



JUDGING ENSEMBLE ACTING

Adam Knight, Riverside Theatre



About me...

- Grew up in Greenville, SC and worked at Warehouse Theatre
- B.S. in Theatre from University of Evansville (Indiana)
- 17 years in New York City working for organizations such as Signature Theatre, League of Resident Theatres, Red Bull Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Ensemble Studio Theatre
- Regional credits include Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Folger Shakespeare Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival
- Co-Founder of Off off-Broadway company Slant Theatre Project (24 world premieres)
- Moved to Iowa City in 2018 to join Riverside Theatre as its Producing Artistic Director



Riverside Theatre, Iowa City

- Founded in 1981 by Jody Hovland, Ron Clark, and Bruce Wheaton
- One of the only fully professional resident theatres in the state of Iowa
- Produced more than 300 productions over 40+ seasons, including 36 world premieres
- Member: Theatre Communications Group and National New Play Network
- Produce Free Shakespeare every summer in Lower City Park



Justice Potter Stewart

“I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. **But I know it when I see it.**”

Jacobellis v. Ohio (1964)

ACTING IS AN INDIVIDUAL'S
ATTEMPT TO FIND MEANING BY
PLAYING A CHARACTER AND
COMMITTING TO IMAGINARY
CIRCUMSTANCES AND, IN DOING
SO, TELLING A STORY THAT IS
BIGGER THAN THEMSELVES.





Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938)

- **Physical action** is the key to unlocking emotional action
- Plays and scenes broken up into **“Beats”** (or **“Bits”**)
- Lines are connected to underlying **actions**
- Actions build towards an overarching **objective**.



Mark Ravenhill (Playwright)

“What is dramatic action? What the characters on stage do to resist change, negotiate with change, initiate change, change the other characters, change the situation they’re in. In a theatre play the characters primarily do this through active use of words.”



Actions

- Primarily happen on lines
- Can be underneath moments of silence or listening
- They **activate** a scene and add complexity
- Often in conflict or response to another character's actions



Rules of the space

- Tables – who sits where?
- Chairs
- Does the staging convey information about the plot and characters?



Rules of the world

- Irish bar.
- Who sits where?
- Who is a regular? Who is a newcomer?
- Physical comfort with each other/with the space



Rules of the space

- Two brothers – who is the alpha?
- Is there any emotional connection to the “objects” in the room?
- Use of negative space



Mark Ravenhill (Playwright)

“A new character entering should be like someone stepping in to a dingy – everyone in the dingy has to reposition themselves to find a new balance or they’ll capsize. The action of the scene is the negotiation of that repositioning. Same for an exit.”

Decorum





Decorum

- Two men in an office
- How big can the action be in a semi-public setting?



Rules of the space

- Professor's office.
- Rules about where one can sit/move



Rules of the space

- What happens when a character in a power position changes?



Konstantin Stanislavski

“A character has to have some kind of arc. A character has to go through an event, and be changed by a human event.”



Relationship



Relationship



Konstantin Stanislavski

“Avoid falseness,
avoid everything that
is beyond your powers
as yet... This
engenders
exaggeration and
lies.”



Sense of Place and Character

- Are the actors believably in the environment?
- Talking with each other, but also taking in the world
- Rules of the space: how do we talk to one another at a baseball game?
- Famous characters



Character



Character

- A brother and a sister in a tree house



Character

- Two high school classmates in a car together



Character

- Two characters 15 years later



Konstantin Stanislavski

“When playing a character who is cruel, look for the places of kindness.”



Intimacy



Intimacy



Intimacy

ZOE. Yes...

JANINE.

Have you heard of the idea of parallelism? / Of – matching grammatical structure – Because here you have “presenting himself as a leader” – gerund – “elite status” – noun – “his ability” – noun with possessive pronoun. Can you hear it? / Whereas if you imagine – “His ability to present himself as a leader, to project elite status, and / to establish commonality.”

JANINE. Yes – yes! There are a plethora of options, three gerunds, three nouns, but any one of them telegraphs to your reader – “You are in safe hands. This writer will

ZOE.

Oo – shoot, yeah.

Yeah, yeah –

“And to establish commonality.”

Broken lines

- Is the character being interrupted really fighting to be heard?
- Are they anticipating the interruption, or playing an action that gets stifled?



Ensemble

- Are there moments where the tension is eased?
- Are the actors taking the time to really **breathe** in the space with one another?
- Sense of environment around them



Ensemble

- Building towards conflict.
- Which characters are most invested?
- Does everyone need to be at a 10?



The big speech

- Opening up (facing downstage), but still connected to the people in the room
- Do they check in with their partners?
- Are others on stage connected to what's being said? How is it affecting them? Are they different at the end?



The big speech

- Different reactions from each character
- An understanding of relationships within a larger group

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TO IMAGINARY CIRCUMSTANCES
AND, IN DOING SO, TELLING A
STORY THAT IS BIGGER THAN ANY
ONE PERSON.



Konstantin Stanislavski

“To arouse a desire to create is difficult; to kill that desire is extremely easy.”