ACTING 2

WITH JIM SOTO

A Word About ACTING

Acting is by far one of the hardest professions to obtain regular work in and harder still to achieve success in. The glamour and opulence of celebrity is extremely alluring and the prestige of being considered a great actor can be very appealing.

However, it's something that many want but only few obtain. To succeed as an actor it makes sense that one should know how to act. Actors tackle acting from either a technical or non-technical approach. There are different acting techniques that can be applied to the craft. In this lesson we will see some of the most popular and effective.

A Bit of History

Acting is an art of storytelling by gesture and body movement combined with conversation between enacting people. It originated in India-The street theatres of **Indian Nautanki's**. These groups displayed the various Indian folklores and great epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata in a semi dance musical form on street theatre moving through cities across India. It's all about gestural presentation of emotions in its own unique format along with music and lighting to glorify the emotions.

In the 6th century BC, Greek actor Thespis performed the first 3 act theatrical performance paving the way for the work of the great Greek dramatists of antiquity. But with modernization taking place centuries later, the theatre evolved with Shakespeare's work laying the real foundation of the art of modern acting techniques.
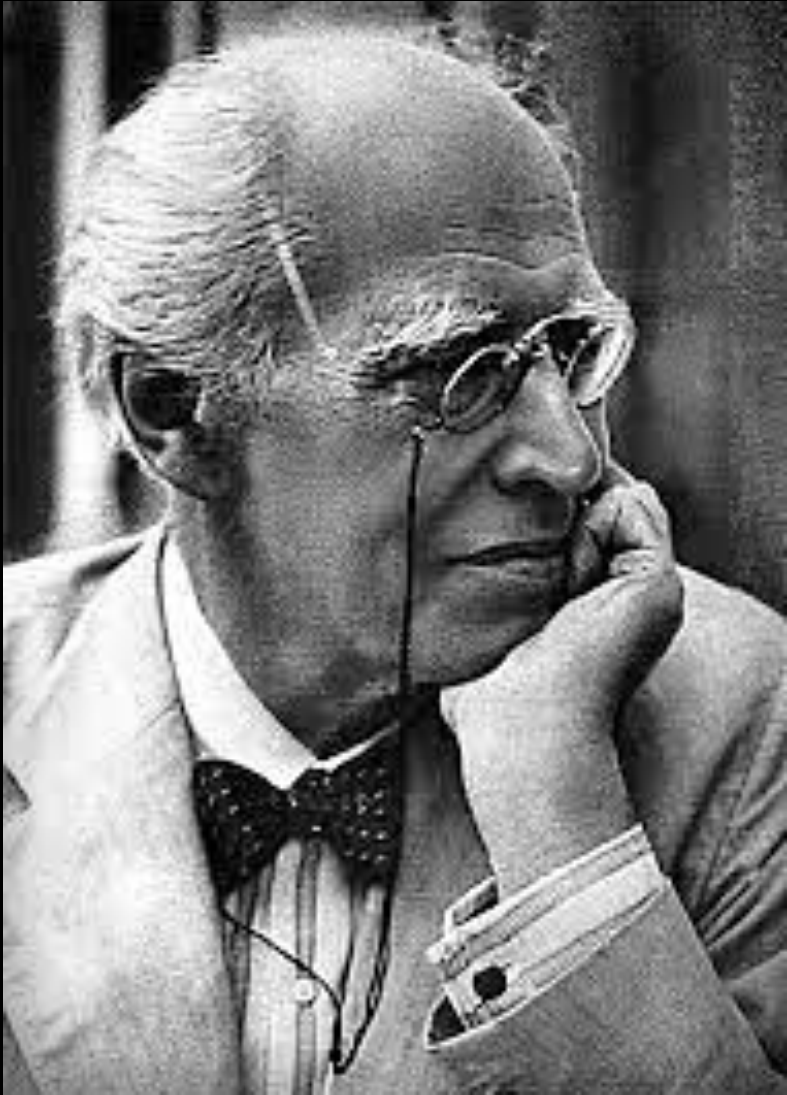
There were several artists/actors who invented their own form of acting which was later so successful that today they comprise of the most famous and sought after actors of our times.

The most successful of all was **Konstantin Stanislavski**, whose technique was influenced and developed by Lee Strasberg as a style known in America as **Method Acting**, the classic example being actor Marlon Brando.

Let us now see various techniques of acting invented by various great artists...

Shakespeare/Classical Acting

Sir Anthony Hopkins

The British classical acting technique was born out of British Theatre. Emphasizing precise dialogue delivery and stylized reactions in a more refined and controlled manner. Actors often committed a whole play to memory rarely deviating from the original text. A complete contrast to the American methods that used improvisation techniques and ´getting in touch with your feelings´.

Shakespeare has a body of work that is by far one of the most difficult acting styles to pull off successfully, it is also one of the most sought after and a serious thespian's dream. Interpreting a Shakespearian play requires great precision and discipline.

Classical Trained Actors

James McAvoy

Judi Dench

Rebecca Hall

Chiwetel Ejiofor
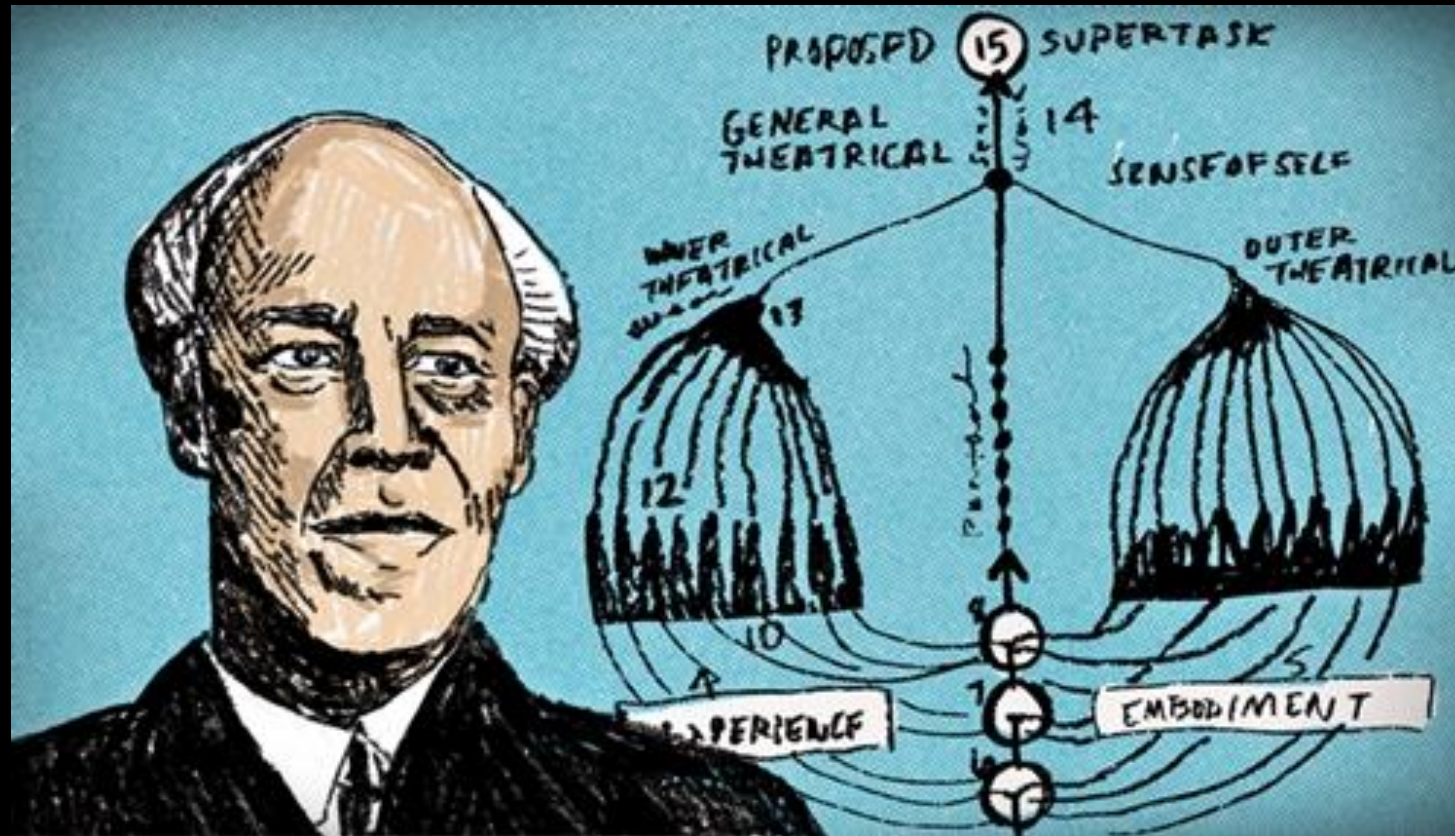
Stanislavski Acting

Cate Blanchett

Konstantin Stanislavski influenced the acting world so greatly that most modern acting techniques stem from Stanislavskian approaches. Stanislavski acting involves analyzing the script and segmenting it.

Stanislavski perceived a problem in the extremely regimented, unnatural acting being performed in Russia: *namely, that it didn't seem real*, and therefore didn't move an audience to empathy. He used many techniques--careful work understanding the character's intention, emotion memory, immersing oneself in the situation of the character through imagination, and concentrating on recreating the physical realities of the character, to transform yourself from the outside in.
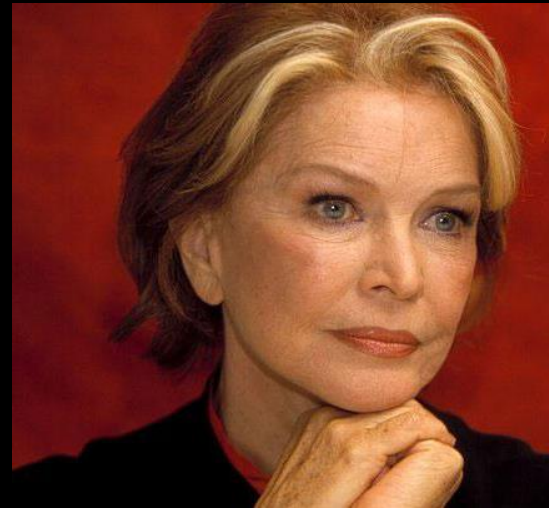
Stanislavski Actors

Kate Winslet

Julia Roberts

Ellen Burstyn

Laurence Olivier

The Method

Marlon Brando

Christian Bale is a perfect example of modern method acting.

Method acting is one of the most recognized developments in modern styles of acting.

The technique emphasizes the use of actor's own life experiences, thoughts and emotions in the attempt to create realistic or lifelike performance. Actors use a range of techniques in order to achieve this, immersing themselves in the world of their characters so that when acting, real memories can be drawn upon.

Method acting emerged from New York's Group Theatre, a collective active during the 1930's, heavily influenced by the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavski. Amongst the company were actors, directors, producers and playwrights.

After WWII Lee Strasberg became it's director. Under his leadership the technique that came to be known as "the Method" was developed, and along with the tutelage Stella Adler and Robert Lewis, amongst his colleagues, the most famous one of acting styles realistic acting developed in to the phenomenon known today, practiced by many of the 20th century's most famous and lauded actors, such as Marlon Brando, Jane Fonda and Marilyn Monroe.

While Strasberg used all of Stanislavski 's techniques for his "method" he focused most on the **emotion memory**. The main difference was that while Stanislavski thought it (the actor using his or her own recollections to evoke an emotion) was one of many useful tools, he noticed actors sometimes becoming hysterical trying it. He tried to find other less draining ways to get at those emotions.

Strasberg really threw his actors into emotion memory without any reservations. He would ask probing psychological questions to students until they were sobbing, falling apart. The criticism of this technique (voiced by Stella Adler, among others) is that in focusing on the actor's own emotion, it separates the actor from the world of the character.

Method Actors

Al Pacino

Heath Ledger

Halle Berry

Daniel Day-Lewis

Salma Hayek

Stella Adler (who studied alongside Strasberg at the Group Theater) studied with Stanislavski, himself. Stanislavski originally advocated emotional memory (affective memory), but then realized it was flawed. Over time, a memory can change. For example a memory that was once traumatic as a kid is now a silly memory. Stanislavski moved away from it his later work.

Stella went back to the U.S. and said Strasberg was wrong and formed her branch of American Method. After personally studying with Stanislavski, Stella Adler denounced Strasberg's work with emotional recall and began teaching a version of acting focused on given circumstances, imagination, voice, and body. She opposed Strasberg and his work at the Actors Studio, setting up her own school in 1949.

Stella Adler Actors

Robert De Niro

Benicio del Toro

Bryce Dallas Howard

Mark Ruffalo

Meisner Technique

Sandra Bullock

Sanford Meisner (another Group Theatre disciple) also thought emotional memory was junk, so he formed his own version of American Method. He focused on instincts and <u>reacting</u> to the moment. He defined acting as *"living in imaginary circumstances"*. Meisner's technique is largely placed on self, circumstances and affect on and reaction to others. Repetitive dialogues are used as an exercise to enable actors to focus on action and reaction, depending on how lines are delivered at the moment. It's about considering the character's objective, reading tone and body language.

Meisner's cause and effect type teaching helps the actor to attune themselves to the community of the performance, who is friend and who is foe. *"What is the catalyst of change and how as a character you deal with change and the chain reaction that follows it?"* – is Meisner's important question to his actors.

Meisner Trained Actors

Michelle Pfeiffer

Chadwick Boseman

Jeff Goldblum

Jennifer Beals

Other Schools

So far we have only scratched the surface of the myriad techniques or schools of acting that exist. Other schools include:

- Michael Chekhov

- Practical Aesthetics

- Uta Hagen

- Viola Spolin

- And the list goes on...

Jack Nicholson

Marilyn Monroe

1. Where did acting first develop and how?

2. What two things does classical acting emphasize?

3. Mention two Shakespearian actors.

4. Who was Konstantin Stanislavski and what was his contribution to acting?

5. What did Lee Strasberg do with Stanislavski's techniques?

6. What was Stella Adler's main problem with "emotional memory"?

7. What is Sanford Meisner's technique main focus?

Next:

GOOD vs BAD
ACTING

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