Stanislavsky's Mindful Actor: The System as a Guide to Experiencing Embodiment

Ysabel Clare[1]

ABSTRACT. This paper proposes that embodiment, ostensibly the subject of the second part of Stanislavsky's actor training course [1] [2] actually forms the experiential foundation on which the first [3] [4] is based, and provides the framework and the terms of reference around which the whole is designed. Discovering how this framework underpins the work elucidates meaning by exposing conceptual and actual relationships between experiencing and embodiment, opening up new possibilities for the understanding and thus the practice of both. The concepts of *Perezhivanie* (experiencing) and *Voploshchenie* (embodiment) are central to Stanislavsky's work. Both resist verbal description, definition or explanation. Stanislavsky has addressed this problem with considerable strategic ingenuity in his fictionalized training diaries. Examining how he did so provides practical insights into how to recognize, learn, teach, and facilitate embodiment.

Research comprising detailed analysis of the action outlined in these texts has uncovered complex narrative patterning evidencing underlying conceptual constructs that, once revealed, clearly articulate an embodied experiential framework. The most complete text, *An Actor Prepares*, is not just a series of exercises with justifications and explanations, but a subtle and nuanced sequence of actions and effects (in a Socratic, dialogic form of exercises and responses) cleverly engineered to deliver a systematic encounter with an orderly underlying model of subjective (and necessarily embodied) experience.

This implicit conceptual framework both originates in and is a re-presentation or projection of human experience. Original diagrams are supplied that in turn re-present the deep structure of Stanislavsky's model in its own terms, graphically illustrating its roots in embodiment. These demonstrate the irrevocable conceptual links between the core concepts of *Perezhivanie* and *Voploshchenie*, showing how they can be operated to create and maintain a stable, coherent state in which the actor is dynamically experiencing embodiment: mindful - 'in the moment'.

Stanislavsky's underlying model is consistent with an experiential realist view such as that of Lakoff and Johnson [5]. While superficially different, it also shares deep structure with other contemporary frameworks for understanding human process, such as those of Pinker [6], Damasio [7] and Fauconnier [8]. Stanislavsky, however, shows us how to manipulate the phenomena of human process deliberately, at will. While language might not serve his purpose, and he cannot actually give the reader of his books an embodied experience, he does the next best thing by cleverly engineering the form and the narrated events. In this reading, results are as important as exercises, for the patterns in which the fictional students' responses occur express essential aspects of embodied experience that otherwise resist description.

In conclusion, the paper asserts that despite the passing of time, Stanislavsky still has something to contribute to actor training in the 21st Century because he offers practical strategies for actors to learn, manage and manipulate their embodied experience for the purpose of mindful performance.

REFERENCES

[1] K. Stanislavsky. *Building a Character,* trans. E. Reynolds Hapgood, Elizabeth, Methuen, (2008).

[2] K. Stanislavsky. *An Actor's Work Part II,* trans. Jean Benedetti, Routledge, (2008).

[3] K. Stanislavsky. *An Actor Prepares,* trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, Methuen, (2008).

[4] K. Stanislavsky. *An Actor's Work Part I,* trans. Jean Benedetti, Routledge, (2008).

[5] G. Lakoff, & M. Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press, (1980).

[6] Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought: Language as Window into Human Nature*, Penguin, (2008).

[7] Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of what Happens : Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, Vintage, (2000).

[8] Gilles Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces : Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language*, Cambridge University Press, (1998).