

Acting Studio 2: Theatre History

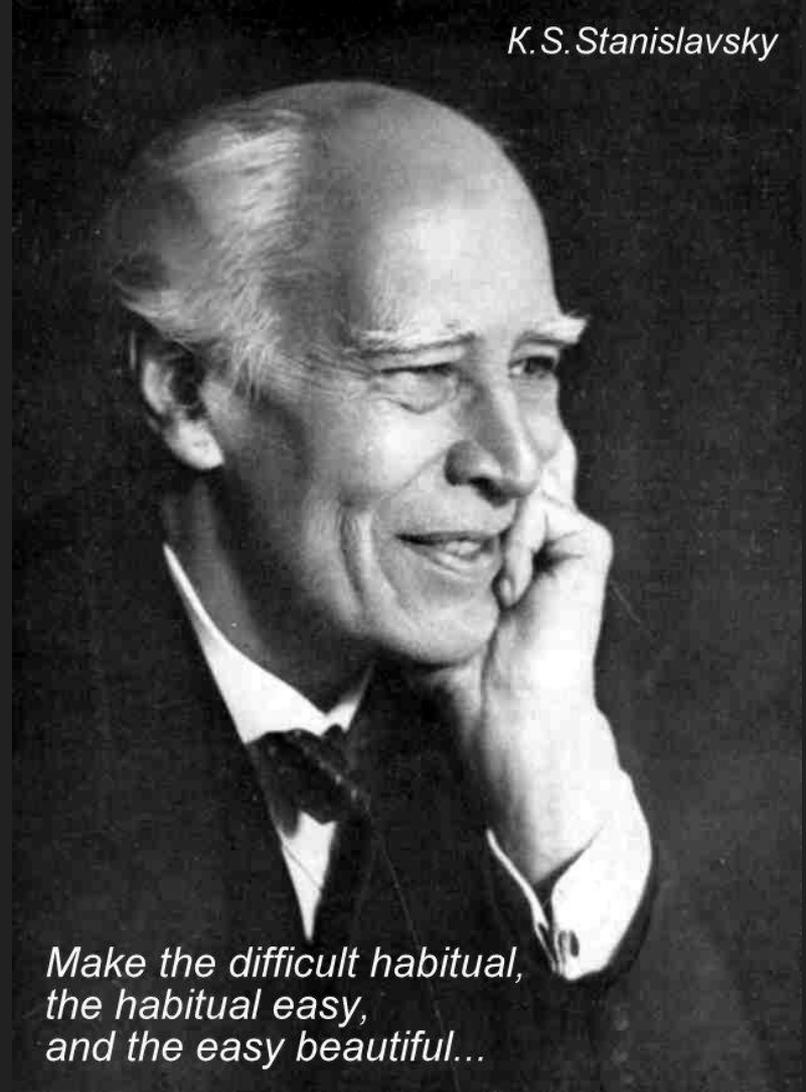
The theorists, or “How the heck do we do what we do?”

Konstantin Stanislavski

- The father of modern acting theory
- Maybe the most important person in theatre history
- Born: 1/17/1863 in Russia “**Konstantin Sergeievich Alexeiev**” to one of the richest families in Russia.
- Used the stage name “Stanislavski” to protect his family from the disgrace of his theatre activities (theatre was still considered “unclean” in most of the world at this point in time).
- Worked in his Family's business, acted on the side
- Was interested in discovering what made “good” acting
- Met Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko in 1897, in a famous meeting that lasted 18 hours discussing theatre and art, they then formed the Moscow Art Theatre or MAT

The system

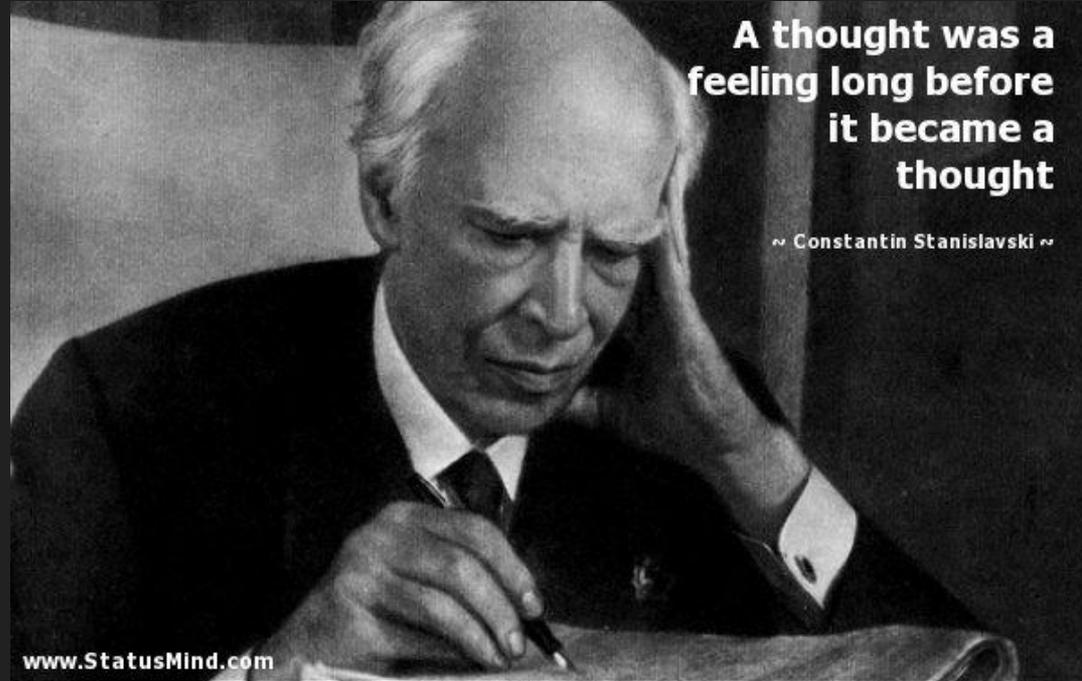
- Stanislavski thought acting could be taught, like ballet, and he developed his system through his own acting and directing work and by watching and talking to the great performers of the day.
- Hey JD - Explain what acting was like then and “acting training”!
- He created the System - which he continued to work for the rest of his life.
- **THE SYSTEM NOT** The Method (this will be important, I promise you).



*Make the difficult habitual,
the habitual easy,
and the easy beautiful...*

The System: Early ideas

- Table Readings
 - Given Circumstances
 - Objectives (& super-objectives, sub-objectives, etc.)
 - Realism
 - Relaxation
 - Vocal work
 - Physical (yoga)
 - Emotional Recall (ER)
 - MAT TOUR
-
- The Seagull - Anton Chekhov



Stanislavski & Realism

- Used the works of Chekhov
- Embraced by the Soviets
- Got in big trouble when he started to explore symbolism and other forms of theatre
- Ended his life under house arrest: Dies 8/7/1938
- Continued to teach until the end

What is important to me is not the truth outside myself, but the truth within myself.

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Konstantin Stanislavsky

Russian Actor

Stan: The Method of Physical Acting

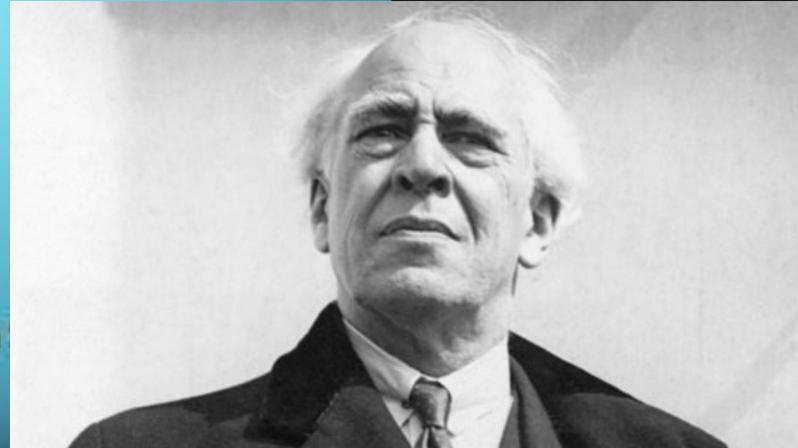
- Ends his life in exact opposite theory than he started
- Kept: G.C., Objectives, vocal and relaxation
- Dropped: E.R., table reading
- M.O.P.A. - physically act out the actions first - add lines later.

**THE LANGUAGE OF THE
BODY IS THE KEY THAT
CAN UNLOCK THE SOUL.**

Stanislavski



**LOVE THE ART IN
YOURSELF, NOT
YOURSELF IN THE
ART.**



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Konstantin

Vsevolod Meyerhold

- Born 1/28/1874
- Student of and actor for Stanislavski
- Lifelong friends, though in the end considered by others to be “competitors”
- Considered by peers to be Stan’s equal
- Rejected realism, embraced Symbolism
- Rejected E.R.
- Explored Physical approach to acting



Meyerhold's Approach

- Used what he called *Biomechanics*
- Using gestures and physical movements to open up emotions
- Created a stylized form of theatre that was reportedly as awe inspiring as the MAT



Meyerhold in practice

- His class focused intensely on physical training
- His performances were often compared to the circus



Meyerhold and Dactyls

- Dactyls were a training method, a series of exercises students would practice and sometimes even use onstage
- Etudes were small movement based scenes that were designed to inspire emotion in the actor
- Masks



Meyerhold & Stan & USSR

- Stanislavski brought Meyerhold in to be his assistant before his death. He told friends: “Take care of Meyerhold; he is my sole heir in the theatre - here or anywhere else.”
- Meyerhold is arrested in 1939, at the same time, “intruders” broke into his house and stabbed his wife to death.
- Meyerhold is killed by firing squad Feb. 2, 1940
- He was erased from history by the soviets until his rehabilitation in 1955 during destalinization



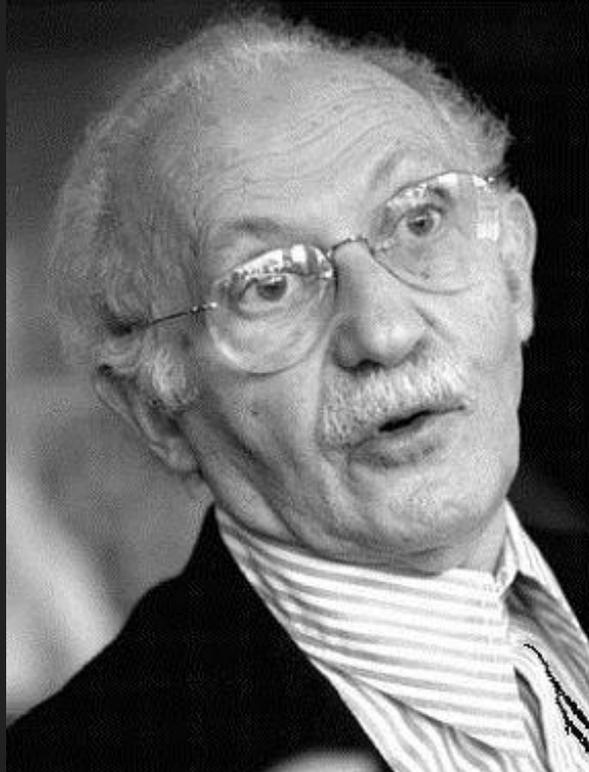
Lee Strasberg

- Born Nov. 17, 1901
- Worked in the Yiddish theatre
- Saw the MAT performance 1923, blown away
- Studied with Boleshevsky (when he defected)
- Formed the Group Theatre with Harold Clurman & Cheryl Crawford
- Created “The Method”



Strasberg's Method

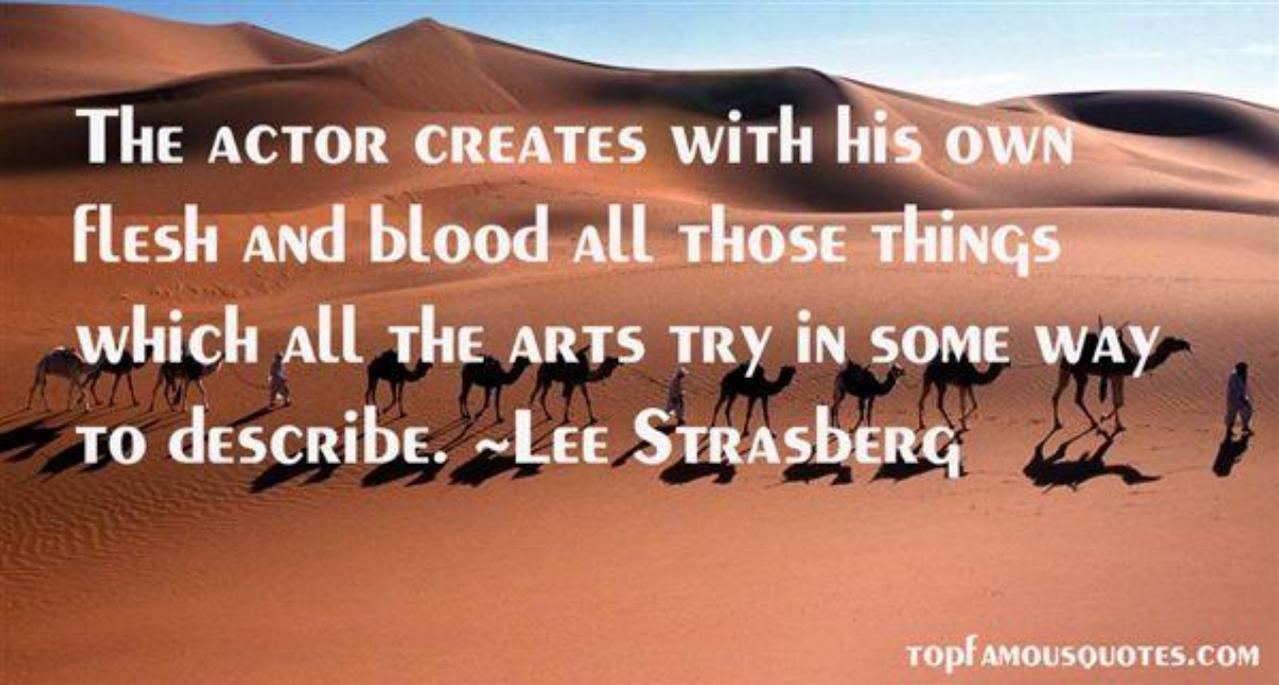
- Based on early Stan
- Centered around E.R.
- Real emotion was the focus
- The actor can only use themselves as the template for character



"Acting is the most personal of our crafts. The make-up of a human being - his physical, mental and emotional habits - influence his acting to a much greater extent than commonly recognized."

Lee Strasberg

Strasberg, Adler, & the end of the Group Theatre

A photograph of a desert landscape with rolling sand dunes under a clear blue sky. In the foreground, a caravan of camels is walking across the sand, with several people leading them. The scene is captured in a warm, golden light, likely during sunrise or sunset.

**THE ACTOR CREATES WITH HIS OWN
FLESH AND BLOOD ALL THOSE THINGS
WHICH ALL THE ARTS TRY IN SOME WAY
TO DESCRIBE. ~LEE STRASBERG**

TOP FAMOUS QUOTES.COM

- Lee was a bit of a tyrant.
- Stella visits Stan
- Stella breaks up the band
- Strasberg continues to teach
- Dies 2/17/1982

Strasberg Students

Sally Field

Dennis Hopper

Dustin Hoffman

Anne Bancroft

Sidney Poitier

Gene Wilder

Shelly Winters

A great actor is
independent of the poet,
because the supreme
essence of feeling does
not reside in prose or in
verse, but in the accent
with which it is delivered.

-Lee Strasberg

Stella Adler

- Created her own approach after the Group dissolved
- Based on Stanislavski, but instead of E.R. as focus, biography and research were



**“Life beats down and
crushes the soul
and art reminds you
that you have one.”**

-Stella Adler

Adler

- Social Justice
- Socio-economic class
- Actor must know what their character would know
- 2/10/1901-12/21/1992



The actor has to develop his body.
The actor has to work on his voice.
But the most important thing the
actor has to work on is his mind.

— *Stella Adler* —

Adler's Students

Martin Sheen

Roy Scheider

Vincent D'Onofrio

Mark Ruffalo

Warren Beatty

Marlon Brando

Benicio del Toro

**“WHEN YOU STAND ON THE STAGE YOU MUST
HAVE A SENSE THAT YOU ARE ADDRESSING THE
WHOLE WORLD, AND THAT WHAT YOU SAY IS
SO IMPORTANT THE WHOLE WORLD MUST
LISTEN.”**

STELLA ADLER

© Lifestack Quotes

Uta Hagen & H.B. Studios

- 6/12/1919-1/14/2004
- Born in Germany, moved to Wisconsin
- Started on Broadway at the age of 18
- Famous theatre artist, blacklisted in film due to affair with Paul Robeson (which also ended her marriage to Jose Ferrer)
- Started teaching at Herbert Berghof Studios (HS Studios in NY in 1947, and married him later



Uta's Approach

- Her work is based in Stanislavski
- Her first book "Respect for Acting" is a classic of college acting class, though she came to reject some of the ideas and later said "I have disassociated myself from that book"
- Her follow up book "A Challenge for the Actor" is a better idea of where she ended

**I have
disassociated
myself from that
book.**

-Uta Hagen

UTA HAGEN

- A big change was the move away from the more “methody” approach of her early years - things like “Substitution”
- “Thoughts and feelings are suspended in a vacuum unless they instigate and feed the selected actions, and it is the characters' actions which reveal the character in the play.”
- Focus on believable action/behavior

No work of art is ever
finished, nothing is ever
static, no performance
is for keeps

Uta Hagen

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Uta's Students

Gene Wilder

Robert Deniro

Matthew Broderick

Whoopi Goldberg

Amanda Peet

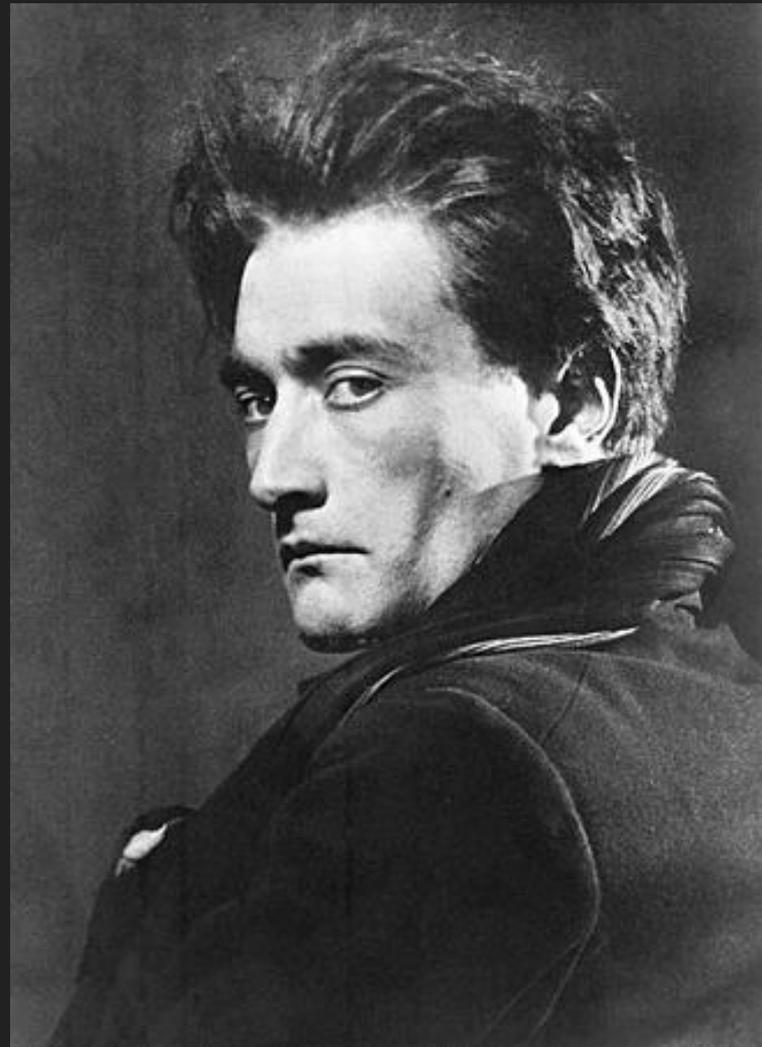
Faye Dunaway

“
Overcome the
notion that you
must be regular. It robs
you of the chance to
be extraordinary.
”

Uta Hagen

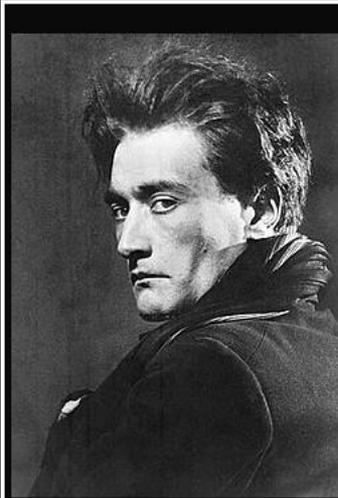
Antonin Artaud Theatre of Cruelty

- 9/4/1896-8/4/1948
- French
- Avant-Garde theatre
- Suffered from addiction to opiates and mental health problems all his life, was in and out of institutions
- Playwrite, Actor, Director, Critic



Artaud - The Theatre and Its Double

- His seminal work was “The Theatre and its Double” which included his essay on the theatre of cruelty
- Believed that theatre was a ritualistic experience
- Theatre can be a safe space to get rid of negative emotions and bring about a more peaceful society
- JD - explain Theatre of Cruelty!

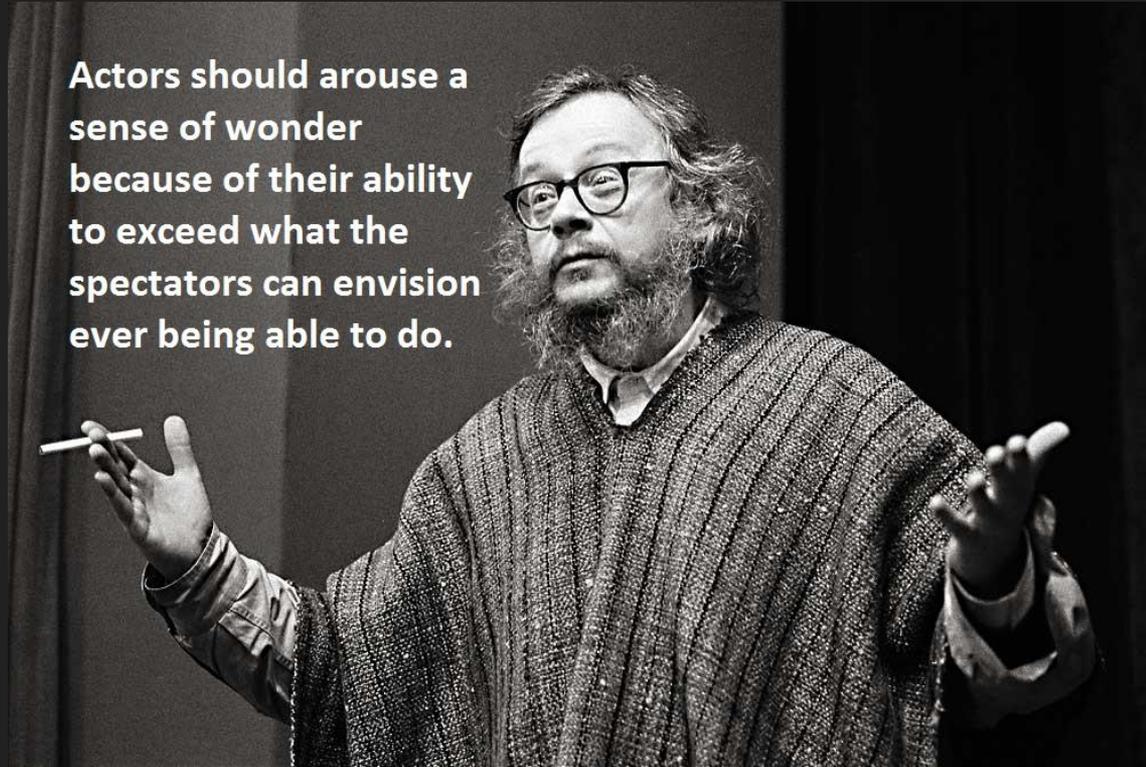


No one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modeled, built, or invented except literally to get out of hell.

(Antonin Artaud)

Jerzy Grotowski

- Born in Poland 8/11/1933 (died 1/14/1999)
- After WWII, Poland was under Soviet control
- Studied theatre in Poland and Moscow
- In Russia, many people who knew both said he was as great an artist as Stanislavski, who he admired, though his work followed more along Meyerhold's lines



Actors should arouse a sense of wonder because of their ability to exceed what the spectators can envision ever being able to do.

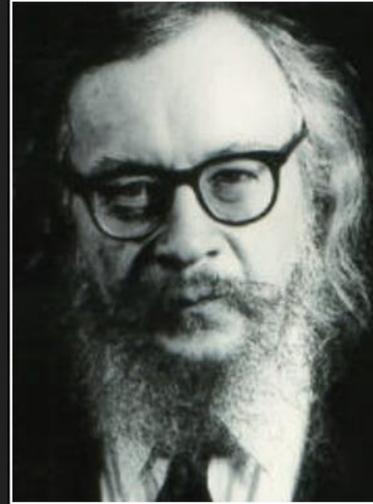
Grotowski's Approach

- Believed that the actor's work was a spiritual practice, saw the actor as a "secular priest"
- Had a very physical approach to theatre
- Started the Laboratory theatre in Poland
- Trained his students like circus performers
- Wrote the book "Towards a Poor Theatre"



A Poor Theatre

- Believed that sets, costumes, prosceniums, etc. got in between the actor and the audience
- Thought Actors fetishized his work and refused to write anymore
- Said “An actor should find it as easy to walk across the floor on his hands as his feet, and as difficult to walk across the floor on his feet as his hands”



The important thing is to use the role as a trampoline, a chance to study and play with what is behind our masks. Creativity, especially where acting is concerned, is boundless sincerity, yet disciplined.

— Jerzy Grotowski —

AZ QUOTES

- Sounds and gestures that evoke associations
- Anonymous costumes
- Minimal props / props transform into symbolic objects / actors as props
- No sets / unconventional performance spaces
- Plays the dealt with important issues
- Contemporising classic works
- Highly physical
- Actor training as a path to self-awareness
- Flood lighting (no spotlights)

Actors using their
"MEMORIES"

Releasing the
"COLLECTIVE
UNCONSCIOUS"



**JERZY
GROTOWSKI**
1933 - 1999

Rehearsal and
performance is
"SACRED"

Focus on the
"SKILL OF
THE ACTOR"
to bring
theatre to life

Experiment
with the "VOICE"
– Actors
"VOCAL
ABILITIES"

*If you want to
create a
masterpiece,
you must
always avoid
beautiful lies'*

Explore the
"RELATIONSHIP"
between actors &
spectators –
creating a
communion

"OBJECTIVE DRAMA"
Psycho-physiological
impact of traditions
and rituals

Physical
expression
of
"IMAGERY"

Transform
"EMPTY SPACES"

Art as a
"VEHICLE"

POOR THEATRE

Sanford Meisner

- 8/31/1905-2/2/1997
- Studied at the Group Theatre but rejected its emphasis on Emotional Recall
- Developed his own technique focusing on “real behavior”
- Taught at the Neighborhood Playhouse

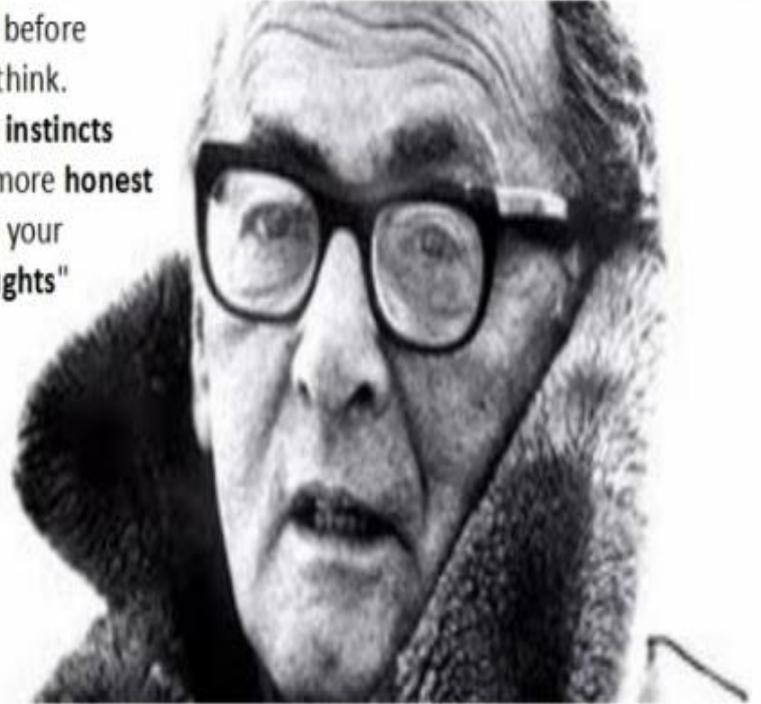


Sanford Meisner

Meisner Technique

- Believed acting was about behaving truthfully under imaginary Circumstances
- Repetition
- Acting is DOING
- In the 90's - early 2000's became maybe the most popular technique in the US college system
- JD's issue - style!

"Act before
you think.
Your **instincts**
are more **honest**
than your
thoughts"



Meisner Students

James Caan

Steve McQueen

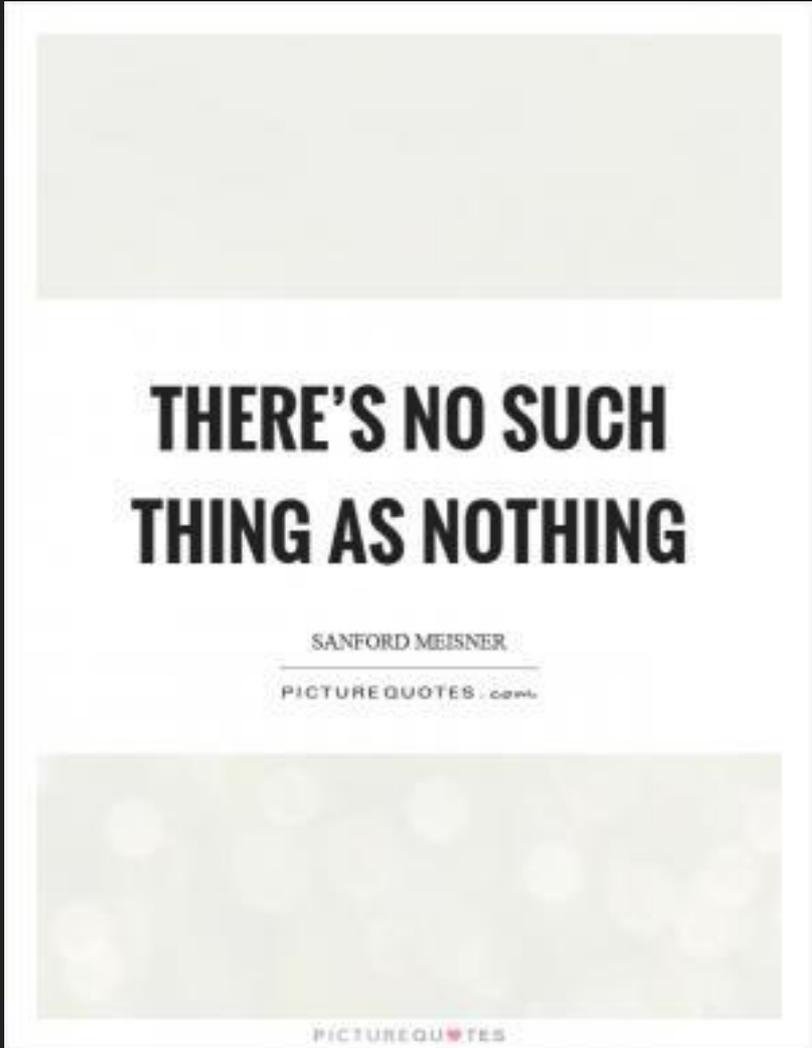
Robert Duvall

Jeff Goldblum

Chris Noth

Christopher Meloni

Diane Keaton



**THERE'S NO SUCH
THING AS NOTHING**

SANFORD MEISNER

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PICTUREQUOTES

Michael Chekhov

- 8/29/1891-9/30/1955
- Nephew of playwright Anton Chekhov
- Studied at MAT
- One of Stanislavski's best students, he also taught at the MAT, but when he developed his own approach later Stan considered it a betrayal
- Alcoholic
- Uneven performances
- Fought with Stan over ER
- Found Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy spiritual approach - No-no in USSR



Chekhov - Fly! Be Free!

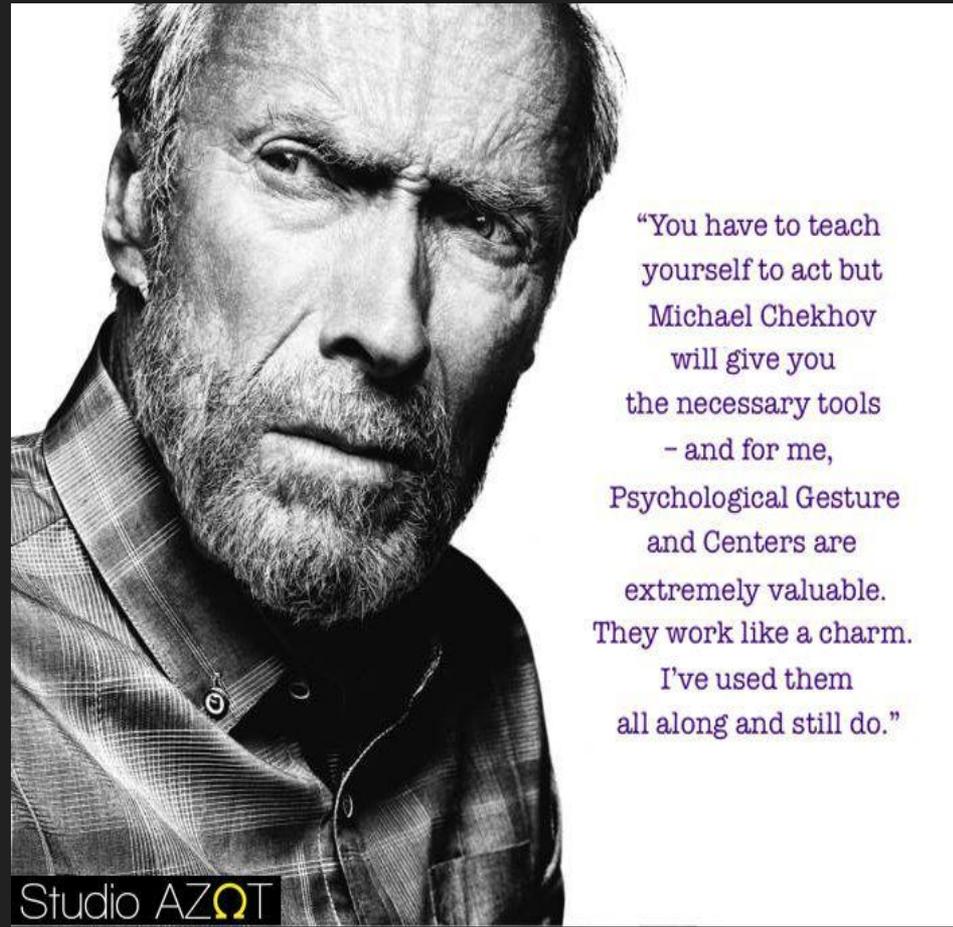
- Has to flee Russia
- Tours Europe
- Begins to develop his own approach
- Based it on Imagination
- Wanted to develop a way for the actor to connect with their “Higher Ego” - their creative self
- Wrote “On The Technique of Acting”

The inner life of the [imagination], and not the personal and tiny experiential resources of the actor, should be elaborated on the stage and shown to the audience. This life is rich and revealing for the audience as well as for the actor himself.

Michael Chekhov

Chekhov's technique

- Imagination is the center of the approach
- Psychological Gesture
- Atmospheres
- Movement and its connection to the creative self
- Acting as a spiritual experience
- JD - tell us some stories of how he developed these ideas!



“You have to teach yourself to act but Michael Chekhov will give you the necessary tools – and for me, Psychological Gesture and Centers are extremely valuable. They work like a charm. I’ve used them all along and still do.”

Studio AZQT

Chekhov students

Marilyn Monroe

Clint Eastwood

Anthony Quinn

Elia Kazan

Jack Palance



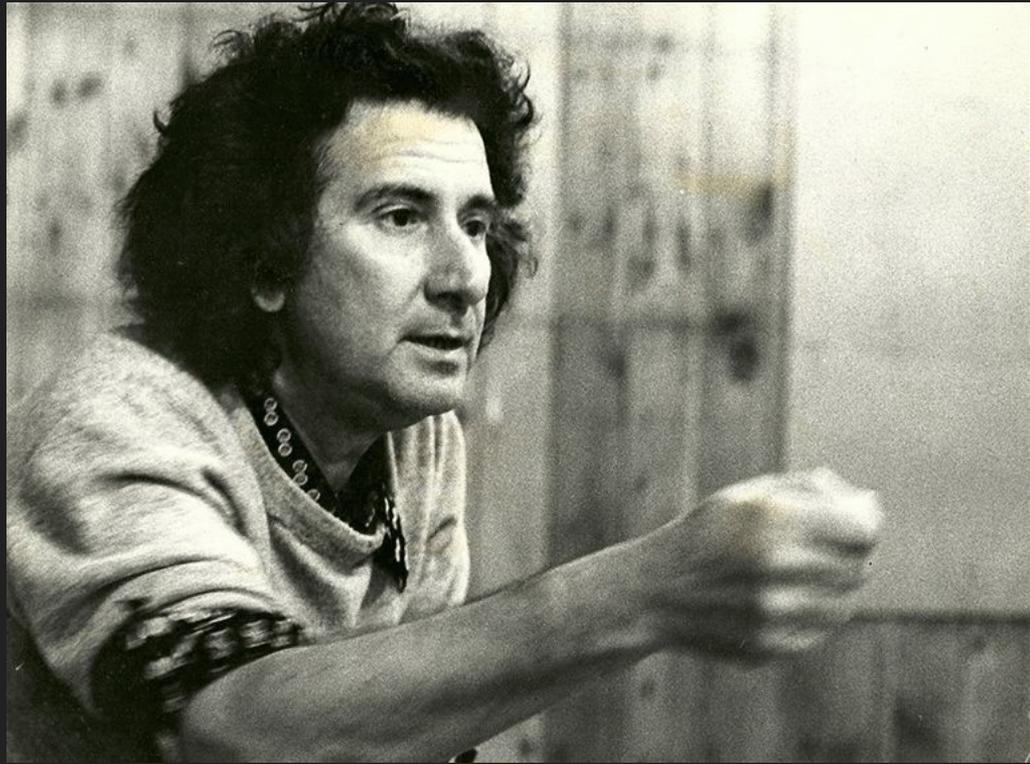
Real inspired acting is never
DOING, it is always **HAPPENING**.

Michael Chekhov

quotefancy

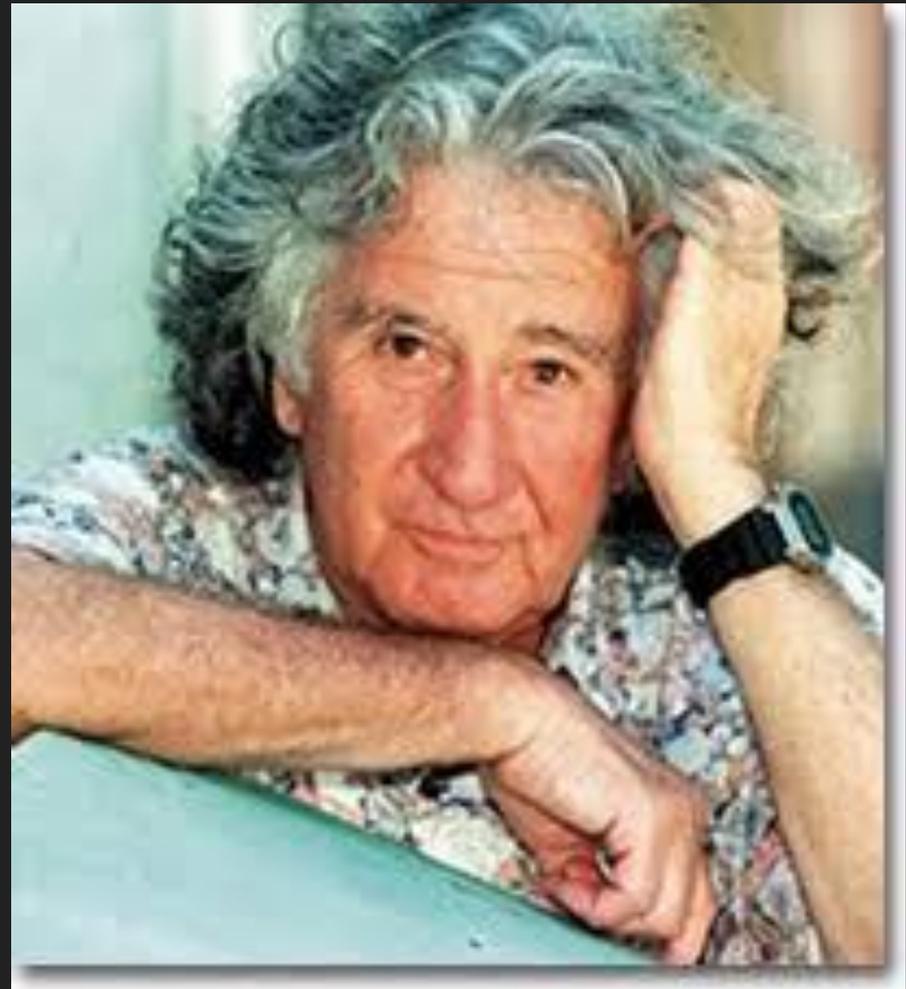
Augusto Boal

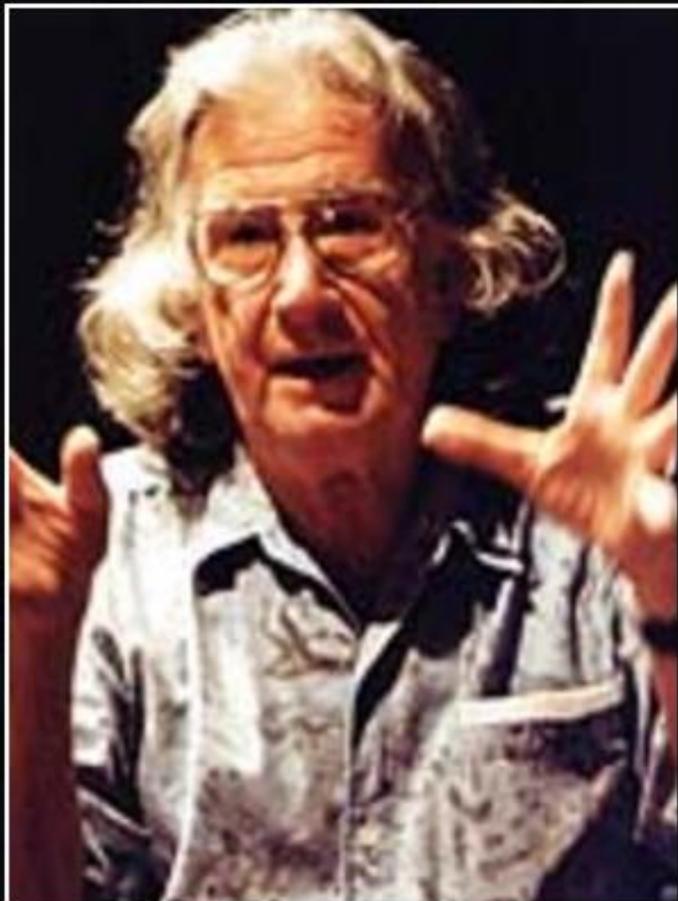
- 3/16/1931-5/2/2009
- Born in Brazil
- Director of the Arena Theatre in Brazil 1956-1971
- Military regime kidnapped and tortured him, exiled him
- Five yrs. In Argentina Boal develops “Theatre of The oppressed”



Boal - theatre as revolution

- You oppressed
- Theatre is a collaboration
- Audience participates
- Guerilla theatre
- Returns to Brazil 1986
- 1992 runs for city council in Rio as a theatre spectacle. Wins.
- Creates “legislative Theatre”
- Got 13 of 40 proposed laws passed





Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.

— *Augusto Boal* —

AZ QUOTES



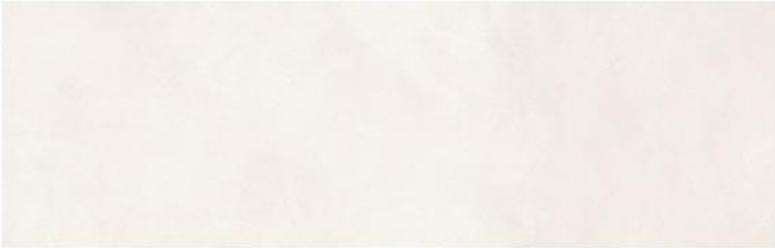
**THEATRE IS A WEAPON.
FOR THAT REASON IT
MUST BE FOUGHT FOR.**

AUGUSTO BOAL

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We are all actors: being a
citizen is not living in
society, it is changing it

Augusto Boal

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Modern Theories: Viewpoints

- An approach that focuses on movement, gesture, and the creative space
- Formalised by Anne Bogart & Tina Landau - though Bogart is arguably the name most associated with it



"SPACE"

- Architecture
- Spatial relationship
- Topography

"STORY"

Arrangement of collected information



ANNE
BOGART
1951

"SYSTEMS"

the elements of theatre

- Space
- Shape
- Time
- Emotion
- Movement
- Story

Influenced by the 1970's choreographer "MARY OVERLIE"

Focus on each individual "VIEWPOINT" before bringing them all together

'Art is violent. To be decisive is violent. To place a chair at a partial angle on the stage destroys every other possible choice, every other option.'

Thinking about acting through "MOVEMENT" and "GESTURE"

"VOCAL VIEWPOINTS"

- Pitch
- Volume
- Dynamic
- Timbre

"SHAPE"

- Body Shapes
- Gestures

"MOVEMENT"
Different ways to move

Developed "VIEWPOINTS" with Tina Landau

"EMOTION" attached to movement

- ### "TIME"
- Tempo
 - Duration
 - Kinaesthetic response
 - Repetition

VIEWPOINTS

Viewpoints

Okay, so here is the thing, if you go to college for theatre today - you will study viewpoints. But almost nobody seems to know how to integrate it into a production on a regular basis.

Sigh.

Modern Theories: Jeremy Whalen

- Whalen tape Technique
- Kill Stan!
- Guru
- Plusses and minuses

