

Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Address by Lola Cohen

August 7, 2018

Lee liked to say that the actor is the priest for the audience. We share ourselves - our pain, vulnerabilities and great joys with the audience. For 50 years our school has dedicated itself to teaching Lee's work and preserving his important legacy. Thank you Anna and Victoria for your dedication and devotion to Lee's work. For me, this is a sacred space where actors from all over the world come to work on their craft. Lee loved actors. He dedicated his life to solving the problems that actors face; the problem of inspiration, of spontaneity, of repetition, of anticipation. For him finding a way of achieving a heightened expressiveness remained one of the paths in the search for the future of the theater.

Lee believed in training the whole human being not just the acting part. He was convinced of the value of relaxation and forced us to become aware of and change our mannerisms and habits that confine expression. He said we should pursue the craft with passion, perseverance and commitment. Lee taught us that actors must be masters of their own inspiration and how crucial it is for us to enter what Stanislavski called "The Creative Mood". He sought to find those conditions under which inspiration was most likely to enter into the actors soul and be summoned by means of the actors' will.

Lee gave us a unique language to explore life's complexities through the senses. He systematized his exercises in order to stimulate and sharpen the imagination and power of observation to respond truthfully on stage not mechanically. He devised the powerful Emotional Memory Exercise which utilizes the soul and experience of the actor as raw material for the work.

Lee was a trailblazer, renowned for his intensity, his perfectionism, his ear for psychological truth and his prodigious knowledge of theater history and all the arts. He was interested in what the theater was going to say and that it must relate to society and the world we live in. He regaled us with stories of Stanislavski, Nemirovich-Danchenko and their beloved Moscow Art Theater that changed Lee's life forever in 1923 when they came to America with the plays of Chekhov, Ibsen, Dostoyevsky, Ostrovsky and more. Lee felt that his work was really a continuation of and an addition to the Stanislavski system and endlessly sang his praises. He was also influenced by Vachtangov, Meyerhold, Eleanora Duse, Jacob Ben Ami, Chaliapin,

Salvini, Giovanni Grasso, John Barrymore amongst others.

Lee had an inexhaustible intellect and appetite for learning and encouraged us to immerse ourselves in the other arts as part of the training. He had an uncanny ability to recognize talent and knew how to unleash an actor's potential. He could detect every false moment in a scene and offer a solution. He urged us to explore our own natures, our strengths and limitations and to discover a deeper level of truth within ourselves. He said we must give our lives meaning and we should take pride in being an actor and that our mission was to serve the audience and the play and that we must cultivate grit and stamina in order to deal with the difficult demands made upon us.

Lee afforded me the opportunity to carry on his legacy internationally and for this I am eternally grateful. I am also grateful to the Strasberg Family for giving me permission to transcribe the hundreds of hours of video tapes which became *The Lee Strasberg Notes*. I was just in Moscow at the book launch for the Russian translation of my second book, *The Method Acting Exercises Handbook* directly across the street from the Kremlin and it was very thrilling to be bringing Lee's work back to Russia where it all began and where Lee is still widely known and loved.

An interesting note about the translation is that there was no Russian word for "Handbook" so the title of the book is "Lee Strasberg, The Method, A Collection of Exercises." Also for the term Private Moment the translation reads "A Moment Alone" which made me think of Lee's Private Moment or "Moment Alone" which he elegantly described in detail. He imagined he was Nijinsky -- playing beautiful music and dancing alone in his room.

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