

# Harold Clurman and The Group Theatre:

## A Celebration and a Call to Action

An educational tool for theatre instructors

Created by Laura Gale

Designed for use in conjunction  
with the play *Clurman*, written and  
performed by Ronald Rand, directed  
by Gregory Abels

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## **A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS:**

Thank you for your interest in *Clurman* and in these materials, which have been designed to help teachers provide a context through which their students might be more fully able to understand and make use of Mr. Rand's play.

Our research has shown that very few schools and training programs offer classes that thoroughly examine Harold Clurman's contributions to the American theatre and the impact of The Group Theatre. In fact, it is common these days to encounter young, trained theatre artists who do not recognize Clurman's name and have no sense of the extent to which The Group Theatre's work and ideas have influenced the type of theatre training they themselves have received. It is this sense of connection to the past that we hope to help cultivate in today's theatre students. The artistic pursuits of these students are connected to a rich theatrical tradition that cannot be perpetuated without today's students having knowledge of it. But while doing more to expose them to this complex artistic heritage is a vital first step, it is not enough. The American theatrical tradition, embodied by The Group Theatre's passionate commitment to social and artistic ideals, will not be perpetuated unless tomorrow's leaders are deeply invested in its continued life. For this reason, students must not only be educated about American theatre history (including the legacy of Harold Clurman and The Group Theatre), but they must be encouraged to understand how the theatre's past relates to its present and that the leaders and ideals of yesterday can still inspire passion and action today; they must be encouraged to recognize and celebrate their own participation in this living legacy.

The materials that follow have been designed to accompany the performance of Ronald Rand's *Clurman*. We are aware that the study of Harold Clurman and The Group Theatre may not be part of your school's curriculum and that this might deter you from offering a presentation of this play to your students. This packet is designed precisely to address such a situation. It offers a complete lecture in outline format which can be presented as a preface to the play. Each section includes thorough notes so teachers can rely entirely on the packet, without having to conduct outside research in order to present it. The outline format also allows teachers to adjust the length and content of a lecture on this topic; the key points are clearly laid out so a more brief summary might be presented, in place of a full lecture.

Although our primary hope is that these materials will be used as a contextual tool to prepare students to attend *Clurman*, the packet need not be used exclusively for this purpose. The lecture is designed to stand on its own and aims to stimulate both discussion and interest on this topic. To this end, it includes questions for discussion and provides a list of resources to allow students to further investigate The Group Theatre, Harold Clurman and related topics on their own.

Today's training system for theatre artists leaves many emerging professionals feeling isolated in a competitive business they were educated to view as a collaborative art. The harsh realities of the industry lead many talented young people to pursue their careers fearfully and passively; they find themselves disempowered, struggling to "get noticed"

and hoping for “a lucky break.” They are floating, as Clurman would say; they lack connection to the theatrical roots that have the power to spiritually and artistically anchor them. Furthermore, they lack a role model, a figure whose powerful example could help to renew wavering faith and inspire action. For many who knew him, Harold Cluman was such a figure. His example stands as proof positive for today’s young artists that, to participate in the theatre as a profession, they do not have to be victims; they can be leaders. Today’s students must be encouraged to realize the theatre’s need for their leadership. With passion, vision, and determination, they can greatly impact the theatrical landscape; they can, and they must. It is their task to lead and shape tomorrow’s American theatre.

We invite you to arrange a performance of *Clurman* for your students, offering them a unique opportunity to not only study Harold Clurman, but to “meet” him and experience the force of his personality and the magnitude of his passion, brought to life on the stage by Ronald Rand. If you have already scheduled a performance, we hope that your students are as inspired by Harold Clurman’s passion, wisdom, and audacity as we have been. We are eager to hear your feedback on both the lecture materials and the play, so don’t hesitate to contact us with your response.

-Laura Gale  
*Clurman* packet author and production dramaturg

**HAROLD CLURMAN and THE GROUP THEATRE:**  
**A Celebration and a Call to Action**

I. INTRODUCTION: The Living Legacy- Harold Clurman and The Group Theatre

A. *The Who- Who is Clurman?*

Harold Clurman (1901-1980) was born in New York City and grew up on Manhattan's Lower East Side. When taken to the theatre by his father at the age of six, he was overwhelmed by the performance of Jacob P. Adler, a great actor of the Yiddish Theatre (and incidentally, the father of actress Stella Adler, whom Clurman would later marry). As a young man, Clurman was considered a sophisticated intellectual by his peers, having studied at Columbia University for a time, then at The Sorbonne in Paris. In Paris, Clurman immersed himself in the world of the arts. After returning to New York in the mid-1920's, he worked as an actor, stage manager, and play-reader in several of the flourishing theatres that had sprung up, aiming to emulate the small, independent theatres of Europe. Working at The Theatre Guild, Clurman met many of the collaborators who would join him in creating The Group Theatre.

B. *The What – What is the Group Theatre?*

The Group Theatre, which actively functioned as a company from 1931-1940, defined the direction of the modern American theatre. Inspired by Clurman's fervent dedication and passion, The Group Theatre struggled throughout the 1930's to bring socially relevant, well-acted plays to Broadway and beyond, under the leadership of co-founders Lee Strasberg, Cheryl Crawford, and Clurman. In spite of financial hardship and a host of other challenges to its existence, The Group persevered, employing a permanent company of actors for nearly 10 years. Out of its ranks grew many of the greatest American actors, playwrights, teachers, and directors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Group produced and performed plays that spoke of contemporary social concerns in a distinctly American voice, and it developed a technique of acting to serve these new plays. Based on Stanislavsky's early teachings at the Moscow Art Theatre, this American approach was developed and taught to the Group actors by Lee Strasberg. Many famous members of The Group Theatre, including Stella Adler, Sandy Meisner, Bobby Lewis and Clurman himself, later went on to teach variations of the Stanislavsky system to thousands of American actors. Their teachings, all of which emphasize a realistic, emotionally truthful performance style, continue to dominate the field of modern acting and have guided the efforts of American playwrights throughout the twentieth century.

## II. EXAMINING **THE WHY** AND **THE WHEN**

### A. Why did The Group Theatre come into existence when it did and why did Clurman feel the need to create it?

#### 1. Background: Comparing the theatre of the 1920's and the theatre of today

##### a. How does the American theatre institution currently operate?

- i. Professional theatres today can be classified as either Regional, Off-Off-Broadway, Off-Broadway, or Broadway houses. In almost all cases, these theatres hire actors on a show-by-show basis. At the Broadway level, productions are usually presented by a group of producers, who choose to financially back a given show, rather than by theatre companies (although a few prominent Off-Broadway companies have recently begun to open shows on Broadway as well). Most theatres then, with the exception of theatre houses on Broadway and those that exist only to provide theatre space to renters, are the home to a company at one of these levels, who employ a permanent executive and administrative staff and operate under a mission statement designed to reflect the company's basic aims.

Plays come to Broadway through numerous routes. Many are given their World Premieres in regional theatres, and if successful, are subsequently produced Off-Broadway. Some new plays are commissioned by or created through developmental workshops at Off-Broadway or regional companies.

Successful Off-Broadway plays often peak the interest of commercial producers, who might transfer a production to Broadway, following its Off-Broadway run.

These days, plays also premiere on Broadway (especially high-budget musicals using star-studded casts), without having ever been produced Off-Broadway or regionally. Often, plays intended for Broadway will open in a city outside New York. In this scenario, adjustments

can be made to the script or production elements and kinks can be worked out before the jump to Broadway occurs.

Many professional actors today are members of Actors Equity Association (AEA), the union for actors and stage managers. To be able to hire union actors, theatres must comply with Equity regulations by providing suitable working conditions and an Equity-approved pay rate. Unions exist to protect directors, designers, and technicians as well.

Many actors are not union members and therefore work primarily at theatres who hire non-Equity performers; many of these theatres pay little or nothing for the actor's work. Some actors acquire agents or managers, who advise and assist them in getting work. Using their access to industry sources, agents can submit actors to casting directors for consideration on upcoming projects. Other actors work without an agent, using public sources, including trade newspapers like Backstage and Show Business, to learn about auditions and opportunities for work. Most actors today jump from job to job, taking work of varying quality in order to make ends meet and to build their resumes.

Though some may establish positive working relationships with a given company and thus be repeatedly cast in that company's productions, actors very rarely work on multiple projects with the same group of people over an extended period of time. Most must adapt again and again to absorb the style, mission, and often contradictory philosophies of the many directors, companies, and plays they encounter.

- b. How did the theatre operate in the 1920's, when Clurman was beginning to feel the need for change?
  - i. Throughout the 1920's, theatre was a booming business; companies like The Theatre Guild presented polished and professional productions of European and new American drama. The "little theatre" movement officially established small, non-professional companies in several

major American cities who aimed to emulate the independent theatres of Europe. Talented and groundbreaking American playwrights, including Eugene O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, and Elmer Rice emerged, writing in a style that, while influenced by the works of famous European dramatists, was shaped, above all, by the American experience.

- ii. What was the spirit of the theatre in the 20's?*  
The 1920's in America were characterized by a strong sense of individualism and optimism. The influx of immigrants in the 1890's had led to a sizable population of hopeful, young people. Through their participation in the arts, their optimism and passion found its way to the stage and was eventually captured in some of the most prominent plays of the era.
- iii. What was celebrated?*  
The individualism of the 20's was reflected in the structure of the growing theatre institution, which produced star-driven Broadway plays and grew increasingly commercialized as it found an American audience. Organizations like The Theatre Guild labored to present highly professional and tastefully artistic productions that emphasized style and beauty. They produced plays including those by George Bernard Shaw, Pirandello, Molnar, and Eugene O'Neill. Thanks to Broadway and these flourishing independent theatres, the New York theatre experience in the 20's offered the public everything from cultural enrichment to glamour, excitement, and celebrity.
- iv. What did Clurman feel was lacking and why did he find it problematic?*  
Clurman was frustrated by the socially detached, highly commercialized nature of the theatre industry. He was dissatisfied with the superficiality of the plays and the egocentric attitudes of the Broadway stars. And while Broadway was driven by materialistic concerns, The Theatre Guild, Clurman felt, simply produced art for art's sake, taking no interest in

the contemporary concerns of the American people. It “seemed to show us more competent stagecraft than humanity or authenticity of feeling” (*Fervent Years*, 43). No existing theatre was concerned with creating an artistically unified production and Clurman especially lamented the resulting disunity in the American theatre. Without a clear artistic purpose or a shared approach to acting, the productions reflected a variety of styles and impulses that did not result in a unified whole. Clurman believed that the theatre, as a collective art, should have something to say to its audience and needed to develop a common vocabulary that would allow artists to more effectively communicate their ideas; furthermore, he felt that a common technique of acting was needed to express these ideas more clearly to an audience.

## 2. A Leader Emerges

### a. *Clurman meets Strasberg and Crawford*

In the 20's, Clurman's ideals were still unshaped, though his longing for theatre of greater significance was strong. The catalyst that propelled forward both the development of his ideas and the creation of a new theatre to embody and explore these ideas was his introduction to Lee Strasberg, and shortly after, Cheryl Crawford.

#### i. *Strasberg*

Strasberg's family moved to New York from Eastern Europe in 1901. As a young man, he became an avid reader, taking a particular interest in the theories surrounding the actor's work. Like Clurman, who first saw the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) perform in Paris, Strasberg was moved by the MAT's work when they came to Broadway in 1923. Constantin Stanislavsky, the co-director of the MAT company, had been developing a systematic technique of acting and using this system to train and direct the MAT actors in premieres of Anton Chekhov's plays (*The Sea Gull*, *The Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Cherry Orchard*). The resulting detailed, richly emotional ensemble acting captured



Strasberg's attention. He seized the opportunity to enroll in classes taught by two MAT members who remained in New York to set up the American Laboratory Theatre, a studio designed to teach Stanislavsky's approach to acting to American theatre artists.

Strasberg and Clurman first met at the Lab Theatre, where Stella Adler was also attending classes. Soon after, while working at The Theatre Guild, Strasberg and Clurman became better acquainted and found themselves drawn together by their shared dissatisfaction and passion. Throughout the late 20's they continued to discuss their developing ideas and gradually began to envision a theatre that would embody their ideals and address their desire for change.

ii. *Crawford*

Cheryl Crawford met Clurman while working as an assistant stage manager at The Theatre Guild. An Ohio native who had recently graduated from Smith College and had moved to New York, Crawford became sympathetic to Clurman's ideas, and although she gained status and security at The Guild throughout the late 20's, she ultimately joined Strasberg and Clurman in their efforts to create a new theatre in 1930.

b. Clurman Talks

- i. Crawford urged Clurman to begin speaking to others about his ideas for a theatre, in order to excite and enlist those who might agree with their aims. In November of 1930, Clurman began a series of now famous talks, held initially in his hotel room, each Friday night after the actors had finished the evening's performances. As word of these talks circulated in the theatre community, crowds grew, forcing Crawford to secure a larger venue at Steinway Hall in Manhattan. These extemporaneous speeches began near to midnight and would last for hours, and although there is no concrete record of what Clurman said, his exhilarating

passion and exciting ideas inspired many who attended. Clurman spoke not only about the theatre, but also about the dilemmas and issues facing all the arts and humankind in general. He related all of this to the conditions of the present historical moment, which he felt demanded collective action and a theatre that “would be vitally connected to real life” and would “respond to profoundest spiritual needs of its audience” (Real Life Drama, 8).

B. What *driving forces* and conditions shaped the theatre of the 1930’s and Clurman’s views?

**\*\*Question: What driving forces shape theatre today?**

1. Politics/ Economics

a. *The Backdrop of the Great Depression*

The Wall Street crash of 1929 launched the Great Depression, which ultimately left millions hungry, unemployed, poor, and powerless. The social and economic turbulence affected all aspects of society and provoked the formation of a new American cultural identity, built on will and perseverance. The arts, which had been so pivotal in the 1920’s “culture of abundance,” were forced into a new position in society as a luxury only few could afford. Bread lines sprang up in cities across the country and became a fixed part of the scenery in New York’s Times Square. Just as many found it difficult to afford attending the theatre, artists found it nearly impossible to support themselves and their families while working in the theatre, which had little money for actor salaries.

The government eventually got involved in this desperate situation when President Roosevelt, as part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), established the Federal Theatre Project (headed by Hallie Flanagan) in 1935 in an effort to provide jobs for unemployed artists. These efforts led to the development of a dynamic network of amateur theatres in cities across the country. It is also important to note that, aside from The Group Theatre, several other influential theatres emerged during the 1930’s, including the Mercury Theatre, led by John Houseman and Orson Welles.

b. *The Role of Communism*

As the 30's progressed and poverty and unemployment lingered, many citizens began to feel as though the nation's system had failed, or more specifically, that capitalism had collapsed and that an alternative solution must be sought to alleviate the suffering that plagued so many struggling, impoverished Americans.

For this reason, many began to examine ideologies like Communism that offered such alternatives. During the 30's and after, many described The Group Theatre as having a Communist political agenda, although Clurman always emphasized that The Group's aims remained apolitical and firmly artistic. However, it was, of course, impossible for a theatre concerned with contemporary social trends in the 1930's to avoid the discussion of political themes in its work. As a historical period, the 30's was a highly politically charged time, and that The Group Theatre confronted political issues and concerns in its plays is wholly unsurprising, in light of the company's aims.

2. The emerging American identity

a. What encouraged the development of the American voice?

- i. A growing desire to see distinctively American theatre, with inclusion of American issues
- ii. The emergence of groundbreaking American playwrights (e.g. Eugene O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, Elmer Rice)
- iii. A new interest in defining an American style—a departure from defining art only by European standards and from copying European style

3. Leadership

a. As the mouthpiece of the new theatre he planned to launch with Strasberg and Crawford, Clurman initially called for:

- i. A theatre reflecting American society, “founded on life values” (*Fervent Years*, 34). Theatre, according to Clurman, had a moral responsibility to examine the social concerns of the American people and to truthfully present their experiences on stage in an authentic,

contemporary voice. This realistic portrayal of the human experience would also require a new technique of acting. Clurman said, “Our interest in the life of our times must lead us to the discovery of those methods that would most truly convey this life through the theatre” (Fervent Years, 34).

**\*\*Question:** Does the theatre today convey the life of our times?

- ii. A theatre combining dramatic texts of superior quality with superior ensemble acting based on a solid, uniform technique.
- iii. A group of theatre artists who shared a common sense of purpose and worked together permanently, so each effort could build on the previous one.

**\*\*Question:** What bearing do these factors (Politics/economics, American identity, Leadership) have on today’s theatre?

### III. EXAMINING THE HOW

#### A. How was The Group Theatre assembled?

1. *What were the first steps taken to launch the company’s work?*  
Clurman and Crawford approached the board of The Theatre Guild and presented a paper, proposing the theatre subsidize their early efforts. The Guild responded by giving them permission to rehearse Paul Green’s *The House of Connelly* (to which they owned the rights) and by offering a \$1000 gift to help finance rehearsals outside the city at a summer retreat.
2. *How did the Group select its members?*  
Clurman, Strasberg, and Crawford interviewed nearly 50 actors and eventually selected 28 for membership in the still unnamed Group Theatre. The three leaders were most interested in finding actors whom they felt would commit to their ideals and had a serious desire to develop their craft; talent, though important, was a secondary consideration. Those chosen were drawn from The Theatre Guild, the Steinway Hall gatherings, and the acquaintances of The Group leaders. They included Phoebe Brand, Joe Bromberg, Morris Carnovsky, Sanford Meisner,

Clifford Odets, Franchot Tone and Stella Adler (whom Clurman had since fallen in love with and persuaded to join them, though Adler was already an experienced actress of some reputation). In June of 1931, the 28 invited actors and the three Group Theatre leaders prepared to retreat to Brookfield Center in Connecticut, where they would rehearse Paul Green's play, with Strasberg directing and Crawford appointed as co-director. Soon, the theatre that the three leaders had been calling "our group" since its conception gained a fitting name, The Group Theatre.

B. What was the *Group Idea*?

1. *Development of a common technique and vocabulary*

All The Group Theatre actors were to be trained in the Stanislavsky system. As Clurman explains, "The system was not an end in itself, but a means employed for the true interpretation of plays" (*Fervent Years*, 43). This system was "a way of organizing the study of parts" designed to "enable the actor to use himself more consciously as an instrument for the attainment of truth" (*Fervent Years*, 43). This technique allowed the directors to more efficiently communicate with their actors in order to help them produce the desired results; furthermore, it led to productions unified by a single, consistent acting style.

2. The belief that the artist's learning is never finished and that artists profit from continued study and continuous practice of their craft.

3. *The use of a permanent ensemble of actors*

Actors would be part of ensemble and would play parts of all sizes. They would not be guaranteed a role in each play, but would be paid for each nonetheless. The size of the actors' roles did not determine their salary, rather variations in pay tended to reflect actor's individual needs (in other words, those supporting a family might be paid a higher wage). The fact that all The Group plays had to be cast out of the limited pool of The Group members meant that the type casting typical of the commercial theatre was not a feature of The Group's casting policies. The Group actors were often stretched by challenging roles and were able to develop impressive range by working on a variety of parts that would have never been offered them in the commercial realm.

4. *The presentation of plays offering a hopeful, affirmative vision of American society, while grappling with real life, contemporary issues*

The Group Theatre was committed to choosing plays that offered a meaningful comment on society and conveyed a “yea-saying rather than a nay-saying” view of humanity and the future (Collected Works, 1050). “Every good play is propaganda for a better life,” Clurman is said to have declared (Reunion, 481).

5. Well-written, high quality new plays by American playwrights
6. The belief that artists must have a sense of social responsibility and that their concerns as artists must extend beyond the limits of their individual disciplines. Clurman longed to widen the moral and artistic scope of the actor.
7. The theatre should offer its audience more than just entertainment, but rather a communion, an experience that is *alive* and involves emotional and energetic exchange between actors and audience.
8. The pursuit of a shared social and artistic purpose, deeply felt by the actors, linking them to the impulse of the playwright (whose work was selected as an embodiment of the company’s philosophy).

**\*\*Question: What *Ideas* drive our contemporary theatre?**

- C. What were the goals and major components of The Group’s process?

1. The cultivation of young American playwrights who might develop from within their ranks and be able to effectively and dramatically articulate their shared ideas.
2. The use of long rehearsal periods, allowing actors to work organically to explore their roles, rather than just deliver immediate results.
3. *Exposing actors to classes to elevate skill, discipline and technique and to facilitate their continuous artistic growth*  
The Group actors trained together in classes focusing on speech and voice, movement, improvisation, playwriting, dance and more.
4. *Rehearsals incorporating improvisation and exercises*  
Improvisations, used as a rehearsal tool, required the actors to engage in scenes that might occur in the world of the play, but

did not exist in the play's text. They would use their own words in these unplanned scenes, forcing them to respond spontaneously out of a personal understanding of their character's experience. These improvisations also helped to develop rich and believable relationships between characters and a strong ensemble sense of the detailed world of the play.

5. *An emphasis on attaining emotional truth onstage as the core of the actor's work*

Strasberg trained The Group actors in the use of Affective Memory (also known as Emotional Memory), designed to help actors to freely express authentic emotion at key emotional moments on stage. These exercises asked the actor to delve into his own personal life, searching for an incident in which he had experienced emotions parallel to those expressed by his character. He would use his memory of this event to allow him to emotionally connect to the character's situation.

6. *Clurman's motivational talks*

Clurman spoke to the actors regularly and at length about a variety of topics related to theatre history, influential movements and figures in other artistic disciplines, and the social and moral dilemmas of their times. He gave the ensemble a sense that their participation in The Group Theatre had great significance and that their present actions were linked to an entire history and tradition; in so doing, he invested them with a strong sense of artistic and historical purpose.

**\*\*Question: Do we, as artists, have a sense of personal connection to this history and tradition today?**

7. *Performance in repertory*

This practice of running more than one show at a time and reviving shows previously produced proved to be very beneficial for The Group Theatre. It allowed them to maximize the involvement of the large ensemble, to give more than one Group actor the opportunity to play a given role, and to tour shows with part of the company while others rehearsed or performed in Group work back in New York. This practice was central to the Group Idea because, as Clurman observed, "For a theatre to grow, continuity of activity is indispensable." Additionally, it was important, Clurman believed, to offer audiences more than one chance to experience a play, particularly when timing, and the hasty, short-sighted assessments of critics can so dramatically color the reception of a worthy piece.

D. What problems did The Group Theatre face and how did they respond?

1. *Lack of money*

The Group funded productions on a show-by-show basis, and was therefore always facing the threat of extinction. If no money was provided to fund the next project, there could be no next project. Regardless of this reality, The Group began rehearsals again and again for projects that did not receive backing until shortly before opening. Crawford was chiefly responsible for acquiring funding and her efforts allowed the organization to produce years of work on Broadway, though many shows closed prematurely and their future was, at each moment, somewhat uncertain.

The Group Theatre also struggled to sustain its membership, who, despite the low and unreliable salaries, remained very loyal to The Group, often volunteering to take pay cuts to prevent a show from closing.

2. *Lack of plays*

Over the years, Clurman continually lamented the shortage of well-written plays that dealt realistically and frankly with the American experience. Often it was a toss-up between which obstacle would dominate, the lack of money to produce a play or the lack of material to produce. Both brought their progress to a temporary halt from time to time, though with the emergence of Odets, the Group found the “home-grown” playwright it had been longing for and was able to encourage and participate in his creative growth.

3. *Producing as a non-commercial theatre on Broadway*

The Group Theatre was an art theatre with non-commercial aims producing within a highly competitive commercial framework. In other words, it could not attain success in conventional terms because it didn't employ the necessary methods; play selection and casting, for instance, were not driven by financial interests, rather by artistic concerns. In The Group Theatre's decision to produce on Broadway, they found their central dilemma; to be “on Broadway but not of it” was a complicated task.

4. *Lure of Hollywood*

Over the years, numerous members of The Group were courted by high profile Hollywood studios and offered luxury, success, and glamour in a world far removed from the struggling Group in New York. The great majority refused these opportunities or did not seek them. They were committed to The Group and to the theatre and to the artistic and social purpose that united them.



During the years of The Group's life and especially after its dissolution, many did work in Hollywood, including Elia Kazan and John Garfield (who joined The Group as interns in 1932), Clifford Odets, Stella Adler, Morris Carnovsky, and Clurman himself. Franchot Tone, an original Group company member, left for Hollywood after only a short time with The Group Theatre. Throughout the 30's, however, his feelings of loyalty remained strong, as did his admiration for Strasberg and Clurman. Tone eventually helped to financially support several Group productions and often expressed a nostalgic longing for his days working with The Group. Before the company's end in 1940, he returned to perform in another Group production.

## 5. Schisms within the ranks

### a. Diverging notions of technique

#### i. *Stella meets Stanislavsky*

In 1934, Clurman and Stella Adler traveled to Europe, and while visiting Paris, they learned that Stanislavsky was there recovering from ill-health. Clurman and Adler were able to meet with him, ask him questions, and discuss the work and technique of The Group Theatre. Over time, Adler had grown frustrated with Strasberg's teachings and the Affective Memory work; she confessed to Stanislavsky that his system had destroyed her love of performance. Stanislavsky responded by telling her that if the system did not work for her, she simply should not use it. Or perhaps, he suggested, she was not using it correctly. Adler, at the time, was preparing for her role in The Group Theatre's upcoming production of *Gentlewoman* by Irwin Shaw. Stanislavsky invited her to work with him on the part. For the next five weeks, she met for hours a day, while Adler's assistant took extensive notes. With this, Stella Adler became the only American actor to work on the craft of acting one-on-one with Stanislavsky. When Adler returned to New York, armed with a new understanding of the Stanislavsky system, she was eager to set The Group Theatre on the right course. The Group was preparing to retreat to Ellenville, the site for the summer's work, where rehearsals would commence and where

Adler would present classes on what she had learned from Stanislavsky.

Upon their arrival at Ellenville, Adler gathered the company for an initial discussion of her findings; Strasberg did not attend.

ii. *Adler vs. Strasberg*

Adler informed The Group actors that Stanislavsky's system had undergone changes in recent years, in response to continued discoveries he had made in working with his actors. He had all but abandoned the use of Affective Memory, replacing it with an emphasis on *actions* and the *given circumstances* of the play. To achieve truth and consistency on stage, it was *doing*, not feeling, that the actor should focus on, Adler said.

Fascinated with Adler's new discoveries, the actors found themselves having to choose between Strasberg's version of Stanislavsky's system and Adler's. Strasberg, who had until this time been the sole authority on the system, felt angry and betrayed, declaring that Stanislavsky had gone back on himself. He insisted that The Group had evidence that affective memory produced impressive results, and he was not willing to abandon the tool that he credited with The Group actors' success.

Adler, however, illuminated the failings of the system as taught by Strasberg, which had already become a concern for many of The Group's actors. Additionally, she explained, Stanislavsky's new system was the more matured product, the result of prolonged work and extensive experience. These adjustments to his earlier technique represented necessary changes in response to important discoveries and observations made over time.

Adler and Strasberg took this artistic dispute very personally; it was not simply a matter of professional disagreement, but the source of much tension between them, and even personal animosity, which continued for the next 60 years until their deaths.

iii. *Complaints from The Group Theatre actors about Strasberg's technique*

Adler was not the only one of The Group Theatre's actors who had grown frustrated with Strasberg's approach, and particularly with the extensive use of Affective Memory. Others, including Morris Carnovsky and Sanford Meisner, had begun to view the tool as destructive and undependable. It was designed so that, about a minute before an emotionally demanding stage moment, the actor would begin to recall the personal memory he had selected in rehearsal and use that memory to help elicit the emotion called for by the script. However, some Group members had observed that, during the minute in which an actor was focusing on his memory, he tended to drop in and out of the scene. Because he was focused internally during this period, he was only minimally invested in his *character's* experience and became temporarily disconnected from his scene partner. Some of the younger actors particularly struggled with Affective Memory. They lacked experience, and thus initially relied heavily on the tool as the central feature of their technique; in contrast, the older actors generally viewed the tool as a supplement, but not a foundation. Years later, Phoebe Brand, one of the youngest original members of The Group Theatre, explained: "Yes, it was unhealthy... You were digging into your subconscious life and not with a trained psychiatrist. You could really do yourself harm in that way, and I think the work disturbed several people" (Reunion, 517).

E. The Group Theatre faces dissolution

1. Events and factors leading to The Group Theatre's demise
  - a. Missed financial opportunities and various administrative blunders led to frustration in The Group actors and tension among its leaders. In response, Clurman proposed changes in The Group's organizational structure. He would serve as managing director and The Group would elect a committee of actors who would take a more active leadership role in the company. However, as Clurman realized later, these

changes did nothing to address the *fundamental economic instability* that was the real root of The Group Theatre's problems.

- b. As the actors also realized the shortcomings of Clurman's plan, they grew increasingly dissatisfied with the faults of The Group leadership and demanded more say in organizational matters. Several of the actors formed The Actors Committee and presented a paper to the directors, detailing their complaints and individually criticizing the three Group leaders for their personal failings. In a meeting with Crawford and Strasberg, Clurman suggested they, as the body of directors, collectively resign and collaborate with the actors on how to move forward. They agreed.
- c. The actors proposed the creation of a committee including the directors and a new group of elected actor representatives. Clurman announced he would be leaving New York to spend 6 months in Hollywood before The Group reconvened to launch the next season. A few organizational meetings of the newly elected body of leaders occurred. Shortly after Clurman's departure, Crawford resigned; Strasberg soon followed suit.
- d. Clurman returned to New York in the fall of 1937 as the sole director of The Group Theatre. He set up a small council of actors to advise him; it consisted of Roman Bohnen, Luther Adler and Elia Kazan. They became instrumental in the company's preparations for its next show, *Golden Boy* by Odets. To forward the financial stability of the company, Clurman came to the heartbreaking conclusion that it was necessary to limit The Group's official membership to only those actors who were cast in the upcoming production; The Group Theatre, he felt, could no longer support those who were not currently involved in production. This represented a major change in policy, straying from the Group Idea to cut off a number of actors who had devoted 6 years of life and work to The Group Theatre.
- e. *Golden Boy* turned out to be The Group's greatest financial success. Clurman, who directed, observed that The Group Theatre had now become fashionable, attracting a more mainstream and upscale Broadway audience.

Thanks to the success of *Golden Boy*, The Group Theatre was able to form The Group Theatre Studio, headed by Bobby Lewis, who began to train young actors and apprentices of The Group. The Group also held New Play Contests, awarding \$100 to a young playwright named Tennessee Williams, which greatly encouraged him to pursue a career writing for the theatre.

The three Group Theatre seasons that followed, however, did not have the same impact. Despite fine casts, the directorial debuts of Group members Kazan and Lewis, and the introduction of playwrights Robert Ardrey and Irwin Shaw, The Group was unable to maintain financial stability and continued to be forced to seek funding project by project.

At The Group Theatre's last summer retreat, they began to work on Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. This was planned as The Group's long overdue attempt to work on a classic play. However, after many weeks of serious rehearsals, the project was abandoned, due to lack of funding, personal feuds within The Group, and the approaching World War. Shaw's *Retreat to Pleasure*, in 1940, was the final Group production.

- f. Clurman's analysis: why The Group Theatre could not escape demise
  - i. Eventually, Clurman later reflected, talk was not enough to sustain actors' spirits. Inspiration, as a spring board for action, was ultimately impractical, since in providing it, Clurman was not providing the fundamental support necessary for Group survival. The situation was, in the end, emotionally difficult and unhealthy. The Group members, working for years under strict discipline and an ever-present sense of uncertainty, were never given the opportunity to experience a release of tension. The situation never became stable enough that they could relax, knowing that their hard work had paid off and had provided them with a satisfying level of comfort and success. Instead, the continued pressure wore on the souls of Clurman and the actors, until Clurman came to feel he was unfairly restricting them from other, potentially more lucrative, work. He could not ask this of them any longer.

- ii. According to Clurman, the primary factor responsible for The Group Theatre's demise was the *lack of sustained societal or institutional support*. Without the support committed ticket-buying audience or consistent funding provided by government, civic or private investors, The Group could not survive.

**\*\*Question: What kind of funding is available to theatres today? Does the present economic climate confront today's theatres with challenges similar to those faced by The Group Theatre?**

#### IV. WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GROUP THEATRE?

A. The Stanislavsky system, now the predominate technique used in actor training in America and at many colleges and universities across the world, was explored and later taught to thousands of students by Group Theatre members. Each developed variations of the system taught by Strasberg in the 1930's, hoping to address the weaknesses they found in the technique they had learned from him. Through The Group Theatre's exploration and their subsequent efforts to communicate their findings, they offered the American actor a variety of systematic approaches to analyzing and performing text, defining a process that would guide the actor in his work.

##### *B. Emergence of the great American acting teachers*

Although many Group Theatre members went on to teach, a few became known as leading experts in actor training, offering a comprehensive approach to the actor's process, based on the Stanislavsky system.

##### *1. Stella Adler*

Adler's technique was formed in response to her work with Stanislavsky in 1934 and her frustration with Strasberg's teachings, particularly the use of Affective Memory, which she found more destructive than useful. Adler's own technique emphasizes imagination, character work, given circumstances and actions. Adler's students worked heavily with script analysis, determining their characters' *actions* (what they physically do on stage), the *justification* of those actions (why they are performed), and their *overall actions* (what the character ultimately desires to accomplish). Her students also thoroughly explored the play's given circumstances, forming characterizations based on the circumstances that shaped their characters' behavior. She also encouraged the use of

paraphrasing to help actors take ownership of the author's ideas by putting text into their own words.

This set of tools would help actors create a vivid and believable world, Adler said. She believed that emotion would flow naturally if the tools were used effectively. By doing an action fully in a scene, she insisted, the actor would become emotionally available.

Adler founded the Stella Adler Studio of Acting, where she trained many, many actors in her technique until her death in 1993. Her Studio, located in New York City, still remains one of the most respected actor training venues in the country.

## 2. *Lee Strasberg*

The system taught by Strasberg following his years with The Group Theatre is referred to as the Method. It is derived from Stanislavsky's system, as it was taught at the American Laboratory Theatre in the 1920's. Strasberg's notes from these Lab classes formed the basis of his teachings in The Group, which emphasized Affective Memory and relaxation as the central components of the actor's process and his key to gaining access to his own emotions. Strasberg continued to refine his technique in later years, but these tools remained at its core.

The aim of Affective Memory is to give the actor a way to bring deep personal emotion to life in the midst of a scene. If the actor could become conditioned to calling forth his emotion, he would be able to repeat performances with high emotional demands night after night with consistency.

Other key components of the Strasberg technique include the use of relaxation to dissolve tension and encourage free expression, the use of concentration and sense memory (which asks the actor to recall sensory sensations, like the feeling of sunlight or the smell of coffee, so that the actor can use the memory of sensations to create a richer and more detailed performance).

### a. *The Actors Studio*

Although Lee Strasberg's name is virtually synonymous with The Actors Studio, it was Elia Kazan, Cheryl Crawford, and Bobby Lewis, who founded The Studio in 1947. Strasberg began teaching classes there several years later, replacing Bobby Lewis, who moved on to other pursuits. Many notable actors trained at The Actors Studio, including Anne Bancroft, Ben Gazzara, Paul Newman, Marilyn Monroe, Geraldine Page, Kim Stanley, Eli Wallach, and others. Despite popular myths, Marlon Brando, who did some work at The Studio with Elia Kazan,

was not a student of Strasberg's, but was initially trained, rather, by Stella Adler.

3. *Sanford Meisner*

Meisner was a well-respected actor in The Group Theatre who, after working with Strasberg for a number of years, began to object to some of the principles of Strasberg's teachings. Meisner's primary dispute was with the use of Affective Memory, a tool which he felt pulled actors out of the present moment and severed their connection with their scene partners. He observed that actors working with a memory would drop out of the scene, becoming introverted and temporarily unavailable. In response to his work in The Group Theatre, Meisner developed his own technique, which defined acting as "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances." This required actors to have a thorough understanding of the situations their characters faced and then to simply respond truthfully to what they experienced onstage. Meisner also emphasized communion, an issue that was also vitally important to Stanislavsky. Both insisted that the tie between actors needed to remain strong at all times. To accomplish this, Meisner said, the actor must keep his attention off himself and on his scene partner. This would help him to notice and respond truthfully to any changes in his partner's behavior; it would also prevent the actor from becoming introverted or over-analytical. The actor should work from instinct and the heart, Meisner believed, not from the head. If the actor could learn to listen deeply and respond fully to the behavior of those around him, this, coupled with his understanding of the play's heightened circumstances, would render the actor emotionally available.

To improve the actor's ability to respond truthfully to a scene partner's behavior, Meisner used an exercise called *repetition*, an important and central tool in his technique. Offstage imagination exercises helped to prepare the actors for emotionally demanding moments, but it was essential that the exercise be used only offstage and left alone as soon the actor entered a scene. Meisner also emphasized the concept of "*doing the doing*." In other words, actors were pushed to *really do* whatever they were supposed to engage in onstage. They must really work hard to glue together the plate or write the letter or pack the suitcase, rather than just pretending to do it. This commitment to really accomplishing a task generates honest and specific human behavior and emotions, which are compelling to an audience. According to Meisner, "character," in and of itself, does not exist. The "character" is simply you, responding truthfully within a given situation.



Meisner went on the head the Acting Department at The Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre in New York City, where he taught acting and directed student productions for over 40 years.

4. *Bobby Lewis*

Many actors were exposed to the technique devised by Group member Bobby Lewis through his classes at The Actors Studio, his influential lectures and books, including Method or Madness?, his work as head of The Yale Drama School and as one of the leading directors on Broadway for over 25 years. Lewis' technique combined many of the tools and concepts embraced by Adler and Meisner, including the use of script analysis and the "acting as doing" philosophy. However, Lewis put special emphasis on imagination and imagery. Acting, he believed, should combine emotional truth and theatrical style. Characterization was also important part of Lewis' technique; this "transformation" was a central step in the actor's process that was too frequently skipped, he felt. In contrast to Adler and Meisner, then, Lewis' teaching relied even more heavily on the actor's "limitless imagination" and emphasized a more stylized approach to interpretation and staging. Imagery, rather than the psychology of the actor, could be used to tell the story of a play, Lewis believed, evoking metaphor and emotion in an equally powerful and even potentially more interesting manner.

5. *Morris Carnovsky, Elia Kazan, Harold Clurman, and others*

Following their years with The Group Theatre, Carnovsky, Kazan, and many other Group members, including Phoebe Brand, Margaret Barker, and even Clifford Odets, went on to teach as well. Clurman himself became an extremely influential teacher, a topic discussed in more detail in a later section. To develop his own unique version of the technique he had acquired from Strasberg, Carnovsky drew upon his extensive acting experience, his study of Stanislavsky's books, and the lessons he had learned in classes with Stella Adler and in rehearsals with Strasberg. Carnovsky, a lover of Shakespeare, taught actors using the Stanislavsky system to prepare them to work on the highest poetic masterpieces with emotional truth and a realistic style. Carnovsky viewed the actor's imagination as his greatest tool. Affective Memory, which had eventually frustrated Carnovsky during his Group Theatre years, was not a component of his own Stanislavsky-based technique. Elia Kazan taught classes at The Actors Studio, which he had helped to found, but is mostly known for his work as a director. Kazan was pivotal in transmitting the values and technique of

The Group Theatre to the mainstream through his work as a leading stage and film director. Some of his most famed accomplishments include the stage and film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the films *On the Waterfront* and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, and stage productions of *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

C. *The Group maintained its sense of artistry, integrity, and community in the face of the pressures of commercialism*

Clurman, in his leadership of The Group Theatre, never allowed the organization to stray from its artistic goals. Although this perpetuated their financial struggles, The Group could proudly say they never sacrificed their ideals and accomplished their main objectives: to develop an ensemble technique of acting, to produce socially meaningful plays that reflected contemporary American life and concerns, and to develop a playwright whose works embraced their philosophies.

D. *Connecting American theatre artists to a rich history and tradition*

The Group Idea emphasized that artists function within a rich and complex historical tradition that all trained theatre artists should be aware of and can draw upon. Clurman urged actors to learn about all the arts, about history, and the moral and social concerns of their time. By linking themselves to their cultural tradition, they would be anchored by a feeling of connection to something of greater magnitude and significance than their individual selves.

E. *The impact on generations to follow*

The ideas of Harold Clurman and the work of The Group Theatre has influenced leading artists in a variety of fields, including such acting teachers as Bill Esper, Uta Hagen, Wynn Handman, Bill Hickey, ED Kovens, Terry Schreiber, John Strasberg and, to name only a few. The Group Theatre's realistic, emotionally truthful style of acting greatly affected many celebrated actors, who are admired as skillful and sensitive craftsmen. Among these actors are Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, Robert De Niro, Robert Duvall, Gregory Peck, Benecio DelToro, Edward Norton, Maureen Stapleton, Eli Wallach, Anne Jackson, Geraldine Page, Kim Stanley, Joanne Woodward, Paul Newman, Kim Hunter, Julie Harris, Colleen Dewhurst and Meryl Streep. All were trained by Adler, Strasberg, Meisner or a direct descendent groomed by one of the three to teach their technique.

Beyond this, The Group Theatre influenced the work of many notable directors, including stage directors Elia Kazan, Arthur Storch, Arthur Penn, and Gene Saks, along with film directors Sidney Lumet, Peter Bogdanovich, Martin Ritt, and John Cassavates. The new style of acting developed by The Group Theatre, along with their commitment to social

realism, also sparked the emergence of new styles of plays. Playwrights including Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, without argument two of the most influential figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre, along with William Inge, Lillian Helman, Paddy Chayefsky, and William Gibson, were enormously influenced by The Group Theatre's work.

## V. CLURMAN'S CHANGING ROLES AND EVOLVING IDEAS

### A. Harold Clurman's many roles throughout his lifetime in the theatre

#### 1. *Harold Clurman, impassioned theatre activist*

Clurman's idealism and audacity distinguished him early on as a unique personality in the theatre. His commitment to the Group Idea was unyielding, and his belief in the power of art and human exchange inspired many through the hardest of times.

#### 2. *Harold Clurman, director*

Clurman did not direct for The Group Theatre until 1935, when he undertook Odets' *Awake and Sing*, hailed as The Group's greatest artistic success. He went on to direct four more Odets plays for The Group (*Paradise Lost*, *Golden Boy*, *Rocket to the Moon*, and *Night Music*) and two by Irwin Shaw. After the dissolution of The Group Theatre, Clurman's career as a director expanded. For thirty years, he directed steadily in the U.S. and throughout the world, staging such notable and successful productions as *The Member of the Wedding* with Julie Harris and Ethel Waters, *Bus Stop* with Kim Stanley, and *A Touch of the Poet* with Kim Stanley and Helen Hayes. He directed works by many of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest playwrights, including Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and William Inge. Clurman's final effort as a director was an acclaimed production of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* with Joseph Wiseman at The Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in 1969.

Clurman directed many celebrated actors throughout his career; in addition to those noted above, he also directed Eli Wallach, Maureen Stapleton, Kim Stanley, Ralph Richardson, Roy Scheider Michael Redgrave, and Marlon Brando, whom he cast in *Truckline Café* in his first adult role. Brando had been recommended to Clurman by the young actor's teacher, Stella Adler.

Clurman also worked outside the United States, directing in London, Tel Aviv, and in Tokyo, where the actors in his productions of O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *The Iceman Cometh* nicknamed him "Uncle Fireball."

Describing Clurman's style and process as a director, producer Robert Whitehead said:

“He would begin to discuss the life, the complexities and the purpose of the play and the journey each actor will take as he or she finds the way to the center of the play’s world...Harold had a way of grabbing an idea and then improvising on his own words till they built and built into a passion that was dazzling, frenzied, and illuminating...he then subsided into a pensiveness in which he very thoughtfully watched the results of the imagery he had set in motion” (Collected Works, 2).

3. *Harold Clurman’s affirmative approach to dramatic criticism*  
Considered “the elder statesman of the American theatre,” Clurman wrote as a critic first for The New Republic, and then for The Nation from 1953 until his death in 1980. His career writing theatre commentary began well before this, however; articles, essays and reviews by Clurman had appeared in a variety of publications beginning in the late 1920’s. Clurman believed the function of the critic was to enlighten or illuminate, rather than to “praise or damn.” Critics, he knew, had the power and the tendency to do more harm than good and their opinions could cripple or catapult careers as well as dictate the failure or success of a production. While a typical critic might be short-sighted, blinded by personal bias, and ultimately destructive to a production and artists, Clurman’s criticism was altogether different in tone, always thoughtful, embracing, and forward-looking. He “guarded and perpetuated a tradition,” culturally educating his readers by relating the theatre’s rich past to the present moment and examining the social significance of new theatrical trends. As Arthur Miller proclaimed, “He has no peer among theatre critics and commentators in this country.”
4. *Harold Clurman, teacher, author, and more*  
In the 1950’s, Clurman began teaching late evening classes, working with such actors including Maureen Stapleton, Elizabeth Wilson, Eli Wallach, Julie Harris, Roy Scheider and Colleen Dewhurst. Clurman continued to teach private classes until his death, personally guiding and inspiring hundreds of theatre artists. He was also appointed as a professor of theatre at Hunter College in New York, where he taught from 1967-1980. His ideas on the theatre also found expression in his many books and essays. Clurman’s published works include The Fervent Years, his comprehensive account of The Group Theatre’s life and work in the 1930’s, On Directing, and his autobiographical work All People Are Famous, among others. In 1994, Applause Books published The Collected Works of Harold Clurman, containing articles, interviews, letters, and criticism spanning six decades.

B. Why do we celebrate Clurman?

1. His ideas, and the passion with which he articulated them and put them into action, inspired a generation of theatre artists (those who would lead and shape the generation to follow) during the formative years of the American theatre.
2. His initiative had an enormous effect on the course of history; his actions are an inspiring tribute to the impact that can result from the dreams and actions of one determined soul.
3. His universal embrace of life and art widened the scope of concern of theatre artists in the 30's. As a critic, his aim was to encourage and support the health of our artistic institutions, rather than to damage or control individual careers. His opinions were thoughtful and constructive; his criticism was designed to take care of the art form and those who devoted their careers to it.

C. Why are so many young theatre artists virtually unaware of Clurman's legacy and his tremendous contributions to their profession?

1. As Stella Adler has written, Harold Clurman's legacy is in danger of being lost because he established no heir. No studio or training program bears his name, and though he influenced and touched many, no one individual or set of individuals were selected to carry his ideas and legacy into the future.
2. Despite the wealth of material written by Clurman, his many books and essays rarely appear on class syllabi. Unfortunately, classes and lectures on Clurman and The Group Theatre are all too frequently absent from traditional theatre curriculum.
3. Ours is a society that tends to neglect our own history. Young theatre artists are not well connected to the American theatre tradition because many academic and independent training programs focus exclusively on practical tools to the exclusion of cultural transmission.
4. As a leader in the American theatre, Clurman stands unparalleled. Today's theatre students lack a contemporary figure to which Clurman compares. No subsequent leader has developed a technique and artistic Idea that responds to the realities of *today's* society, as Clurman did in response to life in the 1930's.

We remain a country with a tradition that still begs to be inherited with each passing generation. Unfortunately, most American students find themselves unable to identify with the tradition of theatrical leadership initiated by Clurman.

5. However:
  - a. Some schools do assign The Fervent Years as required reading.
  - b. In 1979, The Harold Clurman Theatre on Theatre Row in New York City was named to honor his legacy. Clurman was also the recipient of a number of important awards; he was elected a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor and won the first George Jean Nathan Award for dramatic criticism.
  - c. *The Group!* and *Clurman*, two plays by Ronald Rand celebrating The Group Theatre and Harold Clurman, are being performed in New York City and around the country.
  - d. Anne Bogart's SITI Company is creating a new piece about The Group Theatre, based on Helen Krich Chinoy's book Reunion.

### **REVIEW OF CLURMAN PACKET QUESTIONS:**

**\*\*Question 1:** What driving forces shape theatre today?

**\*\*Question 2:** Does the theatre today convey the life of *our* times?

**\*\*Question 3:** What bearing do these factors (Politics/ economics, American identity, Leadership) have on today's theatre?

**\*\*Question 4:** What *Ideas* drive our contemporary theatre?

**\*\*Question 5:** What kind of funding is available to theatres today? Does the present economic climate confront today's theatres with challenges similar to those faced by The Group Theatre?

### **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION:**

1. How can we become more proactive in shaping the art form to which we devote our passion and energies?

2. What changes would benefit the theatre of tomorrow?

3. Does an *American* theatre or an American theatre tradition really matter?

4. Do we have leaders and Ideas in the theatre today? Discuss. Why or why not? Who might we consider our leaders?

5. How and to what extent are theatre students educated about Harold Clurman and The Group Theatre? Summarize the knowledge you had before this seminar and its source. Why do theatre students not learn more about the history of the American theatre (the theatre tradition we are all a part of)?

6. What aspects most interest you about the study of Clurman and The Group Theatre? What topics would you like to learn more about? What is the most interesting way for you to study these topics or how could it be taught in the most enjoyable way for students?

# **APPENDIX**

## **SUGGESTED READING LISTS:**

### **Books Written by Group Theatre Members:**

#### ***By Harold Clurman:***

The Fervent Years, 1945.\*\*

The Divine Pastime, 1974.

Lies Like Truth, 1958.

All People are Famous, 1974.

On Directing, 1972.

Ibsen, 1977.

The Naked Image, 1966.

The Collected Works of Harold Clurman, 1994.\*\*

#### ***By Stella Adler:***

The Art of Acting, 2000.

The Technique of Acting, 1988.

Stella Adler on Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov, 1999.

#### ***By Sanford Meisner:***

Sanford Meisner on Acting, 1987.

#### ***By Lee Strasberg:***

A Dream of Passion, 1987.

#### ***Robert Lewis:***

Advice to the Players, 1980.

Method or Madness?, 1958.

#### ***By Clifford Odets:***

Waiting for Lefty and Other Plays, 1993.

The Time Is Ripe: The 1940 Journal of Clifford Odets, 1989.

#### ***By Cheryl Crawford:***

One Naked Individual: My Fifty Years in the Theatre, 1977.

#### ***By Morris Carnovsky:***

The Actor's Eye, 1984.

\*\*Indicates source quoted in *Clurman* packet.



### **Books Written About The Group Theatre and its Members:**

(Listed alphabetically by author)

The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods by Richard Brestoff, 1995.\*\*

Reunion: A Self-Portrait of the Group Theatre by Helen Krich Chinoy, 1976.\*\*

The Actors Studio: A Player's Place by David Garfield, 1980.

Strasberg's Method by S. Loraine Hull, 1985.

The Sanford Meisner Approach by Larry Silverberg, 1994.

Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-1940 by Wendy Smith, 1992.\*\*

Accidentally on Purpose: Reflections on Life, Acting, and the Nine Natural Laws of Creativity by John Strasberg, 1996.

### **Other Suggested Reading for Theatre Artists:**

(Listed alphabetically by author)

A Director Prepares by Anne Bogart, 2001.

Acting: The First Six Lessons by Richard Boleslavsky, 1933.

The Empty Space by Peter Brook, 1968.

The Open Door by Peter Brook, 1987.

A Practical Handbook for the Actor by Melissa Bruder, Lee Michael Cohn, Madeleine Olnek, Nathaniel Pollack, Robert Previto and Scott Zigler, 1986.

The Artist's Way by Julia Cameron, 1992.

To The Actor on The Technique of Acting by Michael Chekhov, 1953.

Actors on Acting by Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, 1970.

Directors on Directing by Toby Cole, 1990.

Towards a Poor Theatre by Jerzy Grotowski, 1969.

A Challenge for the Actor by Uta Hagen, 1973.

How to be a Working Actor by Mari Lyn Henry and Lynne Rogers, 2000.

At Work With Grotowski on Physical Actions by Thomas Richards, 1995.

Letters to a Young Poet by Rainer Maria Rilke, 1945.

The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting by Joseph Roach, 1993.

An Actor Prepares by Constantin Stanislavsky, 1936.

Building a Character by Constantin Stanislavsky, 1949.

Creating a Role by Constantin Stanislavsky, 1961.

## **SUGGESTED FILMS:**

*The Trip to Bountiful* (1985) with Geraldine Page

*Frances* (1982) with Jessica Lange and Kim Stanley

*Raging Bull* (1980) with Robert DeNiro, by Martin Scorsese

*Taxi Driver* (1976) with Robert DeNiro, Harvey Keitel, Jodie Foster, directed by Martin Scorsese

*The Godfather II* (1974) with Al Pacino, Robert DeNiro, Robert Duvall, Lee Strasberg

*The Godfather I* (1972) with Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, Robert Duvall

*The Graduate* (1967) with Dustin Hoffman, directed by Mike Nichols

*The Last Angry Man* (1959) with Paul Muni

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) with Paul Newman, Elizabeth Taylor, and Burl Ives

*The Three Faces of Eve* (1957) with Joanne Woodward and Lee J. Cobb

*East of Eden* (1955) with James Dean and Julie Harris, directed by Elia Kazan

*On the Waterfront* (1954) with Marlon Brando, directed by Elia Kazan

*A Member of the Wedding* (1952) with Julie Harris

*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) with Marlon Brando, directed by Elia Kazan

*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945) directed by Elia Kazan

*Golden Boy* (1939) film version of Odets' play, with Lee J. Cobb et al.

*The Life of Emile Zola* (1937) with Paul Muni and Morris Carnovsky

# **INSTRUCTOR RESPONSE FORM**

Dear Instructor:

Thank you for the time you have spent reviewing and/ or utilizing these materials in your classroom. Your feedback is very important to us and will be extremely useful as we continue to expand and improve our outreach efforts. Please take a few moments to answer the questions below and encourage your students to do the same, using the Student Response Form provided. As you will notice, several of the questions on the student form echo those asked in the list at the end of the packet. We hope the questions helped to stimulate an exciting classroom discussion and that your students will take this opportunity to attempt to synthesize and articulate their discoveries.

To save you time and trouble, we have enclosed an addressed stamped envelope with this packet so you can return the forms to us once they have been completed. If you did not receive these materials by mail, you may visit our website at [www.clurmantheplay.com](http://www.clurmantheplay.com) and submit your feedback online.

Thank you so much for your support of this important project. To effectively reach out to students, we need to know more about what touches them, what interests them, and what they already know. Your input, along with theirs, will be absolutely instrumental in shaping our future efforts, along with the form and content of this packet.

Sincerely yours,

Laura Gale, packet author and production dramaturg

Ronald Rand, actor/ playwright of *Clurman*

## **QUESTIONS:**

1. Is there a class at your school that examines the history and impact of The Group Theatre and the teachings of Harold Clurman?
  
2. Why do you think that these topics are so rarely taught and that, consequently, many young theatre professionals are unaware of The Group Theatre's history, philosophies, and contributions to their craft?

3. What, in your opinion, are the most important components of a curriculum that prepares theatre students for the artistic and business-related challenges of the theatre profession today? Do you think this ideal curriculum resembles what is typically taught in training programs?
  
4. How important and useful do you feel a knowledge of theatrical history and tradition is for young theatre professionals? Please discuss.
  
5. Which aspects of the material did your students respond most enthusiastically to? Which sections of the packet did you find the clearest, most interesting, and/or easiest to present?
  
6. Which sections could be improved? How could the form and/or content of the Clurman packet be altered to make it more teacher-friendly or more accessible and engaging for your students?
  
7. If you attended a performance of *Clurman*, please discuss your response to the play and your impression of how it affected your students. Please feel free to include any other comments about the play and the post-show discussion.

# **STUDENT RESPONSE FORM**

Dear Student:

These materials were created especially for you. Our goal is to introduce you to some of the most influential and inspirational figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American theatre; these are the men and women whose ideas and teachings have defined *your* notions of what acting is and your understanding of theatrical process. We would find it absurd if music students had never heard of Bach or Beethoven; in much the same way, it is vital for theatre artists to know of Harold Clurman and the actors, directors, and playwrights of The Group Theatre, who led the way in our discipline. Their determination, idealism and passion can inspire us all as we move forward to create the theatre of tomorrow, which it is up to you and your generation to lead.

Please take a few moments to respond to the questions below, including any feedback that you feel might improve these materials on The Group Theatre and Harold Clurman. We also want to know what has peaked your interest and what you'd like to learn more about. It is your input and your interests that will directly shape our future efforts and help us to improve these materials.

Thank you so much for your time and honesty.

Sincerely yours,

Laura Gale, packet author and production dramaturg

Ronald Rand, actor/ playwright of *Clurman*

## **QUESTIONS**

1. Before seeing *Clurman* and/ or discussing these materials class, what did you know about Harold Clurman, The Group Theatre, and The Group's impact on the American theatre? What was the source of your previous knowledge (i.e., Had you learned about it in class? Through independent research)? Please explain.
  
2. Which aspects of this material have caught your interest? In light of what you've learned about The Group Theatre, who or what would you like to learn more about? Why?

3. Do you feel you know how to go about finding more information on the topics you'd like to further investigate? What books might you read? What films are you interested in seeing or watching again more closely?
  
4. Which sections of the material did you find the most interesting? Which sections interested you the least?
  
5. What would be the most interesting way teachers could present this material to make it clear, interesting, and engaging for theatre students?
  
6. Has anything you've learned widened your sense of possibility as a theatre artist or added to your sense of connection to a theatrical heritage? Please discuss.
  
7. If you attended a performance of Clurman, please discuss your response to the play and post-show discussion. Was your experience a valuable one? Please let us know.