FIG. 1 Michelle Aravena and Las Chicas at the ¡Papa Caliente! (i.e. Hot Box Nightclub) in Theatre Under the Stars' Latinx-inspired musical *Guys and Dolls* PHOTO Melissa Taylor

In our fields today, lively debate continues about whether productions should edit or even produce certain older, Golden Age musicals that contain material that is offensive within our current cultural context. Certainly, many revivals and new productions engage this material from a contemporary lens in hopes of making them more resonant and timely for new audiences. Casting is an arena that can allow a production staff to re-conceive such material. In his essay below, **Julio Agustin** explores the intentions, value, and reception of helping to create a new production of *Guys and Dolls* at Theatre Under the Stars in Houston that featured an all Latinx cast and re-conceived setting for this well-known classic.

INTRODUCED + EDITED BY **DAVID CALLAGHAN** + **ANN M. SHANAHAN**

Braving the Challenges of Re-Envisioning the Classic Musical for a New Audience

BY **JULIO AGUSTIN,** UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

"We in leadership positions need to do everything we can to reflect the world we live in."
– **Bill Rauch**, Artistic Director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, to the *New York Times*

INTRODUCTION

In what has become one of the most divided periods in US American history since the Civil War, fear and suspicion of "the other" pervade the not-so-"United" States of America. Residents voice intolerance of differing viewpoints. These expressions are no longer reserved for closed-door conversations between family and close friends, when relationships might supersede ideologies, nor are they limited to online trolling. Instead, biases are openly expressed, often without regard to civility. Residents of this country are frightened of each other and a quiet sense of panic invades the cultural space.

Given that the arts often reflect real life, it is no surprise that there has been an increase in the writing and production of plays about important and what some consider controversial subjects, such as immigration, women's rights, Muslim heritage, and the concerns of LGBT communities. Starting in the 1970s, Augusto Boal aimed to combat oppression and incite social change with his Theatre of the Oppressed; he argued that theatre is "a platform whereby actors and audience can be 'indirect activists,' addressing their own individual and social issues, resolving them and thus contributing to the achievement of a better world" (Hassan). Boal asserted that all theatre is political and mirrors its community by prompting the "audience to become stakeholders in the play's action and recognize the problems it presents as ones they encounter in society" (Schroeter). However, not all theatre is poised to be politically useful. **Tony Kushner** argued in an essay on political theatre that, aside from the rare theatrical box office hit, the "increasingly creepy spectacle" of commercial theatre is no longer the place where the greatest political impact is made (Kushner). He asserted that, with such long-running spectacles as *The Phantom of the Opera* and the myriad of animated film-to-stage productions by Disney, it is in the regional houses where a call to action most often materializes. Hence, one method in which theatremakers of the regional circuit combat contemporary forms of inequality is by re-envisioning some of the most produced classic musical works with the needs and sensibilities of a contemporary audience at the forefront.

With this in mind, I decided to examine a recent professional collaboration as a case study in the challenges that come with re-envisioning the classic musical for a new audience. I was invited to choreograph the quintessential Golden Age musical *Guys and Dolls* with a Latinx "twist" at Houston's long-running, not-for-profit institution, Theatre Under the Stars (TUTS), under newly appointed artistic director **Dan Knechtges**. The motivation for this Latinx-inspired production of the classic musical stemmed from the previous season's ultra-successful hit production *In the Heights* directed by **Nicholas DeGruccio**. Not only did the TUTS production cast twenty out of its twenty-three company members with Latinx identifying performers, but the theatre also successfully expanded its audience base as a result of its outreach in Houston, Texas, the country's fourth largest Spanish-speaking city (Mitelman). Upon receiving approval from the estate, Knechtges and DeGruccio were emboldened to continue the momentum of the previous season by introducing the theatre's bilingual audiences to the classic American musical *Guys and Dolls*. DeGruccio chose *Guys and Dolls* because its setting "lined up perfectly with the big influx of people to New York City from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. (Maines). Additionally, aside from providing opportunities to the Latinx theatre community, Knechtges and DeGruccio sought to honor the musical's inherent traditions while simultaneously embracing the theatre's objectives of education and outreach (Fig. 1).

In terms of design elements, the look of the TUTS production was close to what one might expect from a typical production of *Guys and Dolls* and was lauded for similar reasons. In fact, the skeleton of the set was that of the national tour, adapted by our designer with, among other subtle elements, the insertion of bilingual signage that included "¡Papa Caliente!" in place of "Hot Box Nightclub." The costume design, too, was careful not to veer too far from the traditional, yet was more authentic in patterns and details, especially in the scenes set in Havana and the Hot Box. Given that diversity in our production included the multiplicity of sizes, shapes, and hues representative of the Latin-American community, individual costumes celebrated a company that featured an actor who is also a little person dancing side by side with an actor standing 6'3" tall. Ultimately, the world of the play as created by the design team was highly successful in melding the two worlds of 1940s Times Square with the feel and flavor of the Caribbean and Mexican communities that frequented the Latin Quarter Nightclub.

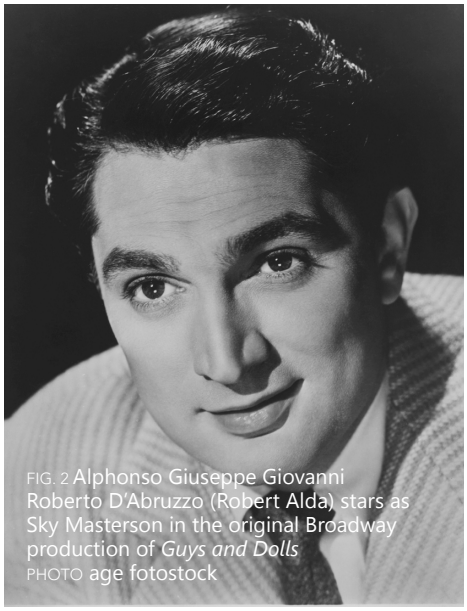

FIG. 2 Alphonso Giuseppe Giovanni Roberto D'Abruzzo (Robert Alda) stars as Sky Masterson in the original Broadway production of *Guys and Dolls*
PHOTO age fotostock

For this production, which reviewer Pnina Topham saw as a model for making classic musicals accessible to modern audiences, we identified goals in the following challenging areas: casting, choreography, community engagement, and critical response. The success of the project required casting a majority of Latinx actors in a well-known, classic musical, testing the potential criticism that such a project would encounter in the media. The production faced head-on the issues of tokenism and negative representations; strengthening the connection between community and the theatre; and reflecting a diverse audience community by embracing the varied textures of its language and movement. In taking on this work, many practical strategies were tested and new strategies forged for re-imagining the classic musical as a way of making the stage a more inclusive and welcoming place for all.

CASTING

As a member of an ethnic minority making my way through New York City's mostly white musical theatre scene of the 1990s, very few opportunities existed that did not perpetuate negative stereotypes, or as *Hamilton*'s Anthony Ramos puts it, "Pedro-the-drug-dealer" roles (Reyes). This resulted in the frequent rejection of projects that did not align with my personal integrity. Yet despite the gains of the past twenty years, diversity in casting continues to be a problem that perplexes many in the industry. One approach to solving this issue is the practice of non-traditional casting, i.e., "the casting of ethnic, minority and female actors in roles where race, ethnicity or sex is not germane to character or play development" (Taylor). Regrettably, this statement leaves room for interpretation. Indeed, much has been written by both critics and scholars on the merits of non-traditional casting. Theatre critic Ben Brantley's 2015 review of the blockbuster musical *Hamilton*, for example, discussed its relevance and appeal, while writer/composer Lin-Manuel Miranda emphasized the importance of having a "cast [that] looks like America looks now" (Brantley).

It is a misconception to imagine that our casting project is a contemporary innovation. There is a rich history of casting *Guys and Dolls* with immigrants, first- and second-generation Americans, and actors of religions, races, and ethnicities that were considered culturally "other" at the time of production. Several early principal actors were, for example, Jewish, and Italian- and Irish-American, including Leila Martin (née Leila Markowitz) cast in the role of Sarah Brown, Robert Alda (né Alphonso Giuseppe Giovanni Roberto D'Abruzzo) in the role of Sky Masterson, and Helen Gallagher cast as Miss Adelaide. Over the musical's history, actors with German, Irish, Russian, Spanish, Haitian, and Chinese or background have graced the stages of both Broadway revivals and in some of the nation's top regional houses (Fig. 2).

Another more audacious approach to diversifying production is what I call "blanket race" casting—the exclusive casting of one race or ethnic group in a production. Examples of blanket race casting in theatre include the 1976 revival of *Guys and Dolls* starring Ernestine Jackson and Robert Guillaume, and more recently the 2009 Yale Rep production of *Death of a Salesman,* both of which featured companies cast solely of African American actors.

One important challenge to address when experimenting with blanket race casting is delineating what entertainment journalist Nina Shen Rastogi calls "legitimate diversity versus crass tokenism" (Rastogi). Playwright/activist Harry Newman reminds: "Non-traditional casting does not of necessity imply tokenism or loss of identity. It's about having all artists considered as individuals with individual qualities, apart to belonging to groups based on often arbitrary distinctions such as skin color or ethnic origin." Since its debut on Broadway in 1950, *Guys and Dolls* continues to be touted as one of the most beloved theatrical musicals of the Golden Age era. Musicals of this period, considered to extend from 1943 until around the mid-60s, contain cohesive plots, as well as songs and dances by developed characters that propel the story forward. Consequently, any changes to the show's familiar conventions can often leave an audience feeling confused or even betrayed. However, the show's depiction of raucous neighborhood hijinks (illegal gambling), the fear of commitment (Nathan/Adelaide), and the thrill of the chase (Sky/Sarah) might be considered "universal" and not particular to any one race or ethnicity. These common themes provide opportunities for exploration with inclusion in mind.

One challenge one might encounter in re-envisioning this classic musical is the misconception that inclusive casting is hard to accomplish. Sadly, the fallacy regarding the scarcity of talent does not exist solely within our industry. Alex Blumberg, CEO of Gimlet Media, was interviewed regarding the problem with homophily in expanding his digital media company's network of connections: "We are a largely white organization in a historically pretty white industry. If we just sit around and wait for people of color to apply for the jobs we post, we are going to stay that way" (Burkus). "We do a lot of scouting," says casting director Blanca Valdez regarding strategies for finding up-and-coming Latinx talent. And writer Quiara Alegría Hudes advises that outreach and partnerships are also essential (Tran). In fact, the number of talented triple-threat performers of Latinx ethnicity that attended our *Guys and Dolls* invited and open auditions was inspiring. Casting director Duncan Stewart of Stewart/Whitley Casting was aggressive in his efforts to reach out to the Latinx community: "Today, more than ever, presenting a diverse pool of talent to our creative teams is paramount." Stewart insists that "We have to conduct rigorous and extensive outreach and not just rely on (or expect) that this unique

pool of talent will come to us." Through his efforts, the creative team was, indeed, graced with the attendance of many of Houston's local Equity and non-union actors, as well as alumni of the Southwest's best training institutions. Additionally, working professionals from such previous Broadway productions as *In the Heights*, *On Your Feet!*, *West Side Story*, and *A Bronx Tale*, in addition to stunning Latinx dancers from the Mark Taper Forum's recent production of *Zoot Suit*, all vied for the chance to participate in our experiment. As the choreographer, I was honored by the turnout of superior talent and felt fortunate to have so many strong casting options.

CHOREOGRAPHY AND DANCE

A major aspect of the dance callback process was ensuring that every person cast could handle the demands of the various movement styles incorporated into our production. Considering the stylistic intentions and shared skills of many of the actors from Houston's Cuban, Mexican, Honduran, and El Salvadoran communities, we aimed to include as many authentic ballroom and social Latin dance styles as possible, as well as traditional theatre dance, in our version of the musical. The entire company in our production had to dance, and except for the characters of Sarah Brown, General Cartwright, and Lieutenant Brannigan, all had to be strong musical theatre performers in order to manage the demands of traditional theatre dance in the show. Additionally, the twelve-member dancing ensemble and various members of the Mission Band had to have strong abilities in ballet and jazz as well as experience in salsa, samba, and tango partnering styles.

As is typical with most professional choreographers, research began months in advance of the auditions and included pre-production work with a small team of dancers. Some initial inspiration was garnered from researching the work of Augustin Eggie Rodriguez and Margot Bartolomei, better known as Augie and Margo, a popular 1950s dance pair from the days of the Palladium known for their technically intricate, yet facile mambo moves.

During the audition, dancers were paired and asked to perform various lifts during the callback appointments as a way of testing their ability, chemistry, and energy. As a choreographer, I consider it essential in this type of project to push a dancer past their comfort zone during the callback process. Careful observation as to how a dancer handles the pressures of working closely with another performer is key to casting the "right" group of people; this is something many choreographers agree is an essential part of creating a safe and creative space for themselves and their corps of dancers (Fig. 3).

The greatest challenge, perhaps, in choreographing a musical with a short rehearsal process (ours was two weeks plus tech) is not necessarily creating dance steps, but instead constructing partner dances that are both authentic in the particular Latinx style (salsa, samba, and tango), and also that replicate traditional pictures and patterns of the era. As a solution, the repetition of motifs with slight variations were incorporated throughout the dance numbers. This attention to detail ensured that an audience of mostly people who did not identify as Lantinx could relax into the familiar without becoming overwhelmed by the "exotic." Additionally, the complicated and intricate weaving of arms, legs, heads, and torsos had to follow a natural progression so as to be teachable to a group of complete strangers on day one of rehearsals. Pictures were created to include circles of kerchief-swinging men around shimmying women, or unison box steps where the dancers' individual arm-ography was enough variety to relay authenticity. All of this was accomplished by pairing couples whereby every man was assigned to dance with the same woman throughout most of the production. Again, this repetition allowed the audience to experience a sense of familiarity, and to relax into the story as told through dance.

As a veteran **Bob Fosse** dancer, I was also motivated to include my own conceptual twist by melding traditional Latin isolations with the whimsical unpredictability of Fosse's vocabulary. An example of this was our mischievous, explosive, and audaciously cheeky nod to "The Rich Man's Frug" from *Sweet Charity*, which was incorporated into our big everybody-dance number "Havana." I was also inspired to include the Afro-Brazilian martial art movement capoeira and found the perfect location for this in the second act's high-stakes betting number "The Crapshooters' Dance." This was accomplished by incorporating quick footwork and many changes of direction into the callback material, whereby these prospective gamblers were encouraged to showcase simple tumbling, off-center floor work, and arm-strength choreography. Ultimately, each dancer's strengths were recognized and individually utilized in the capoeira-inspired "Crapshooters' Dance."

In daring to confront the challenges to re-imagining the classic musical for a new, more diverse audience, the final casting decisions made in our production of the Latin-inspired *Guys and Dolls* were to create a more multicultural company than originally anticipated; bilingual performers of Puerto Rican, Chilean, Cuban, Mexican, and Filipino descent were employed, as well as actors of Native American, African, and Western European heritage. In part, this decision was our way of avoiding exclusionary results in a project that aimed for inclusivity. Sadly, until our industry has moved beyond "white-understood" casting and until a non-white person is no longer considered "diverse," the need for productions such as ours continues to be paramount in advancing diversity in casting.

FIG. 3 The Gamblers performing Capoeira-inspired movement in "The Crapshooters' Dance," *Guys and Dolls* at TUTS
PHOTO Melissa Taylor

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Aside from providing more actors with the opportunity to portray some richly written and coveted roles of the Golden Age, one mission of TUTS' Community Engagement Programming is to expand the community of theatre-goers through audience development, "by attracting more people of the surrounding ethnically diverse neighborhood(s)" (Harlow). This type of programming empowers the surrounding communities with "more people see[ing] themselves and their stories being portrayed onstage," a process that has been deemed indispensable by artistic directors throughout the country towards the purpose of expanding and solidifying their audience base (Wong). The decision of director Nick DeGruccio to cast "Hispanics in nearly every major role is representative of our fast-growing population. In doing so, DeGruccio helmed a production that looks like the great tapestry of America today" (Topham).

Many top regional theatres throughout the country establish partnerships with multicultural institutions as a way of deepening the legitimacy and community engagement of their work. Geva Theatre's 2017 production of *In the Heights*, for example, partnered with the community's established Hispanic institution, the Rochester Latino Theatre Company. Additionally, there are also such longtime organizations as the Hispanic Organization for Latino Actors, Del Valle Casting, and Elsie Stark Casting that offer decades of experience representing bilingual performers at various levels of skill to producers seeking them.

In addition to engaging "non-traditional" audiences through casting and partnerships, our production also extended educational outreach in engaging younger community members. Sara Brunow, Director of Community Engagement at Theatre Under the Stars, coordinated a workshop between the young people of Houston's Crespo Elementary Fine Arts Magnet School and various members of the *Guys and Dolls* company. Children ages six to fourteen who participated in the summer program were treated to a lively dance workshop in which they performed a number from the show, and then improvised steps showcasing their talents and personalities. "An incredibly important piece of arts education and arts engagement is recognizing, reflecting, and responding to the communities that surround us" reflected Brunow. "The cast members from *Guys and Dolls* who came to work with the young musical theatre performers at Crespo Elementary not only bonded over the love of an art form, they also had an in-depth conversation of what it means to them to be a Performer of Color in the industry today.... They talked about perseverance and knowing who you are, about strength and vulnerability, about being open and challenging those around you to tell the stories that need to be told." One of the workshop facilitators, cast member Cedric Leiba Jr., expressed how moved he was through his interactions with the youth of Crespo Elementary: "These beautiful, talented young people were able to interact in fellowship with performers who looked like them, spoke their language, knew their culture." Ultimately, approximately forty children and parents attended that evening's performance in which they got to experience a classic musical performed by familiar faces that resembled their own (Fig. 4).

CRITICS

The fourth consideration in re-imagining a traditional production for a contemporary audience is the response from the critics. Fortunately, a strong and versatile company of performers was cast that could execute the styles, energy, and athleticism of the distinctive dance vocabulary utilized in our production with excellence. Ultimately, the company of TUTS' *Guys and Dolls* introduced audiences to the theatrical conventions of communities in which dance is integral to everyday life. The neighborhood we created was one where people danced for no reason, and for every occasion. Although not all critics

FIG. 4

considered the casting revolutionary, the company was celebrated nonetheless: "The ensemble cast is sexy and fantastic in all the numbers, and I think that alone made this one of my favorite things I have seen at TUTS in terms of sheer talent" (Wilson).

One reviewer revered the use of the "Latinx casting to infuse exciting dance numbers that are so energetic and well-executed you feel at times that you are watching the finals of *Dancing with the Stars*," while another observed that the preshow announcement informing the audience of the Latinx-inspired choices seemed more like a warning to the "traditionalists about the brown people with accents" that they were about to encounter (Wilson, Chen). The need for the later caution is remarkable, given that the 2001 Arena Stage production of this musical with multicultural casting was reproached as being "hardly new these days" (Jones). There were still other critics who criticized the production's "Latin flair" as vacillating "between being a grating, overzealous attempt at fashionable diversity and a rare opportunity to see non-white performers express the kind of sexuality, complexity, humor and agency rarely (almost never) granted to them during Broadway's Golden Age" (Chen). One of the less successful elements in our production was use of dialects; unfortunately, the coach was brought in later in the process. Reviewers commented that the regional, national, and ethnic dialects were distracting (Topham). Ultimately, the negative criticism that came post-production was superseded by positives in favor of the work. Such contradictory responses confirm the need to continue developing this type of project. Not every decision will yield solely positive responses, but a lack of change simply perpetuates a status quo—something we cannot afford.

CONCLUSION

In braving the challenges of re-envisioning the classic musical for more audiences, I learned that careful planning, flexibility, and openness are crucial; that any socially conscious attempt at disrupting traditional theatre is best approached as an experiment.

In our production, the areas of casting, choreography, community engagement, and critical success all depended upon the melding of the traditional approaches with new ideas inspired by our mission. As the choreographer, I found it was essential to avoid being heavy handed in my work, and instead to allow myself to question my choices, knowing that the "right" answers might not yet exist, and that even the "best" solutions might not become apparent until late in the process (if ever). This method of working paid off in both audience reception and critical response. We were committed to asking how to honor a work of art while infusing it with relevance for a contemporary audience. In our attempts to answer this, I am confident that we suggested antidotes to the inequality that exists in our professional industry today. By introducing a classic work to a new and more inclusive generation of theatre-goers, we were successful in embracing Augusto Boal's directive—addressing our "own individual and social issues, resolving them and thus contributing to the achievement of a better world."

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PRS BOOK REVIEW

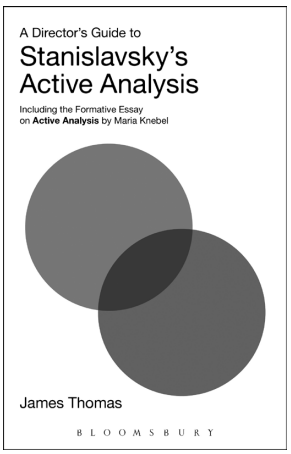
A Director's Guide to Stanislavsky's Active Analysis

By James Thomas

Including the Formative Essay on Active Analysis by Maria Knebel

BLOOMSBURY, 2018; 167 PP.

$29.96 PAPERBACK



James Thomas's *A Director's Guide to Stanislavky's Active Analysis* offers a systematic look at theories of Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938) on stage direction, which developed later in his life. In this short volume, Thomas weaves together disparate ideas, illuminating the Russian director's unified approach to stage direction.

Contemporary champions of Stanislavsky often contend with bias against his system based on misperceptions that have built up over time. In this tradition, Thomas begins with a common refrain:

> "[Stanislavsky's] ideas have transformed acting and directing… and have contributed to the psychological depth and continuing vitality of the modern theatre as a whole. His ideas are also blamed for scores of the modern theatre's excesses and eccentricities that have arisen since his time" (xii).

According to Thomas, ineffective translations, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation all contribute to biases that form when artists and scholars read about Stanislavsky generally, rather than engage in the careful study of his original texts. Further complicating the issue in relation to Active Analysis—Stanislavsky's system of directing formulated in his final years—is the fact that his later thinking is recorded sporadically, especially as it pertains to the rehearsal process. This leads to problems of pinpointing developments and significant

shifts. *A Director's Guide to Stanislavsky's Active Analysis* attempts to remedy these concerns with an authoritative account of what Thomas argues is the culmination—not the revision—of Stanislavsky's theories on directing.

Although unquestionably valuable, the book is difficult to navigate structurally as the reader must pay tediously close attention to prefacing remarks and introductory passages to identify the voices of the book's two authors. Furthermore, the close relation of the term Active Analysis to Action Analysis requires the reader's unwavering diligence to keep them distinct. The book is written in two parts, both with multiple chapters. Thomas indicates that the parts may be read out of sequence based on the needs and desires of the reader. "Part One: A Director's Work with Active Analysis" offers a practical illustration of the system though analysis of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; this section is particularly useful for stage directors wanting a step-by-step guide for putting Stanislavsky's program into practice. "Part Two: Active Analysis of the Play and the Role," articulates the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the system, using Thomas's translation of Maria Knebel's formative essay on Active Analysis. An influential director and teacher, Knebel was one of Stanislavsky's prized students, with whom he worked closely near the end of his life.

Veteran stage directors will be familiar with the recommendations outlined early in Part One, but a less experienced director would do well to study these with care. For example, while a beginning director might take genre for granted—working from the assumption that it mainly governs style or idiom—Stanislavsky considers genre relational and active. This valuable insight has useful implications for a director's approach to design and rehearsals.

In chapter three of Part One, Thomas outlines the preliminary step that Stanislavsky thought directors must take with actors before entering into rehearsals. This work, referred to as Active Analysis, begins with a relatively short period of "around-the-table" work; the shortness reflects an important change instigated by Stanislavsky who previously, along with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and the Moscow Art Theatre, had insisted on extensive, meticulous table work with the actors. Thomas uses Knebel's codified expression of action analysis—itself based on her work with Stanislavsky during his final years. This process recasts literary terms like *plot* and *theme* as actable formulations. These formulations, like *through-action*, comprise a necessary shared language that helps directors and actors together "think eventfully" about what the play means.

After some idiosyncratic remarks by Stanislavsky himself, Thomas introduces the *etude* process, the bona fide entry point into Active Analysis. An etude is an acted sketch with an improvised text. A clear action analysis is important for this process because it allows for an actor to improvise text based on reliable analysis of the circumstances of the play. Creating etudes enhances the actor's imaginative encounter with the text, assisting them to develop more specific, nuanced behaviors on stage tied directly to the Action Analysis.

While this might sound like an actor's technique, it is for the director, who is obliged to have his or her attention simultaneously on the actor, the text, the working analysis, and the director's staging plan in order to guide the actor. Directors will find this a challenge to orchestrate, but the reward is great. According to Thomas, "Etudes ensure that the actors comprehend and express what lies beneath the text and not merely on the surface of it. After all, beneath the text is where behavior exists" (55). Or, as Knebel puts it in her essay, "These etudes, or sketches, serve as stepping-stones that lead the actor towards creative assimilation of the author's text, that is, to the author's words as the principal means of stage expressiveness" (87).

From a directorial perspective, this process marries text and action in a way that renders a deeply meaningful performance for everyone participating in the theatrical experience.

Although the etude is at the heart of Active Analysis, Thomas also addresses blocking and physical characterization within Stanislavsky's methodology, and throughout the text, he provides exercises that anticipate practical questions from the reader. Thomas offers some concluding remarks about realities of using Active Analysis in rehearsals, within the time constraints of a Western straight-run system of theatre production.

Part Two contains Thomas's translation of Maria Knebel's account of Stanislavsky's later rehearsal practices. Knebel was a Russian actor, director, and teacher who trained with Stanislavsky, as well as with Nemirovich-Danchenko and Michael Chekhov. She is considered the pioneer practitioner of Active Analysis and one of the most important Russian theatre practitioners of the twentieth century.

Like Thomas, Knebel begins by defending the great Russian director. She accurately identifies the "crude simplifications" that work to "undermine Stanislavsky's once-experimental technique" (86). Knebel also criticizes theoretical conclusions unsupported by "practical examples of how we actually work" (86). Throughout the essay, Knebel accounts for how she understands and uses Stanislavsky's later developments when making theatre herself. Nonetheless, Knebel's discussion also satisfies readers seeking the theoretical and historical underpinnings of Active Analysis.

Thomas provides a practical illustration of Active Analysis via the rehearsal of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Part One, while in Part Two, Knebel contextualizes the technique from within the theoretical framework of Stanislavsky's ever-developing approaches to rehearsal. Knebel offers practical insights into the technique, while retracing Stanislavsky's rationale for rethinking and further developing his earlier work. For example, as previously noted, later in his career Stanislavsky reconsidered the usefulness of extensive table work. While an actor's and director's meticulous analysis of the meaning of the play became a hallmark of Russian theatre practice under Stanislavsky's influence, Knebel explains that in his later years "Stanislavsky rebelled against the earlier way of preparing a performance, which he helped to originate himself, and he began instead to defend passionately a new way in which the play is analyzed in action, in etudes [sketches] with an improvised text" (94).

Thomas's text helps illustrates that this shift in approach does not work at cross-purposes with Stanislavsky's previous methods. Instead, Active Analysis marries the mental and physical work of the actor as the very mode by which the director best approaches and interprets the playwright's text for performance.

A Director's Guide to Stanislavsky's Active Analysis is not an easy text for beginners. While there are salient concepts and methods the emerging director should begin to employ, the text offers advanced practitioners useful insights and techniques. The reader will find the text challenging to navigate. In the end, however, what Thomas offers for directors of varying experience is well worth sifting through the structural difficulties of the book.

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