

Stanislavsky's System as a guide to experiencing embodiment Part II: other models compared

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This paper builds on that given at last year's AISB conference, *Stanislavsky's mindful actor: the System as a guide to experiencing embodiment*. It was then argued that despite the superficial problems of Stanislavsky's fictional training diaries, underlying the narrative lies a complex, sophisticated and robust conceptualization of embodied human experience in the form of a spatial adpositional model, consistent with the experiential realist view of Lakoff and Johnson [1]. Part II takes this proposition and builds on it, showing how this conceptual framework, that situates Stanislavsky's experiencing actor as embodied and present in the moment, has equally promising potential for exploration of embodiment in other acting practices.

If Stanislavsky's actor reveals whether he or she is actually present and living through the given circumstances through subtleties of body language, gesture, and facial expression, the same subtleties must also reveal the same type of information about other actors using different ways of working. The underlying factors of how an actor implicitly conceptualises relationships with character, circumstance, thought, image and emotion are therefore just as relevant and significant in the work of other performance practitioners. These factors indicate essential aspects of embodied experience and are reflected in behaviour, whatever the System or method employed.

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The same techniques that enabled the articulation of Stanislavsky's underlying model of experience can now be used to map and graphically represent other ways of working and other models of practice.

This paper embarks upon that process by outlining the work of three of the practitioners who developed Stanislavsky's ideas in the West: Michael Chekhov, Lee Strasberg, and Sanford Meisner. Their respective practices are situated within the spatial adpositional framework developed from the analysis of Stanislavsky's. Original diagrams are once again supplied that represent the deep aspects of the structure of the work of these three additional practitioners and illuminate their practice.

As well as clarifying aspects of the work per se, it then becomes possible to draw direct comparisons between pertinent aspects of the conceptual frameworks of the four practitioners, cross-referencing categories of information such as sequencing, relationship, and context. By distinguishing these categories, and making specific distinctions, this process both reviews familiar differences in graphic form and suggests the possibility for new insights.

The paper suggests that as a guide to experiencing embodiment, and because it consists in a progressive exposure to multiple ways of experiencing, thus situating the choices of the actor within the range of possibilities – the human umwelt - Stanislavsky's System also serves as a wider framework within whose terms many other models of practice might also be investigated.

References

[1] George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press, 1980.