

Stanislavski's principle theory of acting was that of psychological realism. In other words, acting should be an art that teaches an actor how to consciously produce natural action; it must teach the actor "how to awaken consciously her subconscious creative self for its super conscious organic creativeness," and how to consciously create action that is usually subconsciously expressed as a result of conscious thought. He discovered that there is no inner experience without outer physical expression, but if an actor on stage performs only physical actions, this violates the psycho-physical union and her performance is mechanical and dead. Therefore Stanislavski protested against "mechanical" acting, exploitation of art, bathos, the art of representation, "theatricality" and the "star" system, and aimed to create a real, artistic, scenic truth by examining the psychological aspects of life by manipulating the subconscious via conscious physical action. This would ensure believability, not only for the actor but for the audience too.

In order to prepare an actor for a role so that it relates back to these concepts, Stanislavski developed a number of rehearsal and performance techniques such as imagination, units and objectives and emotion memory. These techniques were designed in order to help an actor awaken her consciences, and eventually achieve psycho-physical involvement.

Stanislavski said that "Imagination creates things that can be or can happen." An actor must develop her imagination and learn to think on any theme; this will help the actor to adapt easily to any role. As a playwright rarely gives details of a character's past or future, an actor must complete her character's biography in her own mind in order to possess a greater understanding of the character's psyche. Knowing extra withheld details about a character will give depth to the actor's performance and will give the actor a greater perspective and "a feeling of movement in the role." Stanislavski referred to this as "predicted circumstances"; i.e., knowing what has happened before the scene opens and knowing what will happen after the play ends.

An actor should not truthfully believe the reality of events on stage, but she should believe in the possibility of events. The "magic if" transforms the character's aim into the actor's aim. An actor must try to answer the question "What would I do if I were..." so that she does not have to force herself to believe that she is an actual person in these actual circumstances. The "if" is particularly important, as it does not imply that any circumstances exist or are actually truthful. As an actor has no other source from which to draw experiences from except her own life, she must use her imagination to create events that she has not experienced. Stanislavski developed the use of the "magic if" in order to help the actor develop the imaginary and predicted circumstances.

The "inner monologue" is the third imaginational technique developed by Stanislavski. This is an important procedure in consciously creating the subconscious thoughts that are the stimuli behind the physical actions. The inner monologue must exist as inner visions in an actor's head in order to produce a series of emotions and

states of being "by natural organic processes." I.e., the actor must create the thoughts that lie behind the dialogue.

In order to put these techniques into practice when creating a role, let us consider the character of Grace from David Hare's "Wrecked Eggs," a role I have studied. Using predicted circumstances, I must consider how long Grace has felt unhappy in her job, how she originally met Robbie and Loelia, and why she feels unable to help them with their marital problems. Through reading her dialogue, I must use imaginal techniques to develop my understanding of her; why she says what she does and why she acts the way she does. Use of the "magic if" requires me to think, "What would I do if I were in Grace's position? What would I do if I felt helpless in my job? What would I do if two of my friends were getting divorced?" Her line "All right, that's it, that's OK, let's say it's not even to be argued with," requires me to (in my inner monologue) believe that Robbie is about to contradict my viewpoint; in her monologue section "He says... They must be moved out of the way," I must have a mental image of my boss and all of the circumstances that Grace recalls in order to consciously create the series of emotions required in this section of dialogue.

In preparing for a role, there are various exercises I can do to develop my imaginal techniques. I can picture being at home cleaning my room, logically following each physical process in my head. In time I will gradually "merge" with the mental picture and stop being the observer. Stanislavski called this state "I am." Similarly, an actor can describe a person she has met recently, who she does not know particularly well but who has made an impression on her. In order to practice visualizing predicted circumstances, she can try and imagine elements of this person's character or life.

Stanislavski said that a play should be broken down into chunks, or units, by the actor or director in order to make the text more manageable. These units are controlled by the objectives in them; each unit has its own objective, which should be fulfilled by the end of the unit. In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski uses the metaphor of a turkey to describe units and objectives;

"Can you do away with it in a mouthful? No; you cannot make a single mouthful of either a whole turkey or a five-act play. Therefore you must carve it, first, into large pieces... But you cannot swallow even such chunks. Therefore you must cut them into smaller pieces... That's what you must do with the bits of your part, soak them more and more in the sauce of "given circumstances."

This technique can also be described as "channel crossing"; the units can be likened to buoys in a channel, which provide guides for the actor in her voyage.

The objectives contained within the units are active; they must drive the text forward onto the next unit. As they are active, Stanislavski would describe each objective as a verb. If something is introduced as more definitely active, "it will push

you to some fruitful activity to carry out that purpose." If an objective is too general then it cannot be achieved; something more realistic will be easier to carry out. Providing an objective for a unit makes the unit essential; the superobjective therefore makes the whole play essential.

The superobjective can be described as the underlying aim of the play; the one overall theme that is being worked towards throughout each unit. However, each character also possesses his or her own super objective; that which they attempt to personally achieve during the play. For example, the super objective of Wrecked Eggs could be described as "the need to recognise that the act of lying to present an acceptable face to the world for the sake of social convention often backfires." However, Grace's personal superobjective could be to recognise that her problems are quite easily resolvable and, if you don't tell anyone about your problems, no-one can help you.

Emotion memory is also an important technique that can be used in the creation of a role. Recalling experiences in the actor's own life which are similar to those the character is going through can help the actor to deepen her own thoughts and feelings, making her conscious thoughts and natural actions more realistic.

Although this is a natural process, sometimes a particular emotion cannot be recalled at will. This technique is subsequently more designed to be attempted in the rehearsal periods at first; the actor must train herself to use her emotion memory more to her own advantage, and be able to recall it at will. She can also build up a selection of memories that will enable her to create varied emotions quickly, that she can access easily.

The development of emotion memory is therefore an important task, and there are many exercises that can be used in rehearsal to help the improvement of emotion memory. Sensory memory involves the use of the five senses in order to generate a feeling or mood. For example, a certain sound or song may trigger an emotion. A certain taste or smell may generate a memory of a past experience. If these techniques are used in rehearsal then the actor will be able to recognise certain emotions and then recall them at will.

Memory of past experiences may come without much effort, or they may require a great deal of power to recall. In this exercise, the actor must recall the circumstances in which the particular feeling arose until the feelings can be remembered in detail. They can then be evoked at will. If emotion memories do not come spontaneously, then firstly the actor must recall a moment in her life when she experienced a feeling equivalent to that which the character is experiencing – this is known as the 'then'. Secondly, the actor must improvise a situation in the present which will provoke the same emotion – this is known as the 'now'. In this way, the past is brought into the present in a conscious way but in an imaginary situation.

Again considering the role of Grace in *Wrecked Eggs*, in order to make use of emotional memory in order to consciously create natural physical action, I would first think of a situation in which I myself had felt helpless and trapped, unable to make my true feelings known. If the entire role is played with this feeling in mind, it will have an effect on all of the physical actions that occur in the course of the play.

To conclude, Stanislavski's Method of Physical Action requires that what appears on stage should be a 'slice of life'; i.e., as realistic as possible. All of the techniques I have explored above can be used to good effect in the preparation of a role, and will help the actor to reach psychological realism. It is impossible to achieve psychological realism by only considering the physical movements of the character; their psyche must be explored in detail as well, as all internal thoughts and feelings generate an external action which must seem as realistic as possible. In order to make external actions seem as realistic as possible, conscious thought must be as realistic as possible too. The actor must learn how to "awaken consciously her subconscious creative self for its superconscious organic creativeness"; that is, they must learn how to consciously generate subconscious thoughts in order to produce realistic physical actions.