

STANISLAVSKI PRESENTATION
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HISTORY OF DIRECTING

Best known for his Acting *System*, his disciples, and The Moscow Art Theatre.

TIMELINE

1863: Constantin Stanislavski is born into the wealthy family of Alekseyevs. He is born into a time period that perceives actors as lower class.

1877: Father is elected to public office, and builds a theatre for his son's 'impulses.' It was here that Stanislavski began extensive journaling.

1881: A second theatre is built on the family estate. Constantin decides not to attend college and to go by the official stage name of Stanislavski.

1884: He began to study voice and movement with Komissarzhevski, and piecing together his acting system.

1888: Stanislavski creates The School of Society breaking social structures and bringing theatre to the story and the play.

1889: He marries his opposite on the stage, Maria Lillina in Schiller's production of *Intrigue and Love*

1889: Stanislavski moves to kill the prompter. It is one of his many contributions to the theatre.

1892: Stanislavski produces his first solo directorial work, Tolstoy's *The Fruits of Enlightenment*.

1897: With the help of his friend and fellow director Nemirovich, they form the Moscow Art Theatre.

1898: *The Seagull* is performed at MAT to much acclaim and success.

1916: The Search for "the truth" begins. He refers to "the truth" in respect to the art of acting.

THE ACTOR DIRECTOR

Stanislavski started as an actor. In Russia, an actor was the bottom of the social totem pole. His family did not support this decision especially when he started to use their money to continue his endeavors. Stanislavski decided not to go to school but to continue his study of “the truth” on his own. Stanislavski studied with Komissarzhevski, the son of a famous opera singer, both on his voice and body while watching productions at the Maly Theatre. This theatre was known in particular for being the center of Russian realism.

***The Society of Art and Literature.**

In 1888, Stanislavski wanted to unite professional and amateur actors in one single study. With his access funds from the previous year’s season, he created the Society of Art and Literature. Like a few others before him, Stanislavski did not believe in a single ‘star’ but an ensemble. He therefore, wanted to break the class structure that divided the two. Stanislavski remained a true student throughout his life. He grew from the work of Belinsky, Chronnegk, Fedotov and Sollogub, (other realists of the time), in his continual struggle to find ‘the truth.’

“Get to know those who can tell you the bitter truth about yourself. It is with them that you should discuss art.”

-Stanislavski

BECOMING THE DIRECTOR.

In 1889, he married Maria Lillina, an actress that he worked with onstage. It was also at this time that he directed his first solo production, Tolstoy’s *The Fruit of Enlightenment*.

Other than making the setting and costumes as real as possible, there is little if any information on how Stanislavski worked with his scenographer. His primary purpose as a director was to harness the inner and physical expression of the actor.

“Stanislavski uses the theatre and its technical possibilities as an instrument of expression, a , in its own right. The dramatic meaning is in the staging itself. [...] He went through the whole play in a completely different way, not relying on the text as such, with quotes from important speeches, not providing a 'literary' explanation, but speaking in terms of the play's dynamic, its action, the thoughts and feelings of the protagonists, the world in which they lived. His account flowed uninterruptedly from moment to moment.”

Stanislavski said that his system was meant "to liberate art from outmoded tradition, from tired cliché and to give greater freedom to imagination and creative ability.”



Figure 1. Stanislavski and his wife Lilina

THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

In 1898, Stanislavski teamed up with the playwright/director Vladimir Nemirovich to create The Moscow Art Theatre. It became the first place in Russia that performed naturalistic theatre. It also became the key component of initial experimentation on Stanislavski's original system. They were the perfect team because Stan concentrated so much on the acting portion while Nemirovich was all about the play. They tried to make the MAT an open house but were unable to stay financially afloat without the upper class filling the seats.



Figure 2. Anton Chekhov reading *Seagull* to the company of MAT

Although the theatre did well, it wasn't until the performance of *The Seagull* that it really took off. In this production, Stanislavski played Trigorin. After Chekhov's death they took the theatre on tour but eventually concentrated on making it an acting school, which is where Stanislavski began to articulate his SYSTEM.

THE SYSTEM

*The Inner

Beginning in 1916, he came up with his initial system based almost exclusively on the inner consciousness of "Emotional Recall" In this an actor would attempt to recall an event from the past in order to produce a similar emotion in the present. He later renounced this because it was not in tune with the physical aspect and therefore was reading only within the actor's inner dialogue, unknown to the audience. It also caused traumatic episodes in the lives of the actors because they were unable to separate reality from memory thereby returning to the initial trauma.



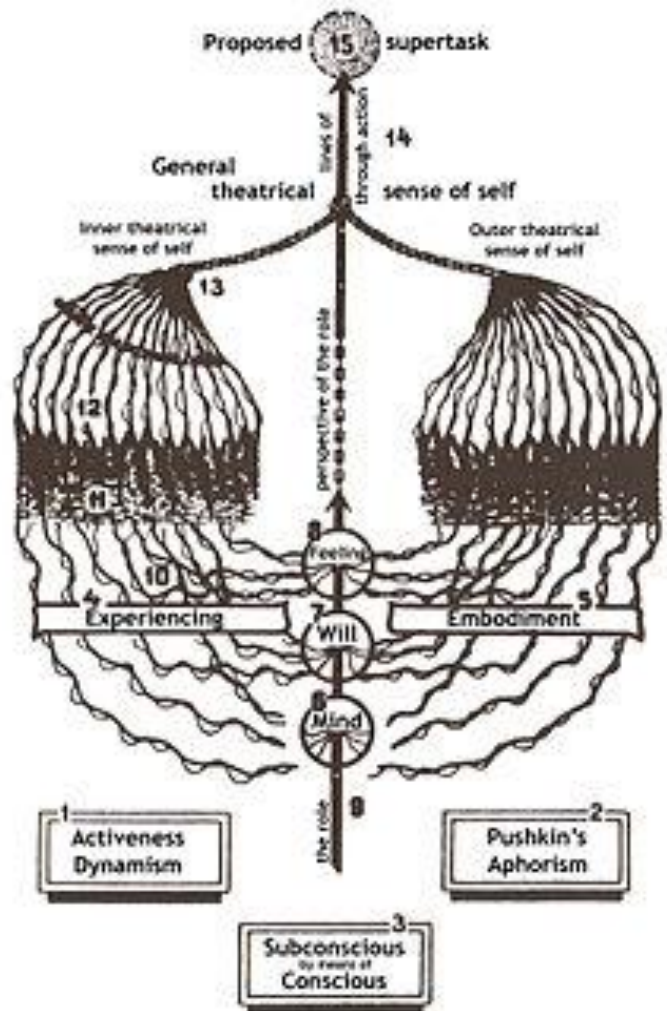
Figure 3. Craig's design for MAT's Hamlet

*The Outer

Because there were so many problems with emotional recall, Stanislavski began experimenting with the way he himself prepared for a part, which was from the outside in. The emotion became the product of the action.

***THE STEPS (Taken from learnnc.org)**

1. Relaxation. Learning to relax the muscles and eliminate physical tension while performing.
2. Concentration. Learning to think like an actor and to respond to one's own imagination.
3. Work with the senses. Discovering the sensory base of the work: learning to memorize and recall sensations, often called "sense memory" and /or "affective memory"; learning to work from a small sensation and expand it, a technique Stanislavski called "spheres of attention".
4. Sense of truth. Learning to tell the difference between the organic and the artificial. Stanislavski believed that there were natural laws of acting, which were to be obeyed.
5. Given Circumstances. Developing the ability to use previous four skills to create the world of the play (the circumstances given in the text) through true and organic means.
6. Contact and communication. Developing the ability to interact with other performers spontaneously, and with an audience, without violating the world of the play.
7. Units and objectives. Learning to divide the role into sensible units that can be worked on individually, and developing the ability to define each unit of the role by an active goal desired by the character rather than as an entirely literary idea.
8. Logic and believability. Discovering how to be certain that the sum of the combined objectives are consistent and coherent and that they are in line with the play as a whole.
9. Work with the text. Developing the ability to uncover the social, political, and artistic meaning of the text, and seeing that these ideas are contained within the performance.
10. The creative state of mind. An automatic culmination of all the previous steps.



LEGACY

Stanislavski's greatest legacy is his effect on the American Theater and Method through his disciples Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Michael Chekhov to name a few. Stanislavski's System is commonly confused to be what is Strasberg's Method. Strasberg was one of Stanislavski's early students and therefore based his entire dogma of thought around Emotional Recall or Affective Memory. This is what he brought back to the United States which is why so much of American Theatre has been affected by Stanislavski's original system. By the time Stanislavski came out with *Building a Character*, American theatre had been shaped. People still confuse the Strasberg method with the Stanislavski system even today.

One could argue that Stanislavski's largest contribution was to the world of acting. It can be said that nearly every acting school understands and pays tribute to the importance of Stanislavski's work on acting technique. Directors, teachers and actors all commonly use terms like motivation, tactic, impulse, and objective alike. He is a household name in almost any acting program and is known as the first person to put a formulaic technique to the process of acting.

Bibliography

Stanislavsky, Konstantin, and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. *An Actor Prepares*. New York: Routledge, 1964. Print

It is the first book that Stanislavski wrote that dictates how he himself prepares for a role. It is known to many as 'the actor bible.'

"Amazon Prime Free Trial." *Building A Character: Constantin Stanislavski, Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood: 9780878309825: Amazon.com: Books*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.

This is the second book by Stanislavski that is more commonly used for the physical aspect of the newly renovated system. It is not as widely read in the United States, but is considered to be both the ladder and correct declaration of the Stanislavski System.

"Constantin Stanislavski Biography." *Bio.com*. A&E Networks Television, n.d. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.

This website gives a detailed biography into the life and times of Constantin Stanislavsky.

Sawowski, Perviz. *The Stanislavski System*. 2nd ed. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.

The book was an extensive research paper on Stanislavski. It was helpful for the use of quotes from Stanislavski himself.

"Welcome to LEARN NC!" *LEARN NC*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.

This is a learning website designed for highschoolers. It helps put complicated terms, such as the Stanislavski system into simpler English.

Beguiristain, Mario. *The Actor's Studio and Hollywood in the 1950's*. N.p.: Edwin Mellen, n.d. Print.

This piece discussed the effects of the System and the Method on American Theatre. It was helpful in finding Stanislavski quotes.

Wilcox, Jules. "I Am a Seagull: V. III | The Antaeus Company." *The Antaeus Company*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.