Key Vocabulary

Facial Expressions	A facial expression conveys an emotion that tells us about the character and the way they react to the situation.
Gesture	A gesture is a defined movement which clearly communicates meaning.
Body Language	Communication by movement or position, particularly facial expressions, gestures and the relative positions of a speaker.
Symbolism	Something that stands for or represents something else
Stimulus	Is a starting point or trigger to generate ideas.
Naturalism	Naturalistic drama is a type of drama that seeks to mirror life with the utmost fidelity
Realism	Refers generally to any artistic or literary portrayal of life in a faithful, accurate manner, unclouded by false ideals, literary.

Konstantin Sergeievich Stanislavski was a seminal Russian theatre practitioner. He was widely recognised as an outstanding character actor and the many productions that he directed garnered him a reputation as one of the leading theatre directors of his generation.

Konstantin Stanislavski: 1863 - 1938

Aims and Intentions

The Stanislavski Method

Before Stanislavski co-founded the Moscow Arts Theatre in 1898, the general acting style had been demonstrative and over the top. He felt this didn't portray the human condition accurately enough and dropped out of drama school after only a few weeks. He then developed his own method or technique, which at its heart focused on the actor being able to portray a believable and real character in performance.

His technique has influenced many practitioners and is still taught as a significant part of many drama schools' training worldwide. The full method is laid out in his book, An Actor Prepares, which charts an actor going through the first year of their training.

Though certain aspects of his practice are complex, fundamentally, there are seven steps to it: who am I? where am I? when is it? What do I want? Why do I want it? How will I get it? What do I need to overcome?

These basic questions form the given circumstances. Using this method, an actor can put himself or herself in the character's situation whilst carrying all their own experiences and emotions. This ties in with The Magic If, a fundamental starting point for addressing the given circumstances, for example, 'What would I do if I were in this situation?'

Another key feature of the technique is objectives. It is a cliché for actors to say 'What's my motivation?' now, but this was a revolutionary way for Stanislavski to approach a text. There are different layers to objectives; what a character wants in a particular scene may be a simple objective. On a larger scale, they have a super-objective which is what they want to achieve throughout the arc of the play. Objectives lead to obstacles. These are things that prevent your character from achieving objectives.

Stanislavski said that how one deals with these obstacles informs the character's traits and makes them into a believable being. Stanislavski was a great people watcher and believed that observation was a trait all actors should have. By observing real life, actors can develop an understanding of the way people behave and increase their empathy, and therefore their art.

Techniques

Given circumstances

Given circumstances are directly stated and/or indirectly inferred from the text of a script.

Magic If

Stanislavski said that the character should answer the question, 'What would I do if I was in this situation? '. The actor puts themselves into the character's situation.

Units and Objectives

Each scene provides particular obstacles and smaller goals for your character, which are called units and objectives.

Observation

Stanislavski believed that Actors should be keen observers. Through observation, Actors can understand experiences that they, themselves, may not have gone through.

Emotional Memory

Emotional memory is when the actor finds a real past experience where they felt a similar emotion to that demanded by the role they are playing.

Before time

Creating the wider universe of the play. What happened before the scene? What happened before the events of the play?

Relaxation

Stanislavski believed in relaxation techniques in order to be open and receptive to inhabiting another person (character).

Communication

Sometimes called 'Rays' Stanislavski was particularly interested in non-verbal communication and authenticity of emotion.
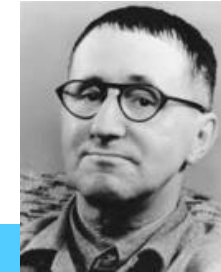
Key Vocabulary

Verfremdungseffekt	Translated into English (The Alienation Effect) this term mean to perform in a way that the audience was stopped from simply identifying themselves with the characters in the play.
Lehrstrucke	Learning Plays. Brecht wanted his audience to take something away and have learned something from the play – not just feel emotions.

Bertolt Brecht was a theatre practitioner. He made and shaped theatre in a way that has a huge impact on its development. Many of his ideas were so revolutionary that they changed the theatrical landscape forever. Modern theatre owes a lot to his methods.

Bertolt Brecht: 1898 - 1956

Epic Theatre

Bertolt Brecht saw Theatre as an active instrument for social and political change. Brechtian theatre aims to instruct and educate. Brecht was a poet, director and playwright, and through his theatre practice, he wanted to encourage audiences to reject the idea that their lives were predetermined and impossible to improve. Brecht evolved what became known as 'epic theatre', and this style of performance was in ideological opposition to the theatre of emotion under Stanislavskian rule. Brecht wanted the audience to question and become critical observers rather than passive audience members. He intended to destroy illusion and reveal truth through action. Brecht often referred to his audience as 'jury-like' as he wanted his audience to consider, reflect and make judgements. One of the main ways he made this possible for audiences was by interrupting the action and developing empathy for characters and their situations.

Brechtian theatre aims to distance the audience. It uses non-naturalistic theatrical conventions to create what he referred to as the 'Verfremdungseffekt.' It is often referred to as 'distancing' or 'to make strange'. Brecht wanted his audiences to 'look again' at something familiar, and therefore juxtaposition, contradiction, and montage were often at the heart of his productions. Through distancing his audiences, Brecht was able to get his audiences to both watch, understand and think. He also wanted to make his audiences laugh and saw Spass (fun) as a great tool to make his audience critical.

Brecht reminded the audience the performance that they were viewing was a construct, not a reality, and that, as with reality, it is open to change. As a result, he was keen to show the 'mechanics of theatre' to his audiences.

Techniques

Gestus

Typically a gesture that exposes the characters attitude or behaviour in a given moment. The gestus should communicate a moment of critical engagement from the audience.

Placards

Placards can comment on the action, tell us what is about to happen or even ask thought-provoking questions to the audience.

Direct address

Often a moment in which the character needs to off-load a worry or give an opinion, and check where the audience are with their thoughts on what is happening.

Narration

Objective Narration - someone who comments on the action or events.

In-character Narration - a character who narrates their own situation within the world of the play.

Freeze frames

Use of freeze frames/tableaux. This is obviously unnatural in the simple sense of that word and should make the audience think about the frozen moment.

Spass

Spass might be used in the form of a comic song, slapstick or physical comedy or even a stand-up routine.

Episodic structure

Involves many different characters and locations, covers a lengthy period of time and typically includes subplots in addition to the main story.

Multi-rolling

Actors play many different roles—frequent picking up and dropping character to prevent the audience from developing a deep emotional connection.

Plays

Mother Courage and her Children — The play is set in the 17th century in Europe during the Thirty Years' War. The Recruiting Officer and Sergeant are introduced, complaining about the difficulty of recruiting soldiers to the war. Anna Fierling (Mother Courage) enters, pulling a cart containing provisions for sale to soldiers.

The Threepenny Opera — The Threepenny Opera is a "play with music" by Bertolt Brecht, adapted from a translation by Elisabeth Hauptmann of John Gay's 18th-century English ballad opera, The Beggar's Opera, and four ballads by François Villon, with music by Kurt Weill.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle — The Caucasian Chalk Circle is a play by the German modernist playwright Bertolt Brecht. An example of Brecht's epic theatre, the play is a parable about a peasant girl who rescues a baby and becomes a better mother than her wealthy natural parents.

Fear and Misery of the Third Reich — Fear and Misery of the Third Reich, also known as The Private Life of the Master Race, is one of Bertolt Brecht's most famous plays and the first of his openly anti-Nazi works.

Key Vocabulary

Total Theatre	Is a use of the imagination. Actors express the genius of the body. Express the story without a set.
Grotesque	Odd or unnatural in shape, appearance, or character; fantastically ugly or absurd; bizarre.

Berkoff is an English actor, director and playwright. He focuses on the performers' physical abilities as a substitute for sets and props, often known as total theatre. His work is influenced by Ancient Greek theatre, Japanese Noh and Kabuki, Shakespeare, East End music halls, and Jewish heritage.

Steven Berkoff: 1937 - Present

Total Theatre

Influences

Steven Berkoff is one of the most influential figures in British Theatre practice. He is an actor, playwright and director. In every sense of the word, he is a theatre-maker. Berkoff works in both a poetic and heightened performance style. His use of voice and physicality is pushed to an extreme, often a 'grotesque' level. There is little room for subtlety in a Berkoff production, and this is largely due to his reaction against naturalism and the need for audiences to become immersed in the world of his imagination. Berkoff believes that theatre should be symbolic, in a way that television and film could not reproduce.

A number of different practices influence Berkoff's work and style. Greek theatre, Japanese Noh/Kabuki, Shakespeare, Punch and Judy, Brecht, East End Music Hall, Artaud, Kafka and Grotowski. However, his work's two most significant influences are his Jewish heritage and his early training with Lecoq. As a result of this eclectic mix, his own work is often referred to as 'Total Theatre'.

Berkoffian/Berkovian productions often use a minimalist set, non-naturalistic design elements, and place the actor's skills and imagination at the forefront of the performance. His characters often speak using poetic language, sometimes Shakespearean, often visceral, guttural/muscular in presentation.

As a playwright and director, Berkoff often explores themes and ideas that consider isolation, alienation, loneliness, fear, corruption of the upper classes, greed, dysfunctional families, poverty, the working-class struggle, racism, and social inequality, apathy and waste. These powerful themes provide us with some understanding of the physical, aggressive and presentational approach to his theatrical style.

Techniques

Essence machine

Berkoff's style relies heavily upon the actors skills and mime, as well as the audience's ability to recognise and understand signs/symbols.

Stylised movement

Abstract and sometimes surreal movement, not meant to look natural or realistic.

Exaggeration

Exaggerated use of voice, pitch/pace/tone, vocal placement explored to an extreme.

Use levels from 1-10 to explore exaggeration.

Grotesque

Berkoff works in both poetic and heightened performance styles. His use of voice and physicality is often pushed to the extreme, often a 'grotesque' level.

Expression

Emphasis on the actor and a heightened visual language /externalisation. Heightened facial expressions/body language.

Direct aside

A short comment made directly to the audience. This form of direct address breaks the fourth wall.

Mime

The theatrical technique suggests action, character, or emotion without words, using only gesture, expression, and movement.

Mie

A 'Mie' is a picturesque pose to establish character. This technique was inspired by Brecht's gestic acting and Kabuki theatre.

Plays

Metamorphosis

Metamorphosis (1969) is Kafka's fable of a man who wakes up turned into a large insect: "the story shook me when I read it, and it has clung to me as has most of Kafka's work. I identified strongly with his dream-like stories and his acute perception of detail, detail that is not ordinary and programmed, the detail of life below the frustrations".

East

East is "a play of boundless vitality. A piece of roller-coasting invention... Its two central characters are razor-happy randy tearaways of almost total moral repellence and absolute physical charm."

Berkovian Physicality

Berkoff's approach to theatre is incredibly physical. Kenneth Reah titled an article, "Like smoking, naturalism can damage your health," which sums up Berkoff's approach to naturalistic theatre. His style is non-naturalistic, often focusing on movement rather than voice. According to him, the only purpose of a script is to help "minimalise and physicalise" the story, stripping it down to its most basic components.

The theory of Total Theatre is key to Berkoff and stemmed from Artaud's theatre style. Total Theatre maintains that every aspect of theatre must have a purpose: every movement that is choreographed; to each line that is learned perfectly; to each lighting effect that is used to convey a mood or message; to each sound effect that enhances the audience's experience; to each prop that has a use.

Total Theatre aims to create extreme moods to give the audience an overwhelming experience and shock, amuse, scare, or amaze them. Berkoff particularly embraced this in his Kafka adaptation of Metamorphosis. As a result of Total Theatre, performances are often minimalist, with bare stages and little language. The focus remains on the physical movement and not on all the effects or the creation of a scene. This serves to detach the audience from the play and make them think about what was being said.

Key Vocabulary

Reinterpretation	Is the deconstruction of the text in order to create a new piece of theatre.
Deconstruct	The process by which a theatrical text can be analysed, and its components explored.

Their work reaches far beyond the stage. Education and community engagement play a vital role in Frantic Assembly's overall artistic vision, making theatre accessible to a broad range of young people and aspiring professionals. The company runs a vast network of workshops, residencies, and talks both nationally and internationally and has established a reputation amongst teachers to provide education work of the highest quality.

Frantic Assembly: Founded 1994

Founders: Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett, Vicki Middleton

Aims and Intentions

FRANTIC ASSEMBLY

Mission

From a reckless leap into the unknown 25 years ago, Frantic Assembly has developed into one of the UK's most successful and best-loved theatre companies. Their ambition is to continue to learn and remain committed to making brave and bold theatre. At times it is physically dynamic and brutal. At others, it's proudly tender and fragile. But Frantic Assembly has always been about more than just the work on stage. It is about the ethos of collaboration, of empowerment, of that constant desire to improve. It is about telling stories in a voice we don't always hear and finding talent in places we don't always look at.

Their distinct creative approach has influenced contemporary theatre-making and foregrounded the use of movement directors and choreographers in new dramatic works. It has inspired writers to embrace new creative processes and opened up actors and dancers to new techniques. This is a matter of great pride for the company as they continue to do something different and to do it differently.

Frantic's flagship programme, Ignition, is an innovative, free vocational training programme for young people, particularly targeting those with little previous experience of, or access to, the arts. Ignition has been unlocking creative potential in young people across the UK for over 10 years and aims to make the future of British theatre better, fairer and younger.

Techniques

The Three Universes

This is a guiding philosophy for movement sequences. The moment before, during and after the touch. Each must be different and interesting.

Collaboration

Whilst Frantic do work on their own productions, they have been highly successful in collaborating and offering their unique approach to directors and companies.

Lifts

Creating spectacle through lifts is a regular feature across Frantic's work. There is a desire to push the possibilities of ensemble physical theatre work in every production.

Music

Frantic has always used music to ignite their work. Music provides a structure to build from and create complicated physical movement sequences.

Building blocks

Frantic often work with simple 'building blocks' of physical work. These simple sequences of movement then gradually become more and more complex.

Round-By-Through

A technique for creating physical theatre sequences. Actors must abide by these simple three instructions when exploring physical theatre work.

Chair duets

Pair work that consists of sequences of movement using chairs. Actors gradually build their physical routine and experiment with music, pace and weight of movement.

Ensemble

The ensemble is at the heart of Frantic Assembly. The ensemble is an integral part of the story and can be used for larger movement sequences or to comment on the action.