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MEDIATING THE METHOD

FEELINGS WITHOUT WORDS

The scene is New York City, 1958. That year, in two disparate arenas, American culture was attempting to come to grips with the difference between noise and art. A twenty-five-year retrospective concert of John Cage's work at New York's Town Hall helped create an intellectually coherent canon out of Cage's experiments, which critics had often treated as puerile provocations or exercises in whimsy to be regarded with bemused toleration. For some forward thinkers, noise was becoming intellectually exciting material for experimental music, whereas the audible audience outrage preserved by the recording of the Town Hall concert testifies to the continuing rearguard pique of more conservative sensibilities.[1] Cage himself couldn't have imagined a more apt illustration of his theories than this aleatory auditory event, preserved for posterity by the recording apparatus.

Meanwhile, in newspapers and weekly magazines, a furious and analogous debate was warming up about the merits of Method acting, a new performance style pioneered by the constellation of actors working under the tutelage of Lee Strasberg, Elia Kazan, and Robert Lewis at the Actors Studio in New York, the obsessive secrecy of which only heightened curiosity about it. To its opponents, Method acting seemed to augur a whole-scale demolition of linguistic fluency in what Robert Brustein, one of the Method's most eloquent denouncers, called the "spoken arts": radio, television, film, and theatre.

In a magisterial essay titled "America's New Culture Hero: Feelings without Words,"[2] Brustein warned that Method acting's new proletarian archetypes threatened to surrender political thought along with language: unlike the prolix heroes of the 1930s generation, they couldn't find the rousing words to summarize their predicaments. He also worried that these actors were, by implication, willing to abandon the entirety of the classical canon, since their halting delivery was eminently unsuitable to the rhythmic strictures of Shakespeare or the ornate cadenzas of

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Shaw. Already the terms of this debate might sound eerily familiar to followers of Cage's critical fortunes—a whole tradition is perceived to be at stake in the re-weighing of the difference between music (art) and noise (not-art).

Here is Brustein's ruthless description of Method acting's antihero:

> Of medium height and usually of lower-class birth, his most familiar physical characteristic is his surly and discontented expression. His eyes peer out at the world from under beetling brows; his uncombed hair falls carelessly over his forehead; his right hand rests casually on his right hip. He is extremely muscular and walks with a slouching, shuffling gait. He scratches himself often, slumps in chairs, and almost never smiles. He is also identified by the sounds which issue from his mouth. He squeezes, he grunts, he passes his hand over his eyes and forehead, he stares steadily, he turns away, he scratches, then again faces his adversary, and finally speaks. What he says is rarely important but he has mesmerized his auditor by the effort he takes to say it. He has communicated not information but feeling; he has revealed an inner life of unspecified anguish and torment.[3]

Brustein blames Marlon Brando more than any other performer for bringing the barbarians to the gates of verbal virtuosity. More precisely, he indicts Brando's rendition of Stanley Kowalski in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, both onstage and (especially) onscreen, in Elia Kazan's 1951 film version of the Broadway production. From Brando's Stanley, according to Brustein, sprang James Dean, John Garfield, Paul Newman, Eli Wallach, and a host of other mumblers, grimacers, flinchers, and fumers—actors whose difficulty forming a sentence threatened to overshadow the dramatic predicaments of their characters and whose illegible speech pointed to a more discomfiting illegibility in their interior lives.

I deliberately juxtapose these two events—the Brustein debate and the Cage concert—in order to rethink Method acting from the perspectives of mediated perception and mediated art making. Most scholarship about the Method considers it largely from within its own precepts: How authentic was its much-vaunted emotional authenticity and how authentic could it ever actually be? How adequate was the experience of its practitioners to prepare them to portray the marginalized social types they often performed? How slippery was the process of emotionally identifying with characters outside the mainstream of American culture, simultaneously celebrating them as antiheroes and co-opting them for mass culture? What assumptions about gender, race, and sexuality did the Method's purported universality elide or repress? These are the essential questions that the Method's critics have asked in recent years.[4] All of these lines of inquiry relate to the Method's purported exploration of the depth psychology of an authentic self and the understandable squeamishness the near-obsessive recourse to vaporous terms such as "truth," "reality," and "honesty" in the public statements of the Method's practitioners and teachers induces in modern readers.

The Method, in Strasberg's conception, brought the vast trove of affective experience registered in the unconscious mind into rehearsal rooms and

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auditoriums. But in what follows, I'll consider the Method as an investigation of a different unconscious, what Walter Benjamin called the "optical unconscious," those uncanny aspects of everyday life revealed by the surgical incursions of the camera and microphone into reality.[5] The Method's most salient legacy may have more to do with media than with emotional recall, with the ways recording had already changed performance and spectatorship. The debates about Method acting were symptomatic of a new postwar landscape of theatrical performance and a new conception of everyday life in which theatre was only one of many possible modes of encountering spoken art, most of them mediated to a greater or lesser degree by technologies of recording. These technologies of reproduction and transmission were becoming ubiquitous: squalling radios, TVs rattling in the background, Muzak in elevators. Life was getting noisier. Moreover, in this new economy, actors were more likely than ever to move between media—TV, radio, film, stage—and face the competing demands each form made on performance.

For listeners such as Brustein who were accustomed to fluency and smoothness in the spoken arts and to media products that attempted to minimize the traces of their own recording or broadcast, Brando's performances mixed music and noise, sense and strangeness.

But what Brustein called inarticulateness is actually a more complicated proposition about the relationship between noise and music, sound and sense, aesthetic and unaesthetic elements in acting and, indeed, in art—and the ways that recording technology was intervening to transform understanding of these relationships. German media theorist Friedrich Kittler has described the disruptive effect of the advent of audio recording on human perception, beginning with the phonograph: "The phonograph does not hear as do ears that have been trained immediately to filter voices, words, and sounds out of noise; it registers acoustic events as such. Articulateness becomes a second-order exception in a spectrum of noise. … The undermining of articulation becomes the order of the day."[6] If we take Kittler's proposition seriously, then the preference of Method actors for mumbling—for blurring speech into sound and meaning into noise—might be the product of the ways the cameras and microphones that constantly surveilled them were altering what it meant to watch and listen to acting. Mumbling brings the wider spectrum of noise into the realm of performed speech.

Method acting marked a crisis point in acting's translation to the big screen. (We shouldn't forget that dialogue had been a part of the cinematic experience for only about twenty-five years by the time Brando started doing his best to make his lines inaudible.) To use Cage's terms, Method acting was noise becoming music onstage and on camera, a form of music produced with the aid of electrical instruments.[7] In this way, I think we can see the Method, and its wildfire effect on the American imagination, as a watershed event in the process that cultural theorist Juan A. Suárez, taking his cues from Kittler, calls the "reinvention of the everyday," the process by which noise, in the cybernetic sense of nonsignifying matter, became "another name for the otherness that modernism … discovered in the heart of the quotidian."[8] As he describes it:

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> Modernism and the everyday life of modernity were actually full of noise: not only the clang of machinery and the din of traffic . . . but also occurrences and recesses that simply refused to yield sense. The material cause of this ever-present opaque component was the analog media—sound recording machines, film, and photography—that were the hardware of modernity and of modernism. . . . [T]hrough their nondiscriminatory receptivity, technologies of electronic reproduction register the automatism of the world. They capture sense and nonsense and mix signifying matter with opaque traces and textures—an involuntary gesture, the distracting fold of a fabric, the grain of the voice.[9]

Mediated representation, he goes on to argue, "thus reveals an uncanny double of the quotidian—a shadow realm of meaninglessness and contingency alongside the intelligible. Relayed by the camera or microphone, 'reality' becomes pregnant with secrets, and the known constantly slips into the unknown."[10]

My suggestion here is that Method acting, abetted by recording technology, quickly became an art of trace and texture, involuntary gesture and vocal grain, and that this was not simply the result of one medium (film) being more suited to representing the real than another (theatre). This is the conventional narrative of twentieth-century acting: that the Method and cinema were simpatico because film allowed for a greater degree of naturalistic detail, permitting performances to become smaller and more lifelike. This story is promulgated by scholars like Richard Blum, who argues, in his *American Film Acting: The Stanislavski Heritage*, that "with actors trained in variations of the Stanislavski system, branching out from the Actors Studio and other experimental forums, screen acting became a natural extension of Stanislavski's search for realism."[11] Instead, I'll argue that Method acting was always poised between media. Recording undergirded the exercises and thought of Lee Strasberg, the Method's Svengali. And upon closer scrutiny, Brando's infamous mumbling reveals itself to be a canny medial experiment.

Alone Together: Lee Strasberg's Public Privacy and Private Publics

In an unpublished fragment written around 1930 and eventually collected in the volume *Culture and Value,* Ludwig Wittgenstein speculates about an impossible theatre of the everyday:

> Nothing could be more remarkable than seeing a man who thinks he is unobserved performing some quite simple everyday activity. Let us imagine a theatre; the curtain goes up and we see a man alone in a room, walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, sitting down, etc. so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves; it would be like watching a chapter of biography with our own eyes,—surely this would be uncanny and wonderful at the same time. We should be observing something more wonderful than anything a playwright could

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> arrange to be acted or spoken on the stage: life itself.—But then we do see this every day without its making the slightest impression on us! True enough, but we do not see it from *that* point of view.[12]

The passage's paradoxes crowd around the slanting "that" of its last line—*that* point of view would provide a second look at what we never see for the first time: the everyday. It would combine the perceptual singularity of primary experience with the clarifying benefit of aesthetic distance. In Wittgenstein's thought experiment, the subject is observed without being disturbed into performance; everyday life has been transposed into the theatre without any alteration to its essential everydayness. What technologies of seeing or staging could possibly allow for this glimpse at the secret progress of an ordinary life?

Some two decades later, a version of this scene—and its aspiration to an uncanny glimpse of quotidian life caught unaware—became a cornerstone of the work of the Actors Studio, as led by Lee Strasberg. The "private moment" exercise was a foundational element in his acting pedagogy, both in private sessions and at the studio. To perform the exercise, an actor would attempt simply to behave as if he or she were alone, unobserved and engaged in some prosaic behavior or task. But there was nothing simple about it. Strasberg's conception of the private moment is almost mystical. It is at once "precise and concrete"[13]—nearly thinglike in its undivided being—and deeply, immanently, subjective. It is the product of intense self-scrutiny but also the vehicle by which an actor can hope to transcend the confining falseness of theatrical self-consciousness. Strasberg suggests that the actor begin by watching him or herself, taking careful note of moments when he or she notices that "'I'm thinking not just about myself, but of this particular thing about myself. When that happens, I usually do this and this—which I would never admit to anybody except in some indirect way'" (118). As I will elaborate shortly, Strasberg's vagueness is at once a Gnostic wariness of defining subjective sensation—a way of preserving the quintessential privacy of the exercise, even in speech—and a by-product of the recording technologies that created the preconditions for Strasberg's conception of privacy.

The pupil would then go on to imaginatively reconstruct the scene of this elusive privacy at the studio, beginning with sensate realities and working outward to more complex dynamics. To this end, Strasberg encouraged actors to bring objects from their private environments to the studio to help create the fine-grained texture of solitary experience: "books, records, and other small physical objects" (118). These objects were intended to "strengthen [the actor's] sense of being alone. He tries to create the room until he can say to himself, 'That's the couch and that's the table,' until he can see and touch and smell the objects in that room, until the room has the kind of reality that any reality on the stage should have" (118).

As Strasberg's commentary elucidates, the studio's staging of privacy did not mean voyeuristic peeping at colleagues' hidden peccadilloes or exuberant confession of taboo topics, although some iterations of the exercise at the studio undoubtedly tended in that direction. It was something weirder and altogether more paradoxical: an attempt to renegotiate the theatre's contract with publicity and, even stranger, with having audiences at all:

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> We do private things when we are alone, and we know they are really private when we cannot continue them if somebody comes into the room. Whereas if somebody interrupts when we are doing a personal thing, we become shy or a little embarrassed, but we go ahead and do it anyhow. . . . A made-up privacy would not have the same results, because there would be nothing to encourage the actor unconsciously. (118–19)

In an intriguing aside, Strasberg once suggested that "the private-moment exercise is particularly useful in training because it obviates questions of interpretation" (119). Why does privacy obviate interpretation? Perhaps because in the true private moment—as in Wittgenstein's parable—life is simply being itself, without referent. It's not theatrical because the spectator, although there, is not *really* there, and the actor, although there, is not there to be *seen*. The actor is not trying to represent anything; the spectator is not trying to read anything beneath the surface of the action, is not aware of herself or himself as a spectator. The paradox presented by this exercise—that the actor should deliberately labor to behave as if he or she were alone in one semipublic forum, the acting school, which was intended to prepare him or her for another, public, forum, the theatre or the film studio—is the paradox of Method acting itself.

Privacy was a paramount concern for the Method's pedagogues and acolytes and a structuring principle for the studio's work and Strasberg's teaching. No one but members of the studio or rare invited guests could observe a working session. (This reticence is preserved to this day.) And these sessions were kept almost vanishingly brief—an hour or so in most cases. The dramatic material with which actors worked was apportioned into small units with small casts—monologues or two-handed scenes—and often discarded partway through a session in favor of impromptu exercises. Most of Strasberg's trademark pedagogical tools—emotion memory, the private moment, the song-and-dance exercise—could be practiced (or were best employed) only by a solitary student.[14] And the Method's notorious discomfort with language, a quintessentially public instrument—quickly abandoned during exercises, mangled by emotive deliveries—is perhaps also another aspect of this concern for privacy. (Although the short excerpts and small companies were undoubtedly partly a concession to the exigencies of getting a group of working actors together to rehearse, the studio's obsession with solitude also suggests that solos and duets were preferable in order to make the work onstage as private as possible without violating theatrical necessities.)

How could this ideal privacy be created? How can you have an audience that is not an audience? How can actors—and acting teachers—be alone but still attentively observed? My argument here is that analog recording was the implicit presence in the Actors Studio's paradoxical dance of public and private. Suspicious of language's mediations of inner realities, the Method substituted the mediation of technology: the tape recorder, the movie camera. The Method's immediacy was deeply mediated; its mediations intended to provide access to unmediated reality. Tape provided the preconditions for Strasberg's theory and practice at the studio. The recording apparatus, the perpetually attentive audience that is not an audience, mediated between the privacy of the Actors Studio's closed sessions and a wider

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public eager to penetrate the secretive laboratory's mystique. The camera (and audio recorder), both prying eye and neutrally observant machine, performed a similar function for reticent performers such as Marlon Brando, whose obsessive worrying of the border between private and public in his acting—with his own body as both medium and message—mirrored Strasberg's preoccupations.

The Actors Studio's very self-conception was as a medial site situated between the demands of the commercial theatre and those of everyday life, commerce and art, life and theatre. And in its exercises, dramatic texts mediated between the actors as they were and the actors as they could be. Work on acting was also work on the self. Strasberg's pedagogy was intended to have a transformative effect on the actors' everyday lives and their professional lives. In many places, Strasberg's commentary circles around the idea that the studio's goals centered as much on revising the daily lives of its actors as on improving their craft: "Neither life nor talent stands still. Standing still leads inevitably to retrogression. . . . The work here is not [just] for artistic purposes, for something that satisfies your soul and nothing else" (32).

The techniques of Method acting were intended to mediate between inner life and outer expression, between real, spontaneous feeling and thought and their onstage correlates, between the resources of the actor and the demands of the director. Because so much of the Method's mandate fell in such liminal zones, in precisely the places where the lines between life and art became fuzzy at the borders, it's no surprise to discover that so much of the Method's energy went into perfecting techniques and concepts intended to resolve the distance between incommensurable philosophical oppositions: surface or reality, sign or symptom, truth or artifice. The Method's medial status was an unending source of anxiety for its practitioners (am I doing this right?) and a major source of perplexity for its critics.

In her brilliant analysis of the Method's vexed status in postwar thought, Marianne Conroy points out that the studio's self-conception as a place between cultural registers was part of what irked commentators:

> The arguments brought to bear against Method acting thus delineate an historically specific kind of cultural controversy: in that struggle, high and low culture worked in concert to shore up residual modernist values against an emergent middlebrow cultural style. Method acting elicited such reactions because its practices confounded the central assumption that enabled modernism to map the cultural universe into simple hierarchies: the high/low distinction between aesthetic autonomy and commercial necessity. In effect, in the approach to performance associated with the Actors Studio, an aesthetic disposition toward technique was adapted to the demands of commerce, so that technique became visible not only in its aesthetic effects, but also as part of the publicity content of performance. In thus mixing the aesthetic and the commercial, the Studio destabilized the founding oppositions—between high and low culture, prestige and popularity—through which the actor's role in bearing cultural values had been constructed.[15]

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To this ledger of destabilizations, I would add the Method's troubling status as a style caught between media—between theatre and film, liveness and recording. In his statements at the studio, Strasberg always couched his descriptions of the studio's goals in the language of high modernism, as a sacred precinct, a refuge held apart from commerce, mass entertainment, and the media landscape of postwar America that was dedicated to the search for artistic truth as a self-rewarding quest. But he was also very aware that a large part of the studio's mystique was due to its relationship to Hollywood. On the first page of Chapter 1 of *Strasberg at the Actors Studio: Tape-Recorded Sessions*, he weeps—this emoting is carefully noted by the transcript—while remembering poor departed "Jimmy Dean" (27). Practicing his preaching, Strasberg neatly combines an adroit use of affective memory with a reminder of the social capital the studio accrued through its association with star actors such as Marlon Brando and his eager disciple, the doomed actor-martyr Dean.

This in-betweenness is reflected in the studio's literature. The major works of acting theory by key members of the Actors Studio (*Strasberg at the Actors Studio* or Robert Lewis's *Method—or Madness?*) evidence several commonalities. First, they weren't actually written per se, but are rather transcripts of classes or lectures given to closed audiences ("informal," as Harold Clurman's preface to Lewis's book of transcribed lectures calls them).[16] Second, they're long: *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* runs to more than three hundred pages, and *Method—or Madness?*, though less unwieldy, is still perhaps more compendious than its substance should permit. Third, they're rather vague, throwing around airy, unqualified terms such as "truth" and "reality." Fourth, they devote almost as much time to dispelling illusions about what the real work of the studio is as they do to documenting that work. The ways the outside world grievously misunderstood the Actors Studio was apparently a hot topic of discussion at the studio. *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* is especially self-referential, devoting many pages to the debunking of myths it reifies with its very vagueness. It is a huge book that still preserves the privacy of its subjects, providing chapters and chapters of public pronouncements by a guru who, we are repeatedly reminded, cannot be truly understood by anyone who hasn't seen him at work in the studio. Finally, recordings—the hidden medium behind the transcripts and thus behind the books—are frequently called in as evidence to support the truth-claims of Method teachers. And usually—and this fact is especially significant—they are cited without actually being played.

When Lewis argued in his famous public lecture series on the Method (later transcribed and published as *Method—or Madness?*) that the Method was not responsible for the notorious mumbling of its most lauded acolytes, he brandished as evidence a recording of the celebrated Italian actor Tommaso Salvini, the performer Stanislavski reportedly trumpeted as the "greatest speaker he had ever heard."[17] He brandished the record—the transcripts indicate the gesture—but he didn't let the audience hear it, saying that although he (Lewis) didn't have the equipment handy to play the album, spectators could take his word that the recording was "definite proof" that Salvini wasn't a mumbler.[18] Although by 1958 the already-ancient disc must have been full of hisses and pops, static and skips—

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markers of the recording's material life—Lewis was sure he could hear past the noise and get to the music. (A little later on in the same lecture he referred to recordings of the actor Alexander Moissi's voice—again for evidentiary value.)[19] The Method paradoxes recur: Lewis was performing an exclusive lecture in private—for invited guests—that was being transcribed for publication. He was being recorded, but he couldn't play a recording.

An even more evocative example appears early on in *Strasberg at the Actors Studio*, the compendious volume that was for decades Strasberg's sole public statement of his theory and practice. Waxing elegiac about his acting heroes, Strasberg arrived in a surprising place: a description of what might be called the primal scene of Method acting. I will quote it at length, because it is so revealing about the importance of recording to the Method's methods. Strasberg introduced the anecdote by rapturously expounding upon a definition of "great acting"—a "true relation between impulse and expression"—while lamenting that "very few of us are sufficiently free so that body, mind, spirit, thought, and verbalization are able to combine in full and true expression" (66). He went on to say that he was fortunate to have witnessed this ineffable comingling just a few times, in only a very few performers: Eleonora Duse, Feodor Chaliapin, Giovanni Grasso, Jacob Ben-Ami, Laurette Taylor, Pauline Lord, the Moscow Art Theatre and Group Theatre at their best.

With these illustrious stage luminaries as prologue—the leading lights of previous theatrical generations—the reader might be taken aback by what succeeds them as the apotheosis of this much-lauded "full and true" expression:

> I am reminded of an experiment we did here quite a few years ago when Clifford Odets brought in a tape on which, in preparation for writing something, he had recorded his aunt and uncle talking. We copied off the words and had one of the actors read them, which he did—very nicely, very simply, very well—and seemingly logically and sincerely. And then we put on the recording. It was a howl in a strange, exciting way, because the sound of human life was so totally different. We heard how real people said those words with fullness of excitement, vividness of response, and sudden poetic leaps of expression. The way in which his uncle could switch from some ordinary remark (*shouting passionately)* "TEN YEARS OF MY LIFE!" and back to (*chattily*), "Well, I mean, she's an idiot," was fantastic. This was dialogue spoken by an ordinary man with an accent and a choked voice, but that ordinary voice became so vivid and expressive through the coming together of emotion and sound and meaning that it was thrilling. It would be flabbergasting to hear that tone on the stage. (66–7; Hethmon's emphasis and stage directions)

So many startling ideas crowd to the fore in this passage that they might as well simply be overtly enumerated. First, for Strasberg, recorded everyday speech surpasses conventional theatrical performance in both authenticity and expressive dynamism. What seemed simple, logical, and sincere pales beside the richness of transfixed spontaneous expression on tape, despite the unavoidable fact that the recording alienates the sound of authenticity from the scene of delivery, separating

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speech from its original gestural and corporeal accompaniment. (This alienation is, of course, what allows it to be savored as the *sound* of authenticity: the recording skews apart seeing and hearing, separates visuality and aurality.) And Strasberg defines the recorded voice—the "tone"—that serves as his paragon of vividness, expressiveness, and the confluence of emotion and meaning by its limitations: the accent, the choked quality. And it perhaps even becomes such a paragon of expressivity *because* of these obstacles rather than in spite of them. Strasberg's description deliberately elides the spatiotemporal chasm between recording and listening—in the moment of hearing the tape, Strasberg believes that he has access to the original, embodied moment of utterance.

This elided interval between inscription and transmission serves as Strasberg's positive example of another surmounted hiatus: the "true"—true because seemingly unmediated—relation "between impulse and expression" (66) in acting, the overcoming of interference in the actor's body so that impulses can flow easily from initiation to expression, privacy to publicity, without being compromised. (Once again, as with Lewis's record, the noise of the medium—static, the whirring of tape reels, the hiss of speakers, any distracting background sounds—is entirely repressed.) Recording points the way to the truth—the reel to the real. One communication medium—tape recording—allows Strasberg to think medially about another—the actor's body.

Finally, the tape is so precious and illuminating precisely because, presumably, the aunt and uncle were unaware of its presence—or at least they don't seem to be in Strasberg's description—and so were not "performing." They were simply being themselves, in a state of uncontaminated privacy. And Strasberg's rhapsodies about fullness, excitement, and vividness suggest that the recording reveals whole swathes of experience unperceivable in any other way. In this anecdote, and, I suggest, much of Strasberg's work and thought, the quintessentially medial problem of acting—what intervenes between impulse and expression, enabling or inhibiting—is resolved by the unforced fullness of "reality" as uncovered by the medium of tape recording. If only acting could approach the truthful reproduction of actuality rendered by tape, a transcript not just of words—like impoverished dramatic text—but of the very grain of reality: accents, habits of speech, sudden emotive flights, the self's relation to objects.

Though the Method is most commonly associated with dredging up traumas registered in the deep folds of the unconscious mind, this anecdote links it more forcefully with Benjamin's optical unconscious—the strange swathes of everyday experience the recording's democratic gaze reveals. Strasberg makes fetishes of the aleatory aspects of the tape: it's the unforeseeable flights the speakers make, the counterintuitive, "surprising," quality of the expressive dynamics—the rubbing of a choked voice and immigrant accent against the words—that constitute its claim to authenticity. I'll leave aside the more explicit political point here—that the hardscrabble speech of the immigrant rebukes the more polished diction of the mainstream and, we can assume, more assimilated actor—though, of course, it is immanent throughout Strasberg's statement. But his margins-over-mainstream narrative has a corollary in the anecdote's reappraisal of aesthetic values, favoring the choked and limited to the eloquent and fluent.

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What seems to attract Strasberg to the recording is the sound of difference as the true sound of everyday life, the unpredictable terrain revealed by the tape recorder's unbiased hearing. The ordinary is inextricably linked with the uncanny and the uncanny with the recorded. For Strasberg, recording allowed a second look at the everyday. It made that superabundance of meaning visible, permitted him to see from "that" point of view that Wittgenstein imagined.

Once we are attuned to the significance of recording for Strasberg, technological metaphors seem to be everywhere in his writing, particularly in his descriptions of the private moment and emotion memory exercises, the two lynchpins of his practice. Strasberg's working vocabulary contains many words with connotations redolent of recording and transmission—media words that jar in the context of the studio's supposedly hermetic freedom from the bustling, noisy, commerce-minded world outside, a world that, as Strasberg is careful to note, most certainly includes the mass media of the culture industry.

In several places in *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* he describes affective recall in terms that suggest tape or vinyl as much as they do the more ineffable reaches of the nether brain. He affirms that the unconscious mind is adept at storing precise transcriptions of sensory or affective experience that only await the right stimulus to surge again to the surface, achieving a kind of cerebral-affective playback: "I mean employing the unconscious or subconscious knowledge that we have stored away but which we cannot easily or quickly put our hand on by means of the conscious mind" (83). Moreover, because this emotional–perceptual archive contains only the already-experienced—the recorded—its contents are safe to peruse again. The now-inert but still vivid secondhand impressions can be "played" again and again by the savvy Method practitioner, without fear of being taken over by the recycled feelings.

Similarly, in his descriptions of the actor's body and the actor's onstage affective life, Strasberg often sounds as if he's talking about crossed wires or kinked cables that are producing static in the line. He is forever trying to unblock blocks, clear obstacles, relax knotted tension to allow for unhindered communication of impulses from interior to exterior. At one point, deploying a particularly apt analogy, Strasberg compares actors to machines not unlike the tape recorder of his Odets anecdote:

> The actor is an instrument that pays attention. Something happens to him as a result of paying attention which is pure expression. It is happening even when he thinks nothing is being expressed. . . . Inspiration is within the actor; something starts it off. If you push a button and no electricity is attached, nothing happens. Electricity only comes from where electricity is, not from where the button is. In the actor, both electricity and button are usually unconscious. Often the button seems to be external to the actor, but it is not. (85)

Strasberg's description of the proper means by which an actor can achieve imaginative texture onstage is a case study in the penetration of his thinking by technological metaphors. Averring that concentration cannot be abstract, he proposes exercises in intense scrutiny of everyday objects that amount to a kind of

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perceptual recording, storing thickened experience for later recall and use. He proclaims that this type of concentration, "true concentration . . . always works" (95). Engaging with a hypothetical table by way of demonstration, Strasberg slowly pores over it as if panning a camera across its shape, tracking its presence across both space and time. How wide is it? How tall? How big are its parts in relation to each other? He doubles back and checks his perceptions again, sliding his attention along the table's dimensions, gathering data (97). In these and other similar examples, the actor's job is conceived as registering sensate information for eventual playback. This process is transcriptive, not mimetic; notational, not expressive. The performer should, by implication, aspire to the neutrality of the recording apparatus: simply seeing, hearing, touching, tasting what is *there*.

Lest a skeptic think I am imbuing Strasberg's parable about the recording of Odets's relatives with too much significance, I'll point out that Strasberg, fulfilling the anecdote's claims for the revelatory capacities of recording, was in the habit of recording almost everything that happened in closed sessions at the studio, creating an aural archive that spooled out over days, months, years, and decades. Both champions and critics of the studio remark on the privileged place accorded the tape recorder in its daily routines. Setting the scene for *Strasberg at the Actors Studio*, writing in the key of hagiography, Hethmon's introduction describes a scene of anticipation akin to a Hollywood soundstage eagerly awaiting the arrival of a star. The students, comely and serious (they "look like an exceptionally attractive and intelligent group of graduate students") await the great man's arrival with a buzz of eager expectation: "the air is charged." Technical precision creates the aura of professional rigor: "A technician comes in, adjusts the tape recorder, and places a glass of water and a large alarm clock on the low stand in front of a movie director's folding canvas chair" (2).

The narrator's description of the scene as like a film studio—prepped for recording—is hardly incidental. (Note the director's chair.) Performances at the studio are only preparation for the important work of critique, carried out under the attentive gaze of posterity, as represented by the tape recorder:

> Finally, whatever the scene, it will be over. . . . *The stage manager starts the tape recorder*, and one of the performers begins to talk about what he had tried to accomplish in the scene. Strasberg listens, sometimes asks a question, and finally calls on the other actors in the scene, one by one, to explain the problems they were working on. Occasionally the actors will be asked to repeat the scene, so that Strasberg can comment as it progresses. . . . Finally, Strasberg himself begins to speak. He may speak for ten or sixty minutes, but usually his remarks continue for only fifteen or twenty, because a second scene must be accommodated before the session ends about one o'clock.
>
> This is all. . . . The casual observer may be somewhat bewildered. "Is this the world-famous Actors Studio? Is this the birthplace and home of stars? Can these rather simple procedures be the famous 'Method'?" (2–3; emphasis mine)

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As in the filming of a movie, where the brilliance of each take may be visible only upon repeated viewing—after seeming sloppiness or casual "'mooching'" (3) has been alchemized into acting gold—so too, the editor suggests, does Strasberg's scintillating pedagogy emerge only in hindsight, upon review: "Only after one has seen in hundreds of examples his ability to bring the full range of his knowledge, experience, personality, and eloquence to bear on the particular problems of individual actors can one appreciate the authority he brings to the training of each one" (17).

Or, by implication, only when one has listened again to the tapes of those hundreds of examples. This expansive conception of duration is conditioned by recording. A similar sense of the scale of the studio's work frequently recurs in Strasberg's critiques, bearing witness to the high seriousness and vital importance of its project to redeem the American theatre for Art with a capital A. He refers to "running" engagements with particular actors over months and years (34). Various actors repeatedly refer to watching their colleagues over long periods. It took two years for one actor to "train [him]self to look and listen and try to understand" (48). An actress points out that "Some of us have watched one another four or five years, some of us ten years" (49). Just as the capacity of tape for audio transcription is endless—subject only to time, opportunity, and the availability of raw material, looping endlessly back on itself, playing again from the beginning as soon as it ends, recorded over in an instant palimpsest—so too is Strasberg's sense of the size of the studio's project shaped by the boundlessness of his favorite archival tool. Even the carefully edited Strasberg of *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* frequently divagates, loops back, revisits the same anecdotes in a way that suggests the medium lying behind his messages. Critic Gordon Rogoff makes the point eloquently:

> Miles upon miles of recorded tape, even when someday they might be edited, may give—as they do in the Studio—a sense of presence and imminent discovery. But like exercises that do not necessarily lead to art, they cannot be expected to drift automatically into philosophy.[20]

Recording was the way Strasberg transformed his impromptu pronouncements into theory—and the necessary ground for that theory. Rogoff—the Actors Studio's administrative director from 1958 to 1960 and one of its most perceptive observers in print afterward—recounts the unvarnished version of Strasberg's classroom discourse:

> Where he is most at home—directly coping with an actor's immediate problems demonstrated moments before in a scene or exercise—he is still unable to match his passion to a clear expression of it. His sentences wind their way in jerky, fumbling patterns through cluttered underbrush, most of them masterpieces of how not to use the language. Studded with qualifiers, parenthetical clauses, and jumbled syntax as his message is, the only miracle is not that it is widely misunderstood, as he so often complains, but that it is understood at all.

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> A written transcription of Strasberg's extemporaneous spoken words can be only partially evocative of the sound he makes; indeed, to transcribe him on paper is to transform what is essentially an astounding run-on sentence into a series of reasonably intelligible single sentences with commas, semicolons, and full stops.[21]

Rogoff goes on to proffer just such a transcription, and the paragraph's seething stops and starts, abrupt divagations, and churning vagaries chafe the eye, while also reminding us how much careful grooming went into producing the more manicured prose of the *Strasberg at the Actors Studio*.

But even in that regularized text, the editor is careful to preserve some flashes of the demotic, hectoring Strasberg, some tics of everyday speech to indicate not only that the transcripts preserve the heat of spontaneous problem solving, but also that Strasberg is a hands-on, rough-and-ready man of practice, not an abstracter of the actor's task: "Huh?"; "I don't know"; "I forget" (259); "okay" (151, 212, 275, etc.); "Gee!"; "Boy!"; "You see?" (89, 235, 370, etc.). These artifacts of the originary scenes of utterance, fetishized survivals of extemporized speech, testify to the book's beginnings in impromptu talk, in immediate verbal objects. They attest to the status of Strasberg's remarks as unpremeditated responses to present performances, not commentary for a disinterested reader. We are always reminded that it is not just the words that carry the force of Strasberg's ideas but the situation in which he delivered them and the power of the animating principles that gave them velocity. The many moments of inarticulacy vouchsafe that his doctrine is rooted in practice, not abstract speculation; the disavowal of fluency testifies to his authenticity. It's the "noise" of his speech—the surface vibration—that provides signs of this seismic stratum of subterranean meaning.

And of course, these signifiers of Strasberg's natural speech patterns, intended to serve as evidence of his immediate presence, are most the products of recording, of mediation. His Method theorizing requires Method reading: his readers must always scan for subtext, ascribe experiential fullness to sketchily visible thoughts. The available texts of his classes evince the same flummoxing of fluency, the same preference for feelings over words that the Method's harsher critics indicted in the acting of Method-associated performers such as Brando. The speech crimes of Method acting seem also to have been the speech crimes of its major pedagogue: he too, preferred feelings to words.

Strasberg's (tactical?) vagueness and prolixity on paper only reinforce the sense that the reader would have to have been *there*, at the studio in the heat of the session, to understand him completely—his gnomic pronouncements remain lastingly private even as he rambles on for pages in public. Like the transcript of reality in his anecdote about listening to the Odets clan, his dictated declamations can only gesture to a fuller truth. And reading through the sessions is itself a kind of playback. The reader is invited to restage the discussions imaginatively, returning to the scenes of breakthrough or blockage—scenes we know really happened because of the book's origins in transcripts of recorded classwork—to pore over their import as acting parables.

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The real drama of the studio wasn't to be found onstage in snippets of Inge, Odets, or Chekhov. It began with the click of the tape recorder and hit its high points when the irresistible force of Strasberg's pedagogical will collided with the immovable object of a stubborn actor. The centerpiece of *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* is a confrontation between Strasberg and a recalcitrant actress, identified only as RR. Over more than fifteen pages, what began as a critique of scene work heats up into a one-act play, depicting a battle of opposing personalities as volatile as the best dustup from mid-twentieth-century realist drama. Clearly intending to make it a parable-play—call it *The Breakthrough!*—the editor presents the scene as dialogue, complete with stage directions depicting the main players' movements and emotional states. (Usually in *Strasberg at the Actors Studio*, the actors' transcribed questions or commentary provide cues for Strasberg's ruminations, but the speakers don't remain a part of the text that follows; they disappear obediently into the background of his monologue.)

The point of the episode isn't the intellectual content—the words themselves are mostly quite banal—but the record of a titanic struggle and the powerful feelings involved. Strasberg—haranguing, hectoring, bullying, overbearing—shouts, interrupts, urges, interrogates. The young actress—successively mumbling, weeping, half laughing, half and fully sobbing—screams incoherently, kicks furniture, curses, rages, protests—and eventually relents (227–41). She is blocked, full of dammed-up expression and emotion that needs to be "let out" (239). This catharsis, and not, crucially, a better performance of the soliloquy from *Romeo and Juliet* that she's ostensibly workshopping, is the true goal of the scene. And the measure of its success is not crisply enunciated pentameters but that the actress is left tear-stained, exhausted, and submissive, having made a mess of the room. One can only imagine how very tenuous the relationship of this psychodrama to Shakespeare must have seemed. (Strasberg notes that she almost broke the tape recorder.) The process is manifestly physical as Strasberg asserts his control over the actress's body, piece by piece, leading her in a series of fantastical movements: "Arms wide. Hold on to the chair. That's right. You have good hands. That's right. (*She sobs.*)" (238). Episodes like this confirm Brustein's worst suspicions about the Method's assault on the articulate acting demanded by complicated classical text. But even more important, they also show clearly that for Strasberg, fluent language was too public an instrument—for either pedagogical discourse or theatrical performance—to be the vehicle for theatrical insight. Really to do Method, you had to leave words behind—or trouble the gaps between them.

In one intriguing passage in *Method—or Madness?*, Robert Lewis describes the photographer Alfred Stieglitz waiting patiently in front of an office building for the right moment of exposure to capture an eloquent moment of urban loneliness and makes an analogy with the Method's training techniques.[22] Strasberg, too, was fond of "waiting" during exercises—dilating the moment of performance, allowing actors to wander far off book and off scene, stretching out the performance until the fictive situation of the scene began to collapse into the reality of the studio exercise, until the right quality of veracity, of natural expression, began to appear in the acting. Just as Strasberg's faithful acolytes kept the tape recorder running to catch pedagogical genius in the moment of its efflorescence, Strasberg frequently

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kept the exercises going, creating intervals of open-ended receptivity—a mode of attention that matched the perfect audition of the ever-present tape recorder. The studio's near-obsessive habit of recording Strasberg's comments after each session suggests a kind of continuity in the archive: an ongoing metadiscourse conducted for the ears of posterity, apart from the demands of engaging with each day's scenes, dramatizing a lonely crusader's search for theatrical truth. His comments were both private and public in conception from the outset.

In the published version of the sessions, because the individual actors Strasberg addresses are anonymized, identified only by letters, and because the reader has no access to the performances Strasberg expounds on beyond the barest of descriptions of the material performed, the "drama" of the encounters is transposed from scenes to critique of scenes, from Strasberg addressing specific acting difficulties to Strasberg taking on the problems of the American theatre at large and addressing acting problems in the abstract—a titanic monodrama of the lonely prophet crying out in the wilderness against mendacity, artifice, commercialism, and glitz and pleading for reality, honesty, and art.

Confronted with Strasberg's perpetual demands for more of these elusive quantities—more reality, more texture, more imagination, more art—what he calls the "sense of 'more-ness' that life has" (72)—we should think again of his anecdotal distinction between the performance of reality's transcript by a careful actor and reality itself as audible on tape. The latter, in his recounting, is fuller, richer, more dynamic, more unpredictable—more "more."

But Robert Brustein's jeremiad against the Method's cluttered speech raises the specter of another "more." For him, and spectators like him, the "more" revealed by Method acting's creative dialogue with recording was not an experience of fullness or vividness. It was actually frighteningly empty or obstructive: more obstacles, more strange blank spots, more meaningless noise and less music. Both Strasberg and Lewis—prompted no doubt by Brustein or the ire of critics who felt similarly (there were many, including Harold Clurman, Strasberg's old colleague from the Group Theatre days)[23]—take great pains in their published statements to distance themselves from the Method's infamous mumblers. *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* and *Method—or Madness?* both contain lengthy disquisitions disavowing poor speech and affirming the applicability of Method techniques to all genres of theatre, not just the proletarian antiheroes of American urban realism.

But perhaps they protested too much: the mumblers were the most faithful exponents of the Method's mediated aesthetic, the most faithful to the aspects of speech that only recording could reveal. Strasberg's (and Lewis's) consternation is entirely understandable: techniques that were supposedly about unblocking the actor, freeing them to communicate, making their performances more full of the ineffable vividness of real, unperformative, everyday life had become synonymous in the minds of the public with stymied speech, inarticulate feelings, mumble-smeared delivery. But as both Strasberg's transcripts and Brando's iconic performances illustrate, these are aspects of the same thing: taking recording as the arbiter of the real also means taking the noise of everyday life as the substance of everyday life. It also means absorbing the noise of the medium into that substance.

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In a 1956 lecture on the Method, Michael Redgrave articulated this reevaluation of noise and music, sound and sense, background and foreground, margin and center in particularly vivid terms: "The danger [of the Method] is that what is seized on and preserved, in this passionate quest for originality, is not the essential but the decorative, or even the waste product."[24] Just as the Method valorized characters from marginal social groups, it made abject perceptual data central to its aesthetic.

Reviewing the Actors Studio Theatre's inaugural 1963 production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* for the *New York Times*, Howard Taubman noted that while Strasberg's approach was "unhurried, sensitive and full of relish for the details of Russian life," the plentitude of such details sometimes disturbed the relation between atmosphere and event. In particular, he pointed out that in the first act, "the chatter and laughter at the table in the background are so insistent and loud that it becomes difficult to follow what is happening in the foreground."[25] Even more remarkable, this conversational noisiness was matched by a corresponding busyness throughout the aural spectrum of the production. Taubman described a "constant concern for the literalism of the precise sounds in the distance, like the tolling of the bells, the calls of the birds flying south and the music of the band playing for the departing soldiers."[26] The same preference for "more," for texture over detail and sound over sense, that pervades Strasberg's thought and studio work seems to have infiltrated his few publicly staged productions from the era.

The Noise of Authenticity: Marlon Brando's Methods of Mediation

Back to Brustein, Brando, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. I'm going to take Brustein at his word and look at Brando's early career performances as exemplars of Method acting. Despite Marianne Conroy's salutary reminder that the Brando fixation of the Method's midcentury critics was essentially revisionist—"to identify Brando as the singular exemplar of the Method style," she points out "is to overlook the intense rifts within that segment of the American acting community influenced by Stanislavski"[27]—I'm going to be just as monomaniacal. My idea here is that the Brando obsession was rooted not just in a confusion over methodology—whether his acting could be attributed to Adler or Strasberg or was properly Stanislavskian at all—but in a recognition that Brando's acting fulfilled a dynamic that was present in Strasberg's thought and work anyway.

Just like Strasberg, in fact, Brando's performances in the iconic early Kazan films—*Streetcar* most prominently but *On the Waterfront* too—use recording to mediate between public and private. For Strasberg, a way of making private sessions public also became a way of translating private speech into public thought, while retaining the aura of authenticity imbued by the original scene of utterance. For Brando, recording became a way of making the public art of acting more private. His performances—whether deliberately or not—obsessively worry the border between those two terms. Incorporating more noise into his delivery, he marks the precise interval where private impulse becomes public expression, simultaneously pointing to the presence of the camera and microphone by making sounds

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only they can register. Upon closer examination, his mumbling wasn't simple mumbling at all but a deliberate attempt to tamper with his instrument to produce new sounds.

Mumbling is itself a medial problem. Mumbling, stammering, and misspeaking are events in which the human apparatus of communication—the brain that searches out the words, the tongue and mouth that shape them—becomes interference instead of vehicle, interposes itself between words and listeners. The nonsignifying noise that attends speech—the ums, the uhs, the clearing of throats, licking of lips, all the vocal stuff we edit out while parsing out the words—surges to the fore. This collapse is particularly acute in the theatre, where the playwright's words preexist and surround the actors who will embody them as a kind of transcendental halo of meaning. In the theatre, mumbling is static on the line.

If you return to the film of *A Streetcar Named Desire*—ground zero of the Method's campaign against good speech—with Brustein's complaints in mind, however, you discover that the problem is not simply one of articulation. It's not just that Brando mumbles, although he certainly does that, waging a one-man war on consonants throughout his scenes; it's also that he usually actually has something *in* his mouth, an object or morsel around which his character's words must flow. In practically every scene of his in Kazan's film, Brando is chewing on something or other. He snacks, he sips, he bites, he chews, he drags on a cigar. And while he does so, he's also masticating Tennessee Williams's words, grinding them against the food or smoking paraphernalia in his mouth and, thanks to the attentive microphones and cameras, pushing the action of his mouth against the frame of the picture. (When he screams "Stella! Stella!" in that now-mythic sequence, you can hear his voice rasping against the limits of the recording apparatus—the invisible line where distortion begins.)

In the original Broadway production of the play, as Kazan's exhaustive director's notes for the production elaborate, Brando's oral fixations were intended to symbolize Stanley's brute sensuality: he loves to taste, to ingest, to display mastery over his environment by literally incorporating its objects into his body.[28] He's the ruler of his domain ("Every man's a king!" he roars at Stella), and the apartment is stocked with his favorite things—snacks, cigarettes, liquor. In most scenes, his first action after his entrance is to put one of these in his mouth, making his body part of his kingdom and his kingdom part of his body.

But once transferred to film, this metaphorical munching became a more complex proposition. Freed from the imperative of making himself heard in a Broadway-sized theatre, Brando was also more free to mumble, slur, drawl, and elide. Think of Brando's occluded mouth as a kind of prepared piano—like Cage, he was adapting his instrument to make noises most spectators hadn't heard before. Recall Clifford Odets's uncle on the Group Theatre's famous tape: once again, but deliberately this time, we have a voice that becomes more "authentic" because of its—self-imposed—limitations. Brando's full mouth always threatens to choke his speech, and the struggle of words against morsels introduces an aleatory element into his acting, enhanced by the microphone's ability to catch happenstance sounds.

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Put simply: when Brando was chewing, he couldn't fully anticipate the sound of his own voice. He introduced a chance procedure into his performance, created the conditions by which the uncanniness of the mediated everyday could slip into view. Like Strasberg, he wanted his audience to be taken by surprise, to experience the everyday as unexpected difference. His chance-operative chewing maintained the spontaneity of his acting while also troubling that slippery quantity that perpetually threatened the private truth of his performance: the inherent publicity of language. And perhaps, as for Strasberg, these by-products, the unforeseeable sounds created by Brando's experiments with obstruction, had a sturdiness that rivaled the material objects anchoring everyday life. Revealed by the camera, they were true because they were strange, immediate because mediated.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche DuBois famously yearns for magic, not reality. Her world of beauty, illusion, and artifice is deliberately set against Stanley's grasping world of material achievement, sensate pleasures, and hard facts. Brando's performance in Kazan's film quite literally put the terms of this debate at the tip of his tongue. Audience members (such as Brustein) accustomed to the more fluent performances of a previous generation of actors wanted the language of playwrights to trip nimbly from actors' lips, exquisitely modulated and articulated even in times of storm and stress. These performers were eloquent even in suffering. Marianne Conroy astutely points out that Brando's costars in the stage and screen *Streetcar*s, Jessica Tandy and Vivien Leigh—tutored in the English repertory system and old Hollywood—were models of diction under duress. She suggests that "through its casting and performance, *Streetcar* staged a struggle between acting styles that enabled Method acting to become visible as a distinctive style."[29]

And film was expected to translate the actor's body to pictures without leaving stubborn residue behind to remind viewers of the materiality of those bodies. Brando's acting in the film version of *Streetcar* deliberately skews the bodily production of language away from the apprehension of meaning. In doing so, he encourages us to pay attention to aspects of everyday speech that we usually tune out, the nonsignifying "noise" of human communication. Brando's teething continually marks the border between inside and outside, the precise interval at which speech becomes public, the moment when utterance as a somatic product, the work of the breath, the lips, the teeth and tongue, the resonance of the body's echo chambers, erupts into the air to be harvested by listeners as semantic signals. Auditors of the film must work harder than usual to sort noise from sense, to separate semiotics from mechanics. (His hand gestures, too, often trace this division: he holds his fingers to his lips as if measuring the vibrations of his speech, briefly rests a fluttering hand on his chest. The play of his performance is medial, tracing the line between inside and outside.)

Film theorist Laura Marks has coined the term "haptic visuality" to describe film or video images that create an appearance of tactility by pulling the gaze insistently to their flickering surfaces, drawing the eye across textures or along contours. Such synesthetic pictures, she argues, foster a feeling of proximity that seems almost to bridge the chasm between viewer and screen, between seeing and touching. In her memorable formulation, these images "approach the viewer

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not through the eyes alone, but along the skin."[30] I expand upon Marks's idea somewhat here to include recorded sound effects that, combined with film images, work to suggest physical nearness. This notion helps to explain what viewers may have found either enticing or alien about Brando's acting. His material being remains perpetually present in his speech, creating perceptual noise by implying touch along with sound. He confuses the aural and the tactile, suggests corporeal dimensions behind cinematic flatness, subverts surface with depth.

But even as Brando's performance brings us closer to his body, it also pushes us further away. His acting makes a virtue of interference. By putting objects between viewers and his words, he reminds us of the presence of that other great hiatus between his speech and our listening, the camera and the editing room. He makes us aware of the gap between performance and spectation. For critics of the Method such as Brustein, in fact, Brando's entire rendition of the character was an obstacle between the playwright and his audience. As the prime exponent of an acting style celebrated for its purported immediacy—for bringing characters closer to us with real existing emotion—it's startling how Brando's performance holds us at a distance, interposes barriers. He simultaneously invites the camera and his audience nearer and rebuffs these urges to proximity. Staging intimate closeness and impenetrable privacy at the same moment, his performance—at once mediate and immediate—reproduces the dance of public and private that recurs throughout Strasberg's work and thought.

And, as with Strasberg, this distancing reflects an important fact: it is precisely those aspects of Brando's performance that became hallmarks of Method acting's immediacy and authenticity—the chewed-over words, the mumbled delivery—that were most mediated, most the product of technology and technologically enhanced perception. His performance is more "cinematic" because it relies so heavily on fidgeting, mumbling, and obstructed speech that only the democratic eyes and ears of the camera and microphone could pick up. The noisiness of his performance is indivisible from the noisiness of the medium.

Kazan's journal entries about *A Streetcar Named Desire* reveal that one of the key changes he planned to make while transposing his production to film was to accentuate the sonic environment of New Orleans—as a way to bring the panoply of the modern city to bustling life but also as a way to presage Blanche's psychic collapse.[31] Noting that the high-strung Blanche is sensitive to sounds, Kazan heightened the aural effect of a raucous urban milieu in the film—clamoring vendors, pealing church bells, traffic noise, and the chugging mechanical din of the factory. In one interpolated scene—in fact, a dramatization of the moment; in the play, it happens offstage—in which Stanley tells Mitch about Blanche's lurid past, the dialogue is entirely drowned out by the thrumming of heavy machinery. The violence of the argument and subsequent grappling is juxtaposed with the relentless brute force of the assembly line.

Why is this important? I think there is a crucial connection between Kazan's resolve to make his film noisier in order to reflect the everyday life of postwar cities and the fact that Brando's enormously influential performance made acting noisier, abetted by modern technology, in this case, the recording apparatus of film. Brando's noisy acting is the corollary of Kazan's noisy city. (As if

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acknowledging the connection between recording and noisiness, at one point Brando as Stanley chucks a radio, the totem of the postwar media ecology, out the window after complaining about the cacophonous pop music Stella and Blanche are listening to.)

So the story of Method acting's romance with the camera and microphone is not, as it is often portrayed, just a narrow story of the triumph of more verisimilar filmic acting over the stagy artifice of theatrical acting or of cinema's defeat of theatre as a mass-cultural medium. Rather, it's a story of how acting became noisier as everyday life did. (In this fable, Robert Brustein becomes a kind of Blanche Dubois figure, undone by the cacophony of a grasping, mediated world unfriendly to his canonical sympathies.) As Suárez points out, "After the machine was there to register it, and after cultural production was done exclusively with or alongside machines, it was harder to keep out the racket."[32]

If we needed proof that Brando's habit of speaking with his mouth full was as much the expression of Method acting's creative dialogue with analog recording as it was a particular oral quirk of Stanley Kowalski's, his portrayal of Terry Molloy in *On the Waterfront* delivers the goods. In the second of his indelible early performances, his mouth is once again almost always occupied, and his habit of withholding persists. Here, chewing gum and sometimes pretzels are the objects of choice. (He even offers gum as a panacea to his vocally outraged sweetheart.) But more important, the film is even more adamant in aligning noise with authenticity than *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

The plot turns on the possession—and eventual confession—of secret knowledge by Brando's character, Terry Molloy. An unwitting accomplice and witness to a murder, he is nonetheless bound by the taciturn code of the longshoreman and refuses to turn stool pigeon. His problem is thus the Method actor's problem: how to align private imperatives with the necessity of public speech, how to disclose the truth without compromising it or himself, how to make interior knowledge exterior fact without cheapening it, how to identify the fit medium for that authentic expression. And the matter in Brando's mouth makes this dilemma tangible: his speech is especially precious because every utterance must surmount obstacles. Each audible word is hard won. Throughout the film, we are conditioned to accept Terry as more "authentic" because he is less verbal (the film is full of prolix liars in positions of power) and because he must fight harder than anyone else to say anything at all. He used to be a boxer, but now his sparring partner is language.

Given all this, it's especially significant that when Terry finally confesses what he knows—to the sister of the murder victim, who also happens to be the film's love interest—his voice is drowned out by the workaday clamor of the docks: the blaring of ship's horns, the rattle of machinery. As with Kazan's additions to *Streetcar,* the making public of a secret is accompanied by the smothering of speech, and noise keeps private the terms of that revelation. We can just barely detect Brando's tones under the racket, but what we hear is texture, not detail; sound, not sense. Freed from the burden of conveying specific meanings, Brando's performance is "pure" confession, private feeling unsullied by the publicity of language—feelings without words, to return to Brustein's elegant phrase.

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In this sequence, the noise of modern life completely drowns language but does not submerge feeling, which, we are meant to understand, is perhaps communicated more powerfully without being limited by words. And once again, noisy acting is the corollary of a noisy city. Technology both enables this mode of expression and conceals it, makes Brando's feeling public and keeps it private all at once. For both Kazan and Brando, the grain of authenticity is more valuable than its particular verbal phrasings.

This is perhaps the apotheosis of where recording as a hallmark of veracity led Method acting: truth is only possible when words are smothered by noise. The noise of the medium and the noise of everyday life become indivisible. The camera and tape recorder were the perfect solutions to the Method's queasiness about airing private emotions in public places, a way to pretend those public places were not public at all by providing an audience that wasn't an audience. In the final analysis, for the Method, truth is what the camera sees or tape recorder hears: a kind of impossibly, inhumanly, expansive perception but also a mode of paying attention that makes no hierarchical distinctions between sounds. To the microphone, the noise of machinery on the dock is as good as the noise of Brando's emotive confession. To perceive everything is also to perceive nothing. More can be less.

ENDNOTES

1. For an evocative account of the Town Hall concert and its place in John Cage's body of work, see David Grubbs, *Records Ruin the Landscape: John Cage, the Sixties, and Sound Recording* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

2. Robert Brustein, "America's New Culture Hero: Feelings without Words," *Commentary* 25 (January 1958): 123–9.

3. Ibid., 123.

4. For recent considerations of these and other questions the Method and its legacy raise, see David Krasner, ed., *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future* (New York: St. Martins, 2000); Rosemary Malague, *An Actress Prepares: Women and "the Method"* (New York: Routledge, 2012); and Shonni Enelow, "The Method and the Means," *Theatre Survey* 53.1 (2012): 85–103.

5. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media,* ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2008), 37.

6. Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* trans. and intro. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 23–4.

7. Cage predicted this new mode of music making in his 1937 essay-manifesto "The Future of Music: Credo," reprinted in Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 3–6.

8. Juan A. Suárez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2007), 8.

9. Ibid., 8–9.

10. Ibid., 9.

11. Richard Blum, *American Film Acting: The Stanislavski Heritage* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), xvi.

12. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value,* trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 4e. I first encountered this enormously suggestive fragment in Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

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13. Robert H. Hethmon, ed., *Strasberg at the Actors Studio: Tape-Recorded Sessions* (New York: Viking, 1965), 118. Cited hereinafter directly in the text with parenthetical text references.

14. See Strasberg's discussion of these exercises in *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* (New York: Plume, 1988). *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* contains several pages of evocative photographs of students performing the exercises in the classroom.

15. Marianne Conroy, "Acting Out: Method Acting, the National Culture, and the Middlebrow Disposition in Cold War America," *Criticism* 35.2 (1993): 239–63, at 249.

16. Harold Clurman, "Introduction," in Robert Lewis, *Method—or Madness?* (New York: Samuel French, 1958), xi–xiii, at xi.

17. Lewis, 5.

18. Ibid. Lewis also admits (jokingly?) that he can't prove it's really Salvini on the record. ("It better be—I paid the guy enough for it.")

19. Ibid., 11.

20. Gordon Rogoff, "Lee Strasberg: Burning Ice," *Tulane Drama Review* 9.2 (1964): 131–54, at 141.

21. Ibid., 140.

22. Lewis, 109.

23. See Harold Clurman, "Actors in Style—and Style in Actors," *New York Times Magazine*, December 7, 1952, 26–7, 34, 36, 38, at 38.

24. Michael Redgrave quoted in Conroy, 247.

25. Howard Taubman, "A Tender *Three Sisters,*" *New York Times*, June 23, 1964.

26. Ibid.

27. Conroy, 253.

28. Elia Kazan, *Kazan on Directing* (New York: Vintage, 2009), 57. Also see Brenda Murphy, *Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A Collaboration in the Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 53–4.

29. Conroy, 255–6.

30. Laura Marks, "Video Haptics and Erotics," *Screen* 39.4 (1998): 331–48, at 331.

31. Kazan, 157.

32. Suárez, 10.

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