

# The Stanislavski System Rethinking of Various Aspects of the Acting

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## Abstract:

This paper deals with the overall concept of the Stanislavski system. Stanislavski gives a detailed description of the acting method in his book *An Actor Prepares*, where he proposes the genuine and creative aspects of approaching characters. The aim of this study is to analyze some elements of his system, such as given circumstances, truth, belief, magic, concentration of attention, objectives and units, adaptation, imagination, relaxation of muscles, emotional memory, and the unbroken line.

**Keywords:** Stanislavski, the system, naturalistic acting, acting, emotional memory, performance, imagination

## Introduction:

This paper is the detail study of the actor's training method proposed by Stanislavski. Stanislavski's approach, often referred to as 'The System' is holistic, draws on many diverse influences, and seeks to unify the inner world and outer behaviour of the actor, as determined by the playwright's text (Smith et al., 2015). His goal is to create truth on the stage, which is only possible when actors behave and articulate sincerely according to given circumstances rather than just doing it blindly or without understanding the real emotion of the character.

Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavski, born January 17, 1863, in Moscow, Russia, was a renowned theatre director. He is known for his innovative ideas and experimental methods of acting and directing (Hobgood, 1973).

In 1898, with the help of Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, he started a theatre company called the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT). Stanislavski introduced the Stanislavski system, a training process that emphasizes the study of actors' subconscious minds to create believable characters. His techniques also elaborately described how an actor can use their past experience to create authentic performances. His theory of 'Emotional memory' refers to that where actors recall their personal emotions to enhance the performance. His concept of the system was the reaction against the melodrama (Tcherkasski, n.d.). Before that, the drama used to happen, which only advocated larger-than-life performance. He pursued realistic theatre no one earlier explored at that time; he primarily wanted to explore the naturalistic acting and truth in the performance.

**1. The Given Circumstances:** The Given Circumstances is a very elementary idea in acting proposed by Constantin Stanislavski. This concept refers to all the possible details given by the playwright about the characters, such as their environment and situation (Revisited & Norvelle, 1962). Other than this, the detail analysis of the historical and social background of the character.

2. **Units and Objective:** In Stanislavski's system, units are small parts of the scene or act that the director or actors divide into small segments to better understand the characters' motives and thoughts. The division of units depends on any sudden physical and psychological change in the thought or movement of the character and any situation and inner motives that change the direction of the play. It also depends on the characters' entries and exits. Every scene has its objective (Adler et al., n.d.). To understand and achieve those objectives, actors have to mark them specifically so that they can perform well and clearly manifest the character's aim and emotion.
3. **Truth, Belief and Magic If:** The most significant aspect of Stanislavski's system is Magic if. Through this concept actors can create believable characters. It is a tool where actors imagine themselves in their character's circumstances (Tcherkasski, n.d.). This exercise also helps connect the actor's personal experience and the character's fictional circumstances. The main objective of the magic if is to explore the thought and mental state of the character. Stanislavski argued that the truth we portray on stage is different from real life. To make characters believable, actors must apply exercises that help them understand the character's emotional situation.
4. **Imagination: Imagination is the essential element of the system:** without it, no one can portray any character. To convert the written text into reality, one must need imagination, which leads them to the imaginary world (Benedetti, 2021). Imagination plays an important role in the given circumstance and magic if.
5. **Concentration of Attention:** Through this system, Stanislavski focuses on channelling mental and physical energies during the performance. Stanislavski described in this system that the actors should cultivate a state called public solitude (Benedetti, 2021). Public solitude refers to where actors achieve a state where they stop being aware of the presence of the audience while doing a performance. There are two phase of concentration Stanislavski mentioned in the System.  
Psychophysical concentration  
Concentration through circles of Attention
6. **Relaxation of Muscles:** Stanislavski stated that to make a performance believable, an actor should need a relaxed mind and body. Stanislavski focuses on the physical action in the acting. He explained that physical actions such as movement, stance, and gesture are essential elements to convey the play's story. So, if actors carry the blocked body on the stage, they cannot express the genuine emotion of the character. Most actors need to be aware of the problem of a tense or blocked body. Jean Benedetti wrote in his book 'Stanislavski and The Actor' that, 'Relaxation is a technique that, over a period of time, can be learned and mastered. It is largely a matter of awareness. The object is to achieve relaxation and only to use, at will, those muscles which are absolutely necessary to carry out a particular action. It is the principle of minimum effort for maximum effect'(Benedetti, 2021). To overcome this problem, they should be aware of it consciously. Relaxed body only can be achieved by doing proper exercise and improvisation.
7. **Emotion Memory:** Emotional memory is the most essential aspect of the system. Through this method, the actor can recall their own experience, similar to the character's experience. To make the performance believable, the actor evokes their past incident and uses it during the performance. This way, they don't need to pretend. Stanislavski stated actor should deal with the true nature of the emotion. It is written in the book, 'Stanislavski and The Actor' that, 'Most of the feelings which we experience are, in fact, feelings which we have experienced before, or which are similar, they are recurrent emotions. We do not often have a completely new, first-time or primary emotion. In acting

we mainly use recurrent emotions. If things go well in rehearsal, these feelings will arise naturally out of our actions. But if they don't, we need a technique to access what is in our memories' (Benedetti, 2021). Emotional memory can develop in three phases

Sensory memory: this memory has two aspects first physical and second mental.

Memory of the past experience: past experience comes very quickly without trying too much. Using past experience makes performance convincing.

Triggers, or ways of gently jogging our memory, without trying to force to force what is hidden out into the open. This is spontaneously and executive straight into the performance.

8. **Communion:** Communion refers to a continuous exchange of thoughts, actions and emotions in between the actors and with the audience. This system focuses on maintaining continuous communion between actors during the performance. It mainly emphasises the interaction among the actors, but it also refers to a deep connection with the audience (Benedetti, 2021). This is achieved by doing proper exercise during rehearsal. The system described how concentrating on a common goal within the scene and fully engaging in listening to other actors' dialogue enhances the believability of the performance.
9. **Adaptation:** This system defines the outer and inner adaptation of the character, such as behaviour and psychological aspects of the character. Through this, the actor can manifest the subtext of the dialogue meaningfully. Stanislavski explained that for a faithful adaptation, the actor needs to understand the character's inner motives and the situation of the play first (Hart, 2020).
10. **The Unbroken Line:** Through this method, the actor tries to maintain a continuous flow of the psychological and emotional state of the character in the performance. Through this system, Stanislavski tried to connect the character's internal life and external expression or movement on the stage (Hart, 2020). This system also helps the actor to establish the connection between the acts or scenes and leads towards the super-objective. So, the actor can define the play's arc and the character's emotional graph.

### Conclusion:

It can be concluded that Stanislavski's system is the naturalistic approach to acting. The different aspects mentioned in his book not only helped for authentic and accurate acting but also engaged the audience in an absolute sense. The imagination and given circumstances give the actors the opportunity to explore all the possibilities, which enhances the quality of the performance. The use of emotional memory and relaxation of muscles can make the performance more believable and engaging. The objectives and units deal with fixed the actor's goals in the acts. The conscious effort of an actor can change the performance in many dimensions.

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