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Mark Travis' Interrogation Process

Toward a new methodology for directing Actors

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Proces Výslechu Marka Travise

Smerem k nové metodice pro rezii hercu

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I declare that I have elaborated the Bachelor's/Master's thesis or doctoral dissertation entitled

Mark Travis' Interrogation Process

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Mark Travis' Interrogation Process as a new directing tool for professional Directors working with Actors today, in the digital age. As a methodology developed in the 21st century and aimed primarily at film Directors, Mark Travis' Interrogation Process allows the Director to bypass the Actor's thinking mind by interrogating the Character, with the objective of triggering authentic responses through the Character's emotional memory. This thesis provides an in-depth, step-by-step guide and analysis of the Interrogation Process, as well as critical reflection on its historical roots and its potential use in the work of professional Directors today. This research extends to Zoom interviews with professional Directors and Actors who are already familiar with, or have used, the Interrogation Process in their work with Actors, as well as a personal (Zoom) interview with Academy Award winning Director Agnieszka Holland, to establish a counterpoint between Mark Travis' Interrogation Process and other contemporary approaches to directing Actors for film.

ABSTRAKT

Tato práce zkoumá proces výslechu Marka Travise jako nový režijní nástroj pro profesionální režiséry pracující s herci dnes, v digitálním věku. Jako metodologie vyvinutá v 21. století a zaměřená především na filmové režiséry umožňuje Proces výslechu Marka Travise režisérovi obejít mysl herce tím, že vyslýchá postavu, s cílem spustit autentické reakce prostřednictvím emocionální paměti postavy. Tato práce poskytuje podrobného průvodce a analýzu procesu výslechu krok za krokem, stejně jako kritickou reflexi jeho historických kořenů a jeho potenciálního využití v práci profesionálních ředitelů v současnosti. Tento výzkum zahrnuje rozhovory Zoom s profesionálními režiséry a herci, kteří jsou již obeznámeni s procesem výslechu nebo jej používali při své práci s herci, a také osobní (Zoom) rozhovor s režisérkou Agnieszkou Holland, oceněnou Oscarem, s cílem vytvořit protipól mezi Markem Travisův proces výslechu a další současné přístupy k režii herců pro film.

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¹ The capitalization of specific terms like Director, Actor, Interrogator and Character, is a stylistic choice made for this Thesis, for the purpose of better defining and highlighting these roles within the context of the research.

PREFACE: SEARCHING FOR A NEW METHODOLOGY FOR DIRECTING ACTORS, THROUGH THE EYES OF A STUDENT DIRECTOR IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Working with Actors as a student Director at FAMU Film School in Prague, where I began my Masters studies in directing in September, 2018, presented a variety of interesting challenges. The Actors that we cast for our student films didn't always have substantial acting experience; some didn't even have an acting background per se. Working with a mix of professional and amateur Actors meant that I had to diversify my directing strategies in accordance with the Actors I was working with, in order to get the best performance out of each one. Although it is important for a student Director to be flexible and adapt to the working processes of each Actor, I felt the need for a more consistent and extensive directing methodology which I could resort to in my work with Actors, regardless of the Actor's experience or level. When directing amateur Actors, I found that the most effective way to guide them towards an authentic performance was to explore emotional points of contact between their personal experiences and those of their Character. However, using such a personal and psychological directing style had its drawbacks, as it often left the Actors with emotional fallout, which neither they nor I were fully equipped to deal with. Finding a new directing methodology which could explore those same emotional depths without invading the Actor's personal and private space became paramount, and the main basis for this Master thesis' investigation.

In addition to the pursuit for consistent authentic performances, I was looking for a technique which had been developed in the 21st century, tried and tested in a time where digital was the predominant format for shooting films. Although the acting theories of the 20th century taught in FAMU, like the works of Stanislavski, Strasberg, Adler, Meisner, and Spolin, are still of incredible value for a student Director like me, I wanted to explore a way of working with Actors which took full advantage of the opportunities provided by shooting in a digital format. The acting theories of the past, such as Stanislavski's² 'System', may not answer the needs of Actors and Directors in the digital age, because they were not imagined for digital filmmaking. Working on digital is by and large much cheaper and more accessible than working on film, which provides the Director with greater flexibility to shape a performance on set and during

² Constantin Stanislavski, whose ideas on acting and the theater helped shape the direction of on-screen Actors in the 20th Century in Hollywood and European cinema, was born in 1863. His ideas, which marked the shift to an exploration of the Actor's psychology, are still used and studied by Directors and student Directors today.

the editing process. When shooting on film, the Director and Actors are often constrained by the amount of film stock they can use, which often means that they need to decide on the performance before shooting, so that they can deliver it in less takes. On the other hand, the digital format gives the Actor and Director space to explore different aspects in their performance over the span of more takes, which allows for a greater freedom to experiment on camera. By having, in principle, more varied footage, working in a digital format also gives the Director and editor a wider selection of takes from which to build the Actor's final performance. As Keanu Reeves narrates in the documentary "Side by Side" by Cristopher Kenneally (2012, min.11), with digital cameras a Director is able to see exactly what is being recorded on set, as it is being recorded, and unlike with film, he doesn't have to wait a day to watch what he has captured. Reeves states that in the digital age the Director is no longer tethered to watching dailies, he can watch 'immediatelies' instead.

My starting point in the pursuit for a contemporary directing methodology was the work of LA/Hawaii-based Director and directing coach Mark Travis³, and his 'Interrogation Process'. My first contact with Mark Travis' Interrogation Process came in my first year at FAMU, in 2018, when a clip of a rehearsal for a scene from "American Beauty" was played in one of my "working with Actors" classes, under Professor Mary Angiolillo. The Director in that rehearsal, Mark Travis, wasn't directing the Actors in any way I had seen or heard about before. He wasn't speaking to the Actors at all, or giving them any direction towards a concrete result; he was actually interrogating the Characters as if he were a voice inside their heads, digging into their emotional depths and triggering spontaneous responses from the Characters, exploring layers of authenticity in their performance in a way which made the Actors feel less exposed. Every

³ *Mark Travis is an American Director, currently working as a Directing Consultant for Directors, Actors and writers in Honolulu, Hawaii. Travis is a graduate of Yale Drama School, and has worked under the tutelage of Group Theater greats Stella Adler and Bobby Lewis, and improvisation teacher Viola Spolin, all renowned names of 20th century acting theories. After completing his graduate studies at Yale, Mark Travis moved to Los Angeles, where he joined multiple experimental theater groups and formed his own theater company, called "The Open Circle Theater." In the 1980's, Mark Travis was invited by Harold Clurman, co-founder of The Group Theater, to join the world-renowned Actor's Studio in New York, and by the end of the 80's Mark Travis began directing well known American sitcoms, among which are "The Facts of Life" and "Family Ties". In 1991, Mark Travis directed his first and only feature film, the Warner Brothers comedy titled "Going Under", starring Bill Pullman, Ned Beatty, Roddy McDowall and Robert Vaughn. From 2000 to the present day, Mark Travis has focused mainly on teaching workshops on directing Actors for Directors and writers. Mark Travis is a member of the Director's Guild of America (DGA), and has been teaching his writing, directing and staging methodology, the Travis Technique, to Actors, writers and Directors worldwide. Mark Travis's Interrogation Process is one of the three pillars of his Travis Technique, and is complemented by the "Write Your Life" and "The Power of Staging" pillars. In 2008, in one of his Directing Workshops at Blinger Film Lab in Amsterdam, Mark Travis started directing one of his Actors as a voice inside the Character's head, and found that technique yielded interesting results. That technique eventually became the Interrogation Process, which is the object of my focus in this thesis.*

time the Actors read the scene as their Characters, their performance was different, depending on which direction Mark Travis went with his interrogation in a given moment.

I was immediately intrigued by this technique and interested to learn more, and try it out in my own work, to see how it fit into my pursuit for a contemporary methodology of directing Actors. For that reason, I decided to make Mark Travis' Interrogation Process the focal point of my research for this Master's Thesis.

Mark Travis' Interrogation Process is an interesting blend between the old and the new, soaking up the influence from the great acting theorists of the 20th century and translating it into the digital age. Delving into the Interrogation Process as a holistic methodology for Directors today allowed me to explore and better understand why the acting theories of the past still carry so much weight in the digital era, in the contemporary curriculums of student Directors, and in the tools professional Directors use to direct Actors. By establishing a parallel between the historic acting theories of Stanislavski, Strasberg, Adler, Chekhov, Hagen and Spolin, and Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, created in the digital age and still being developed today, I discovered just how needed this translation of old ideas into a new digital format was.

Vasco Viana,

Prague, 2023.

INTRODUCTION

The main question posed by this thesis is: how can Mark Travis' Interrogation Process impact the work of Directors seeking to elicit consistent authentic performances from Actors today, in the digital age? The research done for this thesis starts as an in-depth analysis of Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, and is primarily based on personal research interviews conducted with Mark Travis and professional film Directors and Actors who have used the Interrogation Process in their work. From the analysis of the Interrogation Process itself and the research on the historic acting theories of the 20th century, to the interviews with film professionals, this Master's thesis is geared toward understanding and contextualizing Mark Travis' Interrogation Process as a contemporary directing methodology. Using this opportunity to interview a myriad of professional film Directors and Actors, the door becomes open for a deeper exploration into the potential wants and needs of Directors today, which in turn allows Mark Travis' Interrogation Process to be understood within the scope of multiple other contemporary directing approaches. This rich juxtaposition gives further insight into how the Interrogation Process may answer some of the problems Directors face today in their work with Actors, and how different directing obstacles may need different directing approaches.

THESIS OVERVIEW

Mark Travis' Interrogation Process is permeated by acting and directing ideas which can be traced back to the early 20th century. From the exploration of those historical acting theories, the foundation is set from which to start working towards the present, uncovering the answers to the wants and needs of Directors today.

Chapter One, *A deep dive into the Character's world: a review of Mark Travis' Interrogation Process*, is an in-depth personal analysis and guide of Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, a directing methodology which has only ever been documented in Mark Travis' online courses *Deconstructing the Interrogation Process* (2020) and *Socrates on Steroids* (2022). A *step-by-step* roadmap of the Interrogation Process does not yet exist in published format, so that documentation and systematization had to be done as part of this Master's thesis. Chapter One is an analysis of the material made available by Mark Travis, which is organized and shaped into a set of guidelines for those Directors who are coming into contact with Mark Travis' Interrogation Process for the very first time.

Chapter Two, *The roots of the Interrogation Process: comparing and contrasting Mark Travis' Interrogation Process with the great Western acting theories of the 20th Century*, provides a better understanding of how Mark Travis' ideas in the Interrogation Process relate to those explored by some of the big names of 20th century acting theories, among which are Stanislavski, Strasberg, Adler and Meisner. Connecting the ideas percolating in Mark Travis' Interrogation Process to the acting theories of the 20th century allows for a deeper understanding of the creative and historical context of Mark Travis' Interrogation Process.

Chapter Three, *Gauging Mark Travis' Interrogation Process through the eyes of film professionals: a complementary directing methodology for the digital age*, is an extension of the research on Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, and aims to contextualize it as a potential directing tool for the digital age. These research interviews with film professionals allow for an understanding of how the Interrogation Process fits in the existing working methodologies of professional Directors, and how it could answer their wants and needs in the direction of Actors. The sub-chapter 3.2, titled *Alternative contemporary directing strategies: comparing and contrasting the Interrogation Process with other directing tools used by Directors today*, explores the different approaches professional Directors use today to get the best performances from their Actors, and includes exclusive insight from Polish Academy Award Winning Director Agnieszka Holland. Having access to other contemporary directing strategies is important to provide a counterpoint to Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, helping frame it within the scope of the practical work Directors are doing today. This contrast allows for a better understanding of the potential strengths and weaknesses of the Interrogation Process in comparison to other contemporary directing methodologies, a contextualization which is capped in the conclusion of this thesis.

The conclusion of this Master's Thesis, titled *Interpreting Mark Travis's Interrogation Process as a student Director*, is a contextualization of the Interrogation Process as a contemporary directing tool, not only through the experiences of the interviewed film professionals, but through the practical directing experiences of the author of this thesis, as a student Director at FAMU. The aim of this conclusion is to personally answer the question which prompts the research for this thesis, gauging Mark Travis' Interrogation Process value as a contemporary directing tool. Using all of the information gathered throughout the span of this thesis and making use of his personal experience using the Interrogation Process to direct his FAMU graduation film, *The Smetanovo 5*, the author of this thesis circles back to his original needs in directing Actors, in order to better understand the ways in which Mark Travis' Interrogation Process may meet them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Seeing as Mark Travis' Interrogation Process is a recent directing methodology which has not yet been widely reviewed or documented in an academic or literary sense, there is no piece of literature about Mark Travis' Interrogation Process considered relevant enough to base this entire thesis on. The systematization of Mark Travis' Interrogation Process for this thesis is based on personal one-on-one Zoom interviews with Mark Travis, as well as Travis' webinars on the Interrogation Process and the *Director's Lab*, a workshop for directors led by Mark Travis himself.

The research resources for this thesis are divided into three categories:

- (1) Personal one-on-one Zoom interviews with Mark Travis, online classes and new online webinars on Mark Travis' Interrogation Process,
- (2) historical research on the historic acting theories of the 20th century, and
- (3) personal Zoom interviews with professional Directors and Actors working today.

The personal and exclusive Zoom research interviews with Mark Travis used for this thesis date back to October 2020 and 2021, and December 2021. The Mark Travis online webinars used for this thesis are *3 Mistakes Directors Make Working with Actors* and his six-session series called *Deconstructing the Interrogation Process*, where Travis shows how the Interrogation Process works by exploring it with his Actors. In addition to this, a series of Zoom classes on Mark Travis' Interrogation Process titled *Director's Lab*, taught by Mark Travis from January to May of 2021, were also attended by the author of this thesis. In order to provide a better understanding of the historical acting concepts and strategies explored and developed in Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, the research pertaining to the acting theories of the 20th century, from Stanislavski to Strasberg, Adler, Chekhov, Meisner, Hagen and Spolin, has been gathered through published works. The books of Constantin Stanislavski (*An Actor Prepares*), Lee Strasberg (*A Dream of Passion*), Sanford Meisner (*Sanford Meisner on Acting*), Viola Spolin (*Improvisation for the Theater*) and the compilation of accounts on the aforementioned acting theorists, edited by Arthur Bartow (*Handbook of Acting Techniques*), compose the bibliography for this Master's thesis. Lengthy personal email correspondence and Zoom research meetings with the long term former Executive Director of the Actors Studio in New York City, Patty Ewald, also took place throughout the research for this Thesis, in order to better understand and contextualize the prevalent acting theories in 20th century America, namely Lee Strasberg's 'Method'. The research on the experiences of professional Directors and Actors was done through exclusive Zoom research interviews with: FAMU Alumni and

Academy Award Winning Director and writer Agnieszka Holland, professional Directors Jon Amiel, Sean Cunningham, James Lingwood and George Tillman Jr. and Hidde Simmons, Actress Tinka Kleffner and Lewis Webster, editor of *Rehearsal: Scene 22* (A feature documentary on Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, produced in 2021 by Lewis Webster and Elsha Taya Travis). It is important to note that of the aforementioned names, only Holland and Ewald have no knowledge of, or have ever used, Mark Travis' Interrogation Process.

1. A DEEP DIVE INTO THE CHARACTER'S WORLD: A REVIEW OF MARK TRAVIS' INTERROGATION PROCESS

*A deep dive into the Character's world*⁴ is a comprehensive dissection of Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, from pre-production to post-production. The aim of the Interrogation Process is to bypass the Actor's need for a plan on how to perform the scene by speaking directly to the Character, as a voice inside their head. Mark Travis started developing this technique of speaking directly to the Character as a voice inside their head during one of his directing seminars, when he addressed the Actor as the Character. From then on, he started developing the conceptual landscape into the methodology of the Interrogation Process.

The Interrogation Process is here broken down into its procedural stages, rehearsal, shooting and editing, so that Directors may better understand its practical application to their work with Actors in all aspects of film production. Seeing as Mark Travis' Interrogation Process is a methodology which is still in development, through practical experimentation by Mark Travis, the documentation of the Interrogation Process for this Master's thesis is also prone to development, course correction, and the discovery of new ways forward.

1.1. BUILDING AN AUTHENTIC PERFORMANCE, FROM REHEARSAL TO EDITING: AN OVERVIEW OF THE INTERROGATION PROCESS

The goal of the Interrogation Process is (...) to overload the Actor's brain, so that the Actor quits and the Character that lives inside the Actor's unconscious can take over. The pressure that the Interrogation Process exerts upon the Character, forces the Character to improvise their defense. This raw improvisation can result in the most surprising and even profound revelations about what drives the Character. (E. T. Travis, 2020, *The Interrogation Process*)⁵

⁴ The entirety of Chapter One, which pertains to the form and function of the Interrogation Process, is a result of extensive research using various resources, from recorded webinars about the Interrogation Process, to personal interviews with Mark Travis and a direct participation in Mark Travis' seminar on the Interrogation Process, titled *The Director's Lab*. For the sake of clarity and flow, citations and paraphrasing are kept to a minimum in this chapter. This chapter has been read and approved by Mark Travis, and accurately reflects and describes his ideas and work on the Interrogation Process.

⁵ Personal Communication, in APPENDIX (to this thesis), p. 58.

The Interrogation Process is an exploration of the Character's inner world, through a deep and fast-paced interrogation of the Character from the Director-Interrogator. The aim of the Interrogation Process is to pull the Character, in opposition to the Actor, out of their comfort zone and into a place where they are struggling to respond, overwhelmed with questions, statements and accusations from the Director-Interrogator, which may in turn trigger spontaneous emotional reactions from the Character. These spontaneous emotional reactions will lead the Character to respond out of instinct, and will erase any plan the Actor may have had for the scene, in his head. The Interrogation Process aims to bypass the Actor's conscious mind and the need to come up with a plan on how to play the scene, by having the Director-Interrogator address the Character directly. This process is a method of directing which aims to free the Director and the Actor from the pressure of achieving a pre-planned acting result.

1.1.1. PUSHING THE ACTOR TO THINK AS THE CHARACTER: TRIGGERING THE VOICES INSIDE THE CHARACTER'S HEAD

Trying to make the Actor think as the Character, by flooding him with the Character's thoughts, creates a shared unconscious space between the Actor and the Character. The Character and his *committee*, or the voices inside the Character's head, are open to be explored through interrogation. Travis (2020-B, min. 30-31), states that his goal is to bring the Characters to life and then throw them into the scene and see what happens, without trying to control how they will respond. With this exploration come unexpected reactions from the Character, triggers which can later be used to steer the Character into the scene with a specific emotional weight, *doors* which can be opened to discover more about the Character's deepest fears, desires, dreams and feelings. So, when the Actor plays the scene on set, the Character is plunged into the scene with nothing but his own thoughts. A multilinear internal monologue that the Character must wrestle with in order to survive the scene, and his own raw emotions, is activated.

1.1.2. EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS' RELATIONSHIPS: USING EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS TO ACTIVATE SUBTEXT BETWEEN CHARACTERS

In the Interrogation Process, it is important to remember that when working with relationships between two or more Characters, the Director-Interrogator tries to find emotional triggers which relate to the feelings of one Character towards the other, and use them to activate the subtextual relationship between them. The dynamics of the Interrogation Process are reliant

on the rhythm established in the improvisation between the Director-Interrogator, and the Character, and between two or more Characters. The interrogation created between the Director-Interrogator and the Character is a game, and like with any game-based improvisation, it is important that both the Actors and the Director bring to the scene a sense of building on whatever ideas are proposed by the other, without questioning their veracity. As Travis says (2020-E, 1h. 5min), in improvisation there has to be an agreement that whatever is thrown into the scene by one of the players is the truth, or at least their perception of the truth, so the other players must go along with it. The Interrogation Process is composed of various stages which are designed to help the Director-Interrogator build a subtextual conversation with the Characters, aimed at a particular emotional standstill or resolution between them, which can then be incorporated directly in the scene. And although, when mastered by the Director-Interrogator, the order of these stages may be interchangeable, it is useful for first-time Directors to identify and apply the main structural pillars of the Interrogation Process, and their natural progression.

1.1.3. THE INTERROGATION PROCESS IN REHEARSAL: EXPLORING THE CHARACTER'S INNER WORLD THROUGH INTERVIEW AND INTERROGATION

Although the Interrogation Process is fluid in its structure, especially for Directors who have mastered it, there are key steps which delineate its basic progression. For the purposes of documenting the Interrogation Process in a way which can be easily understood by the readers, and easily applied by Directors, the Interrogation Process has been divided into four main pillars, **the interview stage, the interrogation stage, the simultaneous monologues and performing the scene**, which in turn may be split into their own subdivisions. The **interview stage** allows the Director-Interrogator to get to know the Characters and their relationships, routines, likes and dislikes, opinions and feelings about the fictional world they inhabit, as well as allowing the Actor to step into the world of the Character. The **interview stage** has been divided into four action steps, which advance the relationship between the Character and the Interrogator, and help segway them into the next stage, the **interrogation stage**. The four steps of the **interview stage** are: **Asking for permission, Exploring the Character's world, Closing the circle and Approaching the scene**.⁶ The **interview stage**

⁶ Whereas in the **interview stage** the aforementioned four steps should be applied in chronological order, the same is not necessary in the **interrogation stage**, where all steps are fluid and may be applied in different order, depending on the aim and experience of the Interrogator.

is then followed by the **interrogation stage**, where the Director-Interrogator pushes the Character towards a certain emotional state by adopting the posture of Ally and Nemesis, the dual voices inside the Character's head. **The Character's internal monologue: the Ally vs the Nemesis** is one of the steps explored in the **interrogation stage**, with the objective of triggering emotional reactions from the Character. Within the **interrogation stage**, the Character's history can also be explored, in an exercise called **building history**, wherein the Characters improvise and discover their shared history.

Although the Interrogation Process is naturally fluid, it is common for the **simultaneous monologues** to be explored just before **performing the scene**, after the **interrogation stage**, in order to get the Characters in the emotional state deemed most interesting for the scene they are about to explore and to connect them with each other and disconnect them from the Interrogator. The **simultaneous monologues**, where Characters simultaneously tell each other (without listening to one another) something they have been hiding deep within them, can be used as subtextual information by both the Interrogator and the Characters, later in the scene. The Characters are then interrupted by the Director-Interrogator during the **simultaneous monologues**, at the height of their emotional vulnerability. From there, the Director-Interrogator may choose to go directly into the scene, in order to make the most of the Characters' state of catharsis. In this stage, **performing the scene**, the Characters wrestle with the emotions brought to the surface by the **interrogation stage**, as they play the scene written in the script. The Director-Interrogator may choose to interrupt the scene to interrogate the Characters further, or interrogate them at the end of the scene about the events that transpired within the scene.

In the **interrogation stage**, the Director-Interrogator is looking for the Character's *doors*, a reaction from the Character in interrogation which reveals a potential source of turmoil within the Character. As Travis (2020-B, min. 34) explains, the Director-Interrogator is waiting for little moments of reaction deep within the Character to something he said, which allows him to keep digging into the Character's emotionally vulnerable areas. Travis also calls these moments the *flicker* or the *window*. The Director-Interrogator operates within a shared space of subtext between him and the Characters, and he embodies the Character's internal monologues, the multiple voices people have in their heads, which praise them or tear them down on a constant and permanent basis. Travis (2020-C, min. 41-44) says that we all have voices we speak to inside our minds, and which speak to us, criticizing or supporting us. Travis calls these internal voices the *committee*, and as the Director-Interrogator his aim is to simultaneously discover what the Character's *committee* thinks, and to give voice to the voices of that *committee*. The constant barrage of questions and accusations from the Director-Interrogator as the

Character's *committee*, pushes the Characters towards uncomfortable emotional positions, in which they do not know what is coming next, and therefore cannot plan for it. This eliminates the need for the Actor to plan ahead, thus ensuring that whatever comes from the Character in the Interrogation Process is an unexpected or unplanned response to whatever the voices of the *committee* are telling him, which in turn brings the Actor closer to an authentic performance.

In order for the Interrogation Process to work, both Actor and Director have to let go of the need to control the outcome of the scene. For this to happen, the Actors must work in a criticism-free environment, where there are no right or wrong ways to play a scene, just different ways of exploring it. It is important that the Director tells this to the Actors before using the Interrogation Process, to make sure the Actors know that the Director has no specific result in mind, and just wants to explore different ways of playing the scene. As Travis (2020-B, min. 6-8) says, criticizing someone makes their world feel less safe, and one of the primary jobs of the Director is to create a safe environment for the Actors, in which their creative energy can flow from their unconscious.

The distance created by the Interrogation Process between the fictional world of the Character and the personal and private space of the Actor, protects the Actors from sharing or reliving their own potentially traumatic and intimate memories. The aim of the Interrogation Process is not to delve into the Actor's personal traumas, but rather to tackle the short and long-term memories of the Character through the Actor's psyche, tapping into a shared unconscious territory through spontaneous response, which is as much the Character's as it is the Actor's. Travis (2020-B, min. 11-12) speaks about short term memory, and the idea that the human brain can only hold eight different thoughts at the same time, so when a new thought comes in, one of the other thoughts is kicked out. Applying this principle, Travis suggests that the goal of the Interrogation Process is to populate as much of that short-term memory space inside the Actor's head with the Character's thoughts, by bypassing the Actor's rational mind and igniting the Character's fears and desires.

1.1.3.1. APPROACHING THE INTERVIEW

A good way into the Interrogation Process, for Directors who are working with this technique for the first time, is the **interview stage**, wherein the Director-Interrogator asks the Actor for permission to speak to the Character, and then starts asking the Character questions about themselves, and their daily life. The aim of the **interview stage** is not to push the Character

into a state of emotional instability, but to help the Actor acclimate to the **interrogation stage** that will follow, and the world of the Character. It also allows the Actor and Director to explore multiple layers of the Character's history, some of which may not be explicitly stated in the script. Travis (2020-C, min 18.30) says that when the Director addresses the Actor as the Character, he allows the Actor to exist within the Character's world, whilst removing the Actor's need to act. For easier understanding, the **interview stage** of the Interrogation Process can be divided into four areas of exploration: **Asking for permission, Exploring the Character's world, Closing the circle** and **Approaching the scene**.

- a) **Asking for permission:** When approaching the Actor, the Director will ask him for permission to speak to the Character. Once this permission is granted, the Interview may begin, and the Director-Interrogator can start exploring the Character's world.
- b) **Exploring the Character's world:** A series of questions about the Character, their daily habits, their hopes and dreams, their relationships, helps the Director-Interrogator put the Actor into the Character's world, and segways into the third step, which is to use the interview format, and the rapport already established with the Character, to start infusing the Character with thoughts about the Characters around them, with whom they will share the scene which is being rehearsed.
- c) **Closing the circle:** It is important for the Director-Interrogator to start inquiring about the relationship between the Character being interviewed and the Characters around him, exploring his feelings, thoughts, expectations about those other Characters.
- d) **Approaching the scene:** After reconnecting the Character to his relationships and surroundings, the Director-Interrogator must introduce the specifics of the space, time and context of the scene the Character will be thrust into after the interrogation. It is important to explore such details as who the Character will be sharing the scene with, where this Character previously has been emotionally, physically and temporally, and what are his expectations and desires. This means that now the Director-Interrogator may start asking the Character questions about the moments immediately before the scene takes place, as well as help the Actor transition into the internal emotional space of the Character. This, in turn, will help the Character transition more easily from the headspace of the interrogation to the headspace of the scene.

1.1.3.2. APPLYING THE INTERROGATION

Once the interview has reached a stage where the Actor is comfortable embodying the Character, and the Director feels that they know enough about the Character, there is a transition towards the **interrogation stage**. Whereas in the **interview stage**, the Director-Interrogator is a neutral presence, with no agenda or attitude towards the Character, in the **interrogation stage** the Director-Interrogator is required to embody a multitude of voices and personalities which exist inside the Character's head, confronting and appeasing the Character whilst plunging him into a state of emotional unrest. This emotional chaos is achieved mainly through the dynamic created by two different forces of the Character's internal monologue, embodied by the Director-Interrogator: the Ally and the Nemesis.

a) Activating the Character's internal monologue: the Ally vs the Nemesis

The two predominant voices of the *committee* in the Character's head are the Ally and the Nemesis. As the definitions suggest, the Ally is the supportive, loving voice inside the Character's head, the voice who offers nothing but words of unconditional support. The Director-Interrogator uses the voice of the Ally to make the Character feel safe, loved and revered, which in turn makes the *switch* to the Nemesis more impactful and disruptive to the Character's psyche. It is important that the Director-Interrogator shed any personal preconceived sense of right and wrong, and adapt his moral compass to that of the Character's. The Nemesis is the voice that is forever critical of the Character's actions, thoughts, and behavior, and is an important counterpoint to the voice of the Ally because it is through this inner tension that the space for emotion is created. The main goal of the Director-Interrogator should be to put the Character in an uncomfortable emotional headspace, flooded with his own thoughts and feelings, pushed by the Nemesis towards a state of emotional turmoil. This state of instability forces the Character to answer in a truthful and authentic manner to the Director-Interrogator. Travis' technique of *switching* between the Ally and the Nemesis is what leads the Interrogator to find true moments of authenticity within the Character's vulnerable states. Elsha Taya Travis (2020; Personal Communication. The Interrogation Process. p.60.), Mark Travis' wife and avid student of the Interrogation Process, says that the Ally and the Nemesis are the representations of the polar opposites of the voices inside our heads. According to Elsha, it is imperative that the Director keeps the Characters off-balance by going back and forth between the Ally and the Nemesis, a term Mark Travis calls *switching*.

The Director-Interrogator should play both the Ally and the Nemesis, in his interrogation with the Character, and although these two are the main voices of disruption inside the Character's head, the Director-Interrogator may embody other voices, attitudes and personalities throughout. In addition to *switching* between the voices of the Ally and the Nemesis as often

as possible, Travis uses other forms of *switching* to provoke instability within the Character. One such form is abruptly *switching* between topics and jumping from seemingly innocuous areas of interrogation pertaining to the Character's daily routine, to more intimate topics, like the Character's romantic desires or sex life. According to Travis (2020-C, min. 36-39), *switching* causes destabilization inside the Character, and the Character is formed when he tries to get himself stabilized. Travis says that interrogation is not supposed to be safe, it should be chaotic, dig down and stir up a lot of mud, thereby creating the Character.

It is important to note that in the **interrogation stage**, the Director-Interrogator will probe more deeply into the mind of the Character and their fears, desires and deepest secrets, using abrupt *switches* between the voice of the Ally and the voice of the Nemesis. These *switches* put the Character in a situation of discomfort, where they are reacting to the Director-Interrogator, and not thinking about how they should play the scene. The relationships between the Characters are also explored in the **interrogation stage** by the Director-Interrogator, in search of *triggers* which can later be used to activate a specific emotion in the Character, or to build the inner world of the Character, helping the Actor identify more closely with the feelings of their Character. The Interrogation Process can also be used to build the Character's history in a real time improvisation with the Director-Interrogator, and to introduce ideas and thoughts into the Character's mind, which are not in the script. Travis' (2020-C, min. 49-51) goal is to make clear what the Characters feel about each other, so that any emotion that makes its way into the scene comes from the Characters, and not a manufactured result direction.

b) Building history for the Characters

It is worth noting that in between takes, or in rehearsals as an exploration of the subtextual relationship between Characters, the Director-Interrogator may also ask the Characters to physically face each other and explore their shared history, a history which may not be present in the script, and thus has to be improvised between the Characters. This exercise is called **building history**. For example, the Director-Interrogator may explore the Characters' memories with one another: "Our first date; Our first kiss; The first time we fought; Our wedding day; I loved you because...". Travis (2020-E, min. 15-16) says that while the Characters are remembering their shared history, they are also creating it.

This process of building the Character's history leads the Characters to have a deeper understanding of one another, and the Director-Interrogator to gauge which pieces of their history open new *doors*, emotional avenues to use later on with the Characters, as they approach the scene. The new subtextual information that the Characters have just created and shared with each other, registers on an emotional level for the Characters, and imbues them

with memories which they will transport into the scene, and use to inform their reactions and actions within the scene itself. Travis (2020-E, min. 17-18) states that the emotional impact of memories is in many ways more powerful than the memory itself, and said impact can transform someone on a personal level.

When delving into the **building history** exercise, Travis aims to access the Characters' emotional memories and their affective qualities. When this realm of subtext shared between the Characters and the Director-Interrogator is activated, the Director-Interrogator tries to explore one particular *door* revealed by the Character, which he then aims to get the Character to expand on. For example, the Character may be reluctant to talk about his first sexual experience with the other Character, and this is a potential sign for the Director-Interrogator that this is a painful memory which can be mined for emotional truth. Finding these painful memories which the Characters are hiding is part of the build-up to the **simultaneous monologues**, in which the Characters tell each other something deep and private, which may be too painful to reveal.

c) Navigating the simultaneous monologues

The Interrogation Process is geared towards what Travis calls **simultaneous monologues**. **Simultaneous monologues** are monologues between two Characters, where the Characters verbalize what has been going on in their minds and they have never dared to confess, often about each other. After being interrogated, essentially embarking on a roller coaster of introspection, self-discovery, judgment and self-defense, the Characters are then asked by the Director-Interrogator if there is anything they want to tell the other Character, with no consequences attached. This taps into the deeper needs of the Character, and may take shape in something that makes the Characters unhappy about their relationship, that they want the other person to know but have never had the courage to tell them. Travis is looking for the nature of the relationship between the Characters, their deeper and more dangerous truths, which create even greater chaos and disruption for the Characters going into the scene. The opportunity for the Characters to express their innermost feelings allows for a moment of catharsis within them, which in turn will heighten the stakes of the scene, since the Characters have been confronted with their own (and one another's) painful secrets. By revealing their secrets, the Characters discover what they feel about each other, and although these secrets will not be revealed in the scene through dialogue, they will help the Characters navigate their emotions throughout the scene, by showing them what they have to lose, and what they have to gain.

The **simultaneous monologues** culminate with both Characters talking *at* each other, which means that they don't listen to one another or engage in dialogue, but rather just express what they have buried deep inside them, at the same time. This process is first and foremost an exercise in flushing out the Character's pain and sorrow and getting in touch with their true emotions. The Director-Interrogator then checks in on both Characters, interrupting their **simultaneous monologues** to ask if they are feeling ok, if they are feeling heard by one another. After this check-in, the Characters are thrown back into their ongoing **simultaneous monologues**. The added challenge from the Director-Interrogator is that they need to get the other Character to listen to them. This newfound sense of urgency often leads the Characters to engage with each other in improvisational dialogue, which in turn leads to a better understanding of the other Character. Travis' **simultaneous monologues** allow for a better awareness of the Characters' relationship with each other, as they approach the moment where they have to perform the scene. Travis (2020-D, min. 17-18) is aiming at the Character's unspoken truths and feelings about each other, so that the Characters may address them in the **simultaneous monologues**.

d) Performing the scene

The **simultaneous monologues** commonly precede the moment where both Characters perform the scene, both in rehearsal and on set before a take. In the heat of the moment of the **simultaneous monologues**, the Characters are interrupted by the Director-Interrogator and told to perform the scene. Inevitably, the emotions that the Characters were exploring in the **interrogation stage** and the **simultaneous monologues** are transported into the scene. The Characters are forced to deal with, and find their way around, the events of the scene itself. Travis (2020-D, min. 57) throws the Characters into the scene in the heat of the **simultaneous monologues**, just to see what happens, giving them no other plan than to just try to survive the scene. The Director-Interrogator then uses the scene that has just been performed by the Characters to inform his own perception of the Characters. This helps the Director-Interrogator expand his knowledge of the Characters and discover new layers to them, and new ways of playing the scene. Travis (2020-D, 1h 1min.) says the scene becomes a kind of Litmus test, to see how the Characters are emerging and developing.

At the end of the rehearsal of the scene, the Director-Interrogator checks in on the Characters again, in a very soothing and conciliatory way, and once more requests that they tell each other what they truly need from one another. This moment, where the Characters make their final pleas to one another, is followed by a short **simultaneous monologue** between both Characters, and then is capped by a final statement from each of the Characters to each other, which helps solidify the emotions tapped into through the Interrogation Process. This final

statement encapsulates the emotional experience the Characters have shared, and is capped-off with a singular conclusive thought or feeling about the other Character. This conclusive statement allows the Actors to find closure with the feelings they have been wrestling with as Characters and releases them from the control of the written scene, easing them out of the Interrogation Process.

1.1.4. THE INTERROGATION PROCESS IN SHOOTING AND EDITING: PIECING TOGETHER DIFFERENT EMOTIONAL APPROACHES FOR THE SAME SCENE

Using the Interrogation Process on set allows the Director to explore different emotional nuances and angles in the Actors' performances within the same scene, and then use those different takes to create a new performance in editing.

1.1.4.1. SHOOTING: THE APPLICATION OF THE INTERROGATION PROCESS ON SET

On set, the Director may use the Interrogation Process before a take to get the Actor into the emotional space of the Character, and then interrogate the Characters after (or before) each take to understand how what transpired in the scene they just performed influences their feelings about each other, and themselves. What occurs within the scene helps to trigger different emotions from the Characters, which can then be explored by the Director-Interrogator in between takes to trigger the Characters into a different emotional space, thus exploring the possibility that their approach towards the scene may be different to the previous take. Characters can also engage in monologues by themselves before a take, so they can set up their expectations in relation to what they may encounter in the scene, or get into the emotional space of the scene. These monologues are usually spoken out loud, thus allowing the other Characters beside them to absorb some of the energy of their monologue into their expectations for the scene. This is also a good way to ensure that the energy of the Characters isn't lost between takes, while the camera is setting up for a new take, maintaining the momentum of the scene.

1.1.4.2. EDITING: CREATING A NEW PERFORMANCE WITH THE INTERROGATION PROCESS

The philosophy of the Interrogation Process is that the Director may have an image in his head of what he considers to be the right way of playing the scene, and the result he wants from a particular scene or moment, but there is no way for anyone to know with certainty that that is the best way to play the scene. Within the Interrogation Process there is an exploration of the element of surprise, a discovery of something that has not been planned, which leads to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the Characters, and a richer and more authentic work for the film.

The subtextual exploration by the Interrogation Process allows the Characters to experience different emotional states within the same scene, and these emotions are possibilities for how to play the scene. If the subtext explored before the take is different from the previous take, or the Director-Interrogator uses a specific emotional trigger on the Characters before the take, the way the Actors play the scene will also be different, and this connects to the explorational philosophy of the Interrogation Process: instead of aiming to get the perfect version of what the Director considers to be the ideal performance on the set, the Director explores a wide emotional palette, a thread of takes of the same scene which can allow him to find and build the performance in editing. This means that it is in the Director-Interrogator's best interest to explore a different subtext with the Characters through interrogation before each take, so that the Characters in turn can offer the Director a wide range of performances within the same scene. This will allow the editor to splice moments of different takes together, creating an entirely new performance, which gives the scene a wide variety of emotions. This variation makes the scene feel much more complex, authentic and three-dimensional.

Travis (2020-H, min. 2-3) recalls when he met Carol Littleton, the editor of *The Big Chill*, and watched footage of William Hurt's performance in that film, saying that he was horrified because no two takes were alike. Littleton defended the performance to Travis, saying that as an editor it gave her a wide range of emotions from which to build the scene, which in turn created a more deeply layered performance. Mark Travis' idea that there isn't one specific way to play the scene, just many different ways to explore it, frees the Actors from trying to achieve a specific result for their performances in the scene, and allows the Director more choices in the editing process. This sense of freedom for the Director-Interrogator to explore the scene enhances the chance of encountering moments of authenticity in the Actors' performances. The Interrogation Process is, in its essence, a method which helps the Director create a fertile ground for authentic moments, which his Actors can access at any given point of the process,

and which the Director-Interrogator can take with him to the editing room to create a more authentic performance.

2. THE ROOTS OF THE INTERROGATION PROCESS: COMPARING AND CONTRASTING MARK TRAVIS' INTERROGATION PROCESS WITH THE GREAT WESTERN ACTING THEORIES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Some of the ideas which run through Mark Travis' Interrogation Process⁷ can be connected to the most innovative and important acting theories of the 20th century. In order to understand the ideological roots of the Interrogation Process, it is important to explore and contextualize these 20th century acting theories. All in all, the influence of these historical acting theories in Mark Travis' Interrogation Process is clear, even if transcoded to a contemporary context of filmmaking, wherein the focus of the methodology is geared towards film Directors, in opposition to stage or early screen Actors. Mark Travis' Interrogation Process is at its core a blend between Lee Strasberg's use of the Actor's emotional memory and Stella Adler's use of the Character's imaginary circumstances: It uses Strasberg's (and Stanislavski's before him) concepts of an internal subconscious space of emotional memory from which the Actor can draw authentic emotional responses, but recreates that space of the subconscious as the Character's *imaginarium*, in opposition to the Actor's personal and intimate space. As Arthur Bartow (2008, p. xvi) recalls, Stanislavski believed that the pathway to the command of a truthful performance lay through the Actor's subconscious, and that feeling and truth were key to opening the door of creative intuition. According to Bartow, Stanislavski's desire was to find a pathway from the conscious to the subconscious and back, reinstating an imaginary belief that would summon lifelike behavior, making Stanislavsky a pioneer in the development of a psycho-technical system for training the Actor. Strasberg followed Stanislavski's exploration of the Actor's subconscious, by activating and revisiting the Actor's personal memories in order to access authentic emotion in a performance.

In order to put Mark Travis' Interrogation Process in perspective, it is necessary to go back in time, to the early stages of acting for the camera, and to the name who largely contributed to the development of Western acting theories in the 20th century, Constantin Stanislavski, who made his career as a theater Director in the late 1800s and early 20th century. As Stanislavski (2016, p. 13) recalls from his conversations with his Director Torstov, an Actor shouldn't just present the external life of the Character, but live it by experiencing feelings which are analogous to it. As Anna Strasberg (2008, p. 20) recounts, Stanislavski discovered that an Actor has to feel genuine emotion, and that the awakening of an Actor's imagination depends on their ability to stimulate emotional memory.

⁷ The entirety of Chapter Two was personally discussed with Mark Travis, in order to better understand how deeply his ideas could relate to some of the most influential acting methodologies of the 20th century.

Among the first American students of Stanislavski's acting techniques was Lee Strasberg, an American Actor, Director and theater practitioner. Strasberg, born in 1901, interpreted and developed Stanislavski's ideas on emotional memory into a methodology for directing Actors, known today as 'The Method'. Oppenheim (2008, p. 44) recalls that Strasberg was fascinated by emotional truth, and that the exercises he learned from Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya (students of Stanislavski's) emphasized the use of affective memory, which meant recalling past events in sensory detail to access the associated emotions. Strasberg co-founded the Group Theater with Harold Clurman and Cheryl Crawford in 1931, an important theater collective based in New York City, which allowed him to develop his acting theories on a practical level. Sidney Pollack, *in* Meisner & Longwell (1987, p. xiv) states that Clurman, Strasberg, Adler and Lewis emerged as the preeminent teachers of 'The Method' in the Group Theater.

Another member of the Group Theater was Stella Adler, born in 1901, an American Actress and acting teacher, who later parted ways with Strasberg's method of directing Actors, and sought out Stanislavski in Paris, in 1934. This meeting between Adler and Stanislavski marked Adler's realization that Stanislavski had departed from the emotional memory-based approach which Strasberg had been teaching, and was now focused on exploring the imaginary circumstances of the Characters within the scene. According to Longwell, *in* Meisner & Longwell (1987, p. 9), Adler said that Stanislavski's key to true emotion was to be found in a full understanding of the "given circumstances" - the human problems - contained in the play itself. Mark Travis' Interrogation Process draws a lot from the debate between Strasberg's 'Method' and Adler's use of the Character's circumstances, by exploring and creating from the Character's emotional memory, as opposed to the Actor's.

Stanislavski's acting theories also inspired another former member of the Group Theater, Sanford Meisner, to develop his own approach to acting, which was based on the emotional response of an Actor to his counterpart, thus emphasizing the element of spontaneity needed to find truth in a performance. Describing the "Meisner Technique", Hart (2008, p. 54) states that behaving spontaneously is like removing a muzzle from your being, you feel free and energized. A feeling that is echoed in Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, in the way the Characters spontaneously react to the Interrogator without the need to deliver a specific acting result. By analyzing Mark Travis' Interrogation Process against some of the ideas which reverberate through the acting theories of the 20th century, it is possible not only to ascertain the spiritual and methodological influences of said acting theories in Travis' work, but to connect those influences to the methodologies used by professional Directors today. This historical research allows for a deeper understanding of the context in which Actors and

Directors are working today, which in turn helps frame the obstacles Directors face working with Actors, and the solutions they propose to overcome them.

2.1. STRASBERG: CONNECTING THE INTERROGATION PROCESS TO AFFECTIVE MEMORY

“In acting everything is done unconsciously as a process of memory.”⁸

- Lee Strasberg

According to Longwell, in Meisner & Longwell (1987, p. 9), the term *affective memory* can be defined as the conscious attempt by the Actor to remember the circumstances surrounding an emotion-filled event from his past, in order to stimulate an emotion he can use on stage. About Strasberg’s ‘Method’, Anna Strasberg (2008, p. 23) writes that when someone bites into a piece of food they had as a child, they are experiencing their childhood once again. Scheeder (2008, p. 8/9) quotes Edward Dwight Easty *On Method Acting*, stating that within ‘The Method’ universe, the Actor is playing himself and not a Character, and his job is to find new qualities of his own individuality which apply to the Character he is portraying.

The process of mining the Actor’s personal depths for true emotion is mirrored to some extent by Mark Travis’ Interrogation Process, where the Interrogator pushes the Character to explore and reveal emotional truths they have buried deep within, which come out through spontaneous response to the Interrogator. The biggest difference between Strasberg’s ‘Method’ and Travis’ Interrogation Process is that, whereas Strasberg worked with the Actor’s personal memories to mine them for emotional responses, centering on “the personal and private psychology of the individual - the emotions, memories, fears, doubts and dreams”⁹, Mark Travis proposes a methodology in which the Actor is protected from an external probing of his intimacy.

Mark Travis’ Interrogation Process allows for an environment of free discovery and exploration for the Actor, without any obligation to disclose or retread potential personal traumatic events, by creating a shared subconscious space between the Character and the Actor in which the latter one can play, explore, and respond to the external stimuli of the

⁸ Strasberg, as cited in Bartow (2008), p. xxii.

⁹ Scheeder (2008), p.13.

Interrogator. In other words, the line that separates the Actor from the Character is clearly delineated at all times within the Interrogation Process. In contrast with Strasberg's process of *affective memory*, in which the Actors connect to their own experiences in order to build their performance, the Interrogation Process may allow the Actors a bigger freedom to explore the different imaginary circumstances of their Characters, since they are not limited to their own personal experiences.

For a student Director working with amateur or semi-professional Actors (in most cases inexperienced), *affective memory* may still be the most direct way to help these Actors access a place of emotional authenticity in their performance. On the other hand, being that the Interrogation Process is highly reliant on a fast-paced improvisation between the Director-Interrogator and the Actor-Character, it may be more suited to experienced Actors, who are more comfortable with improvisation, and an imagined set of circumstances, in opposition to working with reality, and from their own experiences.

The main question which arises in this collision between the imaginary circumstances of the Interrogation Process and the real circumstances of *affective memory* is precisely the fact that this shared space of subconscious activity generated between the Actor-Character, and the Director-Interrogator, may not be real, in the sense that it is a fabrication of circumstances and memories of events which never happened. This poses the question: will the result of mining in an artificial soil be as deep and authentic as drawing inspiration from real memories? Travis (2021-C, min. 13-14) defends that even though the Interrogation Process is not targeting the Actor's memories, those memories are being unconsciously triggered nonetheless, through Character interrogation, without the Director having to ask the Actor to share them. There is also a valid argument to be raised against the exploration of *affective memory*, which is that if the circumstances of the Character are nowhere near close to anything the Actor has experienced in his personal life, how could he ever convincingly express them?

Strasberg's notion of internal and emotional destabilization through dialogue with the Actor may be connected to Mark Travis' Interrogation Process and the relationship of conflict it establishes between the Interrogator and the Character, in an operative sense. They, respectively, push the Actor (or Character, in the Interrogation Process' case) towards a place of emotional discomfort, even stress, through which the Actor (or Character) is forced to respond in a way which is emotionally truthful and authentic. Through the prism of attempting to bring the Actor closer to the emotions felt by the Character, interrogating the Character offers a much wider range of possibilities connected to imagination and projection, since the space in which the Character exists is a shared *imaginarium* between the Actor, the Character, and his *committee*. This supports the belief that although there is some inspiration drawn from Lee

Strasberg in the Interrogation Process, it may be more spiritually connected to Stella Adler's ideas.

2.2. ADLER: WORKING WITH THE IMAGINARY CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CHARACTER

*"In your choice is your talent. The deeper the soul, the fuller the spirit, the richer, stronger and more complex the actor's choices tend to be."*¹⁰

- Tom Oppenheim, on the *Stella Adler Technique*

Bartow (2008, p. xxiv/xxv) recalls that when Stella Adler visited Stanislavski in Paris after revolting against Lee Strasberg's emotion-first approach, Stanislavski's work had pivoted to exploring the Character's actions, or "beats", a marked change from *feeling* first to *doing* first. Oppenheim (2008, p. 46) summarizes the main philosophical conflict between Adler and Strasberg's ideas as a case of action versus feeling, stating that whereas for Adler, the Actor must first do, and feelings will follow, for Strasberg the Actor must first feel, and the doing will follow.

Oppenheim (2008, p. 32) defends that Stella Adler's technique embraces the view that acting is doing, and that the truth is found in the given circumstances of the play, and that everything an Actor says, thinks or feels on stage must be filtered by their own imagination. It is in that sense that the Interrogation Process can be read as a natural successor to Adler's ideas, given that it exclusively aims to explore and develop the Character's world, which is a fictional and imaginary construct. Stella Adler adopted an approach for working with Actors which emphasized the use of imagination and the Actor's autonomy to make creative decisions. She believed that within each person, and each Actor's *imaginarium*, there was the potential for incarnating different existences, or different Characters. According to Oppenheim (2008, p. 36), in her book *Acting with Adler* Johanna Rotte quoted Adler as saying that a given person is everybody: depending on the areas of their lives, they can be a killer, a crook, a whore or a god. Mark Travis' Interrogation Process also explores the idea of multiplicity within one with the existence of the *committee*, but turns that concept outside in. Instead of suggesting that we have the potential to incarnate multiple Characters, the Interrogation Process suggests that

¹⁰ Oppenheim (2008), p. 31.

we already have those Characters living within us, as the members of our *committee*, a jury of voices which make up our internal monologues. These voices, which find maximum representation in the Ally and Nemesis, support us, criticize us, tease us, provoke us, comfort us and motivate us. Each of these voices has a specific personality, character, reason of being, and in that way, there are similarities to be found with the Characters who Adler believes each one of us has the potential of embodying.

In comparison to Lee Strasberg's 'Method', Stella Adler's approach to acting gave the Actors much more freedom to imagine their Character's circumstances, and it is precisely in this aspect that the Interrogation Process finds deep philosophical connections with it: The Interrogation Process is in its core a process of imagination, in which the Actors are responding with information they are making up on the spot. The imagined circumstances, history and feelings of their Characters come out of them through intense pressure from the Interrogator. In the Interrogation Process, the Character is found precisely in this process of pressure and improvisation, in which the Actor's instincts of response are valued to the extent that they themselves give shape to the Character on the spot, through genuine emotional reactions.

2.3. MEISNER: FINDING AUTHENTICITY IN SPONTANEOUS REACTION TO THE OTHER

“(...) what you do doesn't depend upon you; it depends on the other fellow!”¹¹

- Sanford Meisner

If Lee Strasberg's 'Method' was deeply rooted in a personal exploration of the Actor's emotions through the use of *affective memory*, and Stella Adler's technique was based on the ability of the Actor to imagine situations pertaining to the Character's world, Sanford Meisner's process rested on the pursuit of spontaneous reaction between Actors, which was sought through listening and repetition exercises. Hart (2008, p. 54) states that without that dynamic of spontaneity, acting would become predictable and inhuman. Meisner looked for situations in which the Actors would not have time to plan, only to respond.

Mark Travis' Interrogation Process parallels Meisner's view on acting in the sense that it favors spontaneous reaction over the need for the Actor to have a plan. Meisner's influence

¹¹ Meisner, as cited in Hart (2008), p. 61.

on the Interrogation Process is apparent in the way the Characters listen and respond to each other and to the Interrogator: The aim of the Interrogation Process is to find authentic emotional response through a fast-paced interrogation, in which the Character is pressed by the Interrogator to respond in a spontaneous way. Nothing in these interrogations can be predicted, the Character is confronted with questions and statements and forced to answer in point-blank range, thus creating moments of authentic emotional response which can be further explored when playing the scene.

Regarding Meisner's repetition exercises, Hart (2008, p. 54) states that the Actors are forced to respond to the exchange before thinking, so as not to edit their responses, and, before they know it, they stop paying attention to themselves and begin to play. There are echoes of Meisner's repetition exercises in the Interrogation Process, in the sense that it too is based on a series of rapid-fire exchanges which don't allow the Characters to edit their responses. The aim with interrogation, similarly to Meisner's repetition exercise, is to push the Actors into a state of play, where they are not acting, just reacting. Other exercises in the Interrogation Process like building history, where two Characters improvise a history between them, also force the Characters and the Interrogator to adopt the basic principles of Meisner's technique, which are to focus solely on the Actor sitting across from them, and respond to them. As Sanford Meisner put it, "(...) to transfer the point of concentration outside of yourself, is a big battle won"¹² Travis (2021-C, min 38-39), defends that the major difference between his simultaneous monologues exercise and Meisner's repetition exercise, is that the latter forces the Actor to listen but prevents them from improvising the lines, whereas the former is based on trying not to listen to the other person or Character, while at the same time trying to articulate something that is just forming inside the Character.

2.4. HAGEN: EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS' SUBTEXT THROUGH THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES

"How do I stand in relationship to the circumstances, the place, the objects and other people related to my circumstances? (...) Circumstances may make you feel unsure of

¹² Meisner & Longwell (1987), p. 26.

yourself, extremely self-confident or deeply disturbed. You may detest the situation you are in, or it can make you feel totally safe and protected.”¹³

- Carol Rosenfeld on *Uta Hagen's Technique*

The relationship established between the Director-Interrogator as the voice inside the Character's head, and the Characters themselves between each other and the Director-Interrogator, aims for a deeper understanding of the subtext of a given scene. In each scene, the Characters go in with specific motivations, goals and feelings towards each other, but also expectations and suspicions about one another. These preconceived notions are helped on by the circumstances the Characters find themselves in, and affect the decisions they make. In this sense, the Interrogation Process finds common ground with the ideas explored by Uta Hagen, another member of the Actor's Studio and an Actress and Director, and her philosophy on acting, which delves into the subtextual world of the Characters through an exploration of their circumstances.

This subtextual exploration of the Character's circumstances in Uta Hagen's work is analyzed by Rosenfeld (2008, p. 144/145), who describes how our expectations or opinions of a subject change the way we perceive it, and so change our behavior towards it. Rosenfeld details the existence of endowments, which fall into six categories: fact, opinion, suspicion, speculation, assumption and expectation, and states that the mind is filled with thoughts and preconceived notions about people, and those ideas determine someone's behavior when meeting someone. The Interrogation Process applies the idea of pre-scene endowment towards the exploration and building of subtext, between the Characters or the Character and the Interrogator. However, instead of being discussed with the Actor before a scene, these objective endowments are explored and at times even implemented by the Interrogator at will, during the interrogation with the Character.

The exploration of subtext by Uta Hagen through Character endowments finds echo in Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, where the interrogation and simultaneous monologues which take place between the Characters and the Interrogator are all about exploring subtext, confronting the Characters with their feelings about themselves and one another. This subtextual exploration, which lets the Characters face the circumstances of the scene, as well their expectations of what to find there, endows the Characters with preconceived feelings, opinions and expectations about the scene. These expectations in turn affect the way they

¹³ Rosenfeld (2008), p. 133.

behave, their decisions and responses to the circumstances of the scene. The Interrogation Process appears as a fresh and innovative way of exploring objective endowment without having to plan it with the Actor before a scene. This makes the Actor freer to react spontaneously to the Character's circumstances within the scene, according to what emotions and ideas were explored in the interrogation.

The Interrogation Process aims to explore the realm of subtext within each Character, and the relationships between Characters, through the activation of the voices inside the Character's head, or his *committee*. These voices, which are pushing and pulling the Character at all times, towards and away from particular emotional responses, are the Character's constant reminder of the circumstances that made him who he is, and will lead him into the scene, as well as the circumstances he will encounter during the scene. This is philosophically in tune with Hagen's ideas on the Character's thought process going into a scene, as Travis' aim is to populate the Character's mind with thoughts and emotions related to their circumstances.

Rosenfeld (2008, p. 157) quotes Hagen in *A Challenge for the Actor*, who defends that while a Character is speaking, his mind is flooded with thoughts related to his circumstances, which he does not verbalize. The creation of a Character's obstacles, both internal and external, starts with the script, but can transcend what is written in its pages. The Character's backstory helps the Director and Actors understand what motivates the Character to behave in a certain way, and make the choices that they make. In the Interrogation Process, there is an exploration of the Character's internal obstacles, through a confrontation between the Character and the Interrogator, the embodiment of the Character's *committee*. This means that after the interrogation, the Character going into the scene is not only fighting the obstacles he will face in the scene, but fighting *himself*. This subtextual relationship between the Character and his external and internal obstacles was explored in depth by Uta Hagen, in order to inform the Character's behavior within a given set of circumstances. Rosenfeld (2008, p. 134) details obstacles as being either internal or external, driving someone to do the things they do.

Another perceived obstacle for the Character in Uta Hagen's work was his own self-perception, and how the perception of the world around him pushed the Character to certain behaviors, emotional reactions, or decisions within the scene. Rosenfeld (2008, p. 130/131) says that depending on the circumstances, someone may perceive themselves as a victim or as the luckiest person in the world. The Interrogation Process puts the Character on a permanent war path with his own perceptions of himself and the world around him, with the goal of finding spontaneous and authentic emotional responses to these constant inner conflicts. The process of going into the scene, and building history, which are two building

blocks of the Interrogation Process, are also very much connected to Uta Hagen's ideas about creating circumstances for the Characters. Building history is used in the Mark Travis' Interrogation Process as a way to endow the Characters with backstory about themselves and their relationships, so that they may better understand the circumstances of the scene they are about to play. When going into the scene, Mark Travis defends that the Interrogator should always push the Characters towards their immediate present, the circumstances they are about to face in the scene itself, so that they have a clear idea of where they came from and where they are heading to, before the scene takes place. For example, when Carolyn enters the house and confronts Lester about the *1970 Pontiac Firebird* he just bought in *American Beauty*, she is aware that she is coming from work or a date, that she has just seen the new car in front of their house. She might have had a fight with Lester the day before, she might have told him how much she loved the old car he just sold. No matter what her circumstances are, the fact that she is fully aware of them as she goes into the scene informs her behavior during the scene itself, the way she acts towards Lester. However, even if the Actress may be aware of all the circumstances which precede the scene, having the Interrogator confront Carolyn about them registers on an emotional level, as well as a rational one.

The Interrogation Process prepares the Character for the circumstances he is about to face in the scene, which is, in its essence, in tune with Hagen's ideas on creating circumstances for the Character. Rosenfeld (2008, p. 133) states that when creating circumstances for the Character, it is necessary to ensure that his present has an immediate past and a near future he can relate to. It is possible to establish a strict correlation between the inner workings of the Interrogation Process and Uta Hagen's ideas on objective endowment, and its six major categories: Fact, opinion, suspicion, speculation, assumption and expectation. The Interrogation Process is a way to implement or explore these six categories to emotionally impact the Character before a scene.

It is possible, to give an example, to use interrogation to push Carolyn into the scene where she is about to confront Lester about his purchase of the *Pontiac*, with a heavily conditioned bias against Lester. The interrogation may draw from the premise of the scene, which is that Lester bought a new car without consulting Carolyn, to influence a) Carolyn's opinion of Lester: that he is impulsive and has no ambitions in life; b) her suspicion that he actually bought the car to impress Jane's friend Angela; c) her speculation that she might be able to persuade Lester to return the car; d) her assumption that Lester is only doing this to provoke her into having a nervous breakdown; and e) her expectation that if Lester ever finds out that she is cheating on him, he might do more than just spend their money on a useless car. These endowments can be implemented, explored, or teased out of Carolyn through interrogation, by

asking her simple questions such as: “Do you think Lester bought the car to impress your daughter’s friend Angela?”, or “What do you think Lester will do if he finds out that you’ve been cheating on him?” This line of questioning, in tune with the specific Character endowments chosen by the Director-Interrogator to go into the scene, not only drastically influences the way the Character acts and reacts within the scene, but also pushes the Character to feel a certain way about the scene he is about to inhabit. Similarly, if these endowments were to change, and Carolyn were thrown into the scene with the expectation of reconciling with Lester, and the assumption that the car was actually Lester’s surprise gift for her, the scene would take a completely different color.

Mark Travis’ Interrogation Process operates under similar principles to those of Hagen’s *objective endowment* approach, where the Characters are loaded with information which conditions the way they approach the other Characters in the scene they are about to enter. The big difference between both is that when the Interrogator loads the Character with information, this process takes place directly within the Character’s subconscious, through interrogation, as opposed to speaking to the Actor’s rational mind about what to expect from the scene, which is an external process.

2.5. CHEKHOV: HIDING BEHIND THE CHARACTER’S MASK

“The actor enjoys the pleasure of transforming himself into every character he plays and expressing himself through their masks and personalities.”¹⁴

- Michael Chekhov

Mikhail Chekhov, Stanislavski’s student at the Moscow Theater and former Director and Teacher, proposed some new ideas on how to explore Character using masks. Brahe (2008, p. 110) states that a Character’s navigation through his own ego in order to understand his scene objectives comes from the inspiration of an incorporated image. According to Brahe (2008, p.109) the Actor who puts on the mask experiences a transformation that pulls him toward the physical center of the mask, and away from his own idiosyncrasies.

The Interrogation Process follows a similar Character-building process, with the difference that in this case this process happens from the inside out: instead of using an external artifact

¹⁴ Chekhov, as cited in Brahe (2008), p. 98.

to allow the Character hidden within it to explore and express himself, the Interrogation Process starts building the Character from the inside without the aid of any external image, feeding off the voices of the Ally and the Nemesis (whose duality may itself be associated with the masks of tragedy and comedy dating all the way back to the early days of theater in Ancient Greece) to act out.

There are also points of connection to be found between the way the Interrogation Process sees the development of Character, and the focus Chekhov directs towards the Character, in opposition to early Stanislavski, for example. Hage (2008, p.108) quotes Chekhov as stating that his work focuses on the supremacy of the Character's ego, as opposed to Stanislavski's early focus on the Actor's ego. This focus on the Character's ego, in opposition to the Actor's, may allow for a more diverse interpretation of emotions, since the Actor is not tethered to his own experiences or biases, and this is a notion shared by the Interrogation Process, which puts the Character in the center of everything, as the main source for uncovering emotional truth. Travis (2021-C, min 58), would like to think that through the Interrogation Process, an invisible mask comes on which protects the Actor, the mask of the Character. This makes the Actor feel safe to express and embrace whatever is going on inside the mind of the Character. Similarly, this mask can be shared between the Character and the Interrogator whilst exploring the deepest and darkest corners of the Character's psyche. The greatest difference between Chekhov's use of masks and Travis' exploration of Character is that the former is a physical endowment, which affects the Character's psychology, whereas the latter purely exists inside the mind of the Character. Again, it is possible to connect Travis to Adler via Chekhov, since the use of masks allows for a direct way into the Character's *imaginarium*.

2.6. SPOLIN: PLAYING IN THE IMPROVISATION PROCESS

“The material and substance of scene improvisation (...) come out of the cohesion of player acting upon player.”¹⁵

- Viola Spolin

Viola Spolin was an American acting coach and theater academic who developed innovative acting methodologies surrounding the use of improvisation, to help the Actors explore their

¹⁵ Spolin (2017), p.19.

own sense of spontaneity and play. This approach was heavily based on the Actor's intuition, and ability to quickly respond to his partner. Spolin (2017, p. 4) defends that spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom where someone is faced with a reality and discovers it, is free to explore it and creatively express himself. The Interrogation Process is, at its core, a process of improvisation, of discovering and creating circumstances simultaneously, and is therefore reliant on the ability of the Actors and Director to think on their feet, and build on the information their partner has verbalized. It is a game with clearly defined rules which all participants must abide by, just like in Spolin's improvisation exercises. As Spolin (2017, p. 6) states, it is the acceptance of imposed limitations that creates the playing, out of which the game, or scene, appears.

In Travis' Interrogation Process, it is implicitly accepted that the Interrogator has free reign to verbally engage with the Character, with the intent of appeasing, confronting, provoking, accusing, commending, or any other number of ways of getting an emotional reaction from the Character (in essence the same relationship we, as people, have with the voices inside our heads). The lines between what is a game (the interrogation, the Character-Interrogator dynamic) and what is reality (everything that happens outside the scope of the Interrogation Process, the Actor-Director relationship) are clearly delineated at all times during the Interrogation Process, just as they would be in any other improvisation game. The creation of the rules of the game is an important part of improvisation, and one of the main rules is that there are no expected results or right ways of playing a scene, which negates the need for result directing. Travis (2020-B, min. 1-4) defines result directing as demanding a specific emotion, feeling or attitude from the Actor, which ends up spawning a performance which doesn't feel authentic.

The Interrogation Process is very tightly connected to the spirit of Spolin's ideas about improvisation, perhaps more so than with any of the other aforementioned acting theories, in the sense that it is a process aimed to bypass any fear or hesitation the Actors might have regarding the "right way" to play a scene. In a free-flowing improvisation between Characters, there are no wrong answers, no idea which is censored, and there is an emphasis on the intent to freely explore and make mistakes, just like a child playing in a sandbox. As Spolin states, "the expectancy of judgment prevents free relationships within the acting workshops."¹⁶ Any form of personal judgment pertaining to the way the Actor chooses to play a scene has no place within the realm of the Interrogation Process either, seeing as Mark Travis considers self-consciousness to be disruptive to the Actors' ability to fully be spontaneous and authentic. An idea he shares with Spolin: "(...) in judging, he keeps himself from a fresh moment of

¹⁶ Spolin (2017), p. 8.

experience and rarely goes beyond what he already knows.”¹⁷ Improvisation is, in a sense, the ultimate antidote to result directing, in so far as it negates the need for a plan and emphasizes the importance of exploration and spontaneous reaction to your acting partners. Spolin (2017, p. 18) states that rather than looking for an end result, it is important to try and keep a moving, living reality for the participants involved in the improvisation.

The relationship between the Interrogator and the Characters during Mark Travis’ Interrogation Process, as well that of the Characters between each other during their exercises in building history or simultaneous monologues, is fully improvised. All participants spontaneously react to each other with new information which helps define their circumstances in an increasingly clear way. Those spontaneous reactions in the Characters’ responses to the Interrogator or to each other are delimited by the information that exists in the script, or has been agreed upon between the Director and Actors beforehand. Those are the rules of the game in Mark Travis’ Interrogation Process. Any information about the Characters’ backstory which has not been previously discussed between the Actors and Director, or is not a part of the script, is free to be used in interrogation, be it as a method of implementation used by the Interrogator to inform the Character’s choices, or as a way of building the Characters’ shared history. For example, in one of Mark Travis’ *American Beauty* interrogations, Carolyn and Lester start speaking about their wedding and Lester’s mother, who never appears in the original film. This is used by Travis as a building block of the Characters’ shared history, and adds to the informed decisions made by Lester and Carolyn, decisions based on a rich and complex relationship built between them through improvisation.

There is an exercise that Mark Travis uses with Directors who want to learn his Interrogation Process. It is an improvisation exercise called “yes... and”, and its premise is very simple: one of the participants has to accept what the other one says, and build on it. He can never negate or censor what the other participant says, the only goal is to enrich it by adding something of his own. This is the basic idea behind all improvisation, an idea in which the Interrogation Process is firmly rooted. The principles of creativity, intuition, spontaneous reaction, acceptance, playfulness and willingness to fail, are the core of improvisation games, and the *ethos* of the Interrogation Process. What Travis (2021-C, min. 9-10) has created with the Interrogation Process is a directing technique which impacts the Actors, as opposed to an acting technique which aims to help Actors become better. The Interrogation Process is interactive between the Director and Actor, and so mirrors Spolin’s collaborative approach to working with Actors, where both Director and Actor need one another.

¹⁷ Spolin (2017), p. 8.

Mark Travis' ideas are a reflection, and in many ways an extension, of a rich history of 20th century acting theories, but also an update of that history for the 21st century and digital filmmaking. In keeping with the potential of shooting in a digital format, Mark Travis' Interrogation Process allows the Actor to explore different performances within the same scene without giving them a fixed result-oriented direction, a departure from the pre-delineated performances of shooting in film. The new ideas explored by Travis stem as much from the historical influence of the great masters of 20th century acting theories as they do from the need to transcode their theories to the digital age. Travis' freedom to explore and find the performance in digital shooting and editing extends to the work of other contemporary film Directors, in surprising and innovative ways. Chapter Three of this Master's thesis focuses on the strategies used by film Directors working with Actors today, and how Mark Travis' Interrogation Process may fit as a directing tool for film professionals.

3. GAUGING MARK TRAVIS' INTERROGATION PROCESS THROUGH THE EYES OF FILM PROFESSIONALS: A COMPLEMENTARY DIRECTING METHODOLOGY FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

“I love the Interrogation Process (...) to me it's another tool though, it's not the only way I approach directing actors (...) it's a versatile tool, but it's still just a tool, and you need a full tool kit. It's a hammer and wrench, but you may need a screwdriver.”

- Jon Amiel, Director, 2021, (Min. 58-59)

Having learned more about the inner workings of Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, and the potential connections between his ideas and those of some of the acting theorists of the 20th century, it is paramount to bridge the gap from theory to practice and understand just how such a directing methodology can work on contemporary professional film sets, concentrating on how it meets needs of film Directors today. It is important to understand how Mark Travis' Interrogation Process can be used within the context of shooting a film, where the constraints of time and the pressure of budget may not allow for such a thorough and comprehensive methodological approach in directing Actors. The in-depth interviews with professional Directors and Actors help better understand how Mark Travis' Interrogation Process can be applied today in film sets.

3.1. INTERVIEWING PROFESSIONAL DIRECTORS, ACTORS AND ACTING COACHES ON THE INTERROGATION PROCESS

Since Mark Travis' Interrogation Process is used by a small group of professional Directors, it is not yet a widely disseminated directing methodology. Each interviewed Director has a personalized approach to the Interrogation Process, and an idea on how to incorporate it in their own directing methodologies. Jon Amiel (2021, min. 58 - 1h13), renowned British Director and student of Mark Travis's Interrogation Process, states that the Interrogation Process, whilst being a versatile tool, is not the only way he approaches directing Actors, and that Directors need a diverse tool-kit. Amiel adds that the Interrogation Process may not work as well for Actors who aren't comfortable with improvisation, but, on the other hand, can be used to refresh a scene that has gone stale. Sean Cunningham (2021, min. 55 - 1h5), director of *Friday*

the 13th, defends the Interrogation Process as an efficient tool to create an emotional state for the Actor in a short amount of time. Cunningham goes on to say that depending on the situation and the Actor, any approach might be the right one, but it is an advantage to have the Interrogation Process available in a Director's tool belt. Cunningham (min. 6) also highlights that the Interrogation Process helps the Actor create an unspoken yet visible internal conflict within the Character.

Tinka Kleffner (2021, min. 9), German Actress and acting coach who uses the Interrogation Process in her work, states that it is a very positive tool for an Actor, because answering reflexively as the Character frees the Actor from the pressure of inventing something new. Kleffner (2021, min. 26-29) goes on to say that each Actor's approach to their own work is individual, and that some Actors need close contact with the Director on the set. For Kleffner, it is important for the Director to signal his presence to the Character on the set, even if only for a short moment, to show the Character that he is safe. Kleffner (min. 39) insists that when the Interrogator using the Interrogation Process is strong in his support of the Character, five minutes are often enough for the Actor to have an idea of the Character and the scene. In keeping with Kleffner's idea of using the Interrogation Process to save time on set, George Tillman Jr. (2021, min. 22-23), American Director of *Men of Honor*, suggests that the Interrogation Process can be used between camera and light set-ups, in order for the Actor to stay in the moment before calling *action*. Tillman Jr. adds that the Interrogation Process helps build chemistry between the Director and the Actors by stimulating the Characters' thought process, backstory and ideas. Hidde Simmons (2021, min. 11), Dutch Director and acting coach, reaffirms the potential of the Interrogation Process as a tool to create with the Character the atmosphere needed before a scene, stating that this means that every take could be different. James Lingwood (2021, min. 13), a member of the Australian Directors Guild, defends the importance of interrogating the Characters before going into shooting, stating that when the Characters appear on set, they have already been established, by virtue of interrogation. Lewis Webster (2021, min. 39-40), British director and editor, adds that the emotions of the Characters can be easily accessed in production because these have already been built up before, through the Interrogation Process, the interviews and the simultaneous monologues.

All of the interviewed film professionals for this thesis which used the Interrogation Process found some practical application for it in their work as Directors and Actors, and incorporated it into their directing strategies in different ways. But in order to establish a practical framework for Mark Travis' Interrogation Process as a contemporary directing tool for professional Directors, it is paramount to understand what other directing strategies these Directors use to

elicit authentic performances from their Actors. Chapter 3.2 not only delves deeper into the different directing processes of some high-profile Directors working today, but measures Mark Travis' Interrogation Process against them, in order to understand its potential value in the directing workflow of contemporary film Directors.

3.2. ALTERNATIVE CONTEMPORARY DIRECTING STRATEGIES: COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THE INTERROGATION PROCESS WITH OTHER DIRECTING TOOLS USED BY DIRECTORS TODAY

When asked about the obstacles faced in their experiences working with Actors, each Director interviewed approached the question with a unique perspective, although there were also some coincidental experiences and advice. British Director Jon Amiel (2021, min. 3-5) mentioned the increasing resistance of Actors towards Directors and direction as one of the biggest obstacles to overcome on a film set, revealing that many Actors resist Directors because they've had their trust broken, and that in general a difficult Actor is only a scared Actor. The key in obtaining the Actor's trust for Amiel (min. 5) is to work with the Actor in removing that fear, and Amiel says that eighty percent of his job as a Director is to manage other people's anxieties. American Director Sean Cunningham (2021, min. 12-14) refutes the idea that the Director is supposed to be a puppet-master with all the answers, encouraging Directors to let Actors surprise and inform them instead. As established previously, Mark Travis' Interrogation Process also thrives on the relationship of *give-and-take* between the Director and the Actor, as it is a wholly interactive process. As a tool to approach anxious or over-analytical Actors, the Interrogation Process offers viable pathways for Directors, in the sense that it lets the Actor take a backseat to the Character, allowing for spontaneous response which comes from a place of *feeling*, as opposed to *thinking*. There can be no resistance towards direction from the Actors if there is no direction taking place. In Mark Travis' Interrogation Process there is no plan for the scene, only spontaneous interaction with the Character. This approach may make it easier to communicate with a "scared" Actor, as Amiel put it, seeing as it relieves the Actor from the burden of feeling like he is under evaluation. However, the success of using the Interrogation Process to approach a self-conscious Actor is reliant on the Actor's willingness to play and engage with the Director-Interrogator. An Actor with rigid acting principles which don't encompass improvisation may not respond to interrogation either.

Agnieszka Holland (2022, min. 7), Academy Award winning Polish Director and writer, says that she finds it useful to link the story of the film to the Actors' own life experiences and sensibilities, when working with Actors on the scene. Holland (min. 13) warns on the dangers of a Director over-analyzing the material with the Actors, and defends that changing the *mise en scène* may be helpful to fix a performance which is not working on the set, adding that perhaps the set is blocking the performance, or a piece of dialogue is not right for the scene (min. 28). Holland (min. 1) points at casting as the key for the Director to be able to pull authentic performances from her Actors, defending that if the Actor is not right for the part, it is very difficult to repair the performance later. Holland (min. 3) goes on to add that after the casting the work with the Actors is very individual, and that her approach is to trust the Actors and give them as much space as possible so that both her and the Actors can pursue the truth together, and build a common trust. Holland (min. 4) concludes that courage and trust are key in the working relationship between Actor and Director. Mark Travis' Interrogation Process can be used in casting as another viable tool to gauge the Actor's ability to naturally react and express emotion, as well as the Actor's openness to play and react to the given world of the Character. However, it may be a tool which is best used when a relationship of trust has already been established between the Actor and Director, given the psychologically invasive nature of interrogations.

When it comes to establishing a relationship of trust, play and exploration with the Actor from the earliest possible moment in pre-production, Jon Amiel (2021, min. 36-37) elaborates on the way he talks to his potential Actors during an audition, which in some ways is reminiscent of the Interrogation Process itself: Amiel can ask the Actors questions about themselves and their lives in order to get them to a place where they are feeling a great deal of emotion about what they are talking about, which in turn allows him to see how thought and feeling move through them. Tillman Jr. (2021, min. 2) adds that the most important thing in the audition process is to gauge if the Director and Actor have any chemistry, and see how well the Actors interpret the material and adjust to directions and notes from the Director. Holland (2022, min. 9) talks about the importance of finding out if the Director has chemistry with the Actor in casting, and if they can both inspire and understand each other. The Interrogation Process can also be a powerful tool to help connect and build a relationship of proximity between the Director and Actors who are meeting for the first time in casting, provided that all are comfortable using it and see the value in exploring it.

In the build up to unraveling authentic acting performances on set, the interviewed Directors agree that the rehearsal process plays a crucial role in finding and developing the Character with the Actor. Amiel (2021, 1h 23-24), believes that rehearsal is not about finding the scene,

but instead finding consensus on the scene, to make sure Actors and Directors have the same view of the scene going into shooting. A more grounded and conservative approach than Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, which may advocate more freedom for both Director and Actors to explore the scene within the shooting process, accepting its different potential iterations as part of the process itself. Similarly to Amiel, Holland (2022, min. 35) likes to get to a point in rehearsal where both her and the Actors know where they are going, but haven't found the scene yet, so that final find can happen on the set. Holland (min. 35) rehearses on the set before shooting so that she can then decide her *mise-en-scène* and camera positions.

When asked what the concept of authenticity means in his view on directing Actors, Amiel said:

“Actors love to show; real people love to hide. (...) so when an Actor is showing you what they're feeling, nine times out of ten, it's not authentic. (...) real people don't want you to know what they're feeling (...) they are smiling purely because of the effort not to cry (...)”¹⁸

Cunningham shares similar thoughts on authenticity as a byproduct of inner conflict: “We don't want to see people cry, we want to see people try not to cry, because then you have a conflict.”¹⁹ For Mark Travis (2020-B, min. 4), the concept of authenticity in acting hinges on the condition that there is no *pretending* from the Actor. Travis advocates that there should be no acting in a performance, which in turn frees the Character to explore real emotion without the burden of having to act out a pre-planned result.

In the ever-present debate about using the Actor's emotional recall or his imagination in order to access true emotion in a performance, Holland (2022, min. 15) defends that there is no discernible conflict between using imagination and emotional memory, as it is practically impossible for an Actor to get rid of his emotional experience. However, Holland (min. 16) states that the Actor can't solely rely on his emotional memory, he has to work with his imagination as well, in order to connect his past experiences and build something new. Holland (min. 16) adds that the role of the Director is to help the Actor find new horizons, from the first reading of the role. The debate between the Actor's imagination and the use of his own emotional memory as a source of inspiration is also an interesting point of contention in the Interrogation Process, where the Actor and Character operate within a shared subconscious, which is simultaneously real and fictional. Dutch Director and acting coach Hidde Simmons

¹⁸ Amiel, J. ZOOM Interview with Vasco Viana. 18th of march, 2021 (min. 54-55).

¹⁹ Cunningham, S. ZOOM Interview with Vasco Viana. 15th of march, 2021 (min. 22).

(2021, min. 22-23) defends that as long as the emotions created from inside the Character are real and concrete, they are also the emotions of the Actor. British editor Lewis Webster expands on the idea that it is possible to feel real emotion when faced with fictitious circumstances: “Mad, glad, sad, scared, those are the four emotions. We’ve all had those (...) What we are trying to tap into is a refined point of those emotions that we want to attach to an event.”²⁰

The connective tissue between the directing approaches of some of the professional Directors interviewed for this thesis and those used in Mark Travis’ Interrogation Process is apparent. The Interrogation Process is viewed as a valuable tool by those who have used it before, depending on the Actor and setting. Although some of the interviewed Directors may not use it as a holistic and comprehensive methodology which traverses the whole process of making a film, the way Travis designed it to be, it is still useful in their work, albeit for different situations. But how exactly does the Interrogation Process work when used as a holistic process, from the beginning to the end of making a film? In order to personally discover more about the effectiveness of the Interrogation Process when used from pre-production to post-production, the author of this thesis incorporated it into his directing methodology for his FAMU graduation film, *The Smetanovo 5*, with surprising results.

²⁰ Webster, L. ZOOM Interview with Vasco Viana. 19th of march, 2021 (min. 37)

4. CONCLUSION: INTERPRETING MARK TRAVIS'S INTERROGATION PROCESS AS A STUDENT DIRECTOR

The research for this Master's Thesis began as a personal pursuit for a contemporary methodology of directing Actors which may fit my needs as a student Director today. Having chosen to explore Mark Travis' Interrogation Process as a potential directing methodology for the digital age, it became necessary to understand its inner workings in depth, from the way the process itself may be organized and applied to making a film, to its historical and ideological roots and connections. Throughout my five years of researching and writing this thesis I had the chance to discover Mark Travis' Interrogation Process in detail, study its theory and apply it in my direction of Actors as a student Director in FAMU. The main question which propelled me to investigate Mark Travis' Interrogation Process was: how can it impact the work of Directors seeking to elicit consistent authentic performances from Actors today, in the digital age? My aim in the conclusion of this thesis is to answer that question not only through my research interviews with other film Directors, but also through my practical experiences as a student Director, in a final and personal analysis of the Interrogation Process, from pre-production to post-production.

The main thing that I discovered in my research²¹ for this Master's thesis and in my practical use of Mark Travis' Interrogation Process, is that the Interrogation Process is most valuable when used as part of a toolkit which is composed of multiple different directing approaches. Much like the historic acting theories of the 20th century, or any other directing strategy used today, the Interrogation Process is very effective in certain directing scenarios, but it is wise for a Director to have alternative directing tools for other situations. For example, being that the Interrogation Process works very much like an improvisation, it requires quick thinking and the willingness to play from both the Director and the Actors. If the Director is not used to a particularly active directing approach where he must improvise, or an Actor is not comfortable with improvisation, the Interrogation Process may not be the most effective tool to get a strong performance from the Actor. Similarly, and even though it is a much milder alternative to Lee Strasberg's 'Method', the Interrogation Process is still an invasive methodology which forces the Actor to engage with the Interrogator as the Character, and be ready to open himself (as the Character) up for scrutiny. For Actors who prefer a more non-invasive form of communication and Character exploration with their Director, exploring the Character's imagination in a less confrontational way, like Stella Adler did, may suit them better.

²¹ It is important to note that although I have been learning about and using the Interrogation Process since 2018, I am still nowhere close to Mark Travis' level of expertise as an Interrogator, so the results of using the Interrogation Process detailed in this conclusion would certainly be more effective if I had more experience with it.

I have found Mark Travis' Interrogation Process to be useful even in the casting process of my films, as it allowed me to understand just how deeply the Actors connected to their Characters and how in sync they were with their Characters' emotions. When I used the Interrogation Process in one of my castings for my FAMU graduation film 'The Smetanovo 5', about four international flat mates stuck in a flat in Prague during COVID, it created a deeper connection between me, as the Director, and the Actors, since it enabled us to work with very intimate feelings in a short period of time. The flipside to trying the Interrogation Process in casting would be that not all Actors react to it in the same way, and some are not comfortable with such an invasive and personal form of communication with a Director they just met. The Director would need to assess the situation properly and potentially start by interviewing the Character and seeing how the Actor reacts, before going into interrogation.

It was in my rehearsal process for 'The Smetanovo 5' that Mark Travis' Interrogation Process was most impactful, since it allowed me to understand that the most important thing is not to rehearse the same scene over and over again until it is perfected, but to offer the Actors the freedom to explore their Characters within the scene. By the rehearsal stage, and having gone through the casting process, the Director should know which Actors feel most comfortable with the Interrogation Process, and use it to get the best out of them. I have also found that it is useful to reconcile the Interrogation Process with different directing approaches in an ensemble cast. If one Actor's approach to his work doesn't involve using improvisation-based strategies to explore his Character in rehearsal, then the Director should accept it and find other ways to help him effectively explore the Character. In preparing a scene with an Actor, it is important to acknowledge that different scenes and stories have different needs. So, whereas a script which is more open in its dialogues and situations allows for a deeper exploration of the different ways of interpreting it, a more rigid script, like a Shakespearean drama, may require the Actor and Director to spend most of their pre-production trying to find the best way to be as faithful to the words of the author as possible, and focus on defining the beats of the scene.

When it came time to use Mark Travis' Interrogation Process on the set of the 'The Smetanovo 5', the results varied, depending on the Actors I tried it with and the situations it was implemented in. Out of the four main Actors, two were professionally trained, and two were acting for the first time, which made it the perfect setting to discover which situations the Interrogation Process could be most effective in. Using Character interrogation was very effective with the lead Actress, who was classically trained in the theater and whose Character

was also the one most burdened with all of the deeper and heavier emotional scenes of the film. This allowed us to load her Character with thoughts and feelings just before a scene, which made the Interrogation Process instrumental in pushing her towards heightened emotional states in a very short period of time. The Interrogation Process also worked quite well with one of the most inexperienced lead Actors in the film, who was a jazz musician, and so felt very comfortable playing in the world of improvisation. It gave him a platform in which to express himself, without impositions of structure or expectations of a certain result, which would otherwise have tied him down and limited him. Using interrogation was not as effective with the other two Actors, one of which had a very firm and set way of preparing his Character, and the other one which simply did not have the acting experience to immerse herself enough in the world of the Interrogation Process, in order to believe it. I concluded that having Mark Travis' Interrogation Process as a tool on set is useful, as long as one is flexible enough to understand that different situations may require other tools. However, if the Interrogation Process is used with an Actor who connects to it, and that connection is instant and easy to feel if you are the Director using it, it is a tremendously effective driving force towards authentic emotion.

Having used Mark Travis' principles of exploring a different nuance to the Actor's performance in each take, I found that approach extremely valuable when it came time to watch the footage I had just shot for 'The Smetanovo 5', in the editing suite. Seeing all these different takes and possibilities of exploring the performance allowed me to choose the best moments out of each take and craft a new performance, something which felt more authentic and three-dimensional than previous performances I had shot, when my only aim was to perfect a specific performance I had in mind. Seeing as my graduation film was a fully improvised fake-documentary, the freedom given to the Actors on set translated into multiple interesting options in the edit, and ways to carry the emotion of the story forward which I hadn't imagined when writing the story. However, and similarly to the use of the Interrogation Process in rehearsal, I found that when it came time to shoot films which called for a more precise form, and more continuity between takes, it was more effective to decide on a certain way of playing a scene in rehearsal, and then use it throughout. This precision in planning and executing made it so that the editing options were not limited by discontinuous movements, lines, positions, eyelines and performances.

All in all, I have found my own way of incorporating Mark Travis' Interrogation Process in my work, as did the interviewed Directors for this thesis, and as should any new Directors learning the Interrogation Process. My first contact with the Interrogation Process came in a FAMU

'working with Actors' class in 2018, almost five years ago. During that time, I have had a chance to try it out in different scenarios, yielding different results, and I'm still learning about it to this day. Back in 2018 I found Mark Travis' Interrogation Process to be the most interesting directing technique taught to us in FAMU, and this was my main reason to want to learn more about it. Now, almost five years later, it is one of the directing tools I use the most often to explore Character and performance with my Actors. It is my view that Mark Travis' Interrogation Process is a methodology which explores and expands on many of the best concepts proposed by the leading acting theorists of the 20th century, and transcodes them to a contemporary digital setting. The exploration of performance, the use of interrogation in between takes and the openness to discover a new layer to the performance which may surprise even the Director on set, is a direct reflection of the almost endless possibilities of shooting in a digital format, when it comes to the amount of footage captured. Likewise, with the rise of digital editing, the Director and editor have more footage from which to assemble their desired performance, something which is explored in the Interrogation Process, which focuses on creating a different performance in each take. To answer the initial question for this master's thesis, Mark Travis' Interrogation Process has not only impacted the way I work with Actors, but my view on filmmaking as a whole, and I find it to be the next step in updating the historic acting theories of the 20th century to a new era of digital filmmaking.

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APPENDIX

THE INTERROGATION PROCESS, Elsha TRAVIS (Personal Communication)



THE INTERROGATION PROCESS

By Elsha Taya Travis

The Goal of the Interrogation Process

The goal of the Interrogation Process is first of all to overload the Actor's brain, so that the Actor quits and the Character that lives inside the Actor's unconscious can take over.

The pressure that the Interrogation Process exerts upon the Character, forces the Character to improvise their defense. This raw improvisation can result in the most surprising and even profound revelations about what drives the Character.

This IMPROVISATION UNDER PRESSURE is what is needed to allow each Character to fully become themselves, spontaneously with their own unique attributes and emotional turmoil.

The better developed the Actor's imagination is, the more compelling the Characters will be. And the more adept the Interrogator is at improvising, the safer the Actors will feel to let go of control and allow their Characters to take over.

Training in the Interrogation Process

"Play is the only way the highest intelligence of humankind can unfold."
-Joseph Chilton Pearce

We are born to play, and by playing, to learn. Unfortunately, most of us are taught that learning is a serious matter and supersedes playing.

Training in the Interrogation Process consists of playing with...

- Improvisation and Exaggeration

- Contrast and Contradictions (Ally/Nemesis' attitudes, language, postures, wardrobe)
- Unraveling one's own Character
- Deconstructing the Interrogation Process
- Building and Destroying
- And more...

Definitions

DIRECTOR = The regular you, who has to be rational, smart, considerate, responsible, keep emotions in check, solve problems, know the answers, and keep control over the project no matter what.

INTERROGATOR = *Another* aspect of you, who is irrational, irreverent, contrary, a chameleon, at ease in the middle of chaos and disruptive in the middle of calm, always looking for contrast and contradiction, and not invested in being right. The Interrogator's job is not to solve the problem but to create obstacles and turmoil.

ACTOR = The person who is conscious of the variety of subpersonalities and potential Characters that exist within his/herself and who is trained to draw from these potentials to embody a specific Character for performance on stage, film or TV.

CHARACTER = A personage that is initially sketched out by the script but whose specific attributes need to fully coalesce inside the Actor before she/he can become a truly believable, authentic Character. This alchemical process is greatly accelerated and enhanced by the Interrogation Process.

Basic Steps of The Interrogation Process

1. NAME: The very first step is always to establish the name of the Character who is to be interrogated. This is necessary to separate the Actor from the Character. It's important that the Interrogator is clear about who is being addressed. While interrogating, use the Characters' names often. This will facilitate the Characters' independence and their immersion and investment in themselves.
2. SHIFT: The Actor is asked to leave the room to do what he/she needs to take on the personage of the Character. The shift of location is also a shift in time to help the Actor shift into the Character.
3. LOCATION: Upon re-entering the room, the Character is asked to stand in a spot that best supports the Character's personality and intention. If the Character is a young child, he/she may crawl under a table or even climb on top of it. If they are old and arthritic, you may have to help them find a chair with a good support. The Character, however, is never to go back to the chair that the Actor previously occupied. Separation, again.

4. CHARACTER'S ATTITUDE: Ideally the Actor will immediately shift into the attitude of the Character upon taking his/her chosen location. You'll notice it in body language and tone of voice. You want this to happen before you begin the Interrogation process but it may take a few questions and answers in the Interview phase for this to happen.
5. INTERROGATOR'S ATTITUDE: This may require a whole chapter by itself. But in short, you the Director, must relinquish the superior position of being the Director and take on the attitude of an Interrogator. Directors who have trained in acting and improvisation will have a huge advantage. But if acting does not come easy to you, don't be discouraged. If you know yourself well (your dark heart and the turmoil of voices in your head) and if you are able to both love and criticize the Characters you are to interrogate, you'll do fine. The Interrogator's attitude toward the Character is that of trusted friend *and* unrelenting critic. It requires you to always be a step ahead of the Character while at the same time be willing to let go of control.
6. ALLY AND NEMESIS: The Ally (supportive, protective, adoring) and the Nemesis (critical, judgmental, disruptive) are the representations of the polar opposites of the voices we carry around in our heads. If we all carry around these voices, then every Character we deal with also carries their own pattern of voices in their heads. In order to pressure the Characters into improvising their defense (See: The Goal of the Interrogation Process), it's imperative that the Interrogator keeps the Characters off-balance by going back and forth between Ally and Nemesis. This is the foundation and the driver of the Interrogation Process.
7. INTERVIEW: A new relationship needs time for participants to connect and build trust. That's what the interview is for. This is not the time for probing or challenging the Character. This is the time for sympathetic questions to let the Character relax. However, don't stay in this comfortable Interview mode too long. Always be on the alert to jump into Interrogation mode the moment the Character presents you a Door.
8. DOOR: A door is an unguarded moment when the Character gives the Interrogator a glimpse of what darkness lies on the other side of the Door. Do not expect to be invited in. Rather, insinuate yourself in through pointed questions and innocent statements.
9. OPEN THE DOOR: Through the Interrogator's skillful probing, the Door may be opened, revealing what is at the heart of the Character's fears and desires. Once the Door is breached, the Character will be compelled to deal with this new situation, thereby putting the Interrogator in control.
10. CLOSE THE DOOR. When things get too uncomfortable for Characters, they may close a door by denying the subject or fleeing to another topic. Interrogators, too, can deliberately close a door whenever the Interrogation reaches a plateau or if the Character tries to turn the tables by questioning the Interrogator.
11. RESUME INTERVIEW: At anytime the Interrogator can go back to the Interview process to break the rhythm of the Interrogation and relax the Character for just a moment before putting the pressure back on again.

12. SWITCH: Switching can be done by changing topics; changing attitude, tone of voice or position; alternating between Ally and Nemesis; or even by staying completely silent.
13. INTERROGATOR'S GOAL: Once you discover a Door, don't hesitate to barge in. Now your goal is to discover what was unknown or hidden by the Character and create chaos.
14. BECOME LASER: Once you have a goal in mind, it is best to zero in on it. Choose to get there. Be focused and determined. You don't have to go in a straight line. Truth is, if the Character suspects where you are going, you will face a bigger battle. Come in through a side door. Attack by seduction. Lead by following. A curious Interrogator is often more lethal and effective than an attacker.
15. INSERTION: Insert a new piece of history as fact, followed immediately by a question about that fact. *Your last date was a disaster. Why did you mess it up?* The question is necessary to keep the Character from denying the fact.
16. SPIKE THE BALL: Once you reach your goal you want to solidify its impact on the Character. Go for the deepest pleasure or pain. Make it stick.
17. BAIL OUT or BACK TO INTERVIEW: "Wash, Rinse, Dry – Repeat"
18. SIMULTANEOUS MONOLOGUES: See Mark's document.
19. SCENE: As soon as you sense that the energy of the monologues is at the desirable level, you immediately dump the Characters into a reading or performance of the scene by saying: "Scene!" Nothing else.

TIPS

When Mark interrogates, he goes into game-playing mode. He's relaxed, alert and ready for mischief. He becomes like Mohammed Ali: *"Dance like a butterfly. Sting like a bee."*

Your goal is to **destabilize the Characters** while you, the Interrogator, stays centered and quick on your feet.

1. Mirror whatever the character is saying and build on it.
2. Question the character's beliefs: *She loves you? You sure? How do you know?*
3. Look for the opposite: *Wayne is a lousy teacher. Wayne is intelligent.*
4. Dig for secrets: *Is the Rabbi lusting for the prostitute?*
5. Be inappropriate: *Ask the Rabbi about his sex life.*
6. Interrupt.
7. Change the subject abruptly.
8. Switch from criticizing (Nemesis) to praising (Ally), back and forth.
9. Switch abruptly to the next character and leave the first character in a lurch.

There's a lot more, so I encourage you to observe Mark closely and tease out his other tricks.

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