

## JUDGING ENSEMBLE ACTING

Adam Knight, Riverside Theatre



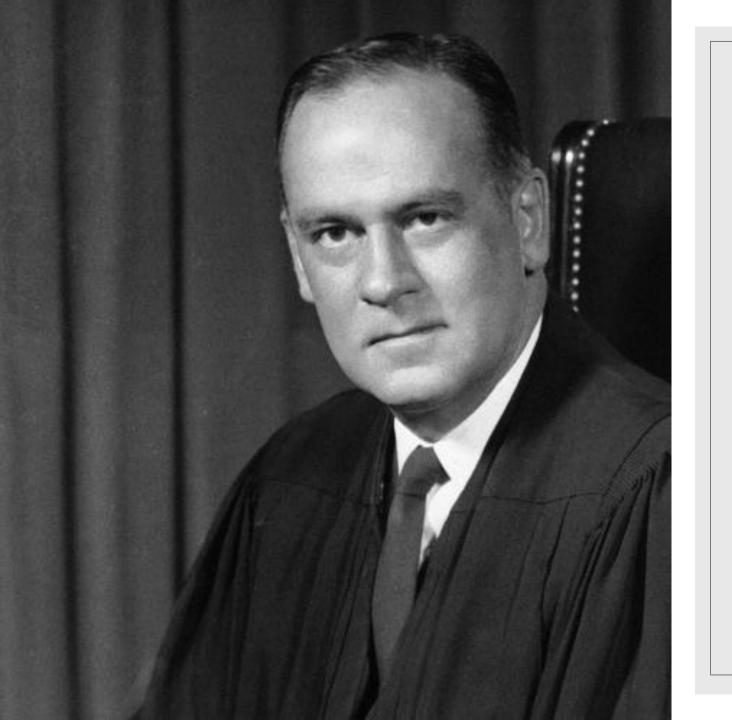
### About me...

- 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 lowa
- Produced more than 300 productions over 40+ seasons, including 36 world premieres
- Member: Theatre Communications Group and National New Play Netword
- 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)

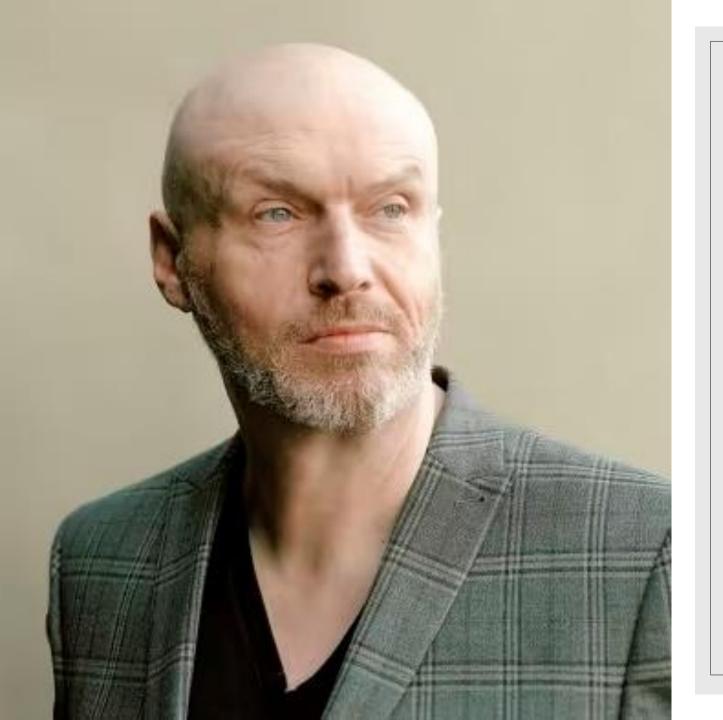
ACTING IS AN INDIVIDUAL'S ATTEMPT TO FIND MEANING BY PLAYING A CHARACTER AND COMMITTING TO IMAGINARY CIRCUMSTANCES AND, IN DOING SO, TELLING A STORY THAT IS BIGGER THAN THEMSELVES.





### 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?



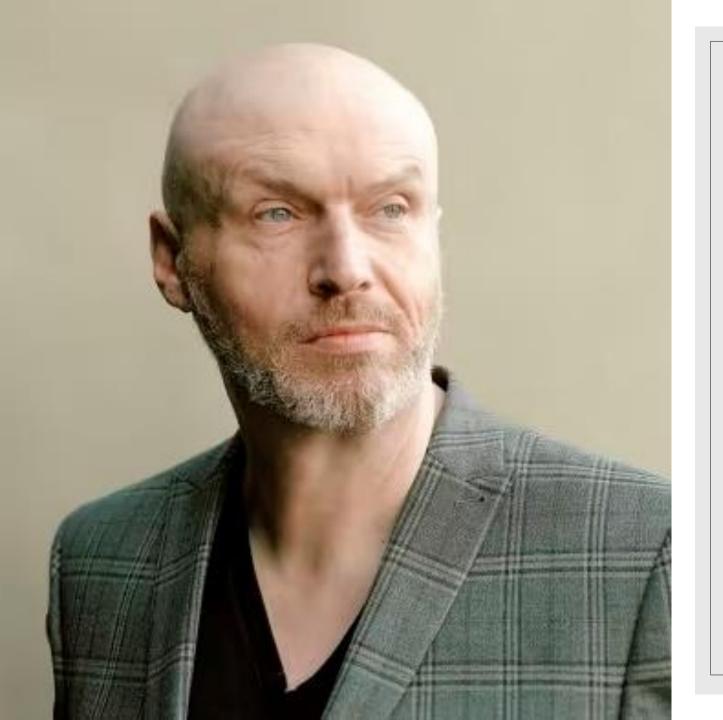
## Rules of the world

- 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 semipublic setting?



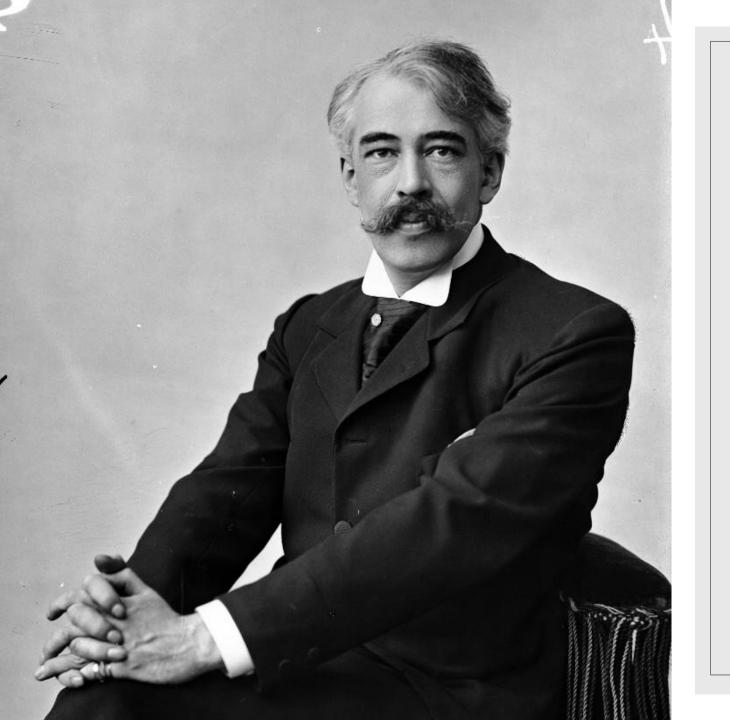
## Rules of the space

- 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

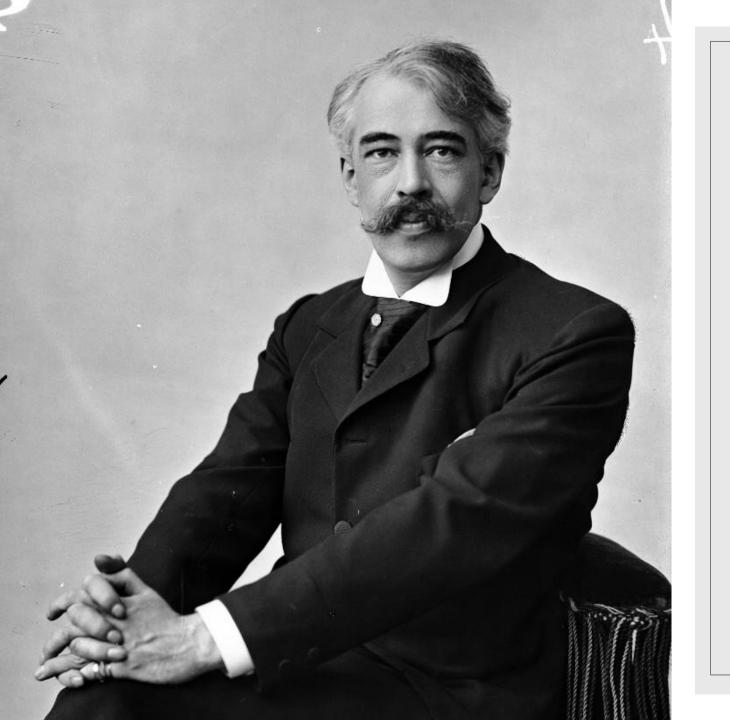
"A character has to have some kind of arc. A character has to go through an event, and be changed by a human event."



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





A brother and a sister in a tree house



 Two high school classmates in a car together

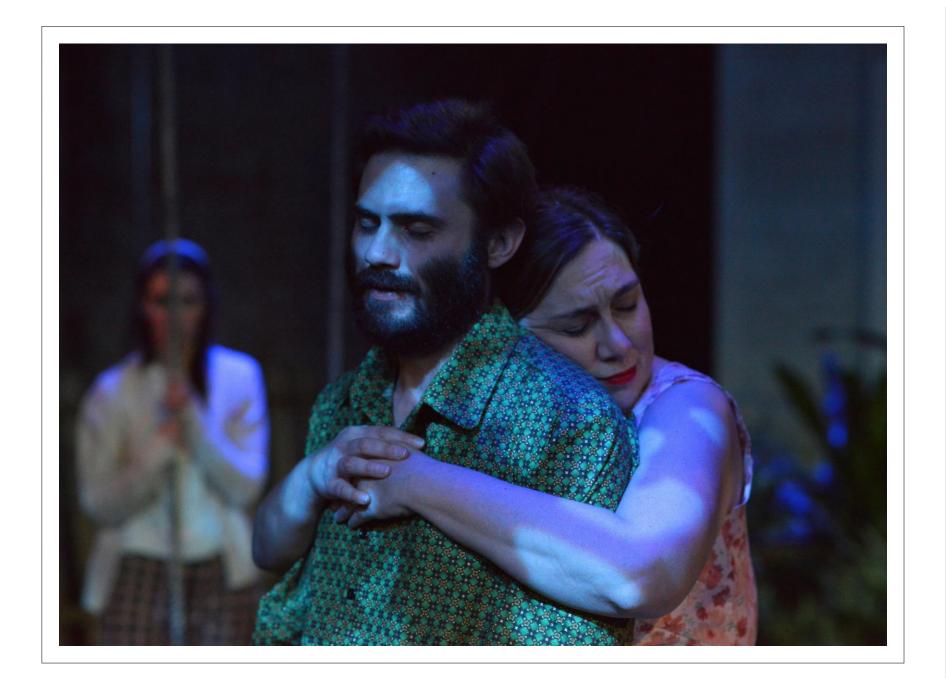


Two characters 15 years later



## 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 ZOE. 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."

Oo - shoot, yeah.

Yeah, yeah -

"And to establish commonality."

JANINE. Yes - yes! There are a plethora of options, three gerunds, three nouns, but any one of them telegraphs to wour roader - "Vou are in cafe hands This -- with will

#### 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 <u>everyone</u>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

ACTING IS AN ATTEMPT TO FIND MEANING BY PLAYING CHARACTERS AND COMMITTING 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."