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Theorizing Film Acting

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### An Actor's Practical Guide to Stanislavsky

In Konstantin Stanislavsky's book *Creating A Role*, Stanislavsky makes various points about acting in a theater production. He makes these points by taking on the fictional role of the director for the play *Othello* by Shakespeare. Even though this book was written over 60 years ago Stanislavsky is still one of the premiere theorists on acting today.

One of the first points Stanislavsky makes is to have the actors understand the story on a deeper level. Instead of just knowing only his/her part and only a piece of the story, the player should understand the story completely. How else could the player truly believe the circumstances of the story without understanding the context of the story? Stanislavsky claims, "The line of a role is taken from the subtext, not from the text itself." Stanislavsky is saying that the language isn't the important part of the script. What is important is the feeling and emotion the language creates because of the text.

Stanislavsky believes for an actor to truly act he/she needs to fully understand the character from the inside and out. Without knowledge and context of the story how can a player truly be believable if he/she isn't enveloped in the world of the story? Later on in the book Stanislavsky claims that a role has two natures: a physical and a spiritual nature. The external physicality and the internal

spirit of a character form together to breathe life into a role and bring the character to life off the pages. If the internal or external of the player is off balance then the role cannot succeed. Both components of the physical and the spiritual are required for a true performance.

The next point Stanislavsky makes is that every actor/actress must be his/her own director. Every player must be able to be critical of oneself. Without being critical of oneself how can a player truly improve? How can the performance become the character off the page if the player is unable to evaluate oneself? Stanislavsky claims that every player must psychologically believe he/she is performing the action-taking place. If not, the actor will become “theatrical” and in turn cloud his/her performance. Excessive bustling from players derives from anxiety to entertain the audience. If the player is only trying to entertain the audience then the performance will not be believable or realistic. The actor needs to feel the need of the objective and not try to please the public.

Stanislavsky goes on to say if an actor has one false, unnatural, non-objectified movement or action it will throw the entire performance down the drain; that one false movement contaminates the performance. That’s why it’s so important for the player to be entirely immersed in the internal and external role of the character. Say for example a player is doing a fantastic job of acting out a scene and then all of a sudden the player takes a strange step and falls down. Is the entire scene thrown out the window because the player fell over?

Stanislavsky was a genius before his time. It is amazing how most modern acting including method acting began with his theories about playing a character.

Stanislavsky really understood what it meant to envelop oneself in a character, a time and place.