

ACTING TEACHERS

THE STYLES, THE PERSONALITIES, THE LEGACY

THE MAJOR TEACHERS

- SANDFORD MEISNER
- STELLA ADLER
- UTA HAGEN
- CONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI



CONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI

- “Do not try to push your way through to the front ranks of your profession; do not run after distinctions and rewards; but do your utmost to find an entry into the world of beauty.”
- “Success is transient, evanescent. The real passion lies in the poignant acquisition of knowledge about all the shading and subtleties of the creative secrets.”
- “Love the art in yourself, not yourself in the art”
- “What is important to me is not the truth outside myself, but the truth within myself.”



CONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI

- Stanislavski's 'system' was a systematic approach to training actors. He developed principles and sets of exercises to help actors develop their acting techniques. Areas of study included concentration, voice, physical skills, emotion memory, observation, and dramatic analysis. Stanislavski's goal was to find a universally-applicable approach that could be of service to all actors. Yet he said of his 'system': "Create your own method. Don't depend slavishly on mine. Make up something that will work for you! But keep breaking traditions, I beg you.

Emotion memory

Stanislavski's 'system' focused on the development of artistic truth onstage by teaching actors to "experience the part" during performance. Stanislavski hoped that the 'system' could be applied to all forms of [drama](#), including [melodrama](#), [vaudeville](#), and [opera](#). He organised a series of theatre studios in which young actors were trained in his 'system.' At the First Studio, actors were instructed to use their own [memories](#) in order to express emotion.

Stanislavski soon observed that some of the actors using or abusing this technique were given to [hysteria](#). He began to search for more reliable means to access emotion, eventually emphasizing the actor's use of imagination and belief in the given circumstances of the text rather than her/his private and often painful memories.

The Method of Physical Actions

In the beginning, Stanislavski proposed that actors study and experience subjective emotions and feelings and manifest them to audiences by physical and vocal means. While in its very earliest stages his 'system' focused on creating truthful emotions and embodying them, he later worked on the Method of Physical Actions. This was developed at the Opera Dramatic Studio from the early 1930s. Its focus was on physical actions as a means to access truthful emotion, and involved improvisation. The focus remained on reaching the subconscious through the conscious.

STANISLAVSKI EXERCISES

(Magic IF) Sit, stand and walk with justification. (ie. Sit at a window to see why the police car stopped in front of the house next door. Sit in order to rest. Stand to be photographed. Stand in order to see better. Walk to pass the time. Walk to annoy people in the apartment below.)

- 1.(Magic IF) Pack to go on vacation. Pack to leave for war. Etc.
- 2.(Concentration/Attention) Count together to thirty. Clap your hands once when a number includes or may be divided by 3. Then repeat the exercise, but clap twice when a number includes 5 or may be divided by 5. If the number may be divided by both 3 and 5, clap three times.



STELLA ADLER

"Don't use your conscious past. Use your creative imagination to create a past that belongs to your character. I don't want you to be stuck with your own life. It's too little."

- "You can't be boring. Life is boring. The weather is boring. Actors must not be boring."
- "Growth as an actor and as a human being are synonymous."
- "A junkie is someone who uses their body to tell society that something is wrong."
- "The word theatre comes from the Greeks. It means the seeing place. It is the place people come to see the truth about life and the social situation. The theatre is a spiritual and social X-ray of its time. The theatre was created to tell people the truth about life and the social situation."
- "Life beats down and crushes the soul and art reminds you that you have one."



STELLA ADLER

Adler was the only [American](#) actor to study with [Konstantin Stanislavski](#). She was a prominent member of the [Group Theatre](#), but differences with [Lee Strasberg](#) over the [Stanislavski System](#) (later developed by Strasberg into [Method acting](#)) made her leave the Group.

Adler's biggest issue with Strasberg concerned whether an actor should use "affective memory" (recalling a personal event or sensory experience for more expressive and truthful behavior), rather than imagination, relaxation, concentration and relating to one's fellow actors. She allegedly claimed that it would take a hundred years to repair the damage Strasberg imposed on American acting. [[citation needed](#)]

Adler once said: 'Drawing on the emotions I experienced, for example, when my mother died to create a role, is sick and schizophrenic. If that is acting, I don't want to do it.'

STELLA ADLER EXERCISES

(ACTIONS) Planned Entrance. Office: hold the mail while coming in; put eyeglasses away; drop your keys. Bedroom: take off scarf; put key into purse; read name and address on letter. Classroom: take off coat; take off gloves; arrange class papers.

1. (ACTIONS) Five Preparations. For example, “to hide” – he’s looking for me so I better hide: Do something as you enter the room and finish it on stage. That way the audience can tell what you were doing before you entered.
2. (ACTIONS) Pain – a headache: Imagine “as if” a) someone were pushing in your eyeballs. b) I were sticking a needle in your eye. Toothache: locate the tooth and imagine “as if” someone were scraping your gums with a razor. Do not anticipate the pain.
3. (WORKING ON THE STAGE) Props: a) personalize them – in reading a magazine, tear out a page; in counting money, put some of the change in your pocket; in going through letters, look for a specific one and throw it away. b) endowment – in pinning a flower on your dress, shake off the water or take off a thorn; in putting away a sweater, fix a loose thread first; in drinking a glass of water, wipe off the lipstick mark first.



UTA HAGEN

- Once in awhile, there's stuff that makes me say, That's what theatre's about. It has to be a human event on the stage, and that doesn't happen very often.
- We must overcome the notion that we must be regular... it robs you of the chance to be extraordinary and leads you to the mediocre.
- “Nobody ever learns how. The search for human behavior is infinite. You'll never understand it all. I think that's wonderful.”
- “Talent is an amalgam of high sensitivity; easy vulnerability; high sensory equipment (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting -- intensely); a vivid imagination as well as a grip on reality; the desire to communicate one's own experience and sensations, to make one's self heard and seen.”



UTA HAGEN

- She also wrote *Respect for Acting* (1973) and *A Challenge for the Actor* (1991), which advocate realistic acting (as opposed to pre-determined "formalistic" acting). In her mode of realism, the actor puts his own psyche to use in finding identification with the role," trusting that a form will result.^[4] In [Respect for Acting](#), Hagen credited director [Harold Clurman](#) with a turn-around in her perspective on acting:

"In 1947, I worked in a play under the direction of Harold Clurman. He opened a new world in the professional theatre for me. He took away my 'tricks'. He imposed no line readings, no gestures, no positions on the actors. At first I floundered badly because for many years I had become accustomed to using specific outer directions as the material from which to construct the mask for my character, the mask behind which I would hide throughout the performance. Mr Clurman refused to accept a mask. He demanded ME in the role. My love of acting was slowly reawakened as I began to deal with a strange new technique of evolving in the character. I was not allowed to begin with, or concern myself at any time with, a preconceived form. I was assured that a form would result from the work we were doing."

Hagen later "disassociated" herself from her first book, *Respect for Acting*.^[5] In *Challenge for the Actor* she redefined a term which she had initially called "substitution", an esoteric technique for alchemizing elements of an actor's life with his/her character work, calling it "transference" instead. Though Hagen wrote that the actor should identify the character they play with feelings and circumstances from their (the actor's) own life, she also makes clear that

"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."

UTA HAGEN EXERCISES

Three Entrances: the preparation for, and the making of, an entrance utilizing: What did I just do? What am I doing right now? What's the first thing I want?

- Three Objects: Place 3 objects in a room. Decide on time, place, surroundings, given circumstances (past, present, future), relationship, main objective, immediate objectives, obstacles, actions. Enter the room, using Three Entrances. Make the 3 objects a part of the "story" and deal with them individually as the story unfolds.



SANFORD MEISNER

- "Acting is the ability to live truthfully under imaginary circumstances."
- "The seed to the craft of acting is the reality of doing."
- "You know it's all right to be wrong, but it's not all right not to try."
- "There's no such thing as nothing."
- "Less is more!"
- "An ounce of behavior is worth more than a pound of words."
- "Silence has a myriad of meanings. In the theater, silence is an absence of words, but never an absence of meaning."
- "May I say as the world's oldest living teacher, 'Fuck Polite!'"
- Acting can be fun. Don't let it get around."



SANFORD MEISNER

- Meisner's unusual techniques were considered both unorthodox and effective. Actor Dennis Longwell wrote of sitting in on one of Meisner's classes one day, when Meisner brought two students forward for an acting exercise. They were given a single line of dialogue, told to turn away, and instructed not to do or say anything until something happened to make them say the words; one of the fundamental principles of the Meisner Technique. The first student's line came when Meisner approached him from behind and gave him a strong pinch on the back, inspiring him to jump away and yelp his line in pain. The other student's line came when Meisner reached around and slipped his hand into her blouse. Her line came out as a giggle as she moved away from his touch.[\[3\]](#)

The goal of the Meisner technique has often been described as getting actors to “live truthfully under imaginary circumstances.”[\[4\]](#) The technique emphasizes that to carry out an action truthfully on stage, it is necessary to let emotion and subtext build based on the truth of the action and on the other characters around them, rather than simply playing the action or playing the emotion. One of the best known exercises of the Meisner Technique is called Repetition, where one person spontaneously makes a comment based on his or her partner, and the comment would be repeated back and forth between the two actors in the same manner, until it changed on its own. The object was always to react truthfully, allowing the repetition to change naturally rather than by manipulation.

MEISNER ACTING EXERCISES

“One Word” story – a) If say more than one word, start again. b) Take out pauses, allow the story to guide you. c) Two main characters, tighten circle, eyes closed. (no anticipation/listening)
“Acting is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances.”

1. Repetition: The First Step. a) Groups of 3 – observer, A and B face each other. Observer says “begin.” A turns head to B and says the first thing s/he notices (physical observation) – no conjectures. Then B. The observer coaches (ex. Did they say the 1st thing?) b) Now B repeats A until the observer says to stop. (Re-do if “stop” is anticipated, or still repeat if there is a mistake. Don’t mimic, just repeat. Don’t drop the repetition, don’t try to be interesting or top one another; no pauses – really listen)
2. Impulse Response Sentence Repetition, Repetition with Independent Activity, Three Knocks, Beyond Repetition.