* chose it (*Paul 1 is baffled)*.

And "[..]nothing more clearly affirms one's 'class ', nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 11).

(He leaves and closes the door behind him. Pauls stare at each other. They don't know what to make of this strange Turkish man and his ideas. The lights fade as the Schubert impromptu reaches its minor section. Blackout.)

ACT II

Act II Scene I An Actor Prepares – for what?

(*Complete darkness and silence. The words/phrases in bold appear and fade on a big screen on the stage as we hear the interview between director Dominic Cooke and actress Sophie Okonedo.)*

DC**:** [..] were you confident when you did the audition? Did you feel that it had gone well?

SO**:** I don't know. [...] I tried for a couple of other dramas and got in. Yeah, I remember thinking I tried for three and got in for three at that time. So, I remember by the time I got to Rada, I think I'd already got placed somewhere else. I was feeling **slightly more confident**, but it was very rigorous. Yeah, I had to, I think go three times, and it was right, very, very nerve-wracking. **And we weren't quite sure what they're looking for**, but I sort of understood about taking direction quite early. Okay, so I realized that **it wasn't so much about having the perfect um speech or being doing it the perfect way**, but understanding **that you could perhaps listen and change**, yeah, and **adapt to what someone was asking you to do.** Yeah, it's taken me a while to think about what I learned there. I think after a while, you sort of undo some of the stuff...[...] And I think the other thing that it did for me is it got me to read a lot of stuff quite fast. And if you hadn't, I didn't have a university background. It sort of got me to, I didn't know who **Chekhov** was when I went to, I didn't know who **Stanislavski** was. I didn't know all these things when I went to Rada. And so, **in a very short space of time, I suddenly knew by the end of the first year who all these people were [...]**." (Okonedo, 2021).

(*Scene change. An open day at a FDS drama school. Walls with vibrant colours and photographic portraits of its patrons -celebrities-. This is certainly not an ordinary university building.*

There building is buzzing with parents and wide-eyed prospective students. There are a few older candidates who are noticeably more observing, perhaps even more cautious.

The main theatre space of the school is dazzling, literally with lights and figuratively with excitement. Some young candidates are pointing at certain parts of the theatre as they grab their parents' arms. Some parents feel tense, awkward and out of place. They see current students in the building which have a distinctly different air to outsiders.

Downstage are tables laid out with "Meet the Lecturer" sign for each department. A younger Onur sets himself down under "Acting", having rushed from teaching a movement class. He is in light-grey tracking bottoms, a loose fitted long sleeved top with a large branding on it. He carries a re-usable coffee cup. His long hair is arranged in a man-bun. He is both grounded and energised yet visibly tired but is very familiar with this environment.

It is nearly the end of the main talk of the open day conducted by not the principal or vice chancellor or the head of school but the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), as that is his title. (Selingo, 2017; Shaw, 2013; Elliott, 2012, p. 53).

He is white, male and speaks in perfect RP iterating the social capital students would be gaining:

> "…and now look at the people sitting next to you. That's right. Look at the people sitting on either side of you. In ten years', time, you will either be working for them, or they will be working for you."

We hear applause and the crowd descends from the theatre and form lines in front of the lecturers' tables. The queue in front of Acting is slightly longer than other departments.

A mother, a father and a young girl looking excited and terrified at the same time approach Onur. The mother is wearing a shawl on one shoulder attached with a diamond brooch and is almost more excited than the girl. The dad is quiet, wearing a nice suit and a crisp shirt despite the heat. They look like they would never perspire. Their clothing is an opportunity to assert their "position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept." (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 50) *Her dress sense is the embodiment of upper middle-class refinement. She looks at Onur's branded top with despise* (Savage, 2015, pp. 162, 258).

Onur: How can I help?

(The family look at each other. The mother glares at the daughter but then can't contain herself.)

Mother: I want to know about the work destinations of your graduates. (Byrne, 2021b) How many of your graduates end up in the West End or the National?

Onur: To be honest, being in the West End or the National is not the be all and end all.

Mother: (*Somewhere between surprise and disgust)* Oh?

Onur: Not least because "We are no longer so much in thrall to specifically national beacons defining the boundaries of legitimate taste [...]" like The National Theatre (Savage, 2015, p. 83) and also let's do some simple maths. There are 39 theatres in the West End (Thomas, 2022) and the average cast size for all productions including musicals is 18 (National Music Council, 2002, p. 34). That makes nearly 700 roles that are already taken. There may be some productions in rehearsal so let's assume another 200 roles are available. That's 900 roles in total which are already taken. There are 19 FDS Drama Schools in the UK and for every one of these schools "there are about half a dozen more colleges and courses promising to train performers and performance creatives to the highest level" (Elkin, 2019). We currently have about 30 students in our acting cohort and many FDS Schools have similar sizes so that makes roughly 600 graduates *per year* from each of the programmes in FDS schools alone. Some schools have multiple programmes. BA Acting, BA Actor Musician, BA Musical theatre and so on. So, you can see that it is highly competitive. In fact, in 2013 it was found that less than 2% of drama graduates ended up on the West End stage (Feldman, 2013).

Mother: But we've seen in your prospectus the modules and training on professionalism, career and employment support?

Onur: We do try to teach our students what it's like to survive as an actor (Taylor, 2021).

Mother: (*Shocked)* Survive?

Onur: Unfortunately, "No matter how effective the career training is, the nature of the acting business is that there can never be cast-iron guarantees of ongoing work." (Byrne, 2021) So, as you may hear from our graduates "Don't be shocked if [your daughter] is out of work" (Byrne, 2021). Actors "are people living and working precariously, usually in a series of short-term jobs" but at least they do have "stable occupational identities" (Savage, 2015, p. 269) – well, sort of. (Hancock & Tyler, 2025, p. 34)

Mother: (*Grabs the daughter by the arm and erupts from her chair)* Oh being out of work is not a problem for her, but not being on the Olivier stage is! (*to the daughter)* Come on Celeste darling. We should never have come to the provinces! I told you we should have stuck with RADA.

(*They are replaced by another family: a son and his father from Birmingham,* (Accent Bias Britain, n.d.) *and we can see that they are tired from travelling.)*

Onur: Hi there. How can I help?

Son: (*trying his best to move to the accent of his addressee* (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 475) *he tries his best to speak neutrally)* Well, I wanted to ask: will I be asked to get rid of my accent?

Onur: What makes you think that?

Son: I heard that "For a large part of the twentieth century, actors in the UK were required to remove all traces of their regional accents and adopt RP for their daily speech." (Oram, 2019).

Onur: Absolutely not. You could think of adding a variety of accents to your palette maybe. We recognise that RP is important, and you will learn it but the short answer is: no, we will not ask you to get rid of your accent.

Son: Ok .. thanks.

(Father and Son exchange glances. They leave. A man appears next in line, alone. He is slightly older than the other candidates.)

Man: I wanted to ask about what the week looks like. Will I be able to work?

Onur: Well, this is a full-time course so you will be in class most of the time. And then there are rehearsals for shows and shows themselves in second and third years and some of them are weekends. "You can't combine work and study. Learning comes first." (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 610).

Man: I see. I was hoping I could work part time in a theatre, even as a walk-on.

Onur: (*Hesitates)* You could, but "[...] hundreds of students have passed through my hands, but I can only call a handful of them my successors who have understood the essence of the things I have given my life to. [...] Because far from all of them have had the will and the stamina to work right through to genuine art. [...] For that you need daily training and drill throughout your whole acting career." (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 348)

Man: But "more students are now in paid employment than not (55% versus 45%). As more than half of students (52%) are looking for work or trying to increase their hours [..]." (Freeman, 2023).

Onur: Maybe "[y]ou have to pay the rent tomorrow. You can't put it off as you don't get on with your landlady. And then there's a letter from home. Your father's ill and that upsets you. First, because you love him and second,

because if anything happens to him you'll be without financial support. And wages at the theatre are low." (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 557). "Most actors seem to think you only have to work in rehearsal and that you can relax at home. That's not the way it is at all." Actors are obliged to "prepare properly for each rehearsal at home. It should be considered shameful and a outrage to the entire cast if the director has to repeat something he has already explained." (p. 561)

(The man listens with ever widening eyes).

How can you find your creative state I hear you ask…

"[…] we shouldn't come to the theatre with muddy feet. Clean off the dust and dirt outside, leave your galoshes, your petty cares, squabbles and irritations, which complicate your life and distract you from your art, at the stage door." (p. 557)

(*The man departs. A young girl with wide eyes approaches, before Onur can speak, without drawing a breath.)*

Girl: I just LOVE this building. And I absolutely LOVE theatre. I go to the theatre every week. And ballet. I just can't get enough of theatre. I live, eat, breathe theatre. But I am a bit worried about the academic side of things. How many written assignments are there?

(Blackout. We are back with the Pauls in their university room, starkly contrasting the drama school environment.)

Paul 1: That question about the accents, did that *really* happen?

Onur: It was one of the most frequently asked questions. It is no surprise as the industry demand shows a bias towards RP as Oram (2019) and Friedman and O'Brien note (Friedman & O'Brien, 2017). Perhaps it's also because Boleslavsky or Boleslaw Ryszard Srzednicki (one of Stanislavski's students and the author of "Acting the First Six Lessons" another seminal book for acting students) was given one year to be "rid of" his Odessa accent (Gordon, 2010, p. 17) by Stanislavski after his successful audition at the Moscow Art Theatre. That little piece of history still haunts our prospective students' perception of the curriculum today.

Paul 1: OK. Let's start talking about your analysis.

Onur: I analysed AAP, both Hapgood (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936)) and Benedetti (Stanislavski, 2016) translations and in them I looked for instances, images, descriptions, suggestions about the volume of capital for the

student actor but more importantly the definition of *an* actor, a good actor and definitions of acting and *good* acting.

Paul 1: But you are being biased here.

Onur: How so?

Paul 1: You are only looking for instances of high volume of capital.

Onur: (*Almost automatic)* That's not what I said. I said instances about the volume of capital; whether they are high are low are yet to be determined.

Paul 2: (*In gentle defence of Paul 1)* Onur, I think I see what the problem is here. Look at the scene above, you already stated that Stanislavski admits the pay at the theatre is low!

Onur: He does, but he doesn't offer any solutions other than leaving financial problem "mud" at the stage door.

Onur: How?

Paul 2: You could say that you are enquiring about the "inherent nature or disposition of the Stanislavskian curriculum" from a Bourdieusian perspective, via representations in his books.

Onur: Ah. Ok fair enough (*Makes a note on his laptop.)*

Paul 2: And you are looking for themes, images, suggestions to abductively infer the disposition of the curriculum using Bourdieusian notions of capital, taste, class and distinction.

Paul 1: What defines capital? Accents?

Onur: Not just the accent.

One, candidates perceive drama schools as "posh places" (institutional habitus) (Celik, 2020; Wright, 2008); two, drama school curricula impose implicit demands from their candidates before they even *begin* their studies (curricular habitus). These demands are, I posit, ones that could be met only by those who have a large volume of capital. In this specific instance being able to speak RP convincingly and with ease would only be possible if the candidate had it as part of their habitus.

Paul 1: But the school was not *demanding* that students would come with an RP accent. I mean the application process or criteria do not specify that candidates *must* have RP, does it?

Onur: No, but clearly the candidates perceived that during their time at drama school they will be asked to get rid of their accent. They often arrived at

open days with the assumption that the school will at some point demand that they change their accents to RP.

Paul 1: But Stanislavski is not demanding RP, is he? I mean he is Russian anyway.

Onur: No, he is not. In fact, he demeans the type of actor that "presents himself" with "crystalline diction, rapid speech, brilliant infections of a voice with enchanting timbre" (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 223). So, accents are the 21st Century iteration of class.

Paul 1: (*gets it)* And that's when your personal experience comes in…

Onur: ..as well as other evidence; such as significance of accents in higher education (Reay, 2017) to support my abductive inference or that "Language and accent are frequent implicit markers of class identity" (Savage, 2015, p. 290). RP can be associated with educatedness but remember, Rodenburg observes an ease and confidence in voice from Eton students compared to grammar school and Leahy notes (albeit in Australia) the authoritative actor's voice and the aesthetics associated with speech (Leahy, 1996, p. 136) and muscular ease is an important aspect in Stanislavski's books, he has a chapter on it. Further, there is a clear lack of explicit criteria for drama school auditions and many schools say "we want to see *you"*. Therefore, a candidate's accent, clothing, bodily hexis are a part of who they are and what is being seen and as such is *unavoidably* a marker of their class identity.

Paul 1: You have NO evidence that drama schools are choosing students with RP over students without.

Onur: I don't. But which school is going to admit to that? Watch this:

(An audition of a very young, fresh-faced Scottish actor to get a scholarship. He is about to start his first year at a drama school. Behind a table sits a middle-aged, white man; small in stature and soft-spoken in RP. The student performs a short monologue from an American play, giving his best shot in an American accent.)

Auditioner: (*smiles, almost too politely and too sincere)* That was *looovely*. Thank you. Could you do it in another accent?

Student: (*in his native Scottish)* Oh, yes, sure. I can try.

(*He performs the speech again in an Irish accent, rather well.)*

Auditioner: (*same smile as before, almost identical)* That was *loooovely.* Can you do another accent maybe?

Student: (*in his native Scottish)* Erm…yea, I can do it in my own accent?

Auditioner: (*scrunches his nose)*

Could you do an accent, perhaps, that's not… *Celtic*?

(*back to the Pauls' office)*.

Onur: And this was very young student who had not even started his studies. So why this man was looking for three different accents to give out a scholarship is beyond me.

Paul 1: Schools are not saying they are looking for people with RP anyway. Even if they did, this has nothing to do with Stanislavski. Because he is not looking for a specific accent in his candidates in his books.

Paul 2: Ah but perhaps drama schools are trying to match the habitus of the student to the habitus of the curriculum by proxy evaluating the student's ability to access…

Onur: …and embody…

Paul 2: …the accent that still had the highest prestige in 2019 (Accent Bias Britain, n.d.) and to see whether the student could move closer to the accent of the addressee. The panel was perhaps looking for signs of an advantage which "precocious acquisition of legitimate culture gives in learning cultural skills, whether table manners or […] or pronunciation." (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 475)

Paul 1: In AAP, there is no audition For Stanislavski's students or for his training. Is there?

Onur: No. In this fictional school, there seems to be no selection process before the training begins. But that process titled "the first test" in Benedetti translation or the first exercise given to the students feels like the first round of auditions of UK Drama Schools.

Paul 2: (*trying to help)* What about audition fees, as a barrier to accessing drama school? Perhaps as it demands economic capital from the candidates?

Onur: Maybe, but actually Stanislavski recognizes the economic capital required to study at drama school as his fictional school has fees (Stanislavski, 2016, pp. 40-41). Drama schools have made an effort to reduce or in some instances cut audition fees. (LIPA, 2022b) Some require eligibility for free auditions (RADA, n.d.) (CSSD, 2023). But of course, there are travelling and accommodation costs for auditions,

sometimes more than once for the same school for multiple rounds of auditions.

Paul 2: There must be online auditions by now, surely? Especially after the pandemic. That would cut travel and accommodation fees.

Onur: Yes, there are. And some FDS schools now offer auditions in venues outside of London, yet there are implications of economic capital when online auditions and self-tapes are considered such as accessing the equipment, internet, the space to record etcetera but the economical capital is not the only capital I'm talking about here.

Paul 1: Then what are you talking about?

Onur: For example, the first three or four years I worked as a lecturer in acting, we did not have explicit criteria in entry auditions. At all. None. We just had a candidate sheet with a box for comments for each of their pieces. This lack of criteria was also the case for some of the acting modules.

Paul 2: Yes, you mentioned you were tasked with writing them.

Onur: Indeed. As part of their first-round audition tasks we asked students to prepare Shakespeare speeches from a list we presented. We did judge them on their understanding of the speeches as their performance would sometimes indicate that they haven't quite understood the speech. And if we had time to do so, we would ask them whether they've read the entire play, but we hardly ever got a chance to speak to the candidates in the first round because the audition slots were so short and the process was so quick. Some of my colleagues would even stop students before they got to the end of their speeches.

Paul 2: Essentially, you were seeing whether they had Educational Capital in the form of knowing an entire Shakespeare play and knowing both the content and the context of the speech they were doing.

Onur: Yes. But also, implicitly we enquired whether they had the time and the means to study the play too. Knowing an entire Shakespeare play is no easy feat. Even for me. Even now. It takes time, **educational capital** and resources. Then **embodied cultural capital** to act the speech out, physically and vocally. And I'm sure students who have a famous actor for an uncle who would help them prepare (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 22), would be able to exchange their **social capital** to audition success.

Paul 1: Preparing one or two speeches should not be *that* difficult.

Onur: How long do you think it is recommended to prepare a Shakespeare speech?

Paul 1: I don't know. Forty-five minutes?

Onur: In her 'quick' guide Soto-Morettini recommends thirty-five.

Paul 1: Thirty-five? See!

Onur: Hours.

Paul 1: (*horror-struck)* HOURS?

Onur: And that's after the auditionee looked up and understood all the words in the speech. She then recommends an additional 22 hours for any additional speech. Each! (Soto-Morettini, 2016).

(beat)

But it isn't only knowledge in the form of Educational Capital of Shakespeare or any other play that a good potential actor must have. They must have more.

Paul 2: Like what?

Onur: We expected in an audition that the students understand the character and the circumstances that the character is in. I mean in Shakespeare this is more difficult than in a modern play, but it is not easy in any play. Stanislavski – sorry (*rolls his eyes, makes air commas)* "Torstov" says Kostya was hastily reproducing Othello without thinking about what Shakespeare wrote and "That is what always happens when an actor does not have at his disposal a wealth of live material taken from life." (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 30).

Paul 2: (*automatically)* Embodied Cultural Capital and habitus.

Onur: How Kostya or any student was supposed to have the wealth of live material to create Othello, an African general in the Venetian army and an eloquent storyteller (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2024) at the beginning of training, I have no idea. Even in the second year of his training, let alone at the audition.

Paul 2: Fair enough.

Onur: And similarities between audition processes and AAP do not end there. Do you remember audition and stress article I mentioned? And how I said they didn't put two and two together? (Matthews & Guevara, 2017)

Paul 1: Vaguely…

Onur: Kostya describes his experience of a rehearsal on the stage for his first test performance: no welcome from the teacher, no introduction. He is then disappointed about the lack of lights and glamour attributed to the theatre. There is a disembodied voice that says “Begin!”. (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 6) We don’t know whose voice that is and whether they are watching them or not.

Think how that would affect the auditionee’s confidence and their comfort and how they assert their presence all of which Leahy discusses in her article as key factors for successful candidates (1996). Drama school auditions are fear inducing.

Candidates are judged against criteria that remain diffuse and mysterious and are virtually powerless against the judgement exercised over them. Matthews and Guevara are tempted to read the audition as an experiment in obedience even and this is what Okonedo was saying earlier. “[I]t wasn't so much about having the perfect um speech or being doing it the perfect way, but understanding that you could perhaps listen and change, yeah, and adapt to what someone was asking you to do” (Okonedo, 2021). And in Bourdieusian terms “obedience to the principles of the dominant ideology manages to impose itself on intellectuals in the form of obedience to the conventions and proprieties of the intellectual world.” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 193) and it all starts at the audition stage. Students are expected to know the conventions and properties of the intellectual world of the speeches that they do.

Paul 1: So, are you saying the schools are selecting students who would fit well within their institutional habitus?

Onur: ...and curricular habitus, yes.

During, before and after their auditions candidates would sometimes talk about their experiences with schools in London where they claimed they were treated so ... invisibly. I remember one candidate saying they were made to walk across the room one by one at an audition for a drama school in London.

Paul 2: Why?

Onur: They weren’t told. And there are so many hoops of capital that students have to jump through.

Paul 1: (*confused)* Hoops of capital?

Onur: For example, Royal CSSD have three rounds of auditions. In the first round, they are asking for one memorised classical speech and for that they are recommending, but not *demanding*, Shakespeare.

One memorised classical speech, one memorised contemporary speech, one devised piece, inspired by a painting, one memorised song or a poem. And this is only round one! (CSSD, 2023). To be fair, as well as their audition fees, some schools now dropped their requirement for a classical speech, which I interpret as giving a chance to those who may not have the Educational and Cultural Capital to interpret a classical speech.

Paul 1: That is a good move, isn't it?

Onur: It is. But we will never know if or when they would compare students who do choose Shakespeare to those who don't.

Paul 2: Savage argues though that the notion of cultural capital is a mutable phenomenon and that the nature of cultural capital has changed, doesn't he? (Savage, 2015, p. 45). In fact, he makes a distinction between high-brow and emerging cultural capital (p. 192) .

Onur: He does. And in the case of the CSSD the requirement for a devised piece could be an indicator of the schools looking for students to have more of the emerging cultural capital. He also points out that graduates of the more London centric universities as well as fine and performing arts graduates score highest of the high-brow cultural capital which he calls Establishment English including Shakespeare. (ibid.)

Paul 1: Those are graduates though. Wouldn't they be learning about Shakespeare during their time at university?

Onur: If that's the case, then why are drama schools asking their candidates to perform Shakespeare in their first round of auditions? And why are students still choosing the genius of Shakespeare (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 143) over modest vaudeville speeches, or short sketches and frothy little comedies (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 1) (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 6) ? I mean does a physics programme at a university ask their candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of quantum mechanics *before* they start their degree?

(*Paul 2 laughs. Paul 1 remains unmoved)*.

Paul 1: Rubbish! (*Pointedly)* Shakespeare as opposed to quantum mechanics, is in the Schools' Curriculum.

Onur: Only two plays at Key Stage 3 and at least one play by Shakespeare which the department for education refers to as “high-quality work”. (Department for Education (UK), 2014). Further, Elliot and Olive found that only a small selection of Shakespeare’s plays are explored at school, and they also refer to Olive’s previous research claiming ‘curriculum is silent about what should be achieved through the study of Shakespeare in particular’. (Elliott & Olive, 2021)

Paul 1: *(insistent)* Still, you can’t say that the students are not receiving the cultural capital before they arrive at drama school. In fact, OFSTED has *told* schools to ensure that all students have access to cultural capital (Mansell, 2019). Therefore, I think it is perfectly reasonable for drama schools to ask their candidates to have *some* knowledge of Shakespeare.

Onur: True. Though unfortunately “school cultural capitals are more likely to logically map onto subject hierarchies, institutional gatekeeping, and family position to consolidate the status-quo.” And despite what Savage is arguing about the changing nature of cultural capital and the emergence of a new, cool cultural capital, “Access to elite cultural capitals via education means learning to value distinctive aesthetic codes which are sanctioned within the education field, but originate within the field of cultural production.” And “school students who have had ‘continuous and prolonged, methodical and uniform training’ [...] are unafraid to perform” (Thomson & Hall, 2022). In other words, what’s gained at school cannot be a substitute for life-long exposure to cultural capital. This again is a feature in Stanislavski’s life. He was exposed to all the performing arts – theatre, opera, ballet and the circus. The ideal of a cultivated human being was very much part of his education within his family. (Cleaves, n.d.).

Paul 1: (*frustrated, but admitting)* Also, those students who are unafraid to perform would have an advantage at a stressful event like an audition or in class. An ease “which is the touchstone of excellence; it produces the paradoxical relationship to culture made up of self-confidence amid (relative) ignorance and of casualness amid familiarity, which bourgeois families hand down to their off spring as if it were an heirloom.” (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 59) Then there is the discomfort felt in cross-culture interaction (Savage, 2015, p. 288).

Paul 2: *(ironic)* How many more rounds *are* there at a drama school audition?

Onur: It varies. RADA has four audition stages and for stage one they are asking for a Shakespearean or an Elizabethan classical speech, an alternative

classical speech, a contemporary speech excluding Chekhov or Shaw and a short song. And if you can get to the final stage, they then require candidates to prepare a new audition speech. (RADA, n.d.). If we take Soto-Morettini's guide, candidates will need at least thirty-five hours for the Shakespeare and, let's be kind, maybe another twenty hours per item.

Paul 2: So, a total of (*calculates)* seventy-five hours.

Onur: Equivalent to two full-time working weeks. I argue that a student, working on all of this, on their own requires not only the **economic capital of** time and the resources but also a large volume of **embodied cultural capital**. I mean that requires a lot of knowledge of drama, plays, and a lot of time to practice them to be able to execute them to a standard that the drama schools require-

Paul 1: (*Interrupting)* Ok, ok. Fine. There is work to be done regarding admissions practices and it was in 2018 that shadow culture secretary asked drama schools to consider abolishing audition fees (Coelho & Savage, 2018). And some drama schools have some kind of outreach programme to assist students from geographically, culturally or economically challenged areas who would not otherwise have access to drama training (FDS Federation of Drama Schools, 2019). I don't understand how any of this relates to Stanislavski or the element of the curriculum.

Onur: Ah! Considering those outreach programmes, I argue that the schools are doing enough for those who are economically or geographically challenged but not the culturally challenged. I guess simply because they can't. How can you teach Shakespeare in a workshop to someone who has never had any practical experience of performing it to a level at which they could succeed under the pressure of drama school auditions with, may I add, no explicit criteria to prepare to?

Compare two students: one with actor parents. He goes to their plays, watches them rehearse, hears Shakespeare, Gorky, Stoppard, Albee in the house; listens to classical music, pop-music, frequently attends theatre, witnesses theatrical conversation in the house. The other, daughter of a working-class single mother with no connections to the theatre what-so-ever, lives a limited life with low income and has no interest in music, no interest in art, not necessarily because she's poor but perhaps because it was not in her upbringing, or habitus either.

All of these are *exactly the same* in teaching and assessment in higher education too. Because Stanislavski's definition of and criteria for good acting always demands a lot from the "self" of the actor.

(*Reaches in his bag and takes out the Stanislavski books. They are well read with corners earmarked, scores of post it notes sticking out, coffee stains on some pages etc. Paul and Paul are watching this car-crash. He exclaims in the worst possible Russian accent)*

"You study [..] from the point of view of the epoch, the time, the country, condition of life, background, literature, psychology, the soul, way of living, social position, and external appearance; moreover, you study character, such as custom, manner, movements, voice, speech, intonations. All this work on your material will help you to permeate it with your own feelings. Without all this you will have no art."

"The basis of our school of acting; which is the basis of living your part."

"[N] ever allow yourself externally to portray anything that you have not inwardly experienced"

"The circumstances which are predicted on if are taken from sources near to your own feelings, and they have a powerful influence on the inner life of an actor. Once you have established this contact between your life and your part, you will find that inner push or stimulus. Add a whole series of contingencies based on your own experience in life, and you will see how easy it will be for you sincerely to believe in the possibility of what you are called upon to do on the stage." (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), pp. 23,31,52).

Even imagination requires knowledge and capital because "Every invention of the actor's imagination must be thoroughly worked out and solidly built on a basis of facts." (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 76)

And all of that *is* the curriculum for acting. Or good acting.

Firstly, there are differences between the books regarding editing and translations. Hapgood and Benedetti seem to have made different choices as to what to include and what to exclude.

Paul 2: Wouldn't all higher education demand *some* capital?

Onur: Maybe. But I argue that acting, good acting doesn't require that much capital.

Paul 1: You did mention translation in your methodology but how does that impact on your analysis?

Onur: Look at the content pages. The first chapter in Hapgood translation is titled "The First Test" however Benedetti uses the title "Amateurism". Even before we read the chapters, the word Amateurism rings different to "The First Test".

Paul 1: David Mamet calls Stanislavski a rich amateur. (1999).

Paul 2: When you consider the word amateur coming from love, lover...

Onur: Does it?

Paul 1: Yes, it does. It also means one who has a taste for some art, study, or pursuit, but does not practice it (Etymology Online, n.d.).

Onur: There is more. The use of these words is particularly important as I am looking for abductive inferences (Krippendorff, 2019, pp. 71-72) of the capital volume in the books belonging to the characters and the author --

Paul 2: --and also the reader.

Onur: Yes, hence translations can paint different pictures. A first test paints a different picture to amateurism. And translators are part of those who make up and transfer the curriculum from the books to us lecturers and the students.

Paul 2: Pinar's intellectual history (2015) !

Paul 1: Go on.

Onur: Hapgood's translations are sort of chronological in the journey of learning acting. The trilogy is presented slightly differently in each translator. The titles follow a logical order of AAP, BAC and then CAR. Benedetti's titles are less obvious with AAW which combines the first two books. There is logically more information about the candidate, the prospective actor and the student in the earlier parts of the trilogy.

Paul 1: But you would or could find inferences about a candidate later on in them.

Onur: How do you mean?

Paul 1: A candidate of acting can find inferences anywhere in the book. The title, the cover picture or even the price.

Paul 2: (*Gets it)* The books themselves are **objects of cultural capital.**

Paul 1: (*hates to admit it)* Or Onur's play as an object of knowledge.

Onur: Oh... I hadn't thought of that. Could we consider the difference between candidates who had access to Stanislavski's books and those who didn't?

Paul 2: Maybe. Isn't that possible?

Onur: I guess so. AAP is "written" by Kostya who was initially thought to be modelled on Stanislavski, but "the enthusiastic student who keeps the

record of the lessons" is actually not modelled on the young Stanislvaski. The idea for Kostya sprang from students in the early studios, who included such brilliant talents as Vakhtangov, Richard Boleslavsky, and Mikhail Chekhov. The fictional student is patterned after one of those students or a composite of all of them." (Hobgood, 1991). Of course, there are other characters in the book including other students, tutors and even other characters in students' lives. The "well-known actor, director and teacher" Torstov is based on Stanislavski (Stanislavski, 2016).

Paul 1: (*makes the connection)* So the books are a product of curriculum experienced by Stanislavski and his earlier students. (*Moving on)* What inferences can you make regarding the capital volume of Kostya?

Onur: In the Hapgood translation there is not much information about the central character. The book simply starts with the account of a student waiting for a first lesson in a theatre school. The Benedetti translation contains an introduction which is "written by" Kostya and we understand that he was a stenographer and was asked to transcribe a lecture by Torstov. Kostya then leaves his life as a stenographer and decides to study acting with Torstov.

Paul 2: Just like that?

Onur: Just like that (*snaps his fingers)*. But if it is true that Kostya was based on Vakhtangov, it might be worth noting that Vakhtangov's father was in the tobacco business and like Stanislavski, his father shunned him for wanting to go into acting (Moore, 1984, p. 110).

Paul 1: Stanislavski's father shunned him?

Onur: "[He] was a child actor at home and, in order to act publicly as he grew up, he had to do it in a clandestine way, hiding away from his family, until he was caught red-handed by his father, doing a 'naughty' vaudeville. His father said: "Listen, if you want to do serious work, get yourself decent working conditions. Stop wasting your time with people of no talent who drink and swear and blaspheme." (Shevstova, n.d.).

Paul 2: The amateurism in the chapter title makes sense now.

Paul 1: So what, if Stanislavski and Vakhtangov were middle class boys?

Onur: The curricular habitus pictured by Stanislavski in his books are visibly demonstrated in drama schools' audition processes. I argue that his primary habitus, the one that was shaped from birth and by their early experiences (Murphy, 2015, p. 7), is being reproduced in these books and ultimately via us, lecturers in drama schools still today. Also apart from

their accents, of which I know nothing about, they are the epitomes of the somatic norm as white, middle-class men in the acting world of twenty first century UK (Brook, et al., 2020, p. 5).

Paul 1: OK let's go back to the books.

Onur: AAP starts with this first test where students are asked to prepare pieces to show Torstov and his assistant Rakhmanov for a week with no input from them.

Paul 2: Like an audition?

Onur: Yes or a class because these students are already admitted to the school. Kostya claims that Torstov would like to see the students' "dramatic quality" in Hapgood and "stageworthiness" in Benedetti. Oh, and there are no other criteria. I posit that this is mirrored, still, today, in FDS schools.

Paul 1: (*with disbelief)* Is that the case in UK drama schools?

Onur: Pretty much. The main difference is that there is a panel of tutors and drama schools have entry criteria, I mean they call it criteria but they are all so very … soft. Some schools are happy to waive the academic requirements if they believe the candidate fulfils the audition criteria (Arts Ed, 2025) (Drama Studio London, 2023)– and the information published by drama schools is very vague and very general. Although I did manage to find explicit criteria for the new course which replaced the drama centre at University of the Arts London.

Paul 1: And what do those criteria say?

Onur: "Interest in, commitment to and motivation for studying the subject, Ability to work imaginatively and creatively individually and in groups" (University of the Arts London, n.d.).

Paul 1: How will they evaluate that in an audition?

Onur: I will come to that.

Generally, candidates are given *guidance* as to what to prepare. These can be speeches and sometimes movement pieces or a song. But there are no published criteria regarding the auditions. It's not clear what you need to demonstrate to succeed in delivering your speech or your song. But of course if you are the daughter of an actress who's been in the business for fifty years, you would turn to your mother for advice for your audition because "she knows more about it" (Quentin & Quentin, 2023), and I

suspect you would be ahead of many other candidates who've never even been to the theatre let alone have a mother for an actress.

Paul 2: Or a famous uncle like Pasha (Paul) in AAP.

Paul 1: (*Still in disbelief)* Do you really mean FDS schools do not publish criteria for auditions?

Onur: Exactly. Some of them provide *some* information but it is all rather vague. For example, Arts Ed have a FAQ section and they write this for their applicants. *(reads from his phone)*

"Q: What are the panel looking for?"

Paul 1: (*as if to say "I knew it")* So, they *do* publish criteria.

Onur: (*Continues to read)*

> "A: We want to see YOU and who you are! That sounds complicated but actually it's simple: We want to see your enthusiasm for the piece and for the process. We're looking for your commitment to the choices you make. We may not agree with your choices, but that's fine as long as you commit to them, so be bold – be passionate. We are interested in the decisions that you make as an actor and how you have interpreted the pieces. Make them your own. Don't try to copy someone else's performance."

Which, by the way, is a *totally* Stanislavski advice to give. "[…] you betrayed the art of representation and lapsed into mimicry, copying, imitation, which has nothing to do with real creative work." (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 25).

> "There is only one of YOU – we are looking for the unique qualities that make you who you are, so make sure you show us your individual creativity. We are definitely not looking for perfection or for the finished product; we do not expect you to be a polished, trained actor – that's what drama school is for!" (Arts Ed, n.d.)

Paul 1: (*Shocked)* Let me get this straight; they are assessing the person, as a person?

Onur: That's what it sounds like, doesn't it.

Paul 1: So, the person needs to be bold and passionate, and can be wrong?

Paul 2: Then why are they asking to see the candidate to perform a speech? Can't they just, I don't know, hold a short interview instead? How are they assessing the "enthusiasm for the process" exactly?

Onur: Drama Studio says they "look for talent, passion, a maturity of attitude, a certain level of technical ability and a flexible approach." (Drama Studio London, 2023). And their first round of auditions is a self-tape.

Paul 1: But what is the criteria for a maturity of attitude in a self-tape?

Onur: I guess they "know it when they see it" (Marston, 2022) (Willis, 2017).

(*By this time Paul 2 is on his laptop. He is typing and scrolling*)

RADA has a video about what they're looking for in a prospective student. They say they're not looking for any particular qualifications or grades. They want to know about the applicant's interests and experiences. And they're looking for potential, creativity and curiosity. (RADA, n.d.), in not one, not two, not three but four rounds.

Paul 1: Interests and experiences. Sounds like embodied cultural capital to me.

Onur: This tweet from an audition coach speaks volumes and absolutely parallels what I argue.

Paul 1: (*aside)* Are we accepting twitter as research data now?

Paul 2: X.

Paul 1: What?

Paul 2: It's called X now. Not twitter.

Paul 1: Fine! Are we accepting X?

Onur: (*hears it)* Why not? Are they not social realities in daily life (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 83)?

(*Paul 1 and Paul 2 exchange glances, Paul 1 tilts head as to mean "Really?" Paul 2 shrugs to mean "I don't know")*

These are all from Lee Knight; a drama school audition coach. His biography lists roles alongside Ian McKellen, Berkoff, Catherine Tate, David Tenant and the list goes on. He is a Drama Centre graduate himself and has designed and ran the schools' audition summer school and was on the panels for auditions for drama schools (Knight, 2019).

Paul 2: Talk about social capital.

Onur: "The time they spend preparing their pieces, preparing mentally, emotionally some never having stood up in front of strangers to speak Shakespeare (yet may have raw talent) – the cost to them to audition

(some £50-60) – them or their parents paying people like me to guide them"

"Sometimes they are working three jobs, they want it so bad, they may have already auditioned for two years, three, for even getting to final rounds…"

"So when students report back to me a school has been rude, cold, not even introduced themselves, not given them fair time, rushed them […] it angers me.." (Knight, 2023)

Paul 2: (*On his phone)* Look at some of the replies here (*Paul 1 is morbidly fascinated that Paul 2 is indulging in this. Paul 2 mouths "sorry")*.

"I'll never forget my audition for central, years ago..the Actor they had on the panel, a face I recognised from TV, didn't look up or say a word throughout my audition. It always stayed with me. That day cost me a total of £90 (train fare & audition costs) & it felt utterly shit." ((@Gladison), 2023). So, it's not just academics on these panels. It is people from the industry as well. The bridge and the tension between curricular and professional habitus.

Onur: Yes, we had them too. And these are people who are hired hourly so they are not full-time lecturers.

Paul 1: (*begrudgingly)* Which means the lines are blurred constantly between the curricular and professional definitions of acting.

Paul 2: "auditioned for east 15 8 years ago and they didn't even see my monologue bc they ran out of time 😔 £50 well spent" ((@stageyrebecca), 2023)

Onur: "I auditioned for 7 leading drama schools & was accepted at 3 before auditioning at CSSD. In interview stage a man looked down his nose over his specs at me - without even a hello - opened with, "Is confidence a problem?". I found the tone in which it was asked shockingly rude." ((@MrAdamFrith), 2023).

Paul 1: (*by this time, he is at this desktop computer.)* Not all schools are the same though. Hear this:

"I've had both wonderful and awful experiences with well known drama schools. One I had traveled overnight to attend and forgot my lines to monologue and naturally got upset. The panel were so kind and supportive." (*pauses)* "The other school told us if we didn't hear our name we were cut.." (@JenMcK, 2023).

But there is no evidence that any of these people come from working class backgrounds or come with a low social capital.

Onur: Actually, we do know about some of them and the way they talk about how much they spent and whether it was worth it indicates that this was a considerable expense for them. Adam Frith is quite open about his experience on his website, which has a section titled Breaking The Class Ceiling. He writes "[...] coming from a working-class background is not something you move up from or leave behind - rather it continues to run through you like the lettering in one of those old-fashioned sticks of rock you can get at the seaside. It is also my experience that being from a working-class background is a formative experience that continues to operate within and act upon you - sometimes in negative ways. It is something I still struggle with." (Frith, n.d.) confirming findings in The Class Ceiling (Friedman & Laurison, 2020).

Paul 1: Still, it's only one person's experience and I don't think you can base your entire thesis on that. If you had some structured interviews or surveys for data...

Onur: True. But I think these statements, in a way, are stronger as data. Lee Knight's public outcry on twitter about auditions is unprompted and potentially damaging for his business. I suspect he felt very strongly about it to have openly criticised drama schools. Then the responses to that are from anyone and everyone. So, it is almost like a focus group and demonstrates instances of curriculum being reflected as a public affair (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 82).

Paul 1: Only you have no control over the demographic of the group or over who chooses to read and respond. It is all haphazard.

Onur: True. But the least I can safely and reliably infer from these tweets, research (Leahy, 1996; Matthews & Guevara, 2017), images in Stanislavski's books and from my personal experience that the audition panel is a place of power and those who audition are nervous, exposed and vulnerable, showing social realities in daily life (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 83). Even Kostya attests to fear of failure, "the powerlessness to do the impossible" (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 11) Imagine how much more nervous those with no embodied knowledge of the theatre environment or theatrical dimensions (Matthews, 2017) would be. I used to be exhausted after our audition days when I was on the panel.

Paul 2: Why was that?

Onur: Because all the applicants were nervous.

Paul 1: Even the confident ones with knowledge and past experience of auditioning for drama schools?

Onur: Less so, but they needed managing in different ways. They brought in either nervous or overconfident energy into the room. Either way, it took a lot of emotional and mental effort to calm them down whilst operating efficiently because we had limited time to see all candidates. I didn't want to be cruel and dismissive but sometimes I could tell that they had no idea what they were doing in their speeches. Yet, I wanted to give them a fair chance. And we saw a lot of candidates. I mean a lot. At one point, we used to physically audition, around two thousand applicants for only thirty something places. I would sometimes see twelve people in an hour giving them five minutes to do two speeches. With pleasantries at the beginning, that's hardly any time to make any kind of decision.

Paul 2: Wow, that is competitive.

Onur: Competition was fiercer for drama schools than for Oxbridge (Smith, 2007) and at the time RADA was claiming to run outreach programmes.

In my first few years, I was less affected. But the more I started to learn about teaching and learning, higher education, criterion-based assessment and social class and the wider picture, I began to view and experience auditions and the classes I taught differently. I could see that some candidates and students were *desperate* to show how good they were or how much they wanted to study acting but at the same time they were so underconfident and they clearly did not have the tools to deal with the requirements of an audition or a rehearsal or an acting class especially given the lack of criteria. They did not know *how or what to do* to get in or to be told that they were good – like 62% good- in class. And what they *did* know, they couldn't perform very well. They didn't know how to enter the room, they were trembling, forgetting lines because they could not understand what they were saying in Shakespeare speeches and also probably because they never had the experience of standing in front of people to speak or act. And I felt -

Paul 2: - Sorry for them?

Onur: No, not in a condescending way. I felt obliged to provide as much comfort and ease as I could within a very short space of time so that every candidate would perform their best. Because we were essentially looking for students to "not so much to be expert in what he undertakes, as to

undertake it like a gentleman . . . This air of ease which comes from a fortunate birth and an excellent habit is one of the amenities of a gentleman" (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 64)

But it felt impossible because I could also see those with utmost confidence and knowledge of what they were doing both generally and specifically in their pieces. The candidates who came with a clear sense of preparation would almost always perform better. You could tell that they knew what they were doing but more importantly they were so **comfortable and confident** being in a rehearsal room, in front of a judging panel; they knew theatre banter; they acted in a way that would fit in a rehearsal or a class on our programme. Were they always the most talented or the most knowledgeable? I'm not so sure. But they looked and felt right. They were good fits as people in the social field of a drama school. I was told to envisage them in our corridors, in our workshops, rehearsals, plays as part of the selection process. And after they got in, their lack of deep knowledge sometimes surfaced, but their confidence kept growing knowing that they were in the right place for them.

So, in my later years I worked on developing some explicit criteria for auditions with my colleagues. We had a no feedback policy but of course candidates could file requests -with a fee- and they could ask to see their feedback sheets.

Paul 1: (*knowing)* So you wanted to cover your backs.

Onur: In a way. For me personally though it was a way to try and make the process criteria referenced, as much as reasonably possible. I mean this is maybe on the periphery of my argument and feels like gossip, but I sensed that the then head of department was not happy with having criteria.

Paul 2: Why?

Onur: Because they couldn't bring on candidates on the course that they exclusively had an affinity for, an elective affinity (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 238) for, even though they were not necessarily the best performers. They used to call those candidates "wild cards". (*rolls his eyes)*.

Paul 2: Bristol Old Vic has Tips for their preliminary audition but it's more about what pieces to choose and this instruction "Think about what your character is trying to achieve, and see if there's a change of direction in the speech." (Bristol Old Vic, 2023). That's character's objective (

(Stanislavski, 2016; Stanislavski, 2016) (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936)) isn't it? Even I know *that*.

Onur: (Working on his phone) No clear criteria from East 15 or Guildford School of Acting, although again they give specifications of what speeches to choose. (East 15, n.d.) and GSA indicates that they send further information upon application. (Guildford School of Acting, 2023) Guildhall provides guidance for the auditions and in 'Tips for Delivery' it says be simple and truthful (Guildhall, 2023).

Paul 1: What's the criteria for truthfulness?

Onur: Who knows? Most schools do not provide any feedback after the auditions. (Guildhall School, 2023; Guildford School of Acting, n.d.; LIPA (The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts), 2023; RADA, n.d.) Some schools do provide feedback if the failed applicant requests it (Bristol Old Vic, 2022) and claim to have criteria but the criteria themselves are not published in advance of the audition (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, n.d.) Royal Conservatoire of Scotland does admit the nature of their assessment being normative anyway. (*shows a document).*

Paul 1: Normative? How? Surely not…

Onur: They, in a way, admit that they compare candidates to one another instead of all candidates to the criteria. (Biggs & Tang, 2009)

Paul 2: (*Reads from RCS's feedback policy)* "The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland will not enter into a dialogue with applicants regarding the provision of feedback. Our courses are highly competitive, and applicants need to recognise that feedback may simply state the fact that other applicants were stronger or that the course is not, in our opinion, suitable for them." (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, n.d.) So, if you get rejected, and ask for feedback they can just say other applicants were stronger?

Onur: Yes. Instead of criteria schools tend to provide *tips* for an audition like "choose two contrasting speeches" or "choose a speech of a character your age" (*to himself)* but strangely not necessarily your own gender (Bristol Old Vic, 2023).

Paul 1: (*done with the computer. Turns his attention to Onur)* What does this all mean then? What is your argument?

Onur: Going back to AAP, the candidates in the book prepare some scenes from plays for their first test. Kostya and his friend want to do something light at first but then they hear their peers talk about Gogol, Ostrovski, Chekhov and realise that they need to do something romantic and in verse.

(Stanislavski, 1964 (1936))This indicates that candidates are expected to know about these great playwrights before they begin their training. In the book Kostya finalises his decision on Shakespeare.

Paul 2: Much like what they require at drama schools.

Onur: Yes. I mean if a candidate can do Shakespeare *already*, with no help from anyone why do they even need to go to drama school!

Paul 1: I disagree. The 'canon' of Shakespeare, Mozart, the British Museum "defined in terms of socially approved and legitimated 'great' works of art and culture, is no longer constitutive of cultural excellence, moral certainty or tradition." (Savage, 2015, pp. 138-139).

Onur: "What makes the petit-bourgeois relation to culture and its capacity to make ' middle-brow ' whatever it touches, just as the legitimate gaze ' saves ' whatever it lights upon," (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 328). So today it's devised pieces, spoken word, Kae Tempest, whatever. But it is always decided by the gaze, the taste, the habitus of the curriculum and those who create and execute it.

And being proud of learning Shakespeare is *still* a thing. Look. (*Onur takes out his phone. After few taps both Paul 2's laptop and Paul 1's mobile phone pings.)* Just forwarded it to you.

Paul 1: (*Reaches for his phone, reads)* "As a 13yr old boy from a council estate, I remember Shakespeare feeling like a foreign language… Skip 28yrs and with patience, wisdom, diligence of reading and experience (life and theatrical) I now (generally speaking) can read and fully comprehend with creative flair!" Who is "at Jimmy B"?

Onur: He's a theatre director and a colleague. His Young Vic profile reads "A self-proclaimed DIY artist from a council estate now turned professional animator of stories". (Young Vic, n.d.)

Paul 2: (*reading from his laptop)* And it also says that he has a BA (Hons) in Theatre and English so it's not so DIY.

Onur: Yes, there are alternatives to Shakespeare now but even Savage considers the canon as high-brow and the more contemporary, avant-garde alternatives as emergent cultural capital. And from what I can see, drama schools are not asking their candidates to prepare any avant-garde pieces. Although they do ask for devised pieces which could be considered as the more emergent cultural capital.

Paul 1: What else is in Stanislavski's books?

Onur: Kostya admits to the daunting aspect of having to perform on stage in front of Torstov. Benedetti's translation is a little more flowery and vibrant in its language than Hapgood's. The students are bewildered that they will be on *the* stage of the theatre for their first test. Kostya calls it an artistic sacrilege in Benedetti (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 5). Kostya even reports shame during his first test on stage (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 11).

Paul 1: Isn't that just general stress of an audition?

Onur: Could well be. Matthews relates the audition processes and their stress inducing nature to Stanislavski but does not extrapolate to capital, he does focus on the *particularly theatrical* (italics original) dimensions and the social dynamics (Matthews, 2017).

Paul 2: Do you mean Kostya's stress and worry are signs of his sense of insecurity, possibly due to low embodied cultural capital?

Onur: Perhaps. Especially in Benedetti where he calls going on the stage as sacrilege. At least to begin with. A few moments later Kostya and the students find the prospect of appearing on the stage attractive, useful and vital (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 6) Somehow, they immediately understand the value of the exercise.

Kostya prepares for his first test for a week or so. After having considered lighter speeches, he decides to do Othello. He owns a copy of it which I argue is evidence of **cultural capital in objectified state**. And clearly, he has **enough embodied cultural and educational** capital to make sense of it and does not hesitate to prepare on his own. He doesn't ask for help from anyone.

Paul 2: This of course is not limited to admissions, is it? After all, AAP is about the first year in training. This would be same for preparing a speech or a scene for class or for a production in training.

Onur: True. Kostya's living conditions point to a comfortable lifestyle too, which I'll also relate to demands from students in training. Kostya has no other duties. He doesn't cook, clean, wash the dishes or look after anyone and has the energy and time to rehearse for five hours on his own without being disturbed or disturbing anyone. I mean imagine the same scenario for a single mother in Liverpool with two kids. Would she be able to prepare for a drama school audition or a rehearsal/class at drama school in the same manner?

Paul 2: How old is Kostya?

Onur: The book doesn't specify but the students in the book are often referred to as young yet somehow have knowledge of great playwrights of their time and Shakespeare at their age which looks like competence but is actually hidden cultural capital just like Bourdieu suggests (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 63, 245). Kostya has five hours to spend working on Othello and doesn't realise how time passes which he attributes to genuine inspiration (Stanislavski, 2016, pp. 5-6).

Paul 2: And students during their training would be in the same disadvantage regarding plays or exercises that require that level of competence or embodied capital. (*somewhat to himself)* I think I'm beginning to understand this. Actor training is one big, three-year long audition!

Onur: Exactly!

Paul 1: What else is there?

Onur: Kostya in Benedetti mentions living in an apartment and waiting for other people to fall asleep so he shares his living space with others but there is no further context. Hapgood translation doesn't mention this. Instead, it states Kostya has an adjacent room, a comfy sofa and a fuzzy bath towel which he uses as headpiece for Othello.

Kostya goes to the theatre on the second day and there is no indication of a job or a need to earn his living. But he oversleeps and is late to the theatre!

Paul 2: Because he has been working for five hours the night before.

Onur: Correct. He is reprimanded by the assistant director Rakhmanov, for being late who then cancels rehearsal because Kostya was late.

Paul 2: Cancels the rehearsal? Because one student was late?

Onur: Yes. I see this as a warning to those reading the book. Rakhmanov claims that Kostya's being late kills the enthusiasm of everyone who is there and says he himself does not want to work anymore so he abandons all the students. He says that they will start the first rehearsal the day after because he wants to establish good feelings for a first rehearsal.

Paul 2: So no impact consideration on students who may be late due to socio-economic circumstances like commuting for example.

Paul 1: What else?

Onur: That evening, Kostya wants to go to bed early so that he doesn't oversleep the next day, but his eyes are set on a chocolate cake in Hapgood

translation and a bar of chocolate in Benedetti which he then mixes with butter to… (*hesitates)*

Paul 1: …to what?

Onur: Smear his face with it.

Paul 2: Smear his face?

Onur: To become Othello.

(*Awkward silence)*

Paul 1: Surely, lecturers would address that and make their students understand the contextual nature of his action.

Onur: Of course. What's more interesting is the fact that Kostya has chocolate at home. You see "during the period of rapid and intense embourgeoisement that occurred between 1875 and 1894 chocolate consumption skyrocketed in Russia: from 6,000 to 180,000 pounds per year (a 3000% increase). From a Marxist-Leninist perspective, the steep rise in chocolate consumption in late nineteenth-century Russia could be said to serve as a measure of the growing size and ascendance of the country's bourgeois class (LeBlanc, 2018).

Paul 2: But Stanislavski's book was not published until 1936?

Onur: Yes, but he started to make notes in 1907-1914 (Hobgood, 1991).

Paul 1: Weren't luxury items like chocolate condemned as bourgeois decadence during the Stalin era?

Onur: They were but by mid 1930s it is argued that along with champagne, ice cream, and other luxury food items […] chocolate became a symbol of a newly achieved material well-being and economic prosperity in Stalinist Russia (Hobgood, 1991). So, before the revolution chocolate was bourgeois. After the revolution, it became a sign of prosperity. Either way, Kostya can afford it not only to eat, but to smear it on his face. In Bourdieu a higher proportion of senior executives consume chocolate. (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 383)

Paul 1: *(Opens his mouth)*

Onur: I know that it doesn't translate to twenty first century UK but what's undeniable is that food and choices of food is an indicator of social class. Savage does not refer to chocolate specifically but emphasises that food but more importantly attitudes towards food can be indicative of social class. It is about having the option in what to consume and how, as well

as being distant from necessity (Savage, 2015). As a tangent, Robertson details how chocolate consumption and advertising was social class related in the early twentieth century in the UK (Robertson, 2017).

Paul 1: That's all very well, but the chocolate incident says more about Stanislavski than a student. I mean it's just a character he wrote in a book and surely, lecturers of today do not take it literally. (*Condescending)* You don't actually think that drama school candidates who have access to chocolate would perform better at auditions or that they would be favoured by drama schools?

Onur: Of course not. And you are right that it says more about Stanislavski than it says about the student. But it also shows that the entire book is shaped on Stanislavski and his habitus and his own capital. Kostya uses chocolate and not a bit of dirt or coal to smear on his face. And my argument is that we, lecturers, reproduce this by continuing to reproduce his demands of capital on students. Because it is embedded in the curricular habitus.

Paul 2: But other practitioners are taught at drama school.

Onur: Yes, FDS schools mention other names and books in their first-year training and these are mostly the American evolutionaries of Stanislavski. Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner were teaching their versions of Stanislavski in the US (Hornby, 2010). Uta Hagen "prized and privileged the Stanislavskian aesthetic aim of achieving truth on the stage" (Malague, 2012, p. 154). And Declan Donnellan in the UK has written the introduction to An Actor's Work (Stanislavski, 2016) but he also claims that he is not sure about Stanislavski and that Stanislavski was, is, misunderstood both by the Russians and the Americans (Coveney, 2006).

I argue that acting candidates and students face a barrier in the shape of the disposition, habitus of "good acting" and its curriculum. And this barrier is inescapable because in the UK all techniques taught and valued by drama schools are based on Stanislavski in some respect. Drama schools' academic requirements are somewhat optional so perhaps they are not academically successful at school as long as they have talent or potential. Though how they demonstrate that is not clear. They are asked to present speeches, songs, movement pieces now mostly as a recording for the first round and they are assessed on…

(pause)

...*who* they are as a person.

Paul 1: By whom?

Onur: By the panel who are often lecturers or sometimes industry professionals who, I argue, reproduce the image of a good actor based on Stanislavski. And that image excludes some people.

Even at entry level, even with now some drama schools dropping their audition fees to be more inclusive (Coelho & Savage, 2018) the assessment of those who apply for drama schools' acting programmes remain largely opaque and vague. This opaqueness then feeds into the fact that those candidates who are in the know, or who have a good amount of social and embodied capital (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984)) about acting and about being an actor are at an advantage. I posit that there is a theme here from the point of access to actor training in drama-schools, the training and then the professional life and that theme is one of being assessed on who you are...

Paul 1: ...your habitus?

Onur: Yes. And also, your social and embodied capital.

At entry level those who may be technically good but not bold for example are at a disadvantage. The criteria are in some cases non-existent, and schools do not readily give feedback to those who fail their audition especially in the first round. So, unless an applicant has access to the ephemeral, evasive know how of oozing confidence and boldness and an interesting self, then they are at a disadvantage, even if they don't know what they're doing at the audition!

Paul 2: That fits with the 21st century aspect, where "those with cultural capital who had confidence in the legitimacy of their judgements." (Savage, 2015, p. 262)

Onur: These drama school auditions are there to select the kind of student who looks, sounds, feels like an actor as opposed to the student who offers technical ability or potential. I mean the schools should be teaching technical ability anyway so why would they look for it in the audition, right? And I'm not alone in thinking this:

"in the selection of actors for Australian acting schools gestures, vocal tones, appearance and demeanour are used to select a narrow cultural class, rather than being used to explore 'emotional connectedness or imagination'." (Leahy in (Hayes, n.d.)).

Paul 2: Like Shrek.

Paul 1: Excuse me?

Paul 2: That scene I was watching. Shrek's table manners at his in-laws is an indicator for where he comes from. He and Fiona are searching for acceptance by Fiona's family (Movieclips, 2019). Fiona's parents of course have some criteria for what kind of a future they wanted for their daughter but all of it is implicit. And the criteria are revealed bit by bit in the scene. Shrek had no way of knowing what those criteria were before sitting down at that table.

(*We hear a clock chime somewhere. It's sunset. The room gets a little darker with each passing moment. Paul 1 stands up and turns some lights on.)*

Paul 1: (*impatient)* Onur you'll have to come back tomorrow on this. Or maybe next wee…

Onur: (*pressing)* Acting school students are asked to have a high cultural and educational capital from admissions and to graduation. In the absence of criteria, the judgement of "good" acting is made by looking for ease, confidence and the student's self – her habitus. This is the same for assessments and professional auditions where the fundamental criterion is "good acting".

If there are any explicit criteria at all they are vague and sparse and are based on Stanislavskian concepts (e.g. truthfulness, believability, objectives, character choices)

These then allow the panels to judge, evaluate, assess the actors/students based on ease and confidence, which serves a way to assess whether the panel and the actor are in the same position in Bourdieu's chart. As long as good acting remains vague, its criteria and meritocratic assessment of it (in higher education and professionally) can be replaced by a process of 'elective affinity' (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 238). If we see actor training as one, big, three-year audition or assessment, then this notion becomes highly significant.

For the students there is an expectation that they should have total commitment to making art no matter what their circumstances are: a fundamental pillar of the curriculum offered in Stanislavski's books.

Widening participation approaches are not effective because those who take part will eventually be evaluated by the gaze of the elite and are unlikely to acquire capital in a short period of time. Therefore, it is a

problem of the mechanism and not objective value of the artistic or aesthetic judgements which continue to remain in the hands of elite; their gaze decides what is good and what isn't.

Remember you asked how a candidate's "Interest in, commitment to and motivation for studying the subject, Ability to work imaginatively and creatively individually and in groups" (University of the Arts London, n.d.) could be assessed in an audition? By elective affinity! And this continues all through the BA training.

And just before I go, let me tell you the biggest barrier in acting is...

Paul 1: It is getting late and I think—

Onur: (*playful)* Art, da'hlings!

Paul 1: I beg your pardon.

Onur: Stanislavski wants to make art. And he could because when he started the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897, he had 300,000 roubles as capital, though he claims it's all tied up in business. And he claims that he is "not that rich". (Benedetti, 1995, p. 7). 300,000 roubles was worth roughly 150,000 USD in 1895. (Egorova & Zubacheva, 2020). He then clearly states "never again will [he] take on a theatrical enterprise at [his] personal risk." (Benedetti, 1995, p. 7).

Paul 2: (*Dismissive)* A hundred and fifty thousand US dollars. And how much is that in today's money?

Onur: Just around five and a half million dollars as spent on a purchase.

And just under fifty-three million USD as relative wealth held.

Paul 2: (*Almost screaming)* HOW MUCH?

Onur: Relative Wealth shows the economic status or relative "prestige value" of the owners of this wealth because of their rank in the wealth distribution, which uses GDP per capita. For example, in 1863, a three-story house in Brooklyn with marble mantels and gas fixtures was for sale at $3,500. The relative value is $1.1 million. (Measuring Worth Foundation, 2023). So, Stanislavski could have bought fifty of those houses at that time.

Paul 1: (*done for the day, puts his glasses in their case. Haphazardly collects Onur's stuff and shoves it in to Onur's arms, tries to usher him towards the door, almost pushing.)*

So what? He was rich.

Onur: (*unmoving)* This is the same man who, after the first test, turns to one of the candidates, Sonya, a tall, ample, beautiful blonde (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 6) and asks:

> "*You must make up your mind, once and for all, did you come here to serve art, and to make sacrifices for its sake, or to exploit your own personal ends? (italics original)"* (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 32)

(Silence. There is tension. Suddenly, there is a bright flash followed by deafening thunder. The room plunges into complete darkness, a storm sets in. Lightning, a massive bang and the door swings open throwing all of them back. In the doorway appears a tall, slim, shadowy figure. In between flashes of lightning and thunder the figure walks forward. And as suddenly it began, the chaos ends. In the middle of the room stands none other than Stanislavski.

Stanislavski: Gentlemen!

(*Blackout)*

Act II Scene II “Stan the Man”

(Stanislavski is standing in the middle of the room. No one is moving a muscle.)

Stanislavski: Nice furniture.

Paul 1: (*whispering to Paul 2) So this* is why he was writing in play form. To simulate interviewing Stanislavski (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 147)!

(*beat)*

Stanislavski: Begin! (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 8)

I don’t have a lot of time. I am only allowed one trip per year to the real world, and I can only stay for a few hours.

Onur: (*barely audible)* Well, I was writing about… your system… Bourdieu and how acting, fundamentally… disposition…. habitus…capital…

Stanislavski: (*thunderous)* Another one who needs me to understand the ways in which his feelings find expression (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 14). Well, intuition only gets you so far.

“[…] without me you could not have understood the ways in which your feelings found expression.” (p. 14) And constant monitoring is required from your tutors for the growth of the feeling of truth in the right way. (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 254) (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 194).

Paul 1: Sorry. Where are our manners. Do please sit down. Paul, why don’t you fetch Mr. Stanislavski a little something to drink?

Stanislavski: (*pointing at Onur)* So this…Turk… talks behind my back.

Paul 1: Well, not exactly. He has been researching higher education in the UK, and the curricular habitus of your method…

Stanislavski: System!

Paul 1: … system in drama schools.

Stanislavski: (*looks at Onur, but decidedly speaks about him in third person)* And what is he saying?

Paul 2: That you demand a lot from your actors.

Stanislavski: And that is bad?

Onur: It’s not bad. It’s just that I… I…

Stanislavski: Yes? Go on!

Onur: (*sweating profusely)* I think…

Paul 1: (*to the rescue*) He is trying to better understand the socio-cultural dynamics at play within the field of acting …

Paul 2: (*jumps in*) …and work towards fostering a more equitable and inclusive theatrical community specifically in higher education in the UK with transparent definitions and criteria to challenge the class inequality in acting.

Paul 1: Specifically, in FDS Schools.

Onur: (*finally*) Therefore I think the *curriculum of acting fundamentals* needs to be challenged.

Paul 1: Examined.

Paul 2: Analysed.

Onur: And adapted.

Stanislavski: Well, I have had a long-lived commitment to experimentation (Carnicke, 2019). I can tolerate that.

Onur: Today, long gone are the days an old actress can afford to be retired and act all sorts of scenes to herself, alone at home, because she had to satisfy the power of a creative mood and give an outlet to her creative impulses. (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 291) or an actress who can give up the stage for years to learn your system (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 297) without worrying about income.

Stanislavski: She had learnt it badly! In fact, I corrected her technique over a few days.

Onur: But her sufferings and doubts were over a period of years (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 298).

Paul 1: Your definition of good acting requires a lot of an actor's self or habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 86). Would it be fair to say that you expect that an actor must fit his own human qualities to the life of a character (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 15)?

Stanislavski: Ah! So you know about Torstov! (*laughs thunderously)*

Paul 1: We do now.

Stanislavski: That would be fair. In fact, only art that is soaked in the living experiences of human beings can reproduce the nuances of life on stage (p17).

Paul 1: You see, considering habitus, that really is a big ask considering that FDS Schools have you as fundamental in their curriculum.

Stanislavski: Aren't there others they teach about?

Onur: There are but your system established the foundations upon which those people elaborated new variants. Your influence in Britain has been immense (Gordon, 2006, p. 87).

Paul 2: If an actor is pouring his own soul into a character, that character can only be portrayed adequately if the actor has enough capital to fill that character. And if the actor doesn't have enough in him, then it is not possible for that actor to reach to *your* kind of art.

Stanislavski: But an actor can learn. In fact, he has to learn. Like an infant. Must learn everything from the beginning, to look, to walk, to talk and so on. (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 110)Besides, there is no escape from completely transforming ourselves if we are to be adapted to the demands of our art (p. 117).

Paul 2: All of that in just three years?

Stanislavski: My book *is* in three years! Year One: Experiencing, Year Two: Embodiment. And that third book, which never gets a mention. Creating a Role.

Onur: But you also call becoming an actor "a major Task, one that will last us a lifetime!" (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 143).

Stanislavski: Just like other artists. "We need this prosaic daily grind as singers need to place the voice and the breath, as musicians need to develop their hands and fingers" (Stanislavski, 2016, p. xxvi). Pianists play scales, every single day. "[...] And a day missed is a day lost, a step backwards artistically." (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 567)

Onur: See that comparison is something Uta Hagen uses too. (Hagen, 1973, pp. 4, 18-19). But neither of you acknowledge that "Differences linked to social origin are no doubt most marked in [...] the playing of a musical instrument" an aptitude which in acquisition and in performance, "presuppose not only dispositions associated with long establishment in the world of art and culture but also economic means (especially in the case of piano-playing) and spare time." (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 68).

Paul 2: Not only that it is an elite disposition to be willing and able to turn down work for leisure time, (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 293) which we saw in Onur's open day hinders those higher education students who have to work for money.

Then, in your curriculum students can exchange their social capital and for educational capital.

Stanislavski: How?

Onur: Kostya gets invited to his classmate Paul's (Pasha) famous actor uncle's for dinner.

Stanislavski: Shustov? (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 121) Yes, so what?

Onur: Remember how Shustov and his children are familiar with Kostya and Paul's technical expressions of theatre.

After that dinner not only Paul but Kostya too arrives at your class with knowledge of concepts that was discussed over dinner at Shustov's. (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 125). This is a prime example of how conversations around a dinner table can be transported into the more formal setting thus turning into educational capital and those who are around that table get ahead in the classroom.

Stanislavski: Is it wrong that Paul had a famous actor for an uncle and that he introduced him to Kostya?

Onur: Of course not. But habitus refers to the ingrained dispositions and practices that individuals acquire through their socialization within cultural milieus (Bourdieu, 1977). So not only Kostya acquires knowledge, educational capital, he also gains embodied cultural capital by observing famous actors. He visits Shustov again towards the end of BAC this time there is another famous actor and observes his demeanour as well as his skill even though this was in a social context. (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 354).

Paul 1: It is then through elective affinity they can get through auditions in training and in the profession. So, it does make sense that Paul was in an acting school even though in your books he is not always the most talented.

Stanislavski: How exactly would he get ahead?

Onur: Not only through their educational capital but also with invisible signs they display like "having the right tone" naturally speaking the language of their audience without making a deliberate effort. (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 238), with ease.

Stanislavski: Couldn't you argue that I created the system so that a student could feel at ease the moment they are "convinced of the truth of [my] physical actions"? (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 147) I actually try to bring that ease to those students.

Onur: Or we could say that your system gives those who are already at ease an advantage. The ways you show to help with ease would take years, decades to learn but, I'll come to that.

By being able to go to drama school Kostya had a chance to *acquire* social capital (Savage, 2015, p. 122) too. "Your social background shapes whom you socialize with, and whom you socialize with in turn shapes your opportunities to maintain or improve your social position." (Savage, 2015, p. 126).

Stanislavski: Nonsense. Any parent or any family member in any discipline would help a university student with their studies if they could!

Onur: Ok. Maybe. But that would only confirm that those families would need to have that cultural knowledge to be able to. You refer to the story of two girls who can only play a tragedy with vicious and trivial cliches as Hapgood translates (p29) or vulgar as Benedetti does(p32). You claim that those girls had never seen a theatre or a performance!

Stanislavski: Or even a rehearsal…

Onur: Or even a rehearsal. I mean theatre and performance maybe but who in general public would be able to see a rehearsal? In what context? Why would anyone see a rehearsal? Especially children?

Stanislavski: I did!

Onur: We don't all have the opportunity to appear on stage at the age of three or four playing winter in 'The Four Seasons' tableaux at our estate in Liubimovka (Stanislavski, 2008, p. 35) the ultimate exurbian bridge between the cultural and the commercial elite (Lovell, 2002) not to mention that having a second home is the sign of the urban elite of today (Savage, 2015, p. 232). Some acting students in the UK do not even own a first home let alone a second country house (Coel, 2018) but what's worse they are asked, in exercises in drama school, whether their parents own a house or not.

Stanislavski: Well, I certainly did not create that exercise. And 'I don't actually have a lot of money coming in, but then I know how to manage, you know. I always say I can live on a shoestring.' (Savage, 2015, p. 51)

Onur: Your present economic position only makes sense with the context of your previous experiences. (Savage, 2015, p. 52) Hence your system, therefore our curriculum, does not really take into consideration those who have "no safety net at all, having to climb ladders with no stable

ground beneath [them]" (Coel, 2018). (*Reaches out his hand to Stanislavski).*

Take a look.

(A rehearsal room in a drama school. It is the first day of first year acting students. The head of department (HoD) is addressing the students, trying to look cool. He sounds very posh with a clear sense of dramatic, flamboyant air about him)

HoD: "…yes hygiene is important as you will be working in close proximity to your fellow actors. You need to make sure that you have enough clean clothes and that means washing them, not spritzing them with Febreze (*The students giggle*). And when drying them don't be stingy: turn the heating on in your flat. The clothes need to dry completely so they don't have that musky smell"

(*More giggles. Back at Paul and Paul's office. It is late into the night. Outside it is dark. The room is well lit. They all have coffees. They look at Onur with wide eyes).*

Paul 2: He didn't say that!

Onur: He sure did. And at the time it didn't bother me as much but as time went on and as I came across more and more literature around social injustice and higher education (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009; Rowan, 2019), I realised what a big ask for some of our students that would have been. Not least because I had to live frugally when I was a student, even when I was working full time. I mean I could afford to wash my clothes but not always had the opportunity to heat the flat and sometimes my clothes took ages to dry. So, whenever I made any demands of my students, I remained as inclusive as I possibly could. Something so simple like having to have clean clothes everyday can be difficult to attain for some students!

Stanislavski: "I think that even if you' re not rich, at least you can be poor and clean. I see patients coming in with dirty feet, it' s disgusting. Why don' t they go to the public baths?'" (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 325).

Paul 1: Sorry, why is this significant?

Onur: This, I believe, is an example of reproduction of Stanislavski's demands in capital of a student who wishes to be an actor. There are so many demands not only in his own books like Kostya leaving his job in an instant, having hours, even days to spare to practice and think about acting but in books of other practitioners that came after him.

If conservatoires demand daily clean clothes from their students, maybe they should provide a laundry room.

And the demands relating to the economic capital are easier to identify but there are demands or expectations relating to other forms of capital too as I've already demonstrated. Students' present economic, cultural and even symbolic capital status goes hand in hand with inherited capitals both in terms of what they own materialistically and in taste. But there's more.

Paul 2: Like what?

Onur Firstly there is a need for a tutor in rehearsal. This is not uncommon (Hagen, 1973) as the tutor decides what is good acting or not. So, access to institutionalised knowledge is a requirement to practice good acting. A knowing outside eye to work with a student is key.

Paul 1: Not dissimilar to a director, I guess.

Stanislavski: Somebody has to make decisions.

Onur: The understanding of the conscious and the subconscious which demands "long, complex creative work, which only proceeds partially under the direct guidance and influence of the conscious mind" (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 17). A requirement for "experiencing" the role and endowing the character with all the features of our own personality at every moment of your creative life (ibid., p19) all the while communicating it outwardly in an artistic form. (ibid., P20) Knowing an actor's cliches (ibid., p28) and avoiding "primitive, formal, outward portrayal of feelings, which the actor has never known or experienced" (ibid., p28) which, of course, you don't consider as art. Young schoolgirls -why is it always girls that you give bad examples about anyway- who haven't been to a theatre can only perform tragedies with vulgar cliches or ham-acting. (ibid., P32). So, to become a good actor you must go to the theatre. But more importantly know where the art ends (ibid., p35.).

Stanislavski: Well, yes!

Onur: I mean I could go on but at the end of the first book you liken the creation of a character to that of "the birth of a human being" (ibid, p336.)

Paul 1: Thus, with a habitus of its own.

Stanislavski: Well, isn't it?

Onur: It is but that human being is not created by the actor.

Stanislavski: And by whom, may I ask, do you think it is created?

Onur: By the spectator. Your model "fails to take account of the complex process of reflection on the words and actions of the various characters through which a spectator exercises judgment in comparing the behavior of one individual with another in the situations given by the playwright, and with other possibilities of human action under equivalent circumstances. In addition, the model apparently ignores the other typical ways in which dramatists have traditionally sought to determine and manipulate the spectator's point of view on the action of the play— rhetorical speech and argument, verbal, visual, and aural imagery, atmospheric and other devices— (Gordon, 2006, p. 57). Which renders the notions that you present as good acting as unassessable.

Paul 1: How is that not assessable?

Onur: How am I supposed to assess that "so much of [an actor's] role has already become mixed into [their] own self that [they] cannot possibly tell where to draw the line between you and your part." (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 329) from the outside? And how does this reality become so close for students that come from lower socio-economic positions playing kings and executives? And if it can, how do they recognise it? By means of recognising that they cannot internalise it? I mean… HOW?

Paul 1: Aren't you pitting the "pedant" against the "mondain" when you try to simplify acting with "criteria"? Won't the lower classes have to assert the value of their acquirements against the ideology of the innate tastes?

Onur: That's why I am arguing that acting is not art! Acting is a set of skills. They can be employed in a variety of contexts. And it is only these skills that can be taught and they are not degree level. A massage therapy course can provide its participants with a qualification to work within weeks, so why does an actor have to study for three years and still be out of work? Drama schools are doing exactly what Bourdieu states. They are trying to assert the value of their students' acquirements of taste against a world of theatrical elite, which we know is a vicious cycle because those innate tastes are the guarantee that they will be elected (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 67).

Acting is not created by the actor. It is created by the director, the playwright, designers, composers, lighting designers etcetera but most of all the audience. Acting is a result of all those people's labour. An actor is employing her skills in the creation of theatre like small cog…

Stanislavski: …"small cogs in a complex machine, the theatre". Stagehands, props men, lighting, painters, sculptors, carpenters… *I* say all of that! (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 553).

Onur: So, you must admit that it's never the actor alone that creates good acting, and it is impossible to evaluate it as something that an actor does. Like what Warner Brothers admitted during Amber Heard - Johnny Depp trial.

Stanislavski: Who?

Paul 2: What?

Paul 1: Who?

Onur: (Realising what he's done) Oh dear. (to Stanislavski) Famous American actors.

Stanislavski: "I have seen many famous technical actors of many schools and many lands [..].and none of them could reach the height to which artistic intuition [...] is capable of ascending." (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 184)

Onur: (*brave)* Nonsense! I side with Diderot: "great acting [is] produced by the exercise of technique alone: "extreme sensibility makes middling actors. . . . in complete absence of sensibility is the possibility of a sublime actor." The spectator should be moved by the acting not the actor. (Gordon, 2006, p. 13)

Stanislavski: So, you want to go regress acting to 18th Century? I was talking about emotional memory there and even I have moved on from that later on.

I didn't get a chance to publish much of my developments after the 1930s as I was being heavily censored by the Stalin regime. I was only allowed to promote my ideas in a sanitized way in compliance with Socialist Realism and Marxist materialism (Carnicke, 2019).

Paul 1: So maybe it doesn't really make sense that you are critiquing Mr. Stanislavski from a modern-day capitalistic framework Onur.

Onur: I argue that his extreme reliance on the "self" of the actor is essentially problematic for defining acting and good acting and that self is still undeniably important in 21st century discussions of class.

Stanislavski: But author is important. "To grasp the spiritual delicacy of a complex soul [...] requires an artist's whole power and talent, as well as the harmonious co-operation of his inner forces, with those of the author" (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 289).

Onur: But you also say “A struggle like this goes on for years when an actor is working on Hamlet [...]. He must dig deep to find the motive forces of that most subtle of human souls. A great work of literature by and about a genius calls for infinitely detailed and intricate research.” (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 289).

Stanislavski: So, he must train! Learn!

Paul 1: And they do but still, “[...] at equivalent levels of educational capital, differences in social origin, when one appeals less to a strict, and strictly assessable, competence and more to a sort of familiarity with culture; [...] can often yield high symbolic profit. (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 56)”

Onur: And that’s why there are no audition criteria, or criteria for good acting are so vague. Definition of good acting is so vague apart from it needs to be truthful (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), pp. 16, 42, 113, 129, 139, 140, 142, 146, 247, 281, 282, 286, 325, 327).

Stanislavski: Truth needs to be a scenic type; equally truthful but originating on the plane of imaginative and artistic fiction. Not “the actual naturalistic existence of what surrounds us on the stage, the reality of the material world!”. And “Everything that happens on the stage must be convincing to the actor himself, to his associates and to the spectators.” (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), pp. 140-142).

Onur: Well, not if you’re Amber Heard!

Stanislavski: Who is this Amber? Are they as famous as Coquelin the elder (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 23), or Shustov (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 121) or (*with sarcasm)* that foreign tragic actor who came to one of my sessions (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 61) ?

Onur: (*mischievous but genuine)* Almost! Though I can’t name drop like you do in your books as I’ve never met her.

Stanislavski: “Unfortunately our art is frequently exploited for personal ends. [..] Others do it to gain popularity or external success to make a career. In our profession these are common phenomena and I hasten to restrain you from them.” (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 32). Is she an artist? A true artist?

Paul 1: (*Joining him)* Debatable.

Stanislavski: And what have they got to do with me?

Onur: Warner Brothers (WB), the producing company of a film she was in, in court, testified that the chemistry between Amber Heard and her co-star was fabricated.

WB admits that "[...] they didn't really have a lot of chemistry together. [...] I think if you watch the movie, they look like they had great chemistry. But I just know that, through the course of the postproduction, that it took a lot of effort to get there. [...]

. A good editor and a good filmmaker can pick the right takes, can pick the right moments, and put scenes together. [...] the music in a scene makes a big difference. You can make a happy scene feel sadder or a sad scene feel happier. And so, it was sort of the...it's just the magic of post-production, editing, sound, sound design, music, etc. (LiveNOW from FOX, 2022).

Stanislavski, Paul 1 and Paul 2: AND?

Onur: (*excited)* WB admit that they can, through elements of film making, fabricate chemistry between actors when there is none real life. I posit that this is the same for all sorts of acting processes including theatre.

In fact, your fellow Soviet Eisenstein is the father of the montage and there is the theory of the Soviet Montage. (Mirrer, 2012) (Gaudreault, 1987).

Stanislavski: But montage is for film and NOT for theatre!!!

Onur: Eisenstein proposes that montage can be used in all art; even in architecture. We could say that theatre is montaged, edited partly prior to staging by the playwright. If the writing is good, half of the job is done. And then there is the idea of montage when rehearsing and then staging the play with design elements, costume, scenery, lights, music on stage just like a film. All of those elements are not dissimilar to what Warner Brothers was describing to create chemistry between two actors. Much like Diderot's example Moliere's double scene in Le Depit Amoureux. (Diderot, 1883, pp. 32-36). Then of course there are other schools of thought in theatre: Meyerhold and Biomechanics, Craig and the Uber Marionette (Gordon, 2006).

Stanislavski: You cannot possibly be suggesting all these regressions. And what if there are no effects or tricks on the stage? What if it is just the actor and the space?

Onur: So, you want to go all Peter Brook here and consider an "Empty Space" (Brook, 1968) for acting. That space is edited or montaged if you like, such as a film is edited by actors changing pace, changing action, breath, sound, cadence of speech and so on; all observable skills and to an extent measurable,

Paul 2: - Or assessable

Onur: -Or at least less susceptible to vagueness which I have argued helps the violent reproduction of taste. So, there is no point in trying to evaluate good acting because the decisions made on the pace, geometry, physicality and vocality even in an empty space will be good or not good according to the gaze of the spectator.

Stanislavski: And how do these actors come up with all these decisions? I'll tell you how! They interpret the play and pour their selves and souls into the characters, understand them and then use what they are experiencing to come up with all those things you talk about!

Onur: I disagree. (*Stanislavski is stunned*).

Stanislavski: (*Through his teeth, outraged*) DISSSAGGGREEEEE?!

Paul 1: (*Stepping In)* If I may, firstly, Onur argued that what you are requiring of the actors demands a large amount of capital, both prior to and during actor training. Secondly, the violent reproduction of taste and lack of criteria and definition of good acting renders the audition process favourable to elective affinity, where panels are disguising their search for "people that go together" instead of the most skilled actor, in and out of training. In training, they reward the students who already exhibit characteristics of the upper-middle classes such as: an ease of execution in performance even without knowledge; the tastes and cultural notions they acquired from their family or background as talent: knowing the social codes of the acting field so they are easy to imagine within that field. And Savage brings this to today with the idea of constellations where "cultural motifs vary and it does not conform to a simple highbrow norm. [...] Members of today's elite class are also in tune with contemporary and popular culture" (Savage, 2015, p. 246).

Onur: (*amazed)* Did....I.....argue.....all.....of.....that?

Paul 1: (*to Onur)* You did. *(to Stanislavski)* Further, the more modern iterations of your system, even with the selective interpretation of mirror neurons are

trying to justify the origins of your system glorifying mimesis, albeit through an artistic truth, and relying strongly on the actor to have a living experience analogous to that of the character.

Stanislavski: Mirror what?

Paul 1: Contemporary (*makes air commas gesture)* "research" in acting selectively and I believe incorrectly interprets findings in neuroscience and empathy in such a way that they, perhaps by confirmation bias, makes it seem the contemporary findings indicate your system was right all along. For example, Evangelatou (Evangelatou, 2020)suggests "As Stanislavski explains, student-actors must [...] must identify what allows emotion to grow and try to recreate similar conditions in the hope that it will re appear" based on the research on mirror neurons and empathy. But they refuse to include findings such as "Gestures having emotional meaning were [...] ineffective." in firing mirror neurons, (Gallese, et al., 1996). They also miss the nuance in definitions such as mimicry, emotional contagion, sympathy and empathic concern which have very strict connotations in neurological discourse as well as not considering the implications of the contextual appraising and the bases of representations of emotional states, (Bernhardt & Singer, 2012) especially if we consider that representations of emotional states in theatre are temporal, sequential and strictly contextual. Some extreme states (violence for example) in theatre *have to be* simulated too therefore cannot be shared as experiences. Which, I believe will nicely tie into extreme formulation of your system already being criticised as infidelity to the playwright (Gordon, 2006, p. 78) (*gestures Onur to continue)*.

Onur: (*stunned, beat)* Yes. Yes. The actors have a limited idea of what the temporal and spatial qualities of a scene are. So, your system is also an infidelity to the director, the designer, the scenographer and even the costume designer.

Stanislavski: Nonsense! Actors experience the scene just like everyone else.

Onur: But not as spectators do. If that was the case there would be no need for a director, or the director's feedback to learn acting. In your books Torstov gives very detailed feedback after every performance or exercise. And the feedback often contradicts what the actors are experiencing. The actors can experience the scene but not as the audiences do. They can't see or experience the three-dimensional staging in chronological order; unlike a painter who, as she creates a painting, can step away from it every now

and again and can view it and its development. Or unlike a composer or a pianist who can hear and analyse their creations as they are creating them. Or a writer, who can read her writings as she is writing them and edit them.

Paul 2: And assess them.

Onur: Actors can't see or experience the play as a chronological happening, a temporal spatial object, the way the audience does. Actors are in and out of the action. Sometimes they come on stage in act one and then disappear for ages and then come in a scene right towards the end, sometimes for comedic effect for the audience not having experienced the rest of the play because they were off stage.

(There is a knock on the door. Paul 1 opens it. It's the student from Act I. Paul doesn't say anything and before the student can speak, he slams the door.)

Stanislavski: So what?

Onur: Let me give you an example from your book! Please…

(Hands him his An Actor Prepares)

Stanislavski: (Reads) "Let me tell you about an old woman I once saw trundling a baby carriage along a boulevard. In it was a cage with a canary. Probably the woman had placed all her bundles in the carriage to get them home more easily. But I wanted to see things in a different light, so I decided that the poor old woman had lost all of her children and grand-children and the only living creature left in her life was—this canary. So, she was taking him out for a ride on the boulevard, just as she had done, not long before, her grandson, now lost. All this is more interesting and suited to the theatre than the actual truth. Why should I not tuck that impression into the store house of my memory? I am not a census taker, who is responsible for collecting exact facts. I am an artist who must have material that will stir my emotion". (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 101) So what? I am encouraging the actors to look at the life creatively.

Onur: And to stir their emotions.

Stanislavski: Yes.

Onur: As in, they need to stir the emotions of the audience.

Stanislavski: Yes.

Onur: And in your story, who is the actor?

Stanislavski: I am.

Onur: No. You're not.

Stanislavski: Then who?

Onur: The woman is the actor, and you are the audience. Because you are watching her and *your* emotions are stirred.

Stanislavski: Well, yes.

Onur: And what do you say the most probable reason is for the woman to put all her stuff in the pram?

Stanislavski: To get them home more easily.

Onur: So not *her intentions*, but the image of her, the story that you told yourself about her and the intentions you attributed to her actions stirred your emotions. The woman on the street did not act. *You* decided to perceive her differently. And I do use the word "decided" because in fact the Benedetti translation uses the phrase "…I decided to take a different view…" (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 117) instead of "…I wanted to see things in a different light." (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 101). And in my play there are no actors but the audience, the reader is probably - I mean hopefully, if I have done my job relatively well- is being affected by what they read we are doing on the page. They are constructing a mental image, a chronological mental image as they are reading. They see things before and after one another and derive context. They can even bridge the gaps in the unbroken line (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), pp. 217-280) between the scenes and acts, or from characters going from one state to the other by imagining the information given by the playwright in the text, or scenic suggestions designed by the stage, lighting and costume designers about what could have happened in that gap which I aim to demonstrate in the closing scene of this play. I replace the scenic elements with the stage directions as this is a play for reading. You attribute the duty of keeping the unbroken line to the actor; I attribute it to the director and the playwright. Like that student who came in a moment ago! The readers of this play might find that funny if they indeed complete the unbroken line

of that character who has been searching for the finance office since Act I and also from a day ago in the timeline of the play!

(*Stanislavski is not convinced)*

Have you seen Up?

Stanislavski: (*looks up)* Where?

Onur: (*to Pauls in desperation, for help)* The Disney-Pixar animation? (Internet Movie Database, n.d.) Do you know the first ten minutes of the film?

Paul 2: Well, yes it shows the backstory of the main character and his wife.

Onur: There are no spoken lines in the opening sequence. It's a montage set to music.

Stanislavski: And?

Onur: Paul, would you vouch that that sequence is indeed a very sad and moving sequence?

Paul 2: (*without hesitation)* I howled like a wolf at the cinema when I saw it.

Onur: So, who are the actors in that sequence?

(*beat, they're all thinking)*.

Paul 2: The characters?

Onur: But they don't exist. It's an animation remember.

Paul 2: The people who voiced them?

Onur: The sequence has no text. It's only images and music.

Paul 2: The animators? And the director?

Onur: To a certain extent yes but they and the screen writer, the editor, the composer of the music, the colour artists etcetera are all a team of people who execute a vision -mostly the director's vision- into reality. They decide what the characters should be doing, wearing, how they should be moving, the perspective from which the audience should see them, what facial expression should they hold and so on and so forth. (*Raises his index finger)* AND there is not a single actor in sight! Yet, the

audience are moved to tears with. And the effects of music, emotion, neuro-science and musical culture (Winner, 2018).

Stanislavski: Fabrication? Nonsense!

Onur: (*looks around, rushes to his bag and finds a crumpled newspaper).* Look at this!

Stanislavski: (*Takes the newspaper. Stares at it).* A picture of a kangaroo?!

Onur: Look at the title.

Stanislavski: The Comedy Wildlife Photography 2023 winner. Air Guitar Roo? What's an air Guitar? (The Comedy Wildlife Photography Awards, 2023)

Onur: This is a photography competition for photographers capturing funny images of animals.

Paul 1: And?

Onur: Do you think the animals are *intending* to be funny or to do the described actions?

Paul 1: No, of course not.

Onur: Yet we, the audience, find these images funny because we contextualize them. The kangaroo is not *really* doing an air Guitar move. Nor is there an otter doing ballet. These are animals caught, I suspect by accident, in awkward angles *after* which the photographers decided to title them and we find them funny because we liken them to human actions or mishaps. The animals are not acting or aiming to be funny. We even attribute human motivation and characteristics to inanimate objects or their motion.

Paul 2: Anthropomorphism!

Paul 1: And animism!

Onur: Both and research shows that when we attribute intentional action to an inanimate object or animal, we also attribute a mental affect to them. (Airenti, 2018).

Stanislavski: (*Shouts*) TRICKS! You are more than anyone are intoxicated by outward, stock-in-trade tricks [...] (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 192) Tricks that mask our

inner emptiness while they emphasize the vacancy of the eyes (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 231)

(*He is turning purple. Pauls offer him assistance, a glass of something and sit him down. Stanislavski tries to loosen his tie and steady his breathing. Onur is smugly enjoying this but is also aware of the tight rope he is walking. There is no turning back now.*)

Onur: (*to Stanislavski)*. "All elements may be taken as of more or less equal importance in establishing a hypothesis of the nature of the on-stage world." (Benett, 2001, p. 229). You, however, over-emphasize the actor, and his actions and at best downplay the importance of the two-dimensional (writing) and three-dimensional and temporal (staging) composition of the play as an object and how it is received by the audience. When teaching acting, this over-emphasis makes everyone think that acting is something that the actor does that can be evaluated without its context.

Paul 1: Do you mean a literary object or a temporal object as performance?

Onur: Both, but specifically the temporal object as performance. Editorial montage, in Eisenstein's terms can easily be applied to theatre. In "To The Actor" (Chekhov, 1991) Chapter 8 is titled "Composition of Performance" and I believe is almost sufficient by itself to learn acting. Yoshi Oida reflects on his experience of watching a Noh play where a male actor was playing an old woman. "In the west, the actor might try to fill himself with feelings of sadness, anger or whatever before stepping onstage. But in the case of this Noh actor, there was no effort to create an interior life; yet somehow the old woman was fully believable)" (Oida & L., 1997, p. 61). There is also Eisenstein's proposition and application of montage in film and other art forms and theoretical research on emotion in the theatre. (Woodruff, 1988) And while I agree that actors must be arriving at actions that *seem* truthful, I don't agree the ways in which they arrive at those actions, which require a lot of social, educational, embodied cultural capital.

Woodruff (1988) differentiates between different types of engagement of audience. He separates emotion from mood and in his view what I'm describing is largely what he calls mood or "tonal sympathy" -and he calls this the most manipulative and I agree, even though I don't like the negative connotations of the word-. Although, I'd argue that the mechanisms for creating emotion and mood are one and the same.

One can consider scenic elements of set, costume, colours, light, sound, material texture will affect the audience. That's why I put some stage directions about these at the beginning of this play, because I believe what the stage will look like will affect how this play will be received. Woodruff alludes to this as well. In the absence of these elements, then actions of the actor will; actions that require skills, yes, but not dedicating a lifetime to art!

Stanislavski: But speech is not an action? What about voice…

Onur: Will Stephen demonstrates perfectly that speech is action. He delivers a speech with no content to evoke a cognitive and emotional response in the audience (Stephen, 2015). I'd recommend watching it as it's very difficult to describe it in writing. An actor can deliver a truthful, believable performance simply by adhering to the mechanical needs of the play - which ultimately are decided by the director. His demonstration is in line with McConahie's summary of findings in music, neuroscience and acting (McConahie, 2008, p. 96).

Stanislavski: But those actions must come from a true place from within the actor.

Onur: I don't think it makes any difference for the spectator. They can only either cognitively or tonally receive (Woodruff, 1988) what the actor is doing and be affected by it. Or they remain decidedly cold (Damasio, 2000, p. 50).

In short, I don't think it is necessary for Nicole Kidman to spend time in an emergency room for her to act.

Paul 2: Which means she is building educational and cultural capital that she doesn't need to act that role.

Onur: And she is promoting it as "good acting" and she and Graham Norton are glorifying, valorising it (Kidman, 2018).

Stanislavski: But then an actor has to learn to perform an action just at the right time for ….(*despising)* manipulation!

Onur: And who decides when the time is right?

Stanislavski: The actor!!

Onur: No, the director. The actor cannot see his action so wouldn't know what effect of his actions would have on the audience unless he imagines himself as viewed by the audience or unless he imagines himself in the audience and another actor is doing the action. Nor can the actor know *when* it is as he doesn't necessarily experience the play from the beginning to the end. So, he might know when the right time is in the *scene*, but he won't know when the right time is *in the entirety of the play*. It is the director that makes the final call because only the director experiences the play from beginning to the end as a temporal object.

Stanislavski: Nonsense. All through my books I encourage the actor to find the character, the moment, the story from within -

Onur: - Then chide them for not getting it right because what they do doesn't *look* right.

Stanislavski: (*hissing, insecure)* HOW DARE YOU (Callow, 2013)!

Onur: Ok let me give you a concrete example from your own book. (*Grabs AAP and with now frustration he's not hiding anymore, he licks his fingers as he turns pages forcefully)*.

There! The money burning exercise.

You, instruct Kostya to play a man whose disabled brother-in-law burns a whole bunch of money. First, Kostya makes some choices playing the scene.

Stanislavski: He makes all the wrong ones!

Onur: Maybe. But who decides they're wrong?

Stanislavski: His peers.

Onur: So those who are watching him.

Stanislavski: And me!

Onur: So, the director/teacher. Then there is the issue of him going to the bathroom.

In the exercise, Kostya's character has a son who is being bathed by his wife as the events are unfolding and Kostya briefly goes out -off stage- to see the baby and then returns on stage.

Stanislavski: Correct.

Onur: How does the audience know that?

Stanislavski: How does the audience know *what*?

Onur: How does the audience know that Kostya's baby is being bathed in the bathroom?

Stanislavski: I tell them!

Onur: So, the audience are *given* that information at some point prior to the scene. If you hadn't told them, there would probably be a scene earlier to show us that his baby is in the bathroom with the wife. Or maybe a line in the play where his wife says "I will now bathe the baby" or something like that. Either way, the audience needs that information to make sense of Kostya's actions, his exit. Otherwise for the audience, Kostya is only leaving the stage, or his room and coming back.

Paul 1: What do you mean?

Onur: His leaving the stage and how he does it can only be right or wrong if the audience knows where he is going and only if the director thinks that his actions are not in line or tune with what's happened before or what's about to happen – say in a later act. And even before the director, it is the playwright who has made that decision and composed the play in a particular way and the actor doesn't need to imagine anything, he just needs to execute the play. "He [..] who leaves least to the imagination of the great actor is the greatest poet" (Diderot, 1883, p. 75)

For the audience the context is important. The character could be going to the kitchen, or he could be going out to open the door to let the dog out. The audience *must know* where he is going to make sense of it or wait until it is revealed at some point either before or after the scene. Only then how he goes out and comes back in can only be right or wrong with respect to that context.

Stanislavski: (*Not convinced but*) Ok. And?

Onur: You mention that when he goes into the bathroom, he should leave his cigarette behind, because…

Stanislavski: "in life would you really go and see a babe-in-arms with a lighted cigarette in your mouth? The poor child would cough because of the smoke. And your wife would hardly allow someone smoking into a room where a newborn baby was being bathed" (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 177)

Onur: And that is your interpretation. As a director I could interpret it another way. I argue, a better way.

Stanislavski: (*incensed)* Better? BETTER THAN ME?

Onur: First, since there is no evidence of another child, this is their first baby. And since Kostya is smoking in his own home, his smoking habit is well established. You refer to the baby as a newborn, so Kostya is not fully accustomed to living with a baby yet. As you say, if this is going to be "as if" in real life, I would argue that Kostya would stand up from his desk with the cigarette in his mouth, then be acutely aware of the cigarette, come back, leave the cigarette, or in fact take a last big puff before leaving it in the ashtray, waft away the smoke and then leave the stage. And those set of actions 'in my opinion' – and that is the operative phrase, would create a more truthful and believable scene.

Stanislavski: Just because those actions on paper are more truthful or believable doesn't mean that they will be received as such by the audience. It all depends on the execution.

Onur: I couldn't agree with you more. And since the director decides what's believable, truthful or good, let the director make the choices and let the actor execute them. The spectators will then put all the information on the stage together and arrive at "good acting".

Paul 1: (*Realising that this has been going on for a while*) That's all very well. I think I understand what you are saying: you argue that the temporal object of theatrical performance does not **solely** rely on the actor and her processes or the outcome of her processes.

Onur: Yes.

Paul 1: You also say that the emotional engagement needs to be that of the audience and not necessarily that of the actor, a la Diderot (Diderot, 1883)

Onur: Yes. “If actors feel, how is it [...] that they can quarrel, or make love on the stage all the while they are conducting some scene of great pith and moment, by which the audience is deeply moved?” (Irving in Diderot, p. xix) “Fill the front of a theatre with tearful creatures, but I will none of them on the boards”. (Diderot, 1883, p. 14).

Paul 1: Ok. I understand these. But what’s that got to do with taste and social class and higher education?

Onur: I think the crux lies in the (educational and professional) assessment of acting and how we define ‘good’ acting and how this definition dictates the curricular habitus. When drama schools are assessing applicants in their audition for the drama school and then giving a mark, a grade as a percentage to a first-year actor in line with higher education practices, we use the implicit definitions and criteria of Stanislavski’s system and other practitioners inspired by it.

We hold and assess those actors by standards that are expressed and implied in Stanislavski’s books: the actors in his book do not work outside of their drama school. Their whole life is acting. They should only make art and not a career out of acting. They must devote their whole life to art and must continually develop themselves in the art. Stanislavski demands a level of self-exploration and self-development that can only be achieved by someone who has no other worry in the world such as looking after kids, paying rent or paying for food.

Kostya, in his hospital bed after cutting his hand practices acting while he is recovering. Because his tutor says he can’t be busy in bed (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), pp. 103-110). I was hospitalised once. I couldn’t walk and I had to be rescued from my flat in an ambulance and the *first* thing that came to my mind was my mortgage! I was terrified of not being able to work and I wasn’t worried about my “art” or how a cat was moving across my hospital bed.

A strong aspect of the curriculum practices is based on attendance at drama schools. Students are expected to stay healthy and not miss any classes or rehearsals: take care of themselves. “Amongst the dominant classes, the purely health-oriented function of the body is combined with

the symbolic and aesthetic gratifications associated with practising in highly distinctive ways." (Williams, 1995). Stanislavski notes that the well-known actor Ernst Possart was dipping a pocket thermometer to his lunch because he wanted to keep a careful watch on the temperature of the things he ate to protect his voice (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 399) and that's the extent of commitment being asked of students in the second book. Think of the amount of capital you need to be constantly testing the temperature of your food. Think not only the physical effort, but the mental and emotional effort to do so! Talk about first world problems!

Yes, and remember that most schools are exclaiming "we want to see you!" "We want to see who you are". So in a way, they are using the somatic norm (Brook, et al., 2020) as a proxy for criteria not only in entry auditions but all throughout the training and even into the profession And that somatic norm is middle class, white and male (*Paul 1 inhales to speak*) though I am not discussing intersectionality. "HE institutions' monopolistic stance at one macro-level [...] may have concrete implications at the micro-level of the individual teacher's decisional power in affecting students' future careers. [...] especially in light of documented bias in casting and the homogeneity of teaching staff identity" (De Bernard, et al., 2023).

Paul 2: In a way, the criteria are being replaced by a norm, by a type of habitus...

Onur: Because we think that only *those kinds of people* can create good acting based on the definitions of acting in your books and your curriculum.

Paul 1: (*finally coming to terms)* Because only *they* have the social, educational and cultural capital to be able to do so.

Stanislavski: Absolutely nonsense! I left my family and my, as you call it, posh existence behind.

Onur: Yes, and that enhances your position as your refusal can only mean that you choose to leave your position as repudiation. "[...] The son of a bourgeois who breaks with his family is favourably regarded, whereas a worker's son who does the same thing is condemned" An intention of aloofness. (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 382)

Paul 2: And the characters are seen by the images of their nature.

Onur: "[...] A doctor's wife will be described as 'made for fine clothes'" (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), p. 382).

(*to Stanislavski*) In your books there is also constant encouragement for a transformation from "sense" to "reflection" a la Kant in Bourdieu. (p492-493). So, in a way, physically sensing what an actor doing is not enough. She has to reflect, ponder, go back, analyse and so on.

Stanislavski: But acting is art!

Onur: (*gradually getting out of control)* Acting is also a job. And while you maintain that actors should be relaxed on stage you mention that bad acting happens when your students are thinking ' "Why did the audience pay good money if I'm not trying to present something to them. I must earn my salary as an actor. I must entertain the audience!" (Stanislavski, 2016, p. 94). And guess what? Yes, an actor must earn his salary. We can't all "began to dislike acting. Going to work at the theatre became a chore and a routine way of collecting my money and my reviews. I had lost the love of make-believe. I had lost the faith in the character, and the world the character lived in." (Hagen, 1973, p. 8). She says this about being on Broadway! Boo-hoo!!! But what would *you* know; you probably never had to work a day in your life! "I can almost guarantee, I don't know when you saw [me in the play] but I can guarantee I'm not feeling anything, I'm at work! You know what I mean? I've got quite a lot on my plate. I've got two and a bit hours, I've got to make love to a woman, eat chilli-con-carne, smoke cigarettes, hit the door knob when the lighting went, on that lighting change, otherwise we're buggered, you know, do all these things. I mean, it might be occasionally that I might get ...you know... something might be triggered, but I'm busy!" (Nighy, 2021). You created a system in which, even as a job, the nature of the work itself dictates actors to not only already have a large amount of capital but to maintain or invest in them (Bourdieu, 2010 (1984), pp. 97-98), which for some of us is impossible! And even if we *did* invest, then we still have to convince the panels that deem us good or bad who are not looking for skill anyway. They want to see if we are (*makes giant air commas)* "electively affined"!

(*Stanislavski, hit hard by this remark, sinks into a childlike helplessness. Onur recognizes this and realises what he's done. Pauls are at a loss. There is clearly no turning back)*

Paul 1: (*Takes a deep breath*) So, what are you proposing?

Onur: (*restrained)*. Acting, and the quality of acting is a contextual result. It cannot be *done by the actor* to be defined, evaluated or assessed outside of its context even if that context is empty space. It is a construct realised

by the spectator. As such, I state that there is no such thing as a good actor. There is only an actor who has the skills necessary to execute what the production/director requires.

I think we can approach acting by defining it as a craft and teaching and assessing skills required rather than acting as a whole. I hope this would re-define the structures of the discipline of acting: manners of justifying, explaining, solving problems, conducting enquiries, and designing and validating various kinds of products or outcomes (Land, 2021, p. 82) thus, its curriculum, and its curricular habitus. While perhaps drama schools as vocational institutions assess using real-life practices to create authentic assessments (Brown & Race, 2021, p. 137), those practices too are dominated by the elite tastes shaped by …(*hesitates)* Mr Stanislavski.

The research is suggesting that the audience's perceptions of the actors are not congruent with what the actors are feeling, even on stage (Panero & Winner, 2021). On film, it's easier to create (good) acting even without the actor.

I created assessment criteria for solo musical theatre performances as well as solo Shakespeare performances and movement assessments to improve transparency for students and staff. I must admit, they worked really well, and students often reported that it helped them understand what to practice to be "good". Though I would now re-frame it as being "better skilled". (Appendix 2).

Paul 1: How does this help with social class and capitals? You already said acquisition of skill requires time and capital…

Onur: At least it can expose and reduce the use of elective affinity disguised as auditions, assessments, evaluations, rewarding of acting, and reduce the over-reliance, over-emphasis of the self thus reducing the need for Bourdieusian capital. It would also reduce the need for congruence of feelings between actor-character, actor-director, actor-tutor allowing cross-class interaction to be more level playing. These would reduce the alienation of the students who come to the field of theatre from not only less privileged but less familiar backgrounds. It would also demystify the notion of talent. But given the proximity of profession and higher education, some things need to change in the profession of acting too.

(*Stanislavski is sulking in a corner. Paul 2 moves his head towards him trying to get Onur to apologise. Onur opens his mouth a few times but fails*

to speak. Finally, he goes to Stanislavski and gently puts his hand on his shoulder)

I think there is a lot of good you've done for actors. Even *I* have an exercise inspired by you.

Stanislavski: (*genuine)* Really?

Onur: Yes, inspired by the passage where you watch the woman out of the window. I devised and trialled this exercise for over five years in UK Drama School settings, then in Turkey with conservatoire students and finally in Greece with lecturers and students of acting, at a symposium titled the S Word…after you. And it works in international cultural contexts. It is an exercise where good acting can be created with the actor knowing absolutely *nothing* about the scene they're playing. It showed that anybody with good, clear instructions and context would be able to execute "good acting" almost instantaneously even in "empty space". (Brook, 1968).

Though participants were both surprised and disappointed that it could be so easy. A few participants called it "cheating". (Appendix 1). And a few asked the same question: "What about my psyche?"

Paul 2: Perhaps because they were afraid that acting would be reduced to labour of the working-classes. And they were beginning to personally recognize the danger alienation of their labour in the capitalist system (Lyons, 2007).

Onur: Well, I think it already is. I was striving not to reduce the labour but reduce the pain in labour. That way satisfaction can be derived from work and not its produced object -which can be faked. Satisfaction can be derived from skills and the creativity that can thereby be achieved (Fischer, 1981) (Magdoff, 2006). And satisfaction should be that of the audience if acting is a job and the audience are trading their time and money for the experience of theatre. They are willing to believe.

Stanislavski: I say that too. The audience are wishing to believe everything that happens on stage (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 146).

Onur: And I agree with you. But your curriculum emphasizes the art of the actor and reduces the construct of art by the spectator.

This is against neuroscience.

Paul 1: Oh dear. You'll have to explain but be concise.

Onur: We detect background emotions by subtle details of body posture, speed and contour of movement, minimal changes in the amount and speed of eye movements, and in the degree of contraction of facial muscles. (Damasio, 2000, p. 52) And we are good at attributing emotion to things that do not have emotion intrinsically. We can anthropomorphize an inanimate object or an animal effectively because emotion is about movement, about externalized behaviour, about certain orchestrations of reactions to a given cause, within a given environment (Damasio, 2000, p. 70). And that's what the audience does. They receive the orchestrated reactions of the actor to a given cause, within the given circumstances. Add a bit of music and it can affect not only what the audience feels but also how they perceive characters' feelings and even thoughts (Hoeckner, et al., 2011) (Ansani, et al., 2020).

Paul 1: And?

Onur: And if that's the case, there is no need to generate an authentic feeling inside the actor to achieve good acting. Elija Konijn's book on emotions and acting confirms that "[...] professional actors, in general, did not experience the same emotions as they portrayed in their roles" (Konijn, 2000, p. 147).

Stanislavski: But the actor cannot be devoid of emotion.

Onur: She isn't. But what the actor feels doesn't necessarily have to be coherent with that of the character, or the tutor, or the director, or the spectator. And if that's the case that means the actor does not need to rely on herself, or habitus as much as you suggest.

Paul 2: This in turn means that the acting technique becomes less prone to violent reproduction, in the Bourdieusian sense, in actor training. Any actor can do any part and demonstrate good acting without having to rely on their own habitus especially if that habitus is not rich with capital.

Onur: The actor doesn't have to know what the character knows. The actor doesn't need to experience what the character experiences. Therefore, doesn't need as much emotional, educational or cultural capital.

And more importantly, the actor, the student actor does not need to have coherence with the feelings of his tutor. Good acting can be accessed without having to convince the assessor of authenticity of one's feeling.

Stanislavski: That's nonsense.

Onur: Didn't you know "The style of the theatre building, the social class of the actors, and all of the language of Chekhov's play did not float above cognition and consciousness. Because all historical cultures depend on signs, symbols, and representations, including language, these historical specifics were also connected to the deep, universal levels of cognition." (McConahie, 2008, p. 126)?

Stanislavski: And?

Onur: Well, **the director, the tutor** is making decisions with their own signs, symbols and representations too. So, another solution in higher education is that perhaps tutors do not behave like directors, but they behave more like skills coaches and assessors.

Remember your comments on Kostya's acting "You did not have any true organic feelings; You did not even have a whole living image." (Stanislavski, 1964 (1936), p. 28) ?

Stanislavski: But he didn't!

Onur: You couldn't have known what he felt. You can only deduce it from what you see. And when you corrected him in the money burning exercise, you interpreted, evaluated the scene from your own habitus and class aesthetic.

"As forms of culture which used to be restricted to the educated middle classes actually filter down to wider sections of the population, the dividing lines are being redrawn so that it is *how* specific cultural activities are enjoyed which matters." (Savage, 2015, p. 98). (Italics in original).

Paul 1: (*sheepish)* Maybe if you had a little champagne that day, you might have felt differently (Till, 2016) .

Onur: And if you didn't want to feel anything at all, you didn't have to feel anything.

Stanislavski: But you can't stop yourself from… feeling things.

Onur: Actually, you can. Famous pianist Pirez can reduce or allow the flow of emotion to her body at will when she plays the piano (Damasio, 2000, p. 50).

Paul 1: (*remembers)* She can remain decidedly cold.

Onur: Declan Donnellan says how you give great importance to the Given Circumstances and the constraints imposed on the character to achieve good acting (Stanislavski, 2016, p. x). I propose that those constraints are imposed not by the actors but by the audience, from the context of the play, by what they see and hear (as well as the actors), by the pace that the play advances, by the set, by where the actors are standing, by what's just happened a moment ago all of it. Just like the constraints you imposed about that old woman with a bird in a cage in the pram. And the audience then puts it all together to create the play and the characters.

Stanislavski: What does the actor do then? Nothing??

Onur: That's like asking "What does the piccolo player do in an orchestra?" She uses skill and knowledge to execute the choices she is given but she is not the *creator of the music by herself as art*. What I'm saying is actors are meant to believe they are the composer, conductor, player, instrument, orchestra all at once. I suggest they are only one instrument in the orchestra, maybe a bit of the player. This allows acting technique to be less reliant on habitus thus making actor training more inclusive by its nature.

I think acting is not a discipline, it's not an art and it's not a BA level subject. It belongs to the drama *school*. But given that "Public spending on initial education and training is heavily weighted towards HE at the expense of FE and VET" (Mason, 2020) drama schools need to prove that they have the higher education esteem to be funded and that's why I speculate that they are happy to reproduce the curricular habitus of your System.

Stanislavski: But your tutor admitted that skill acquisition takes time and… capital!

Onur: True. And music access has similar problems. It is a framework problem. But "good" piccolo playing has independent, transparent criteria. You can either play or you can't. And assessment of good playing can be more transparently achieved than "good acting". But in the UK, drama *schools* are pretending to be universities. They live a higher education life, but they produce school graduates.

Paul 1: Pretending?

Onur: They offer traditional programmes where the curriculum is “soft-pure” but the three years are evaluated the same way “hard-pure” subjects are: using the percentage scale (Bridges, et al., 1999, p. 295).

Paul 2: So, in a way, a piccolo player learns good playing and not necessarily good music. And being an instrumentalist (school) is different to being a musician (degree level). So maybe there is being an actor (school) and a theatre graduate (higher education).

Onur: Or drama schools should teach the hard-pure aspects of acting curriculum only but that too might mean lower-level education.

Paul 1: Or they should challenge the “unwarranted precision” of percentage grading. (Bridges, et al., 1999, p. 294). (*thinks again)* But then again, they can’t denounce degree classifications altogether as *short and symbolic descriptions of achievement* by which the audiences infer the competence of the graduate. (Knight & Yorke, n.d.) if we use your argument of the three-years being one big audition or assessment.

Paul 2: Onur, that girl in the open day scene worried about written assignments: how many written assignments, essays *did* your BA in Acting have?

Onur: Three major ones one in each year.

Paul 1: Nothing else?

Onur: Some reflective journals for rehearsals and practical modules but not much else.

(*Beat. Pauls have a moment of exchanging glances).*

Paul 1: (*changing the subject)* But actors are professionals of emotion. So surely it must be possible to devise criteria for professional judgement.

Onur: Studies indicate that professional actors may not be more suited to producing emotional expression than non-actors, at least when resemblance to spontaneous expressions is the goal (Jürgens, 2015) anyway. So, the *over*reliance on the self which is prominent in your books is not necessary.

Let’s think of how you advise an actor to approach a play for the first time in CAR and the play you chose.

Stanislavski: Many actors do not realise the importance of their first impressions of a play. (Stanislavski, 1981, p. 7).

Onur: Firstly, you suggest the reliance of emotional stimulation again. This was evident in AAP and the theme continues in CAR.

Stanislavski: To clarify the external and internal circumstances and conditions of life of the characters, the actor must first try to answer his questions himself. He needs to keep his work to himself to begin with and must seek no advice or opinions from the outside world. (Stanislavski, 1981, pp. 4-5)

Onur: In other words, utilise his embodied capital to interpret the part. But also, the reader must learn from experienced literary people how to pick out the fundamental line of the emotions. In other words, the actor must possess a certain level of educational capital to make sense of the play and the character.

Stanislavski: (not convinced) If you say so.

Onur: If *you* say so. *Your* books are the books on the curriculum's fundamentals and not Konijn's or Diderot's. What you say is what we expect to be good acting from prospective actors or acting candidates in auditions and then onwards in their training and then onwards in the industry. We expect them to read the entire play, know everything about the character so that they can do a speech in five minutes to get into drama schools.

Paul 1: Please don't let's go back to that.

Onur: Fine! (*sighs)* An actor reading the play for the first time…

Stanislavski: Oh, yes. This cannot be rushed. First impressions also have a virginal freshness about them. They must not read the play hurriedly on a train or in a cab or during breaks from work. This would spoil the first impression. And a first impression cannot be recovered, just like virginity. (Stanislavski, 1981, pp. 6-7)

Onur: Interesting choice of analogy but I'll leave the feminist critique to others (Malague, 2012).

(*To Stanislavski*) You mention the need for time and space for the first reading of a play which many working actors would not have. You also require an attention to it not dissimilar to, and apologies here, sex for the first time.

Paul 1: Please be serious! (Savage, 2015, p. 261)

Onur: Well, he said it first! Today, actors, working actors, actors working in multiple jobs would indeed be doing all sorts of first time reading of a play: on the train, the bus, in between shifts as waitresses and many other jobs that they might do to earn a living.

Paul 2: Higher education students too. “[…] many working students were now in the “danger zone” identified by earlier research, with higher drop-out rates […]” (Adams, 2024).

Paul 1: Except for those who may be relying on the bank of mum and dad.

Onur: Or their gained capital if they have been successful in their acting profession and can afford the time and space in between their high paying acting jobs without having to rely on anything else for income. Though some famous actors are known to have invested in businesses for income. But it’s not only income that makes “good acting” unachievable.

Paul 1: (*Bit fed up)* What else?

Onur: (*hand on forehead, dramatic)* It’s the emotional investment and the toll it takes especially on stage. Norton -who is a Cambridge and RADA graduate by the way- has talked in the past about how […] he would find himself unable to stop crying, or rendered catatonic. (Jonze, 2025) “Two hours of extreme emotions every day.” (Trueman, 2016). Moore says after fifteen takes of a scene in her recent movie “You go fall apart! You just go fall into your bed!” (Moore, 2024). And even the most successful of actors have side hustles. Even Uta Hagen! (Gottlieb, 2016) (Paul Newman's Own, 2024) (Hagen, 1976) (Smith, 2018) (Olson, 2012).

Stanislavski: (*sad)* So they abandoned art…

Onur: And I wish I knew French because there is a book on the intermittence of employment in performing arts in Bourdieu’s’ footsteps (Demazier, 2007) and I’d love to know the implications of his book on the research on performing arts graduate and graduate outcomes for performing artists in the UK and policy making. (De Bernard, et al., 2023) and Bridgstock’s research on higher education curriculum and the “nascent and protean” careers of performing artists (McIntyre, 2021) and higher education policy (Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016). And how all of these tie in with Bourdieu and amateurism and profession and second job and… (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 43)

Stanislavski: Who?

Onur: I also think that the play and characters you chose as examples are significant too.

Stanislavski: What do you mean?

Onur: Famusov: a wealthy land and serf owner; his daughter Sophia: brought up in European literature; Chatski: her childhood friend, a handsome,

brilliant, educated man who has been abroad; Princess Maria: an arbiter of Moscow conservative society manners and traditional spirit; Skalozub: very rich and of good family. (Stanislavski, 1981, p. 14). I think we can see a pattern here.

Stanislavski: There was Molchalin too. And Skalozub is of limited intelligence! (Stanislavski, 1981, p. 14).

Onur: True. You require of the actor preparing for Woe from Wit that they imagine to be the member of the Famusov family. Walk through the house. Imagine the antechamber and the staircase. How am I supposed to imagine all of those to the detail that you require if I have no experience of a large house, heavy furniture and so on? Imagine Famusov's room and his nightshirt and him singing a Lenten song. You say that even though Famusov doesn't exist, you know his kind, his social group even though you don't know him as an individual. I would never have that kind of knowledge as I do not have access to that level of **social capital**. I have never met a wealthy landowner nor would I have any clue of that level of social circles in today's society. And if I did, I would only be able to imagine them from my habitus and not theirs. I certainly do not know anyone who is a serf-owner.

Stanislavski: (*simply)* Are there no serfs now?

Onur: Nope. Though I suspect a similar kind of person would be someone who owns a large house with employees.

Stanislavski: But you could imagine it surely. You could use the knowledge you have from books, plays, films you have seen.

Onur: All of which are forms of **educational and cultural capital.** And look at Sophia who goes downtown to French stores to look at hats, bonnets and pins.

Stanislavski: You must have hats still!

Onur: We do, but I would never be able to have the experience or the embodied knowledge of shopping at high-end clothes stores. (Stanislavski, 1981, pp. 24-34) But my main point is this: an actor should not need to know any of this to execute the play or the character. Or at least, not firsthand.

The actor can approach work from a compositional and structural point of view. He doesn't have to have internalised knowledge of what the character's life is to be successfully received by the audience. It's the audience that does most of the work when creating the character anyway. Elaine Stritch's story is a perfect example of contextualisation of the

performance by the spectator (McConahie, 2008, p. 126). In my opinion, or criteria, she delivers a brilliant rendition of Sondheim's Ladies Who Lunch…

Stanislavski: Elanie who… and what song is this?

Onur: In the song 'Ladies Who Lunch' in company the ladies get to

"A matinee, a Pinter play, perhaps a piece of Mahler's".

Stritch admits that when she performed the song she thought Mahler was a pastry shop on Broadway (Stritch, 2002) and that a piece of Mahler's was a pastry.

Paul 2: Really?

Onur: Yes. But this doesn't take away from her performance. In fact, the only people who need to make sense of that lyric are the people who are hearing it. If they lack the cultural and educational capital of Mahler, then it doesn't matter what Elaine Stritch knows about Mahler as the audience won't get the reference or the joke unless she resorts to hammy gimmicks or displaying it (Stanislavski, 2016, pp. 21, 144). And while "spectators respond differently to performances partly on the basis of their cultural position with regard to race, class, gender, and similar social discriminations". (McConahie, 2008, p. 4).

Paul 1: So, it is the audience that has to have the cultural, educational capital to make sense of the song?

Onur: Along with their "hard-wired" cognition (McConahie, 2008, p. 4) which may come from the timing, phrasing, pitch, direction, lights, where she is on stage, what she's wearing etc. There is a play between the social realities with ongoing cognitive dynamics. (McConahie, 2008, p. 207)

Stanislavski: But if the actor doesn't know, and I mean *really* know from experience what the character is talking about, how will they execute the part well?

Onur: Ultimately, the director will decide how the part can be executed the best. And actors can utilise skills related to compositional elements such as tempo, pitch, cadence not only for speech but also for physical action, a la Viewpoints. But Overlie's not Bogart's (Perucci, 2017).

Paul 2: What's the difference?

Onur: Overlie's Viewpoint of Story is where a Logic is to be discovered through a process of 'exposing … an organization of sequences of information'. This formulation uncovers not only a Story in abstraction but also Story in the

‘chance operation and new logics’ that occur when multiple pieces of information are ‘placed next to each other’. (Perucci, 2017, p. 123). Or actors can learn more about blending and let the director and the playwright decide what the performance should look like. And recognise that “When spectators blend together actuality and fiction, the blended images they produce in their minds retain their reality for them.” (McConahie, 2008, p. 50).

But ultimately, we need to teach actors that acting is *not* something that actors do!

(*With this Sentence we hear a loud thunder signalling the beginnings of something big.)*

Paul 1: (alarmed) Paul!!!!

(*Stanislavski is turning transparent like a ghost. Lights change. He is fading in and out of existence. There is a deafening humming sound*.

The stage gets darker and darker. Stanislavski begins to disappear and the two Pauls along with him. The university room melts as the books fling open and pages begin to float, forming a tornado. Through the chaos we see a small living room of a flat. Untidy, littered, cluttered with empty coffee cups, plates with crumbs, items of clothing spread around on the floor and the furniture. It’s Onur’s tiny flat in Liverpool. It’s nearly dawn. We hear seagulls screeching adding to the storm. We lose sight of Onur for a moment and when he returns, he is now standing on stage in his underwear. He is holding a bundle of papers and his laptop and is alone, trying to stand still in the midst of the tornado.

We hear Schubert’s E-flat impromptu cutting through the storm and the thousand voices of actors until

(BLACKOUT)

Epilogue: In The Garden Of Akademos”

A year later.

The stage is dark and quiet.

A flash of bright light and hear an ear-splitting thunder followed by the first ninety seconds of The Miraculous Mandarin “sets the atmosphere with precisely the right feeling of panic” (Gramaphone, 2002) *with Bartok’s world of turmoil and death during and after the Spanish Influenza* (Gillies, 2016).

Slowly, we see a vast expanse of eternal white haze with a staircase upstage right that appears to go up forever, and a bare olive tree downstage left. This is the “The Garden of Akademos”.

The music fades. Two men appear facing upstage, one very tall and thin, the other with a bunch of papers in his hands.

Onur: You didn’t have to you know.

Stanislavski: I wanted to.

Onur: Your single annual trip to the real world and you chose my defence viva.

Stanislavski: Don’t worry, this doesn’t count as the (*air comma gesture)* “real world”. I’ll use that to come to your graduation. Break a leg!

(Gives him a firm pat on the back and walks off. An interrogation spotlight tightly focused on Onur catches him by surprise. He squints and looks around.
He opens his mouth but thunder drowns his voice. The booming, otherworldly, overwhelming, omnipresent and omnidirectional voice of the Chorus of Akademos (CoA) speaks:)

CoA: In what ways does the current pedagogical emphasis on acting as an "art" rather than a "craft" in Stanislavski contribute to the exclusion or marginalization of individuals from underprivileged backgrounds?

Onur: Stanislavskian curriculum defines acting emphatically as art. Acting is defined and evaluated by elusive, vague, opaque criteria. Using his curriculum as fundamental allows (good) actors and acting to be defined by elective affinity as opposed to by demonstrable skill in higher education and in the profession.

In Stanislavski’s books acting requires full commitment and dedication with no worries of the real world. Practices in drama schools are

commensurate with these features evident in the curricular habitus of Stanislavski.

This curricular habitus belongs to the curriculum. If I set up my own, free academy of acting, yet choose Stanislavskian acting (and/or its contemporary iterations) as "the fundamentals" of my curriculum, I too would be violently reproducing its dispositions because of the way the fundamentals are defined, even if I taught inclusively or widened participation.

While defining acting as art, drama schools are vocational and expect graduates to be successful as professionals. This may be because drama schools have no choice but to exist in the higher education framework and policies to remain government funded. In one way this provides access for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds but only to be a part of a curriculum with an elite habitus.

Drama schools benefit from the parity of esteem of being degree level if they define acting as art (as opposed to a job, vocation, profession) and thus keep the curriculum more elite. That way, the curriculum can be seen worthy of Bachelor's degree with honours descriptors. (QAA, 2024).

The curriculum emphasises that *actors* are in the centre of making art. This permeates to the nature of the technique where there is an over-reliance on "the self" for acting to be good. This requires a large amount of economic, educational, embodied cultural capital.

Good actors are decided by the gaze, tastes and definitions/criteria of the elite. In turn, they would draw the audiences, boost the production income and keep self-prophesizing who is good. Which working class audience (or acting student) could *dare* criticise a renowned, award winning "good actor"?

CoA: What specific elements within Stanislavskian curriculum implicitly or explicitly indicate significant financial, social, or cultural capital from students?

Onur: There are three significant factors:

One, the praxis of learning acting; demanding a vast knowledge of art, literature, cultural context (from admission to graduation) at the level and depth of (often) playwrights, upper class characters, lecturers: not having tangible criteria or definition of good acting but defining it from the gaze of the dominant taste which is elite: emphasizing the actor as the artist and

downplaying the importance of the creative elements, director, designers and most importantly the spectator.

Two, the invisible, hidden elements: embodied ease in performances/auditions/exams which puts those who are from elite backgrounds at an advantage: social capital transformed into educational capital: social capital transformed into economic capital (by booking jobs) by means of networking and elective affinity: misrecognition of inherited embodied cultural capital as merit or talent which is facilitated by lack of criteria for acting (in fact, no labour would get the working-class actor to the same level as the elite actor, except for very few that achieve the mobility, but then to be alienated): keeping criteria as vague and acting as art, a mystery, a matter of "talent" to disguise "elective affinity" in the selection/assessment processes.

Three, acting as art vs acting as a job: Stanislavski's curriculum is impossible to engage with for students who have to work outside of acting for a living. The same goes for acting as a job. Actors must wholly commit to making art no matter what their circumstances are. This is a fundamental pillar of the curriculum offered in Stanislavski's books. An actor must have acting and *nothing else* in his life for it to be art and thus good. She must have time, space and mental and physical health to explore the play and the character; must leave the real-world troubles behind to achieve a creative state; must rely on her "self" and habitus to achieve good acting and keep adding to her capital for a lifetime

CoA: Can a fundamental reconceptualization of acting as "craft" within this curriculum serve as a viable strategy for mitigating such inequalities?

Onur: To an extent.

Firstly, acting can be defined as something that the *spectator* does, along with the creative team of production (stage and recorded media). Theatre is the art; acting is a set of skills deployed for a job in specific contexts.

Acting reframed as a profession with no pretences (literally and figuratively) would allow it to be seen not as something only those who can already afford to live do. Acting as a craft, a job can be an enjoyable and unalienated labour.

An actor who is not an artist is not any the less valuable in the society. This is a message that is hard to relay to those who attribute such high

value to an actor in the Stanislavski curriculum and may be impossible to change.

The capital required to learn craft skills (time, space, technical knowledge) would still be expensive but at least can be more transparently assessed.

CoA: What would a curriculum grounded in acting as a "craft" entail, and how might such a curriculum redefine the requirement for embodied and material requirements for good acting? (*Alternative ways of achieving "good acting")*

Onur: I provide some examples in the appendices.

The curriculum should recognise, fundamentally, that good acting is contextual and is created by the spectator (socio-cognitively), with the help of a huge number of aesthetic and compositional factors thus is not as dependant on the actor as Stanislavski suggests. A wider, louder and fundamental recognition that good acting is not the product of the actor could bring actor training down from its pedestal reducing the reliance on the self of the actor, thus reducing the capital required to engage with it and learn it.

If acting is a set of skills, degree level training in acting may not be required. "Theatre" or "Performance" could be the art, the discipline and acting a small set of skills within. Those coming to such a curriculum could be less alienated too, as it would not be too huge of a jump.

Stanislavski's system and its habitus continue to exclude and marginalise not only working-class backgrounds but intersections of many under-privileged and under-represented groups. A simple example is "disabled actor". An actor with a disability might need an idiosyncratic set of skills to achieve the requirements of productions and reasonable adjustments to acquire those skills. Nevertheless, their skills would be as valuable, or employable in their respective contexts.

The teaching, learning and assessment activities would have to be authentically and idiosyncratically designed. There need be no distinction between an actor and a disabled actor or an actor and a working-class actor or an actor and a gay actor, so on.

Teaching of skills could also be shorter than three years.

CoA: What are the potential impacts of a craft-based acting curriculum on accessibility, diversity, and social mobility within the UK acting profession?

Onur: Reframing acting around demonstrable skills could focus teaching and learning activities targeted towards those skills inclusively for all students from all walks of life. The teaching of skills would still require capital (time, space, muscular embodiment) but at least can be more objectively observable and less subjective to teach and assess which would reduce the use of elective affinity and social capital for deciding which actor is good.

Acting skills could be recognised in and out of performative contexts; daily life, personal or professional development etc.

It would bring another set of problems such as the dominance of the director or the playwright and the loss of freedom of the actor. However, this lost freedom could be claimed by scenic, lighting and costume designers, choreographers, videographers, camera operators, sound designers as joint creators and labourers in pursuit of good theatre. I imagine acting as such a contextual end product that I go as far as removing "best actor" category from award ceremonies. Would an actor win the Olivier if the jurors could watch the same performance with none of the scenic elements?

Aesthetic and artistic dominance of the director/author would also jeopardize the abusive power control and must be approached carefully. There is also the problem of art still being dominant over craft. However, separating the art from the craft may provide opportunities to democratize and legitimize the aesthetic choices of directors/authors from working-class backgrounds, thus demanding acting skills to fulfil those choices which can be rooted in a tiered approach in higher education. Although, how we escape the vicious cycle of Bourdieu's Violent Reproduction, I am not sure.

CoA: (*so loud that it hurts)* Does the inherent nature or disposition of the Stanislavskian curriculum for acting within UK drama school programmes constitute a significant source of class inequalities in the acting profession and higher education?

(*At this moment, Paul 1 runs on stage followed by Paul 2 and Stanislavski who clearly failed to stop him. Looks Onur in the eye then shouts as loud as he can to the sky)*

Paul 1: Well, I (*makes air commas)* "abductively infer" that it does.

(BLACKOUT).

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Appendix 1 Deleted Scene

This is an exercise I developed at the beginning of my teaching practice. It was meant to be a movement assessment but soon after my quest for criteria for good acting began, it turned into an exercise to demonstrate that an actor can know absolutely nothing about the play, the scene or the character and the audience can still spectate "good acting" even without the presence of any scenic elements such as set, costume, soundtrack etc. What creates good acting here is the context for the audience and the temporal-spatial composition/choreography of the scene created by me (the director/spectator). The exercise further demonstrates that the exact same scene can be received entirely differently by the audience when they are given a different context. The contexts that are given are deliberately dramatic but equally can be naturalistic/realistic in Stanislavskian terms.

The reception to this exercise has been unanimous across UK, Turkey and Greece and across students and lecturers of acting alike. The response is undeniably the same and goes as follows: surprise, joy, suspicion, comments like "really?", "But isn't that cheating?", "But what about what I feel?", then gradually into resistance and denial and almost shrugging off the experience that they just had. This, I believe, points to how deep the "value of the actor in the art" in entrenched in Stanislavski's legacy.

(*An empty space. One chair. An actor comes in. He is carrying a plastic water bottle in his hand)*

Onur: (*to the actor*) Ok. This exercise is about how the audience does most of the work in acting. I would like you to come up with seven or eight simple, pedestrian moves. They could be entering the stage, looking at a place on stage, placing the water bottle somewhere, sitting in the chair, taking a breath, so on. You are free to choose whatever you want to do.

Actor: Anything?

Onur: Anything. As long as it looks pedestrian. So, you are not looking to do anything that doesn't look pedestrian. Like modern dance, or a crazy move. (*They both laugh*). Once you have a sequence of moves, number them. Remember that you are not numbering poses, you are numbering moves. For example, entering the stage and walking over to the chair could be move #1. Sitting in it would be move #2. Etc.

Actor: Ok.

Onur: And whatever you do, try not to act, conjure up a character or an emotion or a story. It will be really tempting, but you will struggle with the exercise

in a minute if you do that. I'm just saying. (*Actor nods*) If you happen to feel something while doing the moves you don't have to hide or mask it but you don't need to express any emotion. And you should be able to execute the sequence exactly, repeatedly. Any questions?

Actor: Nope.

Onur: You have ten minutes.

Actor: Ten? I think I'll only need five.

Onur: Even better. Five it is.

(Actor goes to work. Tries out a few things. Walks on. Walks off. Takes the bottle until he comes up with a routine that he's happy with. This does indeed take him five minutes.)

Actor: Done.

Onur: Ok. May we see it? (*The actor performs the following to the audience. Paul 1, Paul 2 and Stanislavski, watching it all and taking it in.)*

(*The actor walks on stage from stage right with the water bottle in his hand (move#1). Stops right by the chair facing the audience centre stage. Places the water bottle down and sits in the chair (#2). Takes a deep breath and sighs out (#3). Looks towards stage right. Stands up.(#4) Takes the water bottle in holding it with two hands. (#5) Looks at the water bottle (#7) Looks towards stage right again (#8) and exits stage right somewhat faster than the pace he's come in. (#8))*

Ok could you do that again? Exactly as you did before, please.

(*Actor does so, although he doesn't hold the water bottle with two hands in move #5 this time. Onur points this out, the actor starts again, corrects it and completes the sequence a second time.)*

Onur: Are you confident that you know the sequence? If I asked you to do it again, exactly as you did, could you do it?

Actor: (*Shrugs*, *easy*) Yeah sure.

Onur: Ok would you mind exiting the stage for a bit and close the door behind you so you can't hear me talking to the audience.

(*Actor exits*).

(*To the audience*) Ok. This is Alex. Alex is 23 years old. He is very shy and he has just started working in a hair salon which is stage right here. The bottle that you are about to see in his hand is hair dye. Alex is taking a break in the break room but the girl that he is desperately in love with is in the salon. He is responsible for her hair colour but since this is his first day at work, he is both nervous and shy. In the previous scene, we saw him apply the hair dye in her hair and then told her that the colour has to set. However, we also saw him apply the wrong bottle. This is the wrong colour. So, when he comes in, imagine you have watched the previous scene. And when the actors look to stage right, just before that moment, please imagine a scream coming from the hair salon. Yes. You guessed it right. The colour has set in! (*The audience giggles. Onur runs to the door and brings the actor in*)

(*to the actor*) Ok, so if you could execute your sequence exactly as you rehearsed, please. (*The actor does. The audience giggles throughout and this distracts the actor. He has to stop as he starts giggling with the audience. He is mildly frustrated but not upset.*)

Actor: (*Giggling*) But why are they laughing?

Onur: (*Giggling too*) It's ok. I can't tell you why just yet. You need to focus on what you are doing and execute the sequence exactly. Have another go. I promise I'll tell you afterwards. Or better yet, you can watch another actor have a go and then you'll know what's going on.

(*The actor does and this time completes the sequence much to the audience's delight. Paul1 and 2 are laughing. Stanislavski, not so much.*

The actor comes back in.)

Onur: Ok. Now we will do the same thing again. Exactly the same. So if you could leave the stage again please and I'll come and get you.

(*The actor exits. Onur speaks to the audience*)

This is Sam. Sam is, in his early 40s and a single dad. This is the waiting room of a hospital. Sam is an alcoholic but this is not what he's here for. He is here, because he has been involved in a car accident. He was drink driving and ran over a young girl whose condition is critical. He was too drunk when found at the scene and has no recollection of the event. He too was taken to the hospital, escorted by the police who explained to him what's happened. Outside, stage right, are the police and the only exit

to the room. The police and the doctors are talking about the identity of the girl. We hear only bits of their conversation but just before our actor looks to stage right we hear the name Alice. Alice is his 14 year old daughter's name.

(*Onur goes to get the actor. The audience are silent. Stanislavski is intently watching the scene. The actor comes in and executes the exact same sequence. This time there is deadly silence in the audience. We hear a gasp at the moment when actor looks to stage right. The actor loses it for a moment but completes the sequence. Onur approaches the audience who we understand to be undergraduate acting students.*

Onur to the audience:)

So, was that a good scene?

(*The audience nods*, *there is murmuring of approval*)

Was the previous scene a good scene?

(The audience nods, shrugs, some giggles)

Did the actor know what they were doing or what character they were playing?

(Audience murmurs no)

Did you (the audience) feel something?

(*Audience murmurs yes, one of the students cannot help a burst of HAH! With a wide expression of shock in her face*)

Yes, I think it really is that simple. The audience does most of the work in acting so the actor doesn't have to do much other than the actions that he needs to do.

A student actor: but…. But…. Isn't that cheating?

Onur: Why would it be cheating? The audience felt something, we got the story, the actor remained engaged. Job done.

Another actor: But what about the actor's psyche?

Onur: What about it? The profession of acting is not for the actor. It is for the audience. What about the hotel clerk's psyche? What about the

supermarket cashier's psyche? In any profession, the professional will find aspects of her work that satisfies her. In acting, the requirement for the fulfilment of an actor's psyche does not necessarily produce good acting. The actor might feel better but he's not necessarily affecting the audience in the right way. Imagine an actor falling apart for real on stage. Imagine an actor being genuinely devastated by grief? Would you want to watch that? That is more like voyeurism.

Besides, how will the actor recover from that in case she is in another scene within moments of finishing another?

(*The stage and the student audience disappears. We are back in Paul and Paul's office. Stanislavski is sitting down*)

Appendix 2 - Criteria for Acting Through Song

I devised the criteria below for teaching and assessing musical theatre. Later I adapted them to use in Shakespeare. It would be too long to explain how each criterion is linked to a demonstrable and practisable skill but here is a short demonstration of how to apply "phrasing" as a criteria and as formative assessment of a demonstrable skill of "good" acting.

In "Nowadays" by Kander and Ebb (Chicago) the lyrical phrases are as follows:

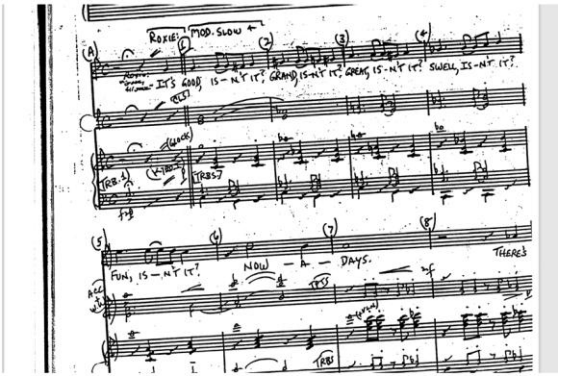
"It's good, isn't it?

Grand, isn't it?

Great, isn't it?

Swell, isn't it?

Fun, isn't it? Nowadays."



The punctuation in the sheet music suggest that sentences should finish at the question mark and that good, grand, great, swell and fun are all dotted crotchets. If phrased as suggested in the sheet music, this should provide the audience with a cross-phrasing effect. However, in all available cast recordings, and in all live performances I've seen the actors phrase it as follows:

"It's good.

Isn't it grand?

Isn't it great?

Isn't it swell?

Isn't it fun?

Isn't it? Nowadays" Therefore is 'wrong' or not as intended by the author/composer. This has multiple connotations:

1. Not all casts all around the world could have made the same mistake nor could they all be lacking the same skill of phrasing. So, this is a deliberate aesthetic choice most probably of the director and the music director.
2. This doesn't mean that those actors are "bad actors" but it also means that they can get away with "bad choices". Or it means the team have altered the writing; which is not an acting skill but is a writing skill. Or the score I obtained is not the finalised version of the writing.
3. The audience wouldn't be able to appreciate whose choice they are seeing. However, if the cross-phrasing choice was made and executed I argue that the audience would "feel it" differently and cross-phrasing would trigger the innate neurological mechanisms of speech and cognition which makes the piece more interesting. This, I believe, is the skill of the composer and the lyricist and is intended. If not intended, it is the skill of the director and the music director to recognise and guide the actor. The skill of the actor is to have the breath control, the pitch and phonation and the ability to recognise both phrasings independently but ultimately, they should have the skill to be execute both/either phrasing on command. However, ultimately, the average audience would simply say the actor/acting was good or bad without knowing why or how.

In an assessment context, the assessment therefore should not be whether students *do* phrase it correctly. It should be whether they can phrase it as instructed, repeatedly and without fail within a given time frame (given that professional rehearsals are time restricted). If they can, they have the skill.

If they don't have the skill, it may be possible to identify what's missing from their existing skill set and target tasks to develop them in:

1. Punctuation and grammar
2. Timing and tempo
3. Phonation and breath control
4. Auditory skills to identify
5. Recall of the above in time restriction / speed
6. Execution under observation (audience/audition panel/stress)

Phrasing is an identifiable and demonstrable skill. Other skills that I could identify are as follows:

Connection

Consider: Eye contact with the antagonist/listener, breathing, physical tension, noticing the changes, accuracy in imagination and execution in accordance with the imagined circumstances.

This is NOT connection to the song, or the music. It's almost the opposite. It's being connected to the task and the listener, and simply being aware of and open to the music.

Effort

Consider: Volume, physical tension, circumstances imagined, perceived effort vs. real effort

Effort is about appropriateness. It is about choosing the right tool for the right moment with efficiency. Part of the appropriateness is to the style and what's written in the score. It's not always about 'ease'.

Thought process

Consider: Phrasing (musical and lyrical phrasing), punctuation, changes (key, tempo, time signature), progression and patterns in the text and the music, visual focus

The key to this is phrasing and dynamic variables of the song. It relies on noting and executing progress(es) and changes with subtlety, should marry the effort, without losing the connection.

Definition

Consider: Articulation, clarity of thought, physical clarity and efficiency, visual focus, core

Note that the audience is going to hear the song only once. Articulation and clarity are key to the definition of the song. Part of that definition comes from the thought process and the clarity of 'thinking' as well as clarity of 'doing'.

Vocal & Physical Choices

Consider: Audibility, Resonance, Pitching, tone, vocal qualities, onsets and decays, effort

Again, think about appropriateness. These choices are down to the individual(s). Our aim is to be aware of these choices and to have the technical dexterity and flexibility to be able to execute them with confidence and subtlety. You need to make sure it fits with the demands of the song.

PERFORMANCE DETAILS

Connection	Sustained To the task To the listener To the imagined circumstances	
Effort	Level Appropriate to task Appropriate to the (technical and stylistic) demands of the song	

Thought process	Sustained Progress through the song Changes and variation Appropriate to task	
Definition	Clarity (physical and intellectual) Articulation Vocal & Physical Choices Audibility Appropriate to task Appropriate to the (technical and stylistic) demands of the song	
Synthesis of all the above	Sustained	Being able to do them all, at the same time, as discussed with the director, sustained throughout the song.

Vocal Technical Check-List

ONSETS	YES or NO		DECAYS
Glottal			Compressed
Aspirate			Aspirate
Creak			Creak
Simultaneous			Fade / Vibrato
Rumble			Constricted
Scoop			Fall of
Flip			Flip
VOCAL QUALITIES			
Cry			
Sob			
Speech (Thick Fold)			
Belt			
Opera / Legit			
Falsetto (Raised plane)			
Mix			
Straight tone / Vibrato			
ADDITIONAL FIGURES			
Twang			
Anchoring			
Nasal Port			
Constriction / Retraction			

Appendix 3 – Defining and Evaluating Good Acting

These vignettes aim to show how 'good acting' is contextual. On the other hand skills that would build good acting are observable, identifiable and can be improved upon targeted practice both in and out of context. These practices could be inclusive of the individual actor's background, race, gender, disability and any other intersectional characteristic that might be marginalised or excluded. If a skill is entirely unachievable (for example due to disability) the student should be aware of these limitations which can open up other skills that may not be readily available to the lecturer. This would ensure the qualitative dialogue that UK Higher Education policy indicate to inform the curriculum of "acting". In the case of casting with elective affinity, it would give those with power in the casting/audition process a way of objectively justifying an actor's skills for the job.

Vignette #1 Assessing Jack – shows that Jack didn't need more cultural or educational capital to execute the scene but rather a technical auditory/musical skill, which is identifiable, demonstrable, observable and practisable. It is how he hears the stress on one of the syllables. The scene is what happens in a Stanislavskian approach to teaching.

Jack in this situation is demonstrating his knowledge of the play, the scene, the line and the character incredibly well. However, Jack never landed this line as instructed in the production. Not because he doesn't understand the character, not because he can't imagine the character or the circumstances surrounding the event, not because he can't feel what the character is feeling but simply because on he can't hear the difference between stressing one word over another which is a musical/aural skill. This skill can and must be practised and assessed observably and transparently. The drama school must give Jack the time, the space and the knowledge to be able to practise this skill with as little "homework" as Jack lives in a tiny student flat and has two part-time jobs to afford drama school. He should not be assessed on his acting. His acting is fine. His musical skill of hearing and executing stress on a syllable however is not so much. If he was instructed to do it in another way, he couldn't even if he could intellectually interpret the part differently. Another option is that Jack can't apply the skill when he's excited about being on stage. In which case, the teaching could focus on that.

Jack: (*Rehearsing a scene).* This isn't my *arm*. This is my brother's arm, this is my father's arm.

Lecturer: (*with lots of emotion)* Stop stop. Jack, do you understand this line?

Jack: Yes, I think so.

Lecturer: Tell me.

Jack: Well he says that the arm that he's raising is the arm of the tradition, the family and those who have gone before him and that he is a part of that.

Lecturer: Great. Now what did you say?

Jack: This isn't my *arm*.

Lecturer: So, you see you are emphasising the word "arm" here.

Jack: Oh yea yea I get it. The arm doesn't belong to him. It belongs to the tradition, the history, the family.

Lecturer: That's it! Great! Ok do it again.

Jack: This isn't my *arm*.

Lecturer: Stop. No, no. It is your *arm,* as opposed to your leg but remember that it is the arm of tradition, history, legacy…

Jack: Oh yea yea. The arm belongs to or represents the past men in the family. The spirit of the men in the family.

Lecturer: Yes, exactly. So think about that. Go again.

Jack: This isn't my *arm*.

Lecturer: No, no. It is your *arm,* but it isn't *your* arm.

Vignette #2 Onur's Entrance – This vignette shows that directors could reach "good acting" quicker by identifying what's missing from the staging of a scene and then making a clear request from the actor as opposed to demanding imagination, given circumstances, knowledge of the character etc. This demonstrates that orchestration of the space can solve the problem of bad acting. The director might instinctively "feel" that the scene is not working but the actor can't. Because the actor cannot see the problem from the outside. In this instance, there is no point in "making the actor discover" a choice from the inside a la Stanislavski. Instead, the director, should be able to have the higher-knowledge and analytical skills to solve the problem. The actor's skill

then is to be able to execute this solution with his bodily and spatial skills. In time, the actor may be able to calibrate this spatial understanding by collecting experiences such as the one below and build a repertoire of "solutions" based on this calibration of director's demand vs. what solves the problem. The actor then can start solving similar problems by thinking like a director. Until then, this problem is not one of bad acting, but it is one of bad directing.

(*Onur is rehearsing a play. The room is busy with other actors, designer. It is clear that this scene is being rehearsed for a long time now. At least an hour.)*

Director: …but it is just that you are bringing very good news.

Onur: Yes, I know.

Director: So, let's try again.

(*They try again…)*

Director: (*Emotional, sighs).* No, no! He is excited but he is not that eager. You must remember that the news travelled from Rome. So it's a long way.

Onur: Yes, that's in the line.

Director: And you must observe him as you are delivering the news to him.

Onur: I am.

Director: Really, think about the circumstances you're in. Actually, think about the circumstances that he's in. He is desperate. He has been stuck here for months now. The news you bring is essentially his salvation. But don't reveal too much because you are trying to be realistic about it. Try again from your entrance.

And so the rehearsal for this two-minute scene continued for about an hour or so with the director giving the same information over and over and asking Onur to repeat the scene. Towards the end of the hour, the director asked Onur to not enter the stage as far and to stay nearer the door as he came in.

Ultimately, the director communicated what he had in mind in terms of the output, and problem was solved quickly. This would have saved an hour of rehearsal for such a short scene.

The caveat here is that Onur had the physical spatial and movement skills to execute what was communicated to him with accuracy. *That* is the assessable skill and not the choices he made for the scene. Only the director can see the scene from the outside and can decide what it is supposed to look like to convey the circumstances of the characters and the scene.

The appropriateness of the application of this skill is not up to Onur, but it is up to the director, designer, lighting designer et. al. The space, the set, the lighting would all affect the staging decisions, and the director might indeed change her mind during the technical run because the rehearsal room does not have these elements. The skill for Onur is then to be able to adapt to the renewed demand under time constraints.

Vignette #3 The Professional Actor – This vignette summarises how I would evaluate performance and what I consider as an assessable, observable attribute and how I would direct actors professionally. For me, Celia Imrie is not a good or a bad actress. Her acting is a product of many creative elements and the spectator. But she can be a skilled or unskilled actress.

The plot thickens! Ambassador Kate Wyler (Keri Russell), Foreign Secretary Austin Dennison (David Gyasi), and London CIA chief Eidra Park (Ali Ahn) watch as Margaret Roylin (Celia Imrie) tells UK Prime Minister Nicol Trowbridge (Rory Kinnear) the truth about the recent attack on a British aircraft carrier.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvMOxAVIarA

Margaret Roylin: I hired the Lenkov group to place an explosive device on our ship. It did not go to plan. The cost (very short beat) was devastating. (very short beat) But the kingdom (very short beat) will remain intact. And that was the most important thing.

Director: Cut! Ms. Imrie, you are bringing the inflection on cost up and for some reason you are giving short pauses just after them. For the thought of the character to flow as a whole and for these sentences to make sense, try getting rid of these beats and try not to bring the inflection up as much.

Here, to improve Celia's performance an acting lecturer or the director might have delved into how driven the character is or how straightforward she thinks, or how ruthless she's acted, and they would have asked the actor to use their imagination to arrive at a conclusion. Instead crafting the outcome is easier and less demanding of the actor in terms of knowing British politics or politics in general, or knowing a politician, or observing hours and hours of politicians in action to arrive at a "believable" performance. In this recording, I posit that the delivery of these lines is laboured and unnecessarily heavy and being able to change it is a skill and a craft. Clearly, the director did not see a problem with this and was ultimately happy to use this take. This is not the actor's problem or her job. Celia Imrie's performance was approved by the director and the editor. Celia Imrie did not have the means to see her performance or how it was edited.

Vignette #4 How scenic elements can improve acting – This vignette summarises how an acting lecturer I worked with was so easily fooled by a student actor putting on a costume. The acting was not deemed good by the lecturer until the actor was in a costume. If this actor was being assessed on their acting, they would receive a higher mark from this particular lecturer if they wore the costume. This points to the fact that acting is contextual and should not be assessed free from its context.

Onur: I was in a student production in training. The director clearly disliked one actor's performance. The actor in question was very skilled and actually was performing really well and was taking direction as required. Their performance was consistent all the way through the rehearsal period. The director was really unhappy with them, however. After a few weeks was the time for a dress rehearsal. We all had our costume fittings, and we had the dress rehearsal. My classmate performed her role *exactly* as she had been rehearsing for weeks; nothing less, nothing more. After the dress rehearsal, the director came up to my colleague, with eyes wide open "OH MY GOD THAT WAS AMAZING. WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?" My classmate was astonished. It was very clear that the costume had made a massive different to how the director received her

performance. We all were astonished too as we didn't see or feel any difference in her performance. We all knew she was good right from the start.

The director was also assessing the project. I wonder how they marked their performance.

Vignette #5 Slow Down or Pause (tempo/speed)– This is another example

of how observable skills can be used to create good acting. The skill(s) needed to approach the text are possible to break down, observe, give feedback on and assess in higher education using criterion-based assessment.

In this example, the specific skill is being able to differentiate between slowing down and giving pauses. The same exercises would also be applicable to walking. Try walking slower. And now try walking with pauses. Understanding and executing tempo and speed are demonstrable and practisable. If a student's acting is "bad" because of tempo, the lecturer should be able to identify this within their own response. Then, the skill to be taught is not the "right way" of executing the tempo/speed but to ensure that the actor has both of those skills to use at their disposal to utilise in any context. Instead, the Stanislavskian lecturer director would go back to the character, and the self, the truth, the believability etc. etc. which are not necessary.

Actor: I don't want to talk about this anymore mother.

Onur: Can you slow this sentence down?

Actor: I (*pause*) don't (*pause*) want (*pause*) …

Onur: No, no. That's not what I meant. Can you actually slow it down?

Actor: How?

Onur: Instead of introducing gaps, try extending the vowels slightly. To be able to execute this you need to be able to hear the difference and have enough control of your breath on vocalisation so that you can extend the vowels, slow down but don't use gaps to inhale. This is so that we can create a character who is responding to the circumstances of the scene and as a result talking slowly. You don't need to understand or even know the scene to be able to talk or walk slowly, but you must be able to differentiate technically between slowing down

and introducing gaps in a verbal or physical phrase. The criterion for this skill is observable and can be demonstrated clearly and transparently. It will be observable to you and to me whether you can do it, repeatedly and in different contexts.

Appendix 4 – The Reality of Being an Actor (non-famous)

This excerpt aims to tie real-life situation and the evidence found in Stanislavski's texts in terms of the dedication required from an actor and what that means in terms of capital (especially economic). There is a torrent of these on social media, and this is in line with the recent court case between Equity and Spotlight (Equity, 2025).

Sarah Pribis in her own words "Sober Working Actor Life" (November 2024)

Here's what it's like to audition for a movie, right now as a non-famous actress, I got this through my agent on a Friday. It was due on a Sunday, 2 days, 10 pages. This is a lead role in a non-union film [...]Three hundred dollars a day, but negotiable for named Talent, AKA not me.

To reiterate in two days I had to find a reader set up. All of my equipment, memorize 10 pages and record this, edit it, and send it in. And now I'll show you about a page worth of audition material with the script [...]

So, there were 10 pages of that. Again, I had to memorize everything then choose my tapes, and edit it all together and send it in. And you have to remember that on top of that, I am not getting paid for my self-tape audition.

Again, I chose this profession. I love what I do, but just to look into the less glamorous side and all of the hard work that actors put in that you don't necessarily see. (Pribris, 2024)

Appendix 5 - The Reality of Being an Actor (famous)

This is the flipside of how a successful actor is made by luck (and social capital). Could Judi Dench ever deliver “bad” acting? I don’t think so. And even if she did, elective affinity would certainly book her the job. She also had a good amount of educational and embodied cultural capital precociously attained right from the beginning.

She writes “My father was a doctor in general practice, but spent much of his spare time acting with the Settlement Players, a very good amateur group in York. He and my mother were keen theatre-goers, so my elder brothers and I were taken to the theatre from a very early age.” (Dench, 2010, p. 17)

Yet she didn’t have to act to get in to drama school: “The audition was a written exercise, and I had tonsillitis at the time, so they sent it to me to complete at home. The question paper asked a lot about Greek theatre, which fortunately I had learnt about[...]” (Dench, 2010, p. 22).

Judi Dench admits the harsh truth (November 2024)

I tell young actors, it's nothing to do with... Good actors are employed and bad actors are not, it’s not like that. It's actors who are employed just happen to be lucky because they happen to be in somebody's eye at the time that... it's true. It is absolutely true. Not being modest, it's absolutely true.

And if you just happen to get some kind of a break, and you can go on and learn from it and go on and maybe get another job, and that's how it is because there ever no guarantee with that. Not at all. (Zebra, 2024)