Introduction

... living the part helps the artist to carry out one of his main objectives. His job is not to present merely the external life of his character. He must fit his own human qualities to the life of this other person, and pour into it all of his own soul. The fundamental aim of our art is the creation of this inner life of a human spirit, and its expression in an artistic form.

AAP p14

In order to express a most delicate and largely subconscious life it is necessary to have control of an unusually responsive, excellently prepared vocal and physical apparatus.

AAP p16

... in our art you must live the part every moment that you are playing it, and every time.

AAP p19

... never allow yourself externally to portray anything that you have not inwardly experienced and which is not even interesting to you.

AAP p29
STANISLAVSKI
THE SYSTEM

Action

On the stage it is necessary to act, either outwardly or inwardly.
AAP p37

On the stage there cannot be, under any circumstances, action which is directed immediately at the arousing of a feeling for its own sake.
AAP p40f

... all action in the theatre must have an inner justification, be logical, coherent and real.
AAP p46
Magic ‘If’ and Given Circumstances

... *if* acts as a lever to lift us out of the world of actuality into the realm of the imagination.

*AAP p46*

*It arouses an inner and real activity...* This important characteristic of *if* brings it close to one of the fundamentals of our school of acting - *activity in creativeness and art.*

*AAP p47f*

... *if* is also a stimulus to the creative subconscious... “unconscious creativeness through conscious technique”.

*AAP p50*

“Sincerity of emotions, feelings that seem true in given circumstances - that is what we ask of a dramatist” (*Pushkin*)

I add from myself that that is exactly what we ask of an actor.

*AAP p50*

[Given circumstances]... means the story of the play, its facts, events, epoch, time and place of action, conditions of life, the actors’ and regisseur’s interpretation, the mise-en-scène, the production, the sets, the costumes, properties, lighting and sound effects - all the circumstances that are given to an actor to take into account as he creates his role.

*If* is the starting point, the given circumstances, the development. The one cannot exist without the other, if it is to possess a necessary stimulating quality. However, their functions differ somewhat: *if* gives the push to dormant imagination, whereas the *given circumstances* build the basis for *if* itself. And they both, together and separately, help to create an inner stimulus.

*AAP p51*
During every moment we are on the stage, during every moment of the development of the action of the play, we must be aware either of the external circumstances which surround us (the whole material setting of the production), or of an inner chain of circumstances which we ourselves have imagined in order to illustrate our parts.

Every invention of the actor’s imagination must be thoroughly worked out and solidly built on a basis of facts. It must be able to answer all the questions (when, where, why, how) that he asks himself when he is driving his inventive faculties on to make a more and more definite picture of a make-believe existence.

Every movement you make on the stage, every word you speak, is the result of the right life of your imagination.
STANISLAVSKI
THE SYSTEM

Concentration

In order to get away from the auditorium you must be interested in something on the stage... an actor must have a point of attention, and this point of attention must not be in the auditorium.

AAP p75

... it is what we call Solitude in Public. You are in public because we are all here. It is solitude because you are divided from us by a small circle of attention. During a performance, before an audience of thousands, you can always enclose yourself in this circle like a snail in its shell.

AAP p82

Relaxation

You cannot... have any conception of the evil that results from muscular spasms and physical contraction.

AAP p96

... in every pose or position of the body there are three moments:

First: superfluous tenseness which comes necessarily with each new pose taken and with the excitement of doing it in public.

Second: the mechanical relaxation of that superfluous tension, under the direction of the 'controller'.

Third: justification of the pose if it in itself does not convince the actor.

AAP p105
Do not break up a play more than is necessary, do not use details to guide you. Create a channel outlined by large divisions, which have been thoroughly worked out and filled down to the last detail.

AAP p115

At the heart of every unit lies a creative objective.

AAP p116

... you should not try to express the meaning of your objectives in terms of a noun. That can be used for a unit but the objective must always be a verb.

AAP p123

Every objective must carry in itself the germ of action.

AAP p123
Faith and a Sense of Truth

... in ordinary life, truth is what really exists, what a person really knows. Whereas on the stage it consists of something that is not actually in existence but which could happen.

AAP p128

Truth on the stage is whatever we can believe in with sincerity, whether in ourselves or in our colleagues.

AAP p129

Neither on the stage nor even in the wings should an actor admit... breaks in the continuity of the life of his part. It causes blanks. These in turn become filled with thoughts and feelings which are extraneous to the role.

AAP p143

... when you are called upon to experience a tragedy do not think about your emotions at all. Think about what you have to do.

AAP p151

... on the stage everything must be real in the imaginary life of the actor.

AAP p157
All external production is formal, cold, and pointless if it is not motivated from within.

AAP p164

Just as your visual memory can reconstruct an inner image of some forgotten thing, place or person, your emotion memory can bring back feelings you have already experienced.

AAP p168

Never lose yourself on the stage. Always act in your own person, as an artist. You can never get away from yourself. The moment you lose yourself on the stage marks the departure from truly living your part and the beginning of exaggerated false acting...

Always and forever, when you are on the stage, you must play yourself. But it will be in an infinite variety of combinations of objectives, and given circumstances which you have prepared for your part, and which have been smelted in the furnace of your emotion memory.

AAP p177

Never begin with results. They will appear in time as the logical outcome of what has gone before.

AAP p185

... we must study other people, and get as close to them emotionally as we can, until sympathy for them is transformed into feelings of our own.

AAP p190
STANISLAVSKI
THE SYSTEM

Communion

If actors really mean to hold the attention of a large audience they must make every effort to maintain an uninterrupted exchange of feelings, thoughts and actions among themselves.

AAP p197

I have read what the Hindus say on this subject. They believe in the existence of a kind of vital energy called Prana, which gives life to our body. According to their calculation the radiating centre of this Prana is the solar plexus. Consequently, in addition to our brain which is generally accepted as the nerve and psychic centre of our being, we have a similar source near the heart, in the solar plexus.

I tried to establish communication between these two centres, with the result that I really felt not only that they existed, but that they actually did come into contact with one another. The cerebral centre appeared to be the seat of consciousness and the nerve centre of the solar plexus - the seat of emotion.

The sensation was that my brain held intercourse with my feelings. I was delighted because I had found the subject and the object for which I was searching. From the moment I made the discovery I was able to commune with myself on the stage, either audibly or in silence, and with perfect self-possession.

AAP p198f

... people always try to reach the living spirit of their object...
AAP p200

... there are only three types which will get... approval:

(1) Direct communication with an object on the stage, and indirect communication with the public.

(2) Self-communion.

(3) Communication with an absent or imaginary object.

AAP p208
STANISLAVSKI
THE SYSTEM

Adaptation

We shall use this word, adaptation, from now on to mean both the inner and outer human means that people use in adjusting themselves to one another in a variety of relationships and also as an aid in effecting an object.

AAP p224

You must learn to adapt yourselves to circumstances, to time, and to each individual person. If you are called upon to deal with a stupid person you must adjust yourself to his mentality, and find the simplest means with which to reach his mind and understanding. But if your man is shrewd, you should proceed more cautiously and use subtler means so that he won’t see through your wiles.

AAP p228

I know any number of actors who are capable of making brilliant adjustments and yet who use these means to entertain their public rather than to convey their feelings. They turn their powers of adaptation... into individual vaudeville numbers. The success of these separate entities turns their heads. They are willing to sacrifice their role, as a whole, to the excitement of obtaining a burst of applause, shouts of laughter. Very often these particular moments have nothing to do with the play. Naturally, under such circumstances, these adaptations lose all meaning.

AAP p230

If you follow an actor through a role, step by step, you may expect him, at a certain point, to give his lines in a loud, clear-cut, serious tone of voice. Suppose that instead of that, he quite unexpectedly uses a light, gay, and very soft tone as an original way of handling his part. The surprise element is so intriguing and effective that you are persuaded that this new way is the only possible way of playing that bit. You say to yourself: “How is it I never thought of that nor imagined that those lines were so significant?” You are amazed and delighted by this unexpected adaptation by the actor.

AAP p234
STANISLAVSKI

THE SYSTEM

Inner Motive Forces

Consequently we have three impelling movers in our psychic life, three masters who play on the instrument of our souls... mind...will... feeling.

AAP p247

... we need to evolve an appropriate psycho-technique. Its basis is to take advantage of the reciprocal interaction of the members of this triumvirate in order not only to arouse them by natural means, but also to use them to stir other creative elements.

AAP p249

The Unbroken Line

A role must have continuous being and its unbroken line.

AAP p254

...the playwright gives us only a few minutes out of the whole life of his characters. He omits much of what happens off the stage. He often says nothing at all about what has happened to his characters while they have been in the wings, and what makes them act as they do when they return to the stage. We have to fill out what he leaves unsaid. Otherwise we would have only scraps and bits to offer out of the life of the persons we portray. You cannot live that way, so we must create for our parts comparatively unbroken lines.

AAP p257
... instead of rushing into his dressing-room at the last moment, an actor should (especially if he has a big part) arrive there two hours ahead of his entrance and begin to get himself in form. You know that a sculptor kneads his clay before he begins to use it, and a singer warms up his voice before his concert. We need to do something similar to tune our inner strings, to test the keys, pedals and the stops.

AAP p265f

We must exercise great care, each time we have a creative piece of work to do, to prepare the various elements out of which we compose a true inner creative mood.

AAP p266

Salvini said: ‘An actor lives, weeps and laughs on the stage, and all the time he is watching his own tears and smiles. It is this double function, this balance between life and acting that makes his art.’

AAP p267
STANISLAVSKI
THE SYSTEM

The Super-objective

In a play the whole stream of individual, minor objectives, all the imaginative thoughts, feelings and actions of an actor, should converge to carry out the super-objective of the plot. The common bond must be so strong that even the most insignificant detail, if it is not related to the super-objective, will stand out as superfluous or wrong.

AAP p271

That inner line of effort that guides the actors from the beginning to the end of the play we call the continuity or the through-going action. This through line galvanizes all the small units and objectives of the play and directs them toward the super-objective. From then on they all serve the common purpose.

AAP p273f

Above all preserve your super-objective and through line of action. Be wary of all extraneous tendencies and purposes foreign to the main theme.

AAP p278

... the three most important features in our creative process:

1) Inner grasp
2) The through line of action
3) The super-objective

AAP p279
The System

The Subconscious

... the coincidence of emotion memories with the sensations called for by the part. The analogy which results from this coincidence draws the actor closer to the person he is portraying. At such times a creative artist feels his own life in the life of his part and the life of his part identical with his personal life. This identification results in a miraculous metamorphosis.

AAP p285

Carry all the elements of the inner creative state, your inner motive forces, and your through line of action to the limit of human (not theatrical) activity, and you will inevitably feel the reality of your inner life. Moreover you will not be able to resist believing in it.

AAP p293

... what we need is a super-objective which is in harmony with the intentions of the playwright and at the same time arouses a response in the soul of the actors. That means that we must search for it not only in the play but in the actors themselves.

AAP p301

Every real artist should make it his object, while he is on the stage, to centre his entire creative concentration on just the super-objective and through line of action, in their broadest and deepest meaning. If they are right all the rest will be brought about subconsciously, miraculously, by nature. This will happen on condition that the actor recreates his work, each time he repeats his part, with sincerity, truth, and directness. It is only on that condition that he will be able to free his art from mechanical and stereotyped acting, from “tricks” and all forms of artificiality. If he accomplishes this he will have real people and real life all around him on the stage, and living art which has been purified from all debasing elements.

AAP p307

Our type of creativeness is the conception and birth of a new being - the person in the part. It is a natural act similar to the birth of a human being.

AAP p312