



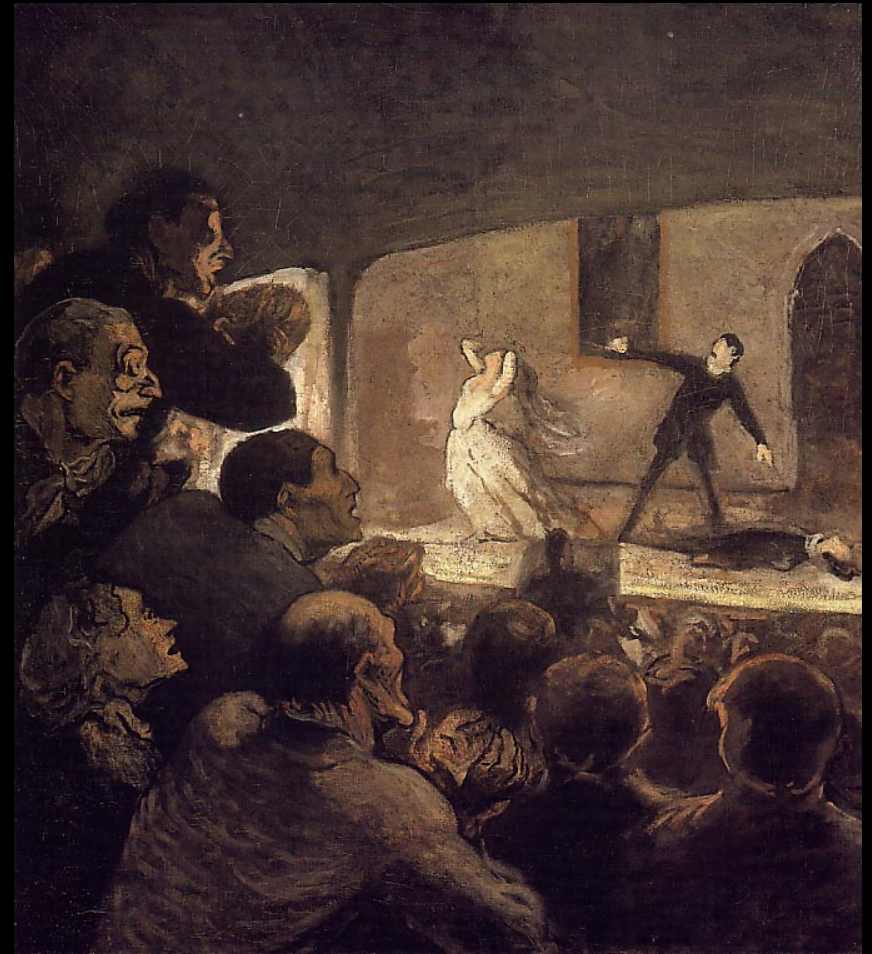
Stanislavski's System for Actors

Konstantin Stanislavski

- Russian theatre practitioner who lived from 1863-1938.
- Originally an actor who moved on to become a director and teacher.
- Greatest influence was in the development of a new approach to acting.
- It took years of experimenting to get to what is now known as the 'Stanislavski System'.

Stanislavski's System

- As an actor, Stanislavski saw a lot of bad acting - what he termed as artificial.
- Stanislavski wanted actors to work on characters from the inside (instead of the outside) and thus create more of a "true" or "real" (i.e. not artificial) performance.
- Stanislavski's thought process toward acting differed greatly from the way actors traditionally approached their roles.



What is it?



- The Stanislavski System is an intense character development process that strives to make a performance "real" and not artificial
- 1. Bring an actor's experiences into the role.
- 2. Expand an actor's imagination.

Cont' ...



- Stanislavski believed that in order to make a character true, the character must be approached from the inside. That means drawing on the real inside life of the actor, most specifically drawing on memories. The actor also has to create the inside life of the character: the character has to have inner thought, back story, beliefs, and so on, just as a real person does. When the actor answers questions about the character, they should speak in the first person. "I am..." "I want..."

Early Teachings: Emotional Memory

- Emotional Memory requires that an actor recreate an event from the distant past in order to regenerate the 'feelings' experienced at that time
- The actor must live true experiences, but true *stage* experiences.
- The actor on stage lives a "repeated" experience, not a "primary" one
- The actor can stir the needed emotion in him/herself by remembering a parallel situation having a similar emotion. This emotion would then need to be brought out at the exact moment when called for on stage. This 'evoking' of past experience was called 'Emotional Recall.'



Limitations of Emotional Memory

- Felt to be too exhausting for actors, producing negative results like tension and hysteria
- Stanislavski realised that unconscious feelings needed to be coaxed rather than forced out
- He found a solution in the body, an 'instrument' that would respond to the actor's wishes without the 'fickleness of emotions' or 'inhibitions of intellect'
- This led him to the 'Method of Physical Actions'
 - The Stanislavski System, Sawoski

The Method of Physical Actions

- The given circumstances
- Units and objectives
- Through line of actions and the Superobjective
- Analysis of text through action
- Truth, belief and the 'Magic If'
- Imagination
- Subtext
- Motivation
- Concentration
- Relaxation
- Communion
- Adaptation
- Tempo/Rhythm
- The Physical Apparatus

Given Circumstances



- The setting in which the scene is situated is called the 'given circumstance'.
- This environment could be shown through set, props or other stagecraft. It could also be shown using the non-naturalistic elements of mime.
- The given circumstances are details found in the script:
 - What has the playwright told us?
 - Location of the play?
 - Time/period/year it is set?
 - People in the play?

Units of Action & Objectives

- Break the script down into units (sections).
- Every unit has an objective for each character.
- A **unit (aka Beat)** is a portion of a scene that contains one **objective** for an actor.
- An objective is expressed through the use of an active verb.
- There can be more than one unit that occurs during a scene.
- Not necessarily what *happens*, but this is what the character is *striving for*

Objective

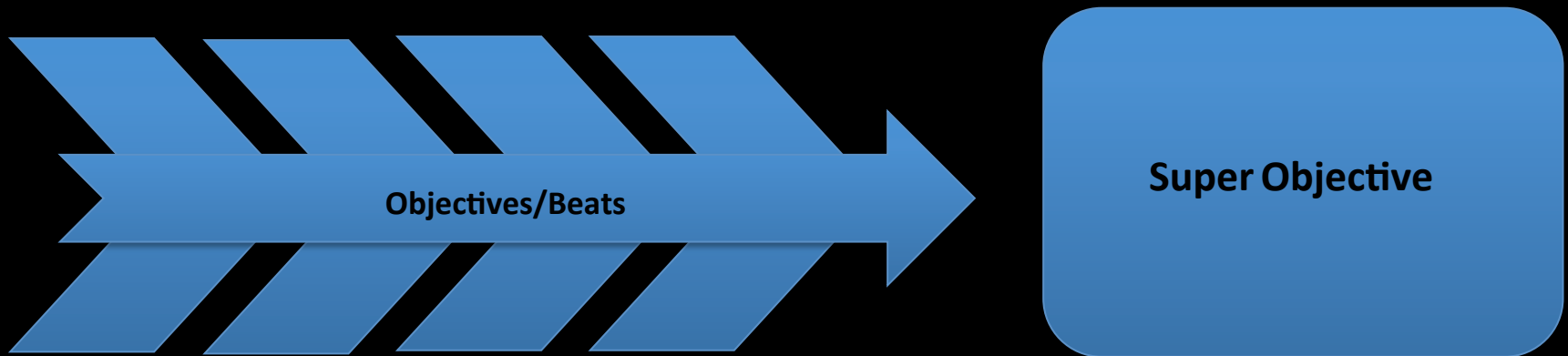
- Objective = The goal that a character wants to achieve
- An objective is expressed through the use of an active and transitive verb, e.g.: 'to seduce her' or 'to annoy him'

- **Ask yourself:**
“What do I want?”



Through Line of Action

- When all the objectives are strung together in a logical form, a through line of action can be mapped out for the character.



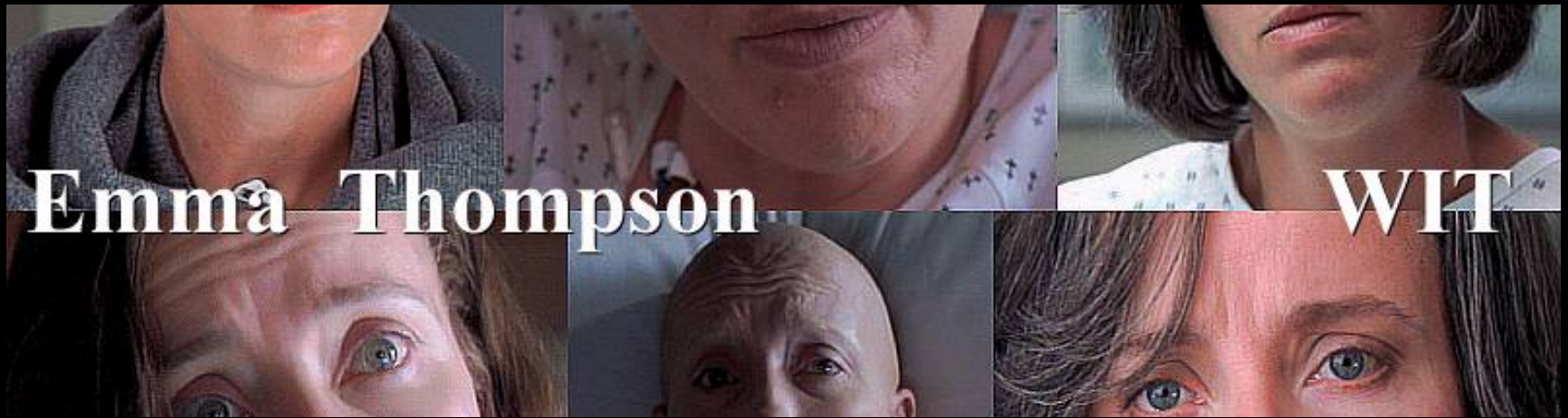
Super Objective

- The Super Objective is the objective for a character for the whole play
- Everything drives toward the Super Objective.
- Think what is the main goal for the entire play.
- 'In a play the whole stream of individual, minor objectives, all the imaginative thoughts, feelings and actions of an actor, should converge to carry out the *super objective* of the plot. The common bond must be so strong that even the most insignificant detail, if it is not related to the *super objective*, will stand out as superfluous or wrong' (Stanislavski, AAP: 271)

Analysis of text through action

- This helps the actor understand the aim or the main idea of the play.
- In analysing an action, the actor answers three questions:
 - *What do I (the character) do?*
 - *Why do I (the character) do it?*
 - *How do I (the character) do it?*

It's all in order to achieve A 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.

Truth and Belief

- Truth on stage is different from truth in life
- Belief means that an actor treats things or persons as if they were what he wants the audience to believe they are
- The ability of an actor to make his audience believe what he wants it to believe creates scenic truth



Magic If...

- In realism where the aim of the actor is to create the appearance of reality or 'truth' on stage.
- Your character is in a specific situation. The Magic If answers the following question: "What would I do if I were in the same situation?"
- The "If" is very important. This about your real life experiences, in combination with your imagination.
- The situation is not real, and the system doesn't assume you have ever been in that situation. But knowing yourself, what would you do? How would you act?
- 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?**

...Magic If

- IF I was to be in this situation what would I do?... Thus, the character's objectives drove the actor's physical action choices.
- **Exercise:** *You are in a play that takes place at a bank. As your character is finishing up with the teller, a bank robber enters and shoots a gun into the air.*
 - *If you were in a similar situation...*
 - *What would you do?*
 - *Would you be a coward or a hero?*
 - *Would you yell?*
 - *Would you hide behind someone?*
 - *Would you run out?*
 - *How would this information help in your character development?*

Imagination

- The more fertile the actor's imagination, the more interesting would be the choices made in terms of objectives, physical action and creating the given circumstances around the character.



- *'There is no such thing as actuality on the stage. Art is a product of the imagination, as the work of a dramatist should be. The aim of the actor should be to use his technique to turn the play into a theatrical reality. In this process the imagination plays by far the greatest part'* (Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*: 54).

Subtext

- Subtext refers to the meaning lying underneath the text/dialogue.
- The subtext is not spoken, but is interpreted by the actor through, gesture, posture, pauses or choices in the action.
- There is a clear relationship between subtexts & dialogue and between subtext and objective...

Subtext Cont'

- *“Jane accidentally runs into Tom, whom she finds extremely annoying. Social necessities oblige her to be pleasant to him, while underneath she wants to get as far away from him as possible.”*
- What's the subtext?
- What's the objective?

...Answer



- Given circumstance: a polite and pleasant exchange
- Subtext: Jane is conflicted by her feelings underneath.
- Objective: to get away from Tom.

- A) That's nice.
- B) Do you think so?

Silence

- A) Well it's got a certain...
style

Pause

Don't you think?

- B) Do you want to know
what I think?

A) God Forbid

B) I think it's terrible!

A) Do you?

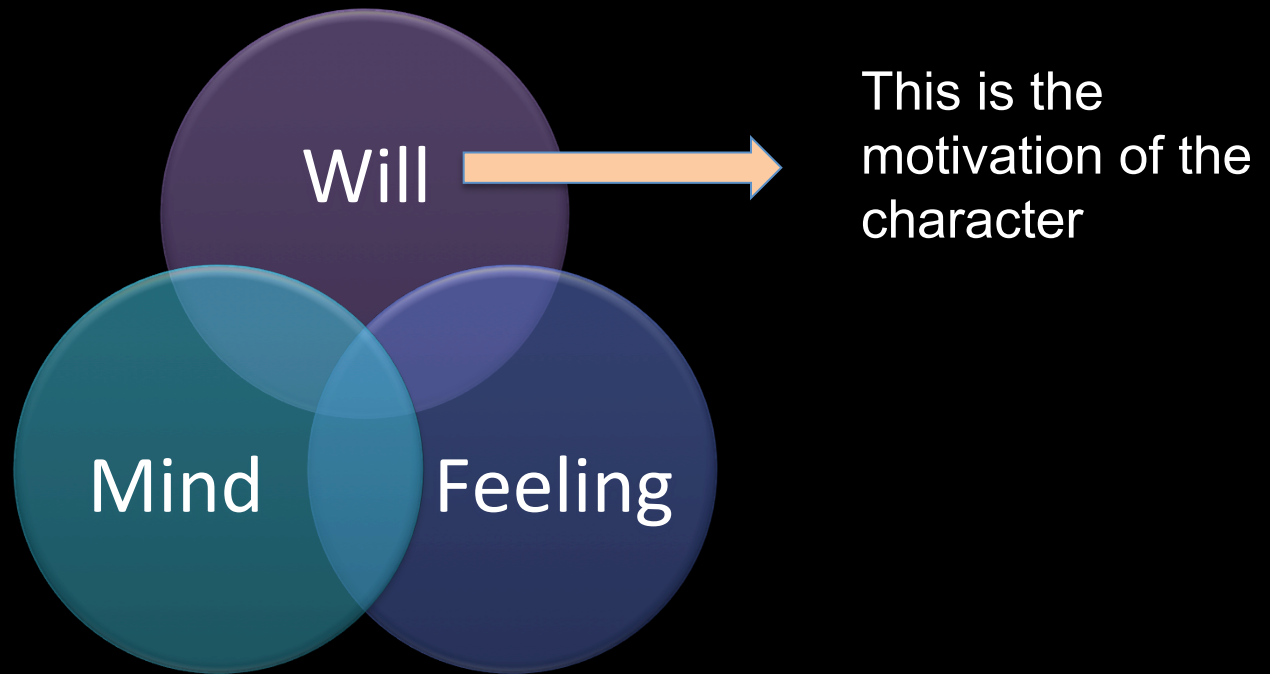
*whispering and then
leaves*

B) Oh, I like it

Look at this
scene. Can you
identify the
subtext?

Motivation

- Stanislavski insisted that an actor was either driven by emotions or by the mind to choose physical actions.
- This in turn aroused the 'will' of the actor to perform the given actions. Thus, the 'will' became activated indirectly through either emotions or the mind.
- The 'will' or motivation is in the subconscious.
- Motivation became important in realism, it is based on the subtext and any hidden meanings.



Motivation or 'will', as Stanislavski called it, was part of a triumvirate, the other two members being 'feelings' and 'mind.' In his earlier techniques, he considered these three to be 'masters' or 'impelling movers in our psychic life' (Stanislavski, AAP 247). Stanislavski insisted that an actor was either driven by emotions or by the mind to choose physical actions. This in turn aroused the 'will' of the actor to perform the given actions. Thus, the 'will' became activated indirectly through either emotions or the mind. The implication here was that the 'will' or motivation was in the subconscious.

Motivation vs. Objective

- Motivation looks backwards into the psychology of a character and the past
- Objective looks forward towards an action

Concentration

- Stanislavski was concerned with actors getting distracted by the audience while performing on stage.
- He sought ways to counteract this distraction.
- He did not advocate that the actor forget the audience, because the audience was an important 'co-creator' of the performance.
- He found a way for the actor. He advised that the actor is to find interest in something (for example, an object) on stage as to not find the presence of the audience a crippling factor.



Concentration

The Circles of Attention



- He taught that there were 3 circles of attention
- Small-The Actor and right around him
- Medium- The Actor and the stage and the other actors
- Large- The whole theater and the actor
- Stanislavski believed that when an actor's attention drifted to the audience, he should bring it back to the smallest circle of attention.

Relaxation

- Stanislavski thought that relaxation is vital in order to control body and mind.
- Only when the actor is relaxed, can the performance be any good. But not totally relaxed.



- For example: Ballet - A highly disciplined art form. When ballerinas appear to effortlessly glide, leap or pirouette, they are not completely relaxed, they are in fact using many muscles. If they were totally relaxed, they would lose energy, couldn't balance etc.

Communion

- Stanislavski called for an unbroken communion between actors.
- He differentiated between communication with a real person and an imaginary person.
- With a real person, one is aware of the other's presence and would communicate with them in a natural and realistic way.
- An actor would answer the question; 'What if (--) were really here?'
- The actor should strive to obtain a definite physical result in the partner, for instance, a laugh, a shrug, would stir imagination and create strong communication.

Adaptation

- Adaptation requires the actor to answer the questions:

- What? (action)
- Why? (aim)
- How? (adaptation)

With respect to an action.

- The function of adaptation is to allow the actor to transmit 'invisible messages' that could not be put in to words.

- Depends on the other actors.
- Adaptation could be used to communicate the subtext.
- Means the 'inner and outer human means that people use in adjusting themselves to one another in a variety of relationships and also as an aid in effecting an object' (Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, p225)

Tempo-Rhythm

- Tempo-rhythm can act as a powerful bridge between the inner experience and the physical.
- ‘Tempo’ refers to the speed of an action or an emotion. Tempo can be slow, medium or fast.
- ‘Rhythm’ deals mainly with the internal, the intensity of the emotion.
- Stanislavski believed that the tempo-rhythm was extremely vital in order to execute physical actions in a concrete and truthful manner.



The Physical Apparatus



- Stanislavski believed that an actor's body and voice is the physical apparatus that is needed in order for the actor to fully express every nuance and subtle shade of character.
- He saw the body and voice as 'instruments' that could be trained and could help the actor give shape to an actor.
- The body needs to be trained, improve posture and make movements supple and graceful, with purpose and truth.

Muscular Memory



- Is how our body remembers and refines body-movement. Stanislavski believed that our body could recall specific action play whether we had the props or not and create the action believably for our audience.