

# Stanislavki vs Brecht

Practitioner Dance-Off

- ❖ Konstantin Sergeievich Stanislavski  
(1863 - 1938) Russia



- ❖ Bertolt Brecht (1898 - 1956) Germany



## Stanislavski

- ❖ Engaged in and encouraged a realistic style of acting.
- ❖ Focused on 'truth' in performance for the actor and created "The System" for acting
- ❖ Work gave rise to the Naturalism and Realism waves of theatre
- ❖ "When we are on stage, we are in the here and now"



## Brecht

- ❖ Encouraged an epic and absurd style of acting.
- ❖ Epic Theatre focused on the audience's experience of the performance
- ❖ Work inspired movements including absurdism and Theatre of Cruelty
- ❖ Work was politically motivated
- ❖ "Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it."

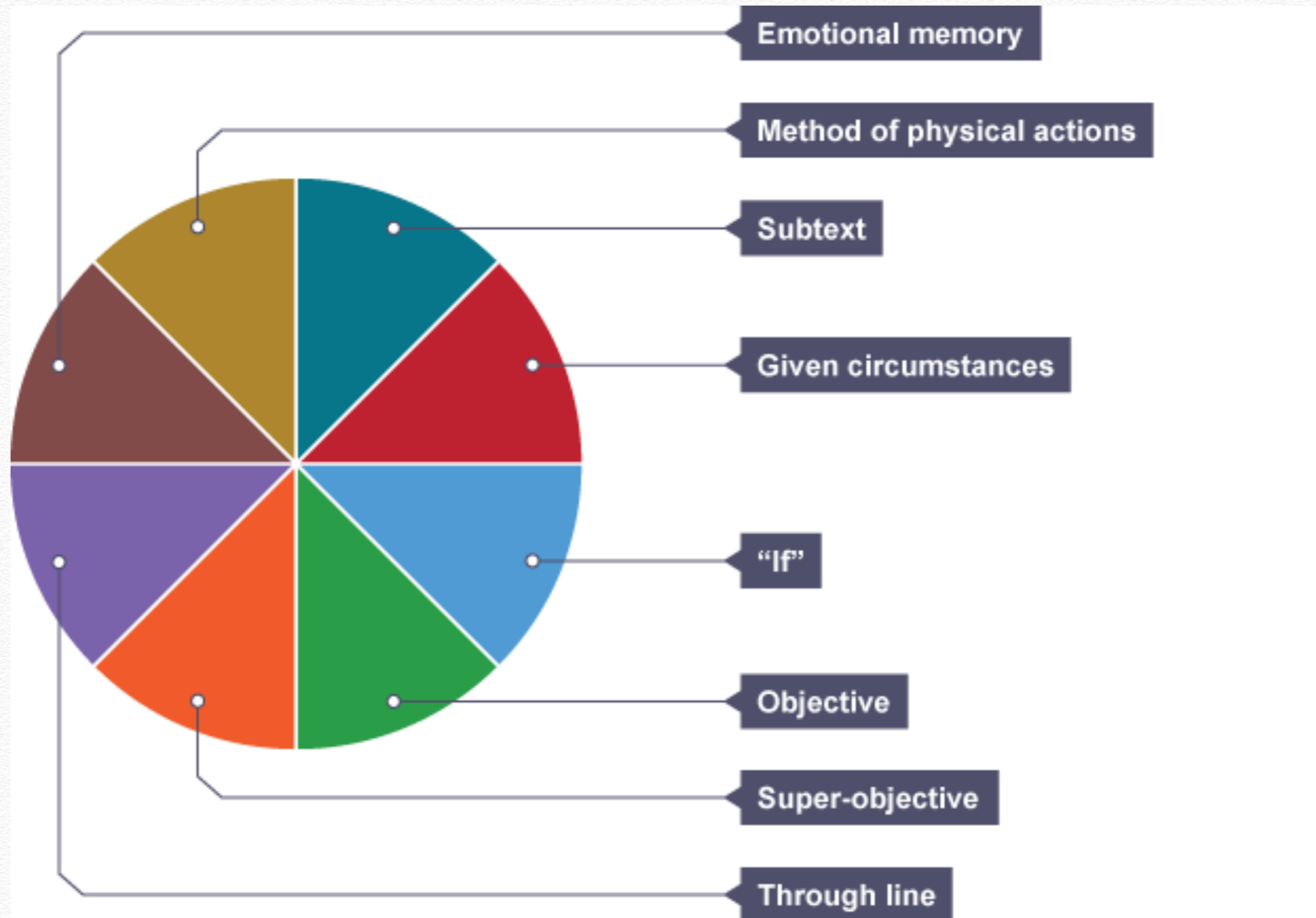


# “Remember: there are no small parts, only small actors.”

- ❖ Actors inhabit the role they are playing.
- ❖ Needed to understand the motivation but also the detail of the character's lives.
- ❖ Texts include: An Actor Prepares, Building a Character, Creating a Role.
- ❖ Realism - portray real life on stage.
- ❖ Naturalism - characters are formed by what they've inherited from family and environment.

- ❖ Presence of the 4th wall
- ❖ Everyday conversations/style of speaking
- ❖ Ordinary people
- ❖ Real settings

# The System



- ❖ Given circumstances - information about the character that you start off with and the play as a whole.
- ❖ Emotional memory - using past experience to 'borrow' feelings to bring a role to life.
- ❖ Method of physical actions - mime brushing your teeth.
- ❖ Now brush your teeth whilst thinking about how to tell your lover that you're leaving them.



- ❖ Subtext - meaning and motivation behind the lines. Someone saying “I love you” to someone brushing their teeth will be different if they think they’re about to be left by that person.
- ❖ The magic if - what would the character do if placed in this situation.

- ❖ Objective - what is the character trying to achieve. Use verbs rather than nouns - "I wish to..."
- ❖ Super-objective - over-reaching objective, usually linked to the outcome of the play. Objectives are stages towards the super-objective.
- ❖ In Billy Liar, Billy wants to escape from his life and family in a Yorkshire town. Throughout the play he faces obstacles to overcome which change his objectives eg "I wish to retrieve the engagement ring" but ultimately this is linked to his super-objective of escaping.

❖ Circles of attention:-

❖ 1st circle - themselves, 'Solitude in Public'

❖ 2nd circle - awareness of the person you are talking to.

❖ 3rd circle - everything else

❖ Which circle are the audience in?

- ❖ Devising a manual, intended to be used flexibly.
- ❖ Stanislavski Centre at Rose Bruford deals with research and practice.
- ❖ Lee Strasberg's method acting - Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, Al Pacino



- ❖ What he (Stanislavski) has to say is still vital, but, also, a lot has changed. The theatre of illusion has lost ground. Curtains and proscenium arches have been replaced by the anti-magical open stage. Playwriting has also altered in myriad ways: it is often more documentary in style and, even when totally fictional, tends to be non-naturalistic. Above all, there has been Brecht, the man who argued that the nature of performance had changed in modern times.
- ❖ Michael Billington, *The Guardian* April 17 2012

“Mixing one's wines may be a mistake, but old and new wisdom mix admirably.”

- ❖ Brecht felt that theatre audiences at that time “hang up their brains with their hats in the cloakroom”.
- ❖ He wanted the audience to be active members of the theatrical experience, kept thinking throughout, not switching off.
- ❖ Still wanted his audience to remain interested and engaged by the drama.

# Verfremdungseffekt

- ❖ Also known as the V effect.
- ❖ Often called the alienation effect although translates more closely to distancing.

- ❖ Narration - breaking the fourth wall
- ❖ Sometimes the narrator will tell us what happens in the story before it has happened. This is a good way of making sure that we don't become emotionally involved in the action to come as we already know the outcome.
- ❖ Direct address
- ❖ Grusha pleads to save baby Michael in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Brecht: "I brought him up, shall I also tear him to bits? I can't."
- ❖ Coming out of role / third person narration



- ❖ Speaking the stage directions - used more frequently as a rehearsal technique.
- ❖ Using placards - the information doesn't just comment upon the action but deepens our understanding of it.
- ❖ Multi-roling - including cross-gender casting. Changes often happened on stage.
- ❖ Split-role - more than one actor plays the same role.

- ❖ Minimal set/costume/props - purely representational. Usually historically accurate/authentic. Mother Courage's cart - 'fifth member of the family'
- ❖ Props could also be symbolic and used in different ways - a suitcase might be a desk, or car door or a bomb.
- ❖ Lighting/Sound/Stage Management - kept simple but often visible, Brecht wanted us to see the workings.

- ❖ Montage - a montage is a series of short self-contained scenes grouped immediately after each other whose juxtaposition or contrast highlights the important issues with absolute clarity. This idea of separate scenes also allows for a focus on minute details if the situation of the play demands it.
- ❖ Brecht was inspired by the Odessa Steps scene in Battleship Potemkin - this video is worth a watch in your own time - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hESDxUnZ1fo>

- ❖ Spass - translates as fun
- ❖ Brecht used comedy to keep the audience engaged and to break the tension in a scene.
- ❖ Gestus - a clear movement, or gesture or a position on a stage that portrays an attitude, a meaning or a social comment rather than delving into emotion. For example, a soldier saluting as he marches across a stage is a gesture. But if he was saluting as he marched over a stage strewn with dead bodies, it would be Gestus as a social comment about the type of person he represents.
- ❖ Brecht used archetypal names such as The Soldier or The Girl rather than character names.

- ❖ Song and dance - music and lyrics would often jar or not seem to fit together.
- ❖ Watch - Bobby Darin - Mack the Knife - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SElHMWkXEU>
- ❖ Video of Brecht images whilst he sings Mack the Knife - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPWxcTtnuX4>
- ❖ What Brechtian techniques can you spot in this video? National Theatre production - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avuBkilpemg>

- ❖ He wanted the following on his grave stone:- 'He made suggestions and we carried them out'
- ❖ Further watching:- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-828KqtTkA> National Theatre's introduction to Brecht

- ❖ Exercise - create a scene that you can tell in two different styles, one using Stanislavkian techniques and the other using Brechtian techniques.
- ❖ Either pick a scene from a well-known story or pick a topic/theme - remember Brecht was politically motivated.
- ❖ Appoint a director and a scribe, both can still be actors too.