

NAME: **KEY**

STANISLAVSKI AND THE SYSTEM

KONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI

- He was born in **Moscow**, Russia in 1863.
- His family was **wealthy** and did not approve of his **acting** career so he hid it from them.
- He moved on from acting to become a **director** and a **teacher**
- In 1898 Stanislavski co-founded the **Moscow** Art Theatre with Vladimir **Nemirovich-Danchenko** who was a successful **playwright** and **critic**

THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko sought to establish a theatre of **new** art forms with a **fresh** approach to its function.

They agreed that Stanislavski would have absolute control over the **stage direction** while Nemirovich-Danchenko was assigned the **literary** and **administrative** duties.

They wanted to focus their work on **Naturalism** vs. the **Melodrama** that was popular at the time. They produced **classical** works of the Western theatre such as plays by **Ibsen** and **Shakespeare**.

The fifth show in their season was ***The Seagull*** by Anton **Chekhov**.

The company went on to become a huge critical and popular success and launched Chekhov's career. He became one of Russia's most acclaimed **playwrights**.

Stanislavski went on to direct the premiers of Chekhov's other major plays:

- **Uncle Vanya**
- **Three Sisters**
- **The Cherry Orchard**

The artistic **realism** of Chekhov's plays, which focused on **subtext** and **naturalism**, matched the new approach to **acting** that Stanislavski was creating.

Stanislavski used the company as a **lab** and **practice** ground to work on a new approach to acting.

This new approach was an **ensemble** driven process focused on **research** and **reading**

The goal is to make a performance "**real**". In order to do that Stanislavski used the system to bring an actor's **experiences** into the role and **expand** an actor's **imagination**.

This system changed Actor **training** forever.

THE STANISLAVSKI SYSTEM

Stanislavski believed that in order to create a **realistic** character, an actor had to work from the **Inside Out** vs. the **Outside In**

The character has to have **inner** thoughts, a **backstory**, **beliefs**, and so on, just as a real person does which means the actor had to draw on their own **inside** life.

He insisted that actors use **First Person** pronouns when discussing their character. "I am . . . I want . . ." etc.

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The use of the **imagination** is crucial in the System. It is not about **self-indulgence**, **therapy** or working out your **problems** on stage.

Stanislavsky was always focused on the **art** of the process and trained his actors to do the same.

After Stanislavski left the Moscow Art Theatre, he wrote 3 books on acting which have become required reading for any serious actor.

1. **An Actor Prepares**
2. **Building a Character**
3. **Creating a Role**

He also wrote a biography: **My Life in Art**

THE PROCESS

Given Circumstances

The **Given Circumstances** are the character details in the script - the **facts** the playwright gives the actor. They are **unchangeable**.

They typically focus attention on the **geographical**, **social** and **historical** elements in the script. Sample questions to ask:

- Where am I?
- What is my specific location?
- What year is it?
- What relationships do I have?
- What has happened before the play begins?

Super Objective

The **Super Objective** is the main **goal** or **task** that a character is trying to accomplish through the course of the play.

Objective

Once the **Super Objective** of the play is established, break the script down into sections or "**beats**".

The **Objective** is the **goal** for your character in each beat. It's what the character **wants** or would like to see happen at the end of the **beat**.

Objectives usually directly **serve** the Super Objective.

The actor has to understand the **events** in each beat in order to know what their Objectives are.

The actor has to know what they **want** and what they are **willing to do** to get what they want. Those things are known as **Tactics**.

Magic If

The Magic If answers the question, "**What would I do if I were in the same situation?**"

The "If" is the crucial part of this system and prevents the actors from slipping into a therapeutic kind of practice. Again, this about your real-life experiences in **combination** with your imagination.

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The situation is not **real**, and the system doesn't **assume** you have ever been in that situation.

Take the **imaginary** situation and make **real life** decisions as to how you would **behave**.

It's crucial to determine the "**do**" in the question. What **action** would you take?

Emotional Memory

Also sometimes called **Affective** Memory.

Emotional Memory the actor **remembers** a situation when he/ she felt the same, or similar, **emotions** as their character. **Recalling** the situation leads to **emotion**.

The actor must not force a memory or bring up something **hurtful**. Stanislavski said It's important not to "**assault the subconscious**."

Past memories are used because they are more **controllable**.

The actor can also use situations they were **not directly** involved with - it could be a something they **saw**, **read about** or **heard about**.

Sense Memory is an offshoot of Emotional Memory. The actor recalls a memory and tries to put all five **senses** to the memory.

Inner Monologue

Also referred to as **Subtext**. These are the character's **thoughts**.

The actor has to understand what's going on **inside** the character during a scene

Creating the **subtext** is part of developing the **inner** life of the character.

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Legacy and Impact

- **Michael Chekhov** was considered Stanislavski's brightest student
 - Created the theory of **Psychological Gesture** and made a total break from Stanislavski
- **Richard Boleslavsky** began teaching in the United States
 - 1923 - Co-founded **American Laboratory Theatre** in New York with Marie Ouspenskaya
- **Lee Strasberg** studied under Boleslavsky
 - 1931 - Co-founded **Group Theatre** in New York with Harold Clurman & Cheryl Crawford.
 - Took over **The Actor's Studio** in 1951 and began teaching **The Method** based largely on Emotional Memory
- Stella Adler & Sanford Meisner studied under Strasberg at The Actor's Studio
 - 1935 - **Sanford Meisner** took over **The Neighborhood Playhouse** School of the Theatre
 - Focus on "**communication**" and "**adaptation**"
 - "Acting is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances"
 - 1949 - **Stella Adler** created the Stella Adler School of Acting
 - Focused on **Given Circumstances**
 - "In your choices lies your talent"