
Letters

A Reaction to T-57 Article on Stanislavsky

TO THE EDITOR:

As the President of The American Center for Stanislavski Theatre Art, Inc., I feel responsible for protecting Stanislavski's teachings from further misunderstandings. Hence my reaction to Mr. Poggi's article, "The Stanislavsky System in Russia," in the Russian issue of *The Drama Review*.

For a good fifty years, there has been in America the keenest controversy about Stanislavski and his System. Though strongly felt, the importance of Stanislavski has never been understood. In American theatre Stanislavski is identified with those who are still following his early approach and using his experimental techniques of some fifty years ago. Mr. Poggi calls these techniques Stanislavski's "pet theories." That Stanislavski, after tireless searching, finally found the answer to his quest of four decades is completely unknown in this country.

Mr. Maniukov's (from the School at the M.A.T.) answer about affective memory seems to be a complete misunderstanding. In American theatre affective memory is not "overem-

phasized" but is being used in a wrong way. Surely, by now, Mr. Maniukov knows, as we do at the American Center, through study and research of the Russian experts and scientists, that a well-developed affective memory is most important in the actor's work. In fact, affective memory is the *only* source for the actor's authentic experience on stage. Affective memory is as important for an actor who is 17 years old as it is for an actor of 45. His experiences will be invaluable for creating characters in his range of age. Stanislavski and his disciples reject the forcing of emotions which was used in Russia in the 20's and is still being used by the American "method" actors today.

Boris Zakhava, the dean of the Shchukin Drama School at the Vakh-tangov Theatre, in his book, *The Mastery of the Actor and the Director*, has explained admirably the functions and the importance of affective memory.

In speaking of an "action," Mr. Poggi oversimplifies Stanislavski's teachings. An "action" is the term for an act of human behavior; it is what we think,



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experience and do physically. Thus, an "action" is a human psycho-physical act. The importance of "action" cannot be overemphasized. In the Stanislavski School of acting, the actor's mind is trained to be capable of psychological processes and the actor's body is trained to be capable of expressing the psychological processes.

Mr. Maniukov's statement about "outward manifestations of the psyche" is absolutely correct. But Mr. Maniukov obviously took it for granted that the American theatre workers knew what "manifestations of the psyche" mean and how the actor's mind is prepared for "manifestations" in the character's psyche. Mr. Maniukov spoke of the Method of Physical Actions: the final Stanislavski technique which summarizes his studies of over forty years and is the means for expressing outwardly the organic processes in the actor's mind as the character.

To reject the importance of the "action" means to reject the fact that to behave as a living human being the actor must fulfill acts of human behavior on stage, i.e., to doom the actor to being a puppet. Without fulfillment of "actions" there is no life on stage. As Boris Zakhava said, "Action is the main thing that inspires feeling, it is the material of the theatre."

A thoroughly selected and correctly fulfilled action involves the psycho-physical apparatus of the actor (in Grotowski's words the actor then achieves the "total act.") The thoroughly selected and correctly fulfilled typical action will build the character and gradually reveal the events and conflicts of the play. Thus, without "action" there is no theatre.

The "subtext" is as important as the "action." "Subtext" is the undercurrent of the words, i.e., it is for words what the "action" is for the life of the character.

It is not surprising that "the elaborate system that Stanislavski worked out and set down in his books is a very different thing from the tradition that he handed down to the people I saw working at the Nemirovich-Danchenko School-Studio . . ." Knowledge of Stanislavski's teachings in America is based on his book *An Actor Prepares*. Though published in 1938 (the year of Stanislavski's death) it contains his obsolete deductions. All Stanislavski's other books, published after his death, were compiled and edited by his colleagues and disciples, and represent chapters, notes and fragments. Stanislavski validated his Method of Physical Actions—a revolution in his own earlier techniques and the answer to his life work—but had not time to elaborate upon this method.

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The Method of Physical Actions was concretized and further developed by Stanislavski's disciples. It was enriched by many years of their personal experience in the actor's training.

If the immediate perception of a text cannot be taught, the analysis of the text can surely be learned. The Method of Physical Actions includes the most efficient and subtle analysis of the play, the finding of the super objective and the analysis of the character's behavior. But, as Mr. Karev (from the School at the M.A.T.) said, to learn how to find the life of the words is a lifetime work. But is there any art that does not require a lifetime to study?

Unity of profound content and artistic form is essential for the creation of any work of art. The richness of the inner content expressed in a laconic artistic form gives birth to a work of art. When Boris Zakhava spoke of their "work for unity of inner and outer forms," he obviously was under the impression that American actors knew how to create the inner life of the character—the content.

Mr. Poggi's statement that in life "we don't always pursue goals" is certainly not based on the study of human behavior. Every act of human behavior has a purpose. And an "action" is a purposeful act of human behavior. Stanislavski has proven and major scientists confirm that only a purposeful action will involve the actor's emotions.

Meyerhold was disappointed in his "biomechanics," which did not achieve the stirring of inner processes through certain movements of a highly trained body. The Stanislavski System rendered impotent the System of "Expressive Movement" by F. Delsarte. Delsarte suggested expressing emotions with prescribed gestures. But human emotion depends on numerous factors such as typical traits of an individual, the

tempo-rhythm in which the actor acts at a given moment and other circumstances. Stanislavski has proven that only a purposeful action expressive of the inner state will involve the actor's emotions, will be rich with content and always fresh.

Since the rules developed by Stanislavski are based on *objective natural* laws, they can never be outdated. It is also obvious that the System is not a Russian phenomenon. The laws of nature are universal—the same for all people, in all countries, and in all times. Therefore, the rules developed by Stanislavski are obligatory for all actors. Teachers' ways of teaching the System and the command of the actor's organic resources may vary and be further improved.

Emotional freedom on stage is not the "result of national temperament." American actors mastering the Method of Physical Actions are mastering control of emotions and are "passionate" as the Russian actors are. "There is even an element of wildness in their work," too. These American actors are also free physically and emotionally.

Meyerhold, Vakhtangov, Brecht, Grotowski—did not build a school of acting. We have only their aesthetic views, opinions, theories. For the first time in the history of the theatre, the problems of theory, of methods and of artistic technique have been profoundly studied by Stanislavski and he, alone, has created the School of Living Experience.

The American Center for Stanislavski Theatre Art, Inc., exists to bring the summary of Stanislavski's teachings into the American theatre. We who participate in this institution believe that such training is essential for a truly artistic theatre.

**Sonia Moore, President
The American Center for Stanislavski
Theatre Art**