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REVISITING STANISLAVSKI'S SYSTEM OF ACTING IN JANET EMMANUEL'S DIRECTION OF SALAMI'S *IDIA: THE WARRIOR QUEEN*

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Abstract

This work entitled "Revisiting Stanislavski's System of Acting in Janet Emmanuel's Direction of Salami's Idia: The Warrior Queen" reveals the Acting system used by Stanislavski on his actors. The study therefore makes use of both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The research design adopted for the work was the descriptive and qualitative design. The study made use of the Constantin Stanislavski's Acting System theory as the theoretical framework. This work reveals one of the key findings of Stanislavski's system on its emphasis on the actor's inner life and emotional truth. Both the practitioners, scholars as well as student in the area of theatre practice are likely to benefit immensely from the outcome of this research. This work recommends that Actors should study the principles and techniques of the system thoroughly. Stanislavski's system is complex and requires deep understanding and practice. Actors must develop a strong foundation in observation and self-awareness. Actors should prioritise the search for truth in their characters and work towards a genuine and heartfelt portrayal. This involves exploring the emotional life of the character and connecting it to the actor's own experiences and memories.

Keywords: Acting, Emotions, Revisiting, System, Techniques.

Introduction

Generations of theatre artistes have struggled to answer the question of how one goes about acting. What is it an actor does? What tool does the actor use? A painter mixes colours before using brushes to transfer their art onto canvas. When a pianist performs, the notes are delivered by a complex mechanism of keys, hammers, and strings. In what comparable terms can the actor describe the process of creating a role for the stage? These questions point to the essential way acting differs from other art forms, best summarised by Lee Strasberg (1988), who also states the fact that "The actor is both the artiste and the instrument, in other words, the violinist and the violin" (122). Unlike the pianist the actor has no external mechanism upon which to exert their art. Unlike the painter, the actor is a living creation, existing during performance. Thus, the actor's challenge is to direct the creative process while simultaneously creating the product. Many have attempted to explain the complexity of the actor's process. However, the most enduring of these endeavours lies in the work of Russian Constantin Stanislavski. His development of a "system" of actor training became his life's work which, as a byproduct, created the language still used both in Russian and translation to describe the actor's work. In this context, Rose Whyman (2016) posits that:

> Longevity is an indication of practical use – the system or variations of it have stood the test of time and continue to be widely used in drama training. One of the reasons for this is the contribution Stanislavsky made to the development of a language of acting. In developing a terminology, Stanislavsky created possibilities for greater communication between actors and director. (260)

At the core of Stanislavski's 'Acting system' lies a quest to understand not only the actor but also the nature of life, which the actor strives to create upon the stage because according to Okon Udofot Jacob, "literature is the mirror of life, it mirrors both the virtues and the vices within the society in which the writer domiciles" (2). It is on this premise that Okon Udofot Jacob and Godwin edet Effiong explain that, "the writer is not supposed to act as an outsider concerning those unpalatable events occurring in his society" (131). Stanislavski's obsession with organic life shows that the 'acting system' itself was alive and ever-changing. Even after his death, his 'acting system' lives on, furthered and adapted by theatre artistes around the world. In Constantin Stanislavski's own words (1989), he states that:

> The vein of gold in the art I profess, the result of a lifelong quest, is my so-called 'system'. The method of acting I have discovered allows the actors to create characters, to reveal the life of the human spirit and embody it in an aesthetic form onstage. The basis of this acting method was a practical study of the laws of the actor's own nature as an organism. My 'system' is divided into two main parts: 1) the actor's inner and outer work on himself, 2) inner and outer work on a role. Inner work on oneself consists of developing a psycho-technique which enables the actor to evoke the creative state in himself, in which inspiration arises much more easily. Outer work on oneself consists of preparing one's physical apparatus to embody a role and convey its inner life exactly. (35)

While Stanislavski divides the "system" in two, neither part separates inner from outer work. Inner work focuses upon developing an understanding of psychology and emotions while outer work trains the body as an active instrument, both responsive to the demands of performance. Magarshack, David (1950) asserts that "Though the actor can work with emotion and action independently and with differing emphases, the two cannot be divorced from one another as both body and mind equally participate in the creation of the actor's art". This union of inner and outer work in performance allows for the actor's experiencing the embodiment of the character. While two distinct facets of the actor's work, experiencing and embodiment must be considered as Stanislavski intended: two sides of the same "psychophysical coin" (40). It is the precise balance between inner and outer work, experiencing and embodiment, that encapsulates the arc of Stanislavski's exploration of the art of acting.

To support his conceptualisation of the "Acting System", Stanislavski employs a specific terminology to discuss the fundamental components of the actor's work creating, in essence, a vocabulary for acting. The language Stanislavski uses has subsequently become ubiquitous, enduring despite the terms, subsequent adoptions and adaptations around the globe. Before

Stanislavski and the 'acting system', actors and directors lacked a consistent vocabulary with which to describe the actor's work. Sonia Moore (1984) posits that:

> Nowhere in the world of theatre can directorial or acting problems be solved without taking Stanislavski's teachings into consideration. With the System's terminology, super-objective, logic of actions, given circumstances, communion, subtext, images, tempo-rhythm, and so on, a common language have been created. (7)

At its core, is seen that the Method Stanislavski used focuses upon psychology and emotions as well as a personalisation of the role. The stress upon inner work within the American Method disrupts the equilibrium between experiencing and embodiment, recalling a similar imbalance in the actor's work as was seen in the development of the Soviet Method of Physical Actions.

As opposed to the American Method of Lee Strasberg, which embraces the use of affective memory during the performance itself, for Stanislavski, affective memory was a means of triggering an actor's enthusiasm for a role, enabling him or her to connect truthfully with a character's inner life, but was done in the preparatory work, in rehearsals. Merlin describes how in the training process of working on yourself, actors need to re-learn how to produce natural human emotions and actions in preparation of being able to express later the spirit of any chosen character. This research is used to justify notions of these scholars on the Stanislavski's style of acting and how he used it to train his actors and how they excelled in them. This research is used to analyse and breakdown the training in which any actor has to undergo using the Stanislavski's method of acting to excel in his or her chosen profession because according to Okon Udofot Jacob (2024), characters in the play are identified based on their actions" (32).

Concept of Acting

The concept of acting is a complex and multi-faceted one, but at its core, it is the art of portraying the character in a way that communicates emotion and meaning to an audience. Actors use their bodies, voices and facial expressions to convey the emotions and motivations of their characters, and they must be able to connect with the audience on an emotional level. Acting also involves understanding and communicating the context of a scene, and making decisions about how to interpret the character. It is a creative and interpretative process that can be both challenging and fulfilling. There are many school of thoughts when it comes to the concept of acting. Some actors focus on "Method Acting" which emphasises emotional truth and realism. Other actors use "Classical Acting", which is based on the works of great acting teachers like Constatin Stanislavski. There is also "Physical Theatre" which focuses on using the body to express emotions and ideas. There is also "Puppetry", which uses puppet to tell stories and express emotions. Whichever is the case, Okon Udofot Jacob (2024), avers that, "as cultural activity, theatre performances often rely on the collaboration of the real or imagined environment in determining the texture, creative statements and social imports of artistry" (141).

The Art of Acting

Historically, acting has been defined by the varying inter play of the heightened and normal, the theoretical and the nonchalant, in the conception of the role. According to Leo Brandy (1984), "until the renaissance, there was little attempt to place any special value on the absorption of the rhythm, themes and gestures of everyday life into drama or acting style" (419). Aristotle had in his time highlighted that the most intense feelings possible in drama were those in tragedy, when the characters and the art of acting were on a much higher plane than the ordinary life of the available members.

Acting on stage had necessarily developed a tradition of naturalness as well. In the 18th century, Diderot Leo (1930) argued that, "the paradox of acting is that an actor must be cold and tranquil in order to project emotion" (420). Diderot also states that "Actors who play from the soul, are mediocre and uneven." In Diderot's own words he says; We are not moved by the man of violence, but by the man who possesses himself.

Theories of Acting

Acting, according to Effiong Johnson (2005) is, "a conscious performance by actors as directed before an audience. What is acted was chosen by a director based on his appeal by the text; then rigorous rehearsals were held to register the director's vision of the performance, and the very perspective(s) he wished the audience to see in the play" (129). Acting is truly communication, because a message has been painstakingly prepared and is presented in the sharpest and most formidable psychologically-gripping manner that generates impact. This is why Okon Udofot Jacob posits that, "In Performing Act, the Practitioners are interested in informing, educating before entertaining the audience and communication of one form or the other constitute the major points in actualising these basic objectives" (93).

The movements are simply learned movements without intention or justification. Stanislavski (1989) posits that:

> Can I persuade you that physical tension paralyses our whole capacity for action, or dynamism, how muscular tension is connected to our minds" before any creative work can begin, the actor must work on the body, working towards being able to find and release unnecessary tensions, and building the strength and stamina necessary for performance. (121)

The body is their instrument and the audience will interpret everything they see on stage, from the set and costumes to the way the actors move. The reasons behind strength and stamina are obvious, acting is a physical activity and the body must be prepared for what is being asked of it. Muscular tension and release may seem a bit harder to grasp, but if an actor is unnecessarily tensed onstage, it will stifle the creative work and block any connection they might have with scene partners and audience alike. Onstage, we need to see, walk, speak differently better, more normally than in life, more closely to nature. First, because our defects are all too visible, all too glaring in the footlights. Second, because these defects influence our state of mind. While the understanding and ability to release tension is a valuable tool, one must not release excess bodily tension altogether, not only is it impossible but it is also unnecessary. Certain amounts of relaxation and tension are essential for different positions,

actions, and characters. The key is to understand and execute only what is required, making sure that it is a conscious decision by the actor and justified by the wants and needs of both character and story.

Relevance of the Stanislavski's System of Acting to Actors

Stanislavski's System of Acting, also known as the Stanislavski's Method or the Method Acting, is highly relevant to actors in the field of theatre and film. Developed by Constantin Stanislavski, a renowned Russian theatre practitioner, this approach emphasises realistic and truthful performances.

One of the main principles of 'Acting System' is the concept of "emotional truth." Actors are encouraged to tap into their own personal experiences and emotions to create authentic performances. By connecting with their own feelings, actors can bring depth and believability to their characters. Another important aspect of the system is focused on inner life of the character. Actors are encouraged to deeply understand the motivations, desires, and objectives of their characters. These help them develop a rich and complex portrayal that goes beyond surface-level acting.

Synopsis of the Play in Focus: *Idia the Warrior Queen*

Irene Salami's *Idia: The Warrior Queen* is deduced from the history of both Oba Ozolua and Oba Esigie. Idia's date of birth is also a matter for conjecture. However, it is a well established fact that she was born in Ugieguhdu, a village in the present day Uhunmwonde Local Government Area of Edo State. Idia, was said to be very beautiful, strong willed and a very fine dancer, when she went to Benin with her village dance group, for a dance performance at the Oba's palace, Oba Ozolua, full of admiration for her, immediately asked the Enogie of Isi, to direct the newly installed Eholo of Isi to use his Igban authority to marry Idia into his harem, this was Eholo's first assignment on his assumption of office. Before he could carry out this assignment, Idia's parent got wind of the plot and immediately proceeded to disfigure her by putting some marks on her face. This made it difficult for the Eholo to identify Idia. After a long search, the Eholo of Isi was advised to offer sacrifice to the shrine of Ugieghudu in Idia's home village. He immediately sacrificed a bull to the shrine, after this, he was able to identify Idia, and took her to Oba Ozolua's harem. To this day, the offering of a bull to the shrine of Ugieghudu is part of the installation ceremony of Eholo of Isi.

In a matter of months, Queen Idia, became pregnant and had a child named Osawe, who later became Oba Esigie, Traditionally, Queens were sent to their mothers' home to have their babies. Upon delivery, the Queen's parents were to inform the palace of the Oba of Benin immediately, of the birth of the royal child. Prince Arhuanrhuan, was delivered few hours before the birth of Oba Esigie, but his mother delayed in informing the palace of his birth. As soon as Oba Esigie was born, the smart Queen Idia quickly announced the news to the palace. As a result; he was recognised as the eldest son and installed in accordance with the law of primogeniture, (Benin kings are installed as Oba as soon as they are born; hence the saying "aisagbon rio oba") meaning, "kings are made before their brith".

This led to a succession dispute and conflict. Arhuanruhuan was eventually defeated with the help of queen Idia. He died with his only son. With victory secured, Prince Osawe ascended the throne of Benin kingdom in 1504A.D. Queen Idia was installed the Iyoba of Uselu and in 1515AD, she went to Idah war and returns victorious in 1516A.D.

Applying Stanislavski's System of Acting to *Idia the Warrior Queen* by Irene Salami

Stanislavski **(1989) asserts that "**Before any creative work can begin, the actor must work on the body, working towards being able to find and release unnecessary tensions, and building the strength and stamina necessary for performance" (121). This must not be something done solely in class or rehearsal, but has to become a daily habit of monitoring the body for excess tension. It may seem cliché, but just as a musician practices their instrument every day, so should the actor. Their bodies are their instruments and the audience will interpret everything they see on stage, from the set and costumes to the way the actors move. The reasons behind strength and stamina are obvious, acting is a physical activity and the body must be prepared for what is being asked of it. Muscular tension and release may seem a bit harder to grasp, but if an actor is unnecessarily tensed onstage, it will stifle the creative work and block any connection they might have with scene partners and audience alike.

From the above, the Stanislavski's system of acting consists of the body, the mind and imagination. This image above as explained by the researcher gives the situation that the actor who played the role of Ologboshere had to give in the body of the character he represented, through the physical appearance, have the emotional state of the character to give the audience members a believeable performance.

Stanislavski encourages his students/actors to use the "magic if" to believe in the circumstances of the play. Actors use their imagination to answer questions like: "What if what happens in the scene was really happening to me?" "Where do I come from?" "What do I want?" "Where am I going?" "What will I do when I get there?"

From the above, it is clear that the Chiefs were emotional when the women leader makes her complain to the Oba concerning the killing of Queen Mothers after the ascension of the Oba to the throne. The Chiefs show the emotions of displeasure and anger because the women are not always allowed in the Oba's court and still coming to give the Oba orders or as well threaten the peace of the kingdom if the Queen Mother is killed.

Stanislavski makes use of the Emotional Memory which requires that an actor recreate an event from the distant past in order to regenerate the 'feelings' experienced at that time. These feelings thus regenerated are then used in the current acting situation in order to fill out the role with 'human depth and personal involvement'. The necessity of the event being from the distant rather than recent past is because Stanislavski felt (at that time) that time distilled events and feelings, acting as a 'splendid filter for remembered feelings.' Stanislavsky encouraged his students to concentrate on actions rather than emotions. In every scene, the actor has an objective (a goal of what he wants to accomplish) and faces a series of obstacles. To reach his goal, the actor breaks the scene down into beats, with each beat being an active verb, something the character does to try to reach his objective.

The acting system of Stanislavski known as the Relaxation system during the production of the paly in focus was equally applied. The Oba looks very relaxed so as to show his control over his intellectual and motor faculties.

Stanislavski's thoughts on relaxation were based on the premise that in order to achieve control of all motor and intellectual faculties, the actor needed to relax his muscles: 'Muscular tautness interferes with inner emotional experience'. However, his line of reasoning on this was somewhat unclear. On one hand he quite rightly identified muscular tautness as the cause for several constrictions in performance. Some of these constrictions could be loss of fullness of voice, a 'wooden' physical appearance, or the blockage of creativity. These concerns were valid because actors have been known to 'clam up' through muscular tension.

The acting system called "Communion" was also utilised during the production of Idia: The Warrior Queen. This acting system was used to communicate with the audience members and got hold of their attention. Stanislavski propounded this acting system so that the audience members would not feel left out during a performance.

Communion for Stanislavski was communication with the audience indirectly through communion with other actors. Stanislavski called for the unbroken communion between actors which would hold the attention of the audience. He differentiated between being in communion with a real partner and in communion with an imaginary person. With a real partner, to be in communion, one had to be aware of the other's presence and actively transmit them through spoken words with energy. To strive to obtain a definite physical result in the partner, for instance, a laugh or a shrug, would stir the imagination and create strong communion. With an imaginary, unreal, nonexistent object, Stanislavski felt it was futile to delude oneself into thinking that one could really see it. Instead, the actor had to ask the question, 'What if people were really here?'

Stanislavski suggested that this energy centre or the seat of emotion could commune with the brain, (which is generally accepted as the nerve and psychic centre of our being.) So, during a soliloquy, the brain held 'intercourse with feelings, thus providing a 'subject' and 'object' that could be in communion with each other. Stanislavski stressed the importance of external equipment for communion. This reiterated the importance of physical apparatus of the actor in achieving communion and stressed the importance of training this apparatus.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to do much more research on "Revisiting Stanislavski's System of Acting in Janet Emmanuel's Direction of Salami's *Idia: The Warrior Queen* as a study. From the data gathered and analysed, Stanislavski's system emphasises on the actor's inner life and emotional truth. Stanislavski believes that in order to portray a character effectively, an actor must first delve into their own experiences and emotions to find a connection with the character's feelings and motivations. Stanislavski believes that by fully understanding and embodying these given circumstances, an actor could better understand and portray the character's actions and reactions. Additionally, Stanislavski places a strong emphasis on the actor's physical and vocal techniques. Stanislavski advocates for the use of voice and

movement exercises to develop the actor's ability to express themselves physically and vocally. These exercises help actors to develop an awareness of their bodies, gestures, and vocal patterns, allowing them to effectively communicate the character's physicality and voice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Stanislavski's system of acting has had a profound and lasting impact on actors in particular and the field of acting as a whole. His emphasis on truthful and realistic performances revolutionised the way actors approach their craft, moving away from traditional and melodramatic styles. The system encourages actors to delve deep into their characters, developing a profound understanding of their motivations, emotions, and actions. Stanislavski believes that an actor should tap into their own experiences and emotions to make the character more relatable and authentic. Furthermore, the system emphasises the importance of preparation, rehearsal, and technique. Actors are encouraged to thoroughly research and analyse their characters, exploring their backstory, objectives, and relationships. This thorough preparation helps actors to fully embody and portray their characters in a convincing and compelling manner.

Recommendations

This research proffers the following recommendations, having observed this during the production of *Idia the Warrior Queen* as the Stanislavski's system of Acting was used on the actors who should study the principles and techniques of the system thoroughly. Stanislavski's system is complex and requires deep understanding and practice. It is important to fully grasp the concepts of objectives, actions, and circumstances, as well as the techniques such as emotional memory and character analysis.

Actors should develop a strong foundation in observation and self-awareness. One of the key aspects of Stanislavski's system is the understanding of the self and the ability to observe and analyse human behaviour. Actors should continuously work on observing themselves and others, exploring the motivations and emotional states behind certain actions and behaviours.

Actors should learn how to utilise the sense of truth and authenticity. Stanislavski emphasised the importance of creating a truthful and authentic performance. Actors should prioritise the search for truth in their characters and work towards a genuine and heartfelt portrayal. This involves exploring the emotional life of the character and connecting it to the actor's own experiences and memories, and also use the given circumstances as a foundation for character development. Stanislavski believes that every action and behaviour is influenced by the circumstances in which the character exists. Actors should thoroughly analyse and understand the given circumstances of the play and their character, including the time, period, social status, relationships, and environment. This understanding informs the choices and actions of the actor.

Actors should continuously work on physicality and vocal range. Stanislavski believes that physical and vocal expression were essential components of an actor's craft. Actors should strive to develop a versatile physicality and vocal range that can fully express the emotional

life of their characters. This can involve physical exercises, voice training, and exploring different movement and vocal techniques.

Actors have to learn on how to collaborate and engage in ensemble work. Stanislavski emphasised the importance of ensemble work and collaboration among actors. Actors should actively engage with their fellow performers, supporting and responding to each other on stage. This creates a sense of unity and realism in the performance.

Finally, actors should be open to experimentation and adaptation. Stanislavski's system is not meant to be followed rigidly, but rather adapted and personalised by each actor. Actors should be open to experimentation, trying new techniques and approaches, and finding what works best for them individually. All these allow for growth and development in their craft.

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