Professor David Peimer | Konstantin Stanislavski, Part 1: His Method

– Hi everybody. Hope everybody's well and able to start enjoying a little bit of summer. So, what I'm going to look at today, this week and next weekend is first of all, today, is looking at Stanislavski himself and the ideas about acting and rehearsing and performing, which really gives rise to the whole of actor training and actor rehearsals over the 20th century, into our times right now, and then a couple of very contemporary examples of his ideas, put into practise. And then next week we will take it further with even more contemporary ideas, sort of upgrades, of Stanislavski's ideas 'cause he primarily worked and theorised before the Second World War. And next week we'll take it after the war into the second half of the 20th century to Peter Brook and many of the others who had this remarkable influence and extraordinary development of his ideas in acting and performance an rehearsal theory at practise. Okay, so Stanislavsky is not only studied in every drama school across the planet pretty much, but his world is so known, if you like, as the grandpa, the founder, the father, originator, innovative figure for, as I said, actor training, actor rehearsing and questioning, "What really is the actor?" "Can you train an actor?" "Is it all just God-given gift?" "Talent?" "Are there things which can be developed "or raw talent and then shaped and developed further?" And Stanislavski was the first to absolutely have a very scientific approach and a rigorous approach together with many of the ideas emerging pre-Freud and then early Freud in terms of psychology, of course. And so he's not by chance, he's linking in with, extraordinary amount is happening in the early 20th century of course, as we know, revolutions in scientific thinking, in medicine, in other forms of technology, the aeroplane, the car and medicine and so on. And so, enormous explosion, some would argue as a more hopeful result of the Enlightenment, separation of church and state power, which has been corroded in parts of the world right now. In order to allow the development of reason and rationality and the scientific approach, not only to research science, but a scientific or rational approach to investigating knowledge and ways of producing human endeavour, really, in this case acting. So he is the originator. And of course there's Freud with psychology and many others. So he's combining ideas which are almost percolating at the time. And he's in touch enormously with what's happening in Western Europe and in New York, in parts of America, 'cause he travels there. So he's the first though to put them all together and to come up with a coherent body of theory and work on those throughout his life and teach them and rehearse with them and influence directors in Moscow and actors and then in Europe and in America. The influence is absolutely massive. It goes into what we call today Method acting, the foundational approach, I guess in America, a version of it, which is foundational in the UK, in Europe, and elsewhere in the world. So all of different variations on Stanislavski. And I'm going to keep using this analogy to Freud because he is that kind of a figure who innovates, originates, and

then many others take from his ideas and, you know, take or trash, they develop some much more, they keep some, they modify, they, et cetera, et cetera. But it begins with him and they're all acknowledged it completely. And then after I've gone into his life and some of his main ideas, we'll look at some examples, some clips from films to show it, to put it into practise by actors who've studied the Method so well. So this is Stanislavski here, born just outside Moscow, 1863. 1938. So it's interesting, he dies just before the war because post the war is when so many more of the ideas really take off into the late 40s and early 50s. And it also influences the writers, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, other writers in England and elsewhere. The whole approach and a different way of understanding, even writing theatre and plays primarily in the field of naturalism. And that of course goes into influencing the writing, acting and directing in film, all of it coming from his ideas. Okay, this is just to give you an idea here, the pardon me, the father of method acting in America. And it's an absolutely apt phrase that, not only in America, I would say. It's method acting in America. It's called other things elsewhere, but he is the father of this rigorous approach to acting that I mentioned. And there are four books which are absolutely central. "Building a Character," "Creating," obviously translated from the Russian, "Building a Character," "Creating a Role," and "The Stanislavski System." And then the other one, which for me is the most helpful. And my experience writing, directing and my experience working with actors, it's this book, "An Actor Prepares," which has been the most beneficial. And in the jargon I suppose it's known as one of the bibles of actor training and actor rehearsals. So he wrote these four books, primarily, sorry, these three, those are, "Creating a Role," "Building a Character." It's very obvious what it means, building a character. How do you create a character on stage and they're creating a role. And what's the distinction between the two? Another book of his was "My Life in Art," but that's more about his own personal journey, his own personal life. These are the ideas themselves. And he takes, his own personal life history, is different, it's more semi-autobiographical, "My life in Art." And then this book here, "An Actor Prepares," is the main book. Okay, so coming back to Mr. Stanislavski, he, as we see is he living in 1863. So he is after the Emancipation of the Serfs, he's living at the time of the so-called golden era of Russian literature. Dostoevsky, Gogol, you know, some of the writers that I've been looking at over the last number of weeks. So there's extraordinary opening up to Western Europe, to North America.

There's extraordinary opening up, discovering each other in a way. And I spoke a lot, with Dostoevsky and Tolstoy especially, and Gogol, this obsession with Russian identity. Is Russian part of the Enlightenment developing in Western Europe? The ideas of of democracy, social justice, human rights and so on. And the influence of a rational approach to structuring a society and absolute and separation of powers. Because of course Russia is still under the absolute and

tyrannical despotism of the Czars. So this is all very, very different political milieu that these guys are writing and working in. Then of course comes the Russian Revolution, 1917, before that 1861 Emancipation of the Serfs, two obvious, as we all know, absolute landmark moments in Russian history. So he's living over this entire period, but it's not only that Russian literature's flourishing, but it's a period where education is allowed to 90% of the population who were ex-Serfs, approximately 10% were aristocratic elite, access to education, reading, writing, not only literature, but science and all the other industry and medicine and so on. But it then opened for the rest of the population of the 90% of Russia to begin to have access to at least a basic education, read, write. And if you can do that, of course, you know, knowledge of any kind can come in. So it is a moment of flourishing in Russia as we know at the time. And hence the influence of ideas from Western Europe and North America can come because more and more people are receiving education, can read and write and are encouraged to. And that leads to development of the expression in literature, in writing, of a rigorous method. Okay, and of course the explosion of science, 'cause once you separate church and state, once you begin with some freedoms, hence scientists themselves, mathematicians, scientists in whatever field can really rise to the fore, hopefully with minimal threat from state surveillance or arrest. So that's the overall milieu in essence of Stanislavski. And he, in at the age of 33, he founded what became the world famous Moscow Art Theatre, probably one of the most important theatres founded at the beginning of the early, just before the 20th century and running right through. And he founded with a very close friend of his, a guy called Nemirovich-Danchenko. And I'm going to show a picture of him right now. And this is his friend, Nemirovich-Danchenko. The two of them have endless discussions, what to do, "Should we carry on doing theatre as it's known, "should we take ideas from the west, from Europe, "from England, from from America, elsewhere?" It's all up for grabs in a way. It's a creative set of collisions, of ideas, flooding this whole, these parts of the world. And they decide they're going to set up the Moscow Art Theatre, which is going to look for new work, it's going to stage the classics, but look for new ways of acting, directing and staging theatre. And for the first time, this idea of a rigorous approach comes in, the idea of spending weeks and weeks and weeks rehearsing, the idea of a director really takes over, the idea of spending time in the space. Lights and sound and organising the staging, where the actor moves three steps here, two steps there, turns his or her body looks this way, that way. All of this comes out of these two guys working at the Moscow Art Theatre, Nemirovich-Danchenko. And they then also go on a tour of Europe in 1906. That's crucial. And they go to the main capitals of Europe to see what others are doing. They meet up with an Englishman called, this guy called Edwin Gordon Craig, who's hugely influential in English theatre and the development of what everybody takes for granted today of actor training, actor rehearsal.

The idea of, how you turn the stage into an artistic event, not only a spectacle maybe, but an artistic event and how you work with director and light and mise-en-scène and costume. Put it all together. And Craig was fundamental in Britain and they worked with him and met him. They tour Europe in 1906. And then in 1923, 1924, they toured North America, in particular the US. Another huge influence confluence of ideas, of sharing their ideas with their American counterparts and vice versa. And of course this is post the 1917 Russian Revolution. So all these ideas are moving, trying to get a sense of obviously way pre-internet. But you know, these are thinkers and artists trying to find out, "How do we take theatre forward in the scientific age?" What for them was was a scientific age after the first World War, before the second. Of course they staged "The Seagull," Checkhov's "Seagull" in 1898, which is an absolutely fundamental production. And it was Chekhov's first main play. And when Chekhov first wrote it, it was a disastrous flop. And then Nemirovich-Danchenko and a couple of others persuaded Stanislavski to redirect it a little bit later in the Moscow Art Theatre and that became known as one of the most famous productions ever done, of certainly of the 20th century, giving rise to the whole approach of their ideas of rehearsing, training and so on. This is a picture of their great protege Meyerhold, who became one of the great directors of Russian theatre. And much later of course he was tortured and killed by Stalin's Secret Police. Well, not so secret. this is a young Meyerhold rehearsing "The Seagull", whether he's posing intentionally and trying to get that special artistic arty look, you know, and so on. But it's quite classic stereotype image as we know of the actor/artist in angst and reading the text of Chekhov's "The Seagull," and trying to imagine, "How I'm going to act it," with these new ideas of Stanislavski's and so on. You know, what am I going to do? It's not just in the old days, learn the lines, get on the stage, make sure you don't fall over the furniture to put it crudely. But you know, that would've been a lot of actor work beforehand because of course, we've got to remember the structure before was repertory theatre. They had to make money so the actors would know two or three players at a time, do one in the morning, one in the afternoon, move on to the next, another next day, and two different plays in the next two different plays. You know, you had to keep the repertory system going, tour around your home country performing all the time, knowing two or three plays. And then, you know, while you're doing that, you learn the script of another two or three, going way back to Shakespeare's time and before, but all the way through in England, certainly and elsewhere. So from an enormous influence of basically learning the script as fast as possible and getting it on stage as fast as possible 'cause you had to make money and you had to make sure you kept the number of plays changing all the time. Let's never forget it's pre-film, pre-TV, obviously, all of that. So it's a hugely loved form of entertainment. But then with these guys, it starts to become different. Spent weeks on rehearsal, weeks with the text, weeks with going line by line, understanding the themes, the characters, the ideas, and what's the meaning here. You know, one can

get obsessed with that, but at the same time it's appropriate because it's a far more educated audience, let's never forget. And it's a far more, if you like, it's a world under the influence of science and rational thought and a whole different way of approaching the very structure of daily living in society. And education is happening for so many more people, who can ask all sorts of questions in all different ways. Does theatre become much more elite? Yes. Does it become far more, or certain aspects of it, or approaches? Yes, it's coming up with in the competition of film, et cetera, you know, the silent movies and so on early on. So, okay, we have these kinds of things happening and these ideas, I say percolating, then he does a landmark production of Hamlet, where the idea was really imagining it all as a dream. Was Hamlet dreaming the whole thing, or wasn't he? And it was one of the first productions to turn the story on its head and make Hamlet's dream fundamental, which changes the entire acting, changes the approach to staging and acting. You know, you can start to have light inside the building and other things and moving sets. Then he really championed the work of Chekhov, did all the great classics of Chekhov, "Three Sisters," "Uncle Vanya," "Cherry Orchard." And out of that came an obsession with what became known as naturalism or a kind of realism. It's never the aim, for me, theatre is not about imitating life, it's about making the stage live. So there's a misnomer about understanding this idea of this word, "realism" or "naturalism." It's not, you know, the cliche of "Put a mirror up to life and there it is," and da, da da. It's not, it's crafted artistically. Time and space are compressed. It's a two hour production or one and a half time and space are compressed. You can go through a whole person's life or family's lives in, you know, a hundred, 120 minutes and the space is compressed. So because of that, you get a greater charge of intensity. You've got to manipulate in the, in the true sense of the word, manipulate, plot, character, dramatic action, all of these things come into play. It's not about imitating life at all for me, ever theatre. It's to make the stage live. He works with Gorki and Bulgakov, the three of the great playwrights of Russia at the time. Gorki of course, very interestingly, he allies himself much later with the Russian Revolution. And he becomes huge in the Russian Communist Party and the president and the leader for Stalin of, of, of socialist realism, which becomes a dominant form in communist Russia. Quite a distinction, very big distinction between him, Chekhov and others. But they all had to obviously play their cards very carefully because of, obviously after the Russian Revolution.

Then in 1928, the Moscow Art Theatre celebrates their 30 years of doing productions, not only of Chekhov and Gorki, but Tolstoy's plays as well. But of the whole canon, if you like, the western cannon, the classics and the contemporaries. 1928, Stanislavski has a huge heart attack on stage, but he insisted on acting to the end of the play, make of it what you will, all right. Crazy, obsessed with making his art, living for the art, that whole, I suppose romantic dream notion

of, live and die for your art, whatever. And he waited until the curtain fell at the end. And then they rushed the doctors on stage. He collapsed. After that, he didn't really act anymore, 1928. But he continued to teach and write about teaching and investigate approaches to training and rehearsal. And that is crucial. So the terrible irony, the tragic irony, he hadn't had the heart attack, we might not have such a rigorous approach to a theory of acting, training and rehearsing. And he writes all his great books that I've mentioned. He's awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour. He's awarded the order of Lennon, the People's Artist of the USSR. He gets all these great awards, Stalin holds him up to be one of the great heroes. Lennon loves the work. Lennon dies in the early 1920s, but goes to the Moscow Art Theatre. They're all these Russian leaders. The communist leaders love going there and watching the theatre. And that's a fascinating, I don't have time to go into it now, but that confluence of politics and art and revolution, it's a confluence happening in this one little theatre or not so little, but, one theatre in Moscow. He develops this thing, which became known as "The System." And it started because he was trying to investigate "How do I overcome blocks to acting?" Some actors are blocked remembering lines. Some forget that, you know, you got a body, it's not just words and talking heads. You got a body. How do you animate the body? Some forget, "Do I use my imagination?" "How do I do the emotion?" "How do I make it believable that the audience believes "that I'm really acting?" All these questions come about and these blocks that happen at different times. Fascinatingly, in Lawrence Olivier's autobiography, he talks about this. He gets this total stage fright in his fifties. This is a guy, he's in his fifties, Olivier, total stage fright. And he just, he gets terrified. He's going to forget lines and it's a complete block and how all different techniques he tries to overcome it. Pretty much every actor I've ever known, when they're honest, will talk about the blocks they have. He started the idea, let's just look at what really began. The idea of discussion of the play with the actors beforehand. Never really happened before. Sit around the table with endless cups of coffee and cigarettes and discuss, "What on earth is this about?" Character, play, dramatic action, plot. What does this line mean? That line mean? This scene in relation to another scene? How do you stage these new naturalistic plays that they're calling them? Of Chekhov, of Ibsen, of Strindberg, coming from other parts of Europe and the world. How do you stage these things? Do you try and be as literal, to how people maybe are? Or do you still see it as a heightened artistic endeavour because it's a dramatic character, it's not a real person? The idea of subtext becomes crucial, which is, "What is the hidden meaning?" The invisible meaning, which is inside the words, inside the dramatic action of the scene. What is the subtext, which is not articulated, but is inside? And we all know, we go for coffee with a friend or a colleague, we have meetings, work and at home and other things. There's always a subtext of other thought and other feeling going on underneath in most human situations. Nothing is as it seems. There's always, you know, subtext. So Stanislavsky originates this

idea of exploring the subtext, to pretty much an extreme. Way too much, he realises later, and cuts back on it 'cause he can get obsessed with the psychology of subtext as well. You know, trying to get every single nuance. But it's important because it begins it, he also brings the idea of the inner life of character, which is fundamental to, I would say to 20th century and especially English language theatre, where it's the inner life of character as opposed to what we might call the character as a two-dimensional stereotype, which will get a fair amount of in more in Europe, in central Europe and in comedy, where it's not nearly as three-dimensional nuance of psychological complexity of the character, but we go for the more two-dimensional of the stock type. The king, the queen, the princess, the servant, the maid, the banker, the robber, the killer, et cetera. It's the soldier, the general, where the external image of the social image of character is all that is acted. This is the general, this is the priest, the king, the princess. You act the external image and you try and portray it physically, which became quite melodramatic as the century wore on. And you start to see it getting dated more and more because of the rise of naturalism in writing and this obsession with an inner life of character, which comes of course, from the influence of psychology. How do you create what we call today, a complex, multi-dimensional inner life of a character, not merely the outer life? And this dichotomy is absolutely central in writing literature, in writing theatre and film and in acting it and directing and how much you work with both. 'Cause of course you've got to play with both. You can be at a professor or a king or a general, or a soldier or the prince or the princess or whatever, the lady of the manor. You've got to have certain external physical traits, but you've also, which are social image, but you've also got to have an inner life.

And how do you find that combination? And Stanislavski is the first to obsess about that and try and work with that, the inner and the outer image. Okay? And here, this is just one example where he worked with his wife, you can see they're trying, and this is very dated of course, but you're trying to find, you know, he's the soldier, he is the leader, et cetera, the Russian, you know, in the Russian army and so on. And there's the dead wife. This is his actual wife, the character. And trying to find how do you do that? Especially when you've got such a costume where it's all about social projection of body and tone of speaking and attitude. It's not about the social image that matters, it's not the inner life that matters, but what if you're trying to act both? How do you do it? And that's where the subtext and the obsession with this comes in. He also rejected the idea of inspiration, which was very contentious at the time. And it's still because what do you do when you, you know, people are inspired and you can try this or that, or why not? And he tried to go more for a kind of training and observation and that rigour that I spoke about of a logic. Much later he rejected it later in his life and came back more to the idea of inspiration and how to keep that creativity alive. But at least they investigated all these ideas seriously. And as one

of his students put it, not Meyerhold, one of the other great students, she said, "I looked my fellow actor on stage, "I looked him in the eye." "I try to read the character's thoughts in his eyes "and I reply in that moment with the expression "on to what's going on in his eyes "and his face and his body." Now this had never really been explored before. You know, you waited for your cue, one person would speak, then the other person would speak, et cetera. But if you are so in engrossed in the moment, what today I suppose sports people call being in the zone, you're so engrossed in the zone. You block out a thousand people watching or a couple hundred whatever, and you just, you completely relating to that other person. You take out all the other thoughts in the mind and you're just watching and you know the line is coming, but you're so engrossed and you create extraordinary power on stage. Because for me, ultimately theatre is about relationships, human relationships. It's not just about virtuosity of one actor. And when you get that relationship working, then it's powerful. And here an example of, they're trying to investigate how do we make the relationships amongst characters the centre of the theatre piece, not just virtuosity of the brilliant actor and then the secondary and third, you know, subsidiary actors. Of course there's always going to be the star. And it's always, going back to ancient times. But the attempt at least is to make it relational. Another idea was this idea of psychological realism. The other idea what they set up was trying to explore the idea of laboratory and studios never been done before. Experimentation, of course, it's coming from the influence of the explosion of science in the early 20th century. You know, a laboratory, a studio where you can try anything, experiment different things, be radical, fail, succeed, whatever, starts with Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre. Freud had the great phrase, the dreams of the royal road to the unconscious. And what Stanislavsky said, was the aim of actor training and rehearsal was to make the unconscious motivations of the character, conscious. So if Macbeth in his phrase talks about vaulting ambition, if ambition is the objective, the main objective, driving that character, vaulting ambition, well it's in the unconscious, but try to make it conscious so that you can figure out a way to act it in all the different scenes, the doubt about ambition, the anxiety, the worries, the fears, the, you know, geeing up to go and kill the kids of Banquo, Duncan and others. Then the idea of improvisation comes from Stanislavski, let's get together, let's just improvise. Get a group of actors together. Let's improvise an idea, a scene character. Let's just play and improvise, comes from these guys. Later, socialist realism unfortunately, becomes the dominant mode of the Soviet Union. And that's where Gorky kicks in. He becomes the president and he is the one to pull them all together and say, "You must write in this genre," which is ridiculous and terrible. And it destroys so much of writing the theatre in the Soviet Union to come after this. And they label Chekhov as... You know, they put all of these under this very broad label. If you're not quite that, then you know, basically what happens is that it means that you excommunicate, you get rid of anything that

can be imaginative, symbolist, surrealist, avant garde as we know today. But anything that's going to experiment and try something different. So it's not only in theatre, but it happens in the society. Do not be different. If somebody, Gorky, or whoever it is, stands up and says, "This is how thou shall do it." It's the 11th commandment. And lo and behold anybody who who breaks it. There's no rhyme or reason. There's no rationality behind it. It's just, for me, a method of control, done in the whole society and evidenced in doing it in theatre. Stanislavski himself is important. Came from one of the richest families in Moscow and in Russia, incredibly rich. The family estate had two wonderful theatres just on their estate alone. And, you know, his own life was going into the father's business as well as running the theatres, setting up the Moscow Art Theatre and all of that. So he comes from an incredibly privileged background, but you know, many others have come from those backgrounds as well. Not in Russia, but other times in human history. It doesn't for me, I think it's absolutely childish or ridiculous to put that up against the achievements of what he and the others did. But it is important 'cause it gave him so much time and money to do all this without worrying for a second that they own two private theatres. He began to explore also the voice: Ways of training the human voice. Never really been done before in a codified way, rigorous way, linking the body and the voice, seeing the human actor as a total instrument, body, voice, imagination, intelligence, rationality, emotion, seeing all of this as an instrument to be trained for the stage. He introduced the idea of this, of a great rigour in discipline in rehearsals, extensive rehearsals as I said. And then finally he changed and brought on the idea of imagination enormously 'cause that troubled him all his life. Imagination sort of allied to creativity. And if you obsess too much with such extreme rigour, the price you can pay is a playful creativity and letting anything come through the imagination. And that's a problem. There are two, I guess, two examples to give, which is, with the emotion. He came up with the idea of emotional memory, which is become very, I think overused and often misunderstood because he kept obsessing, thinking, saying, well how do you, let's say, you're playing Macbeth again. Well, you never murdered anybody.

So how do you act somebody who murders others on stage, you've never done it, but how do you act it so that it's believable to the audience? And I carefully use this word believable. And it's the word that the brilliant, brilliant British director post Second World War, I'm sure everybody knows, or Peter Brook, and Brooke focuses on the word believable, not only truthful, that's a very vague word, but to make it that it's believed by the audience. And that's a subtle but important shift from the word truthful. So how do you be believable that you're killing somebody, you're a murderer, you're planning, you're thinking, all the rest of it. You know, you can be many other things. You could have been been kings generals, whoever, how do you do it? And the idea of emotional memory was to think of a time in life where you've had the impulse to kill. It could be anybody, it could

be, well let's not go into examples, but everybody's had the impulse to kill somebody. They can't bear their can't stand, even if it's only for a fleeting few seconds. And then you recreate from a past memory in life that feeling, that kernel of feeling and you try and find it for the character in that scene. Now that's pretty tough to do, but it's been worked on enormous amounts, controversially, 'cause you can get into areas you don't want to get into with actors and they may be very blocked or not want to go there, and rightly so. The best example that I've ever experienced was directing a play in New York City long time ago, boiling hot like it is now, humidity, heat, et cetera. And rehearsing a play with this actress. And she towards the end of the play, she has to kill the husband. Of course she's never killed or the rest of, et cetera. How do you make it believable? And in heat and humidity of the New York summer, she'd taken the subway for over an hour and a quarter from one place anyway, to get back to her home. She had some bookcases and shelves there, gets home sweating hot, opens the door, and her cat jumped from the top of the bookcase onto her and scratched her arm bleeding and she picked up the cat and in an instant, hurled it in anger against the wall. The cat survived. But in that impulse, in that moment was the impulse to kill, to murder where all other rational thought had gone out or any other, you know, self-censoring thought, just furious, "Kill, get rid of it." And out of that we did a whole lot of exercises around what Stanislavski would call emotional memory. And that had happened about five, six years before we actually started rehearsing. So I'll give you that cat's example because what I have found, and a lot of friends who direct tell me also work with the more banal example, rather than a traumatic example of somebody one has rarely wanted to kill because somebody's done terrible injury to one on an emotional or personal level. And often it's better to work with this banal, like a cat example than the more traumatic, because the traumatic will trigger other emotional memories, which may not be beneficial at all in a 4, 5, 6 week rehearsal period. So it's fascinating, you know, what has come through the Stanislavski idea of emotional memory, but it's one example that I give you of what he worked an enormous amount and people still do today. Then he developed, he got frustrated with that and rightfully so. Because you can see the very fine line between traumatic memory and banal memory to trigger the same thing. And he started to work much more with imagination and came up with a phrase, "The Magic If." If I was a person who was in a situation and I then in an impulse wanted to murder A or B, how would I react, if I was this person in the situation, if I was Macbeth in the situation with King Duncan sleeping in my castle and I lose the courage. So I go to my wife and she says, "Come on, you're too full of the milk of human kindness." Come on, come on Mac, get up there, stab, kill the guy, I'm finished. Yeah, get on with it. You know, be much more of a man. Would I gee myself up? If I was the murderer Macbeth in that moment to kill the king, how would I, the actor, you know, Joe Schmoe, how would I actually go and do it? And that's a fascinatingly different approach and become much more popular everywhere. "The Magic If," was the

phrase that Stanislavski and his colleagues at the Moscow Art Theatre came up. So, the imaginative approach or the emotional memory approach, and these are all worked on today, all the time, everywhere in rehearsals. They were so arrogant, Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko they said their discussions and their ideas were as important as the Treaty of Versailles. Of course they were doing a tongue in cheek and ironic, but they felt they were part of a revolution in theatre making, is the key, and they really were. Now another thing that's fascinating is to explore the difference between these guys and Mr. Bertolt Brecht, who I just want to bring up here for a moment. Yeah. Because of course Brecht is working in the 30s and 40s, primarily the 40s in America, you know, he goes into exile, escapes Nazi Germany, and the remarkable German playwright and theorist, Bertold Brecht, extraordinary theatre.

Anyway, and Brecht's ideas, I don't want to go into all of them now 'cause we're not looking at Brecht, we're looking at Stanislavski. But Brecht's main thing was, focus on the social image, the social milieu that the character finds themselves in. Because Brecht is interested in movements of history, of change, of social experience and change. And his idea is more that it's the social external that influences the internal. And it's a brilliant challenge to Stanislavski and remarkably creative to work with. How do you combine, 'cause we all have social images. We may be a CEO of a company. We may be a mother, a father, we may be a student, a professor. We may be a doctor in the hospital, a surgeon, et cetera. We, a pilot. We all have the social image. And Brecht's idea is focus on that because that's the important thing to show how history and society really functions. Because in the end we conform to that and that is the way that society is perceived and we are perceived through that more than our internal life. And of course the obvious thing is the extremely version extreme image of the Jew, by the Nazis, et cetera. So it's, anyway, without going more into Brecht, it's the social type. And out of that, create the character. So work on physical gestures, work on attitudes, of how you portray the social cloth, the social type in language, tone, accent, all the rest of it. And that becomes crucial on the stage. You don't have to go into depth with the inner life. So the creative tension and clash between these two for me is endlessly fascinating and worked on today. And we still work with both all the time. In Elia Kazan's diaries, and he of course is the great director of Brando and many, many others of that generation where he talks about he would try and plant the ideas in Brando, in "Streetcar named Desire." You're a Polish immigrant, you're a working class, you live here, it says the social image of the character and Jessica Tandy, you know, you come from that lost broken world of the South and what has happened there you were the Belle, you know, the princess, it's all gone, it's toast. So he tried to work with both in that and many directors and actors try to now combine these two together. Okay, a couple of wonderful phrases, Stanislavski "Remember there are no small parts, only small actors" And I think we can apply that to any sphere of human life. "Every person who is

really an artist has a desire "to create inside another, far more interesting life "than the one that actually surrounds him." What Peter Brook later calls a heightened charge of intensity in acting and in life and in art that you have this extra charge of intensity. You know, that to make something a moment extraordinary as opposed to ordinary, which we do not only for art, you know, in art, but in many other spheres of life we try to have feel a little bit more alive intensity. Okay? What I want to do is I'm going to show a couple of clips. This is just a picture of Chekhov and Gorky. Chekhov died, of course, young, and he was very, very sick.

We've gone into that already, but they were more or less contemporaries. The differences were kept very subtle and under the carpet. This is Stanislavski later age, acting a general in a Russian play. How you get the sense of he's trying in the eyes to capture something of an inner life. And in the costume, in the body, you know, the general, the outer life. Picture of Stanislavski at an older age, second from the left, the tall guy, this is a year before his death, working on one of his books. "The Actor Prepares" book is really fascinating. It's written in the Socratic method. It's a dialogue between a teacher and a student. The whole thing is a dialogue. And he doing it intentionally, using the ancient Socratic method, believing that is the approach to education, not the approach of today, which is, you know, "Here's the textbook, learn it, memorise it, "it's gospel, goodbye student." For him it's Socratic, it's constant, interactive. This idea of relational collaboration, improvised new ideas, old ideas, and so on. So it he, the form he chooses to write his acting manuals, his books on actor training and rehearsal is what he wants to happen in the studio and in the rehearsal space.

Okay? To show you a couple of examples, this is one of the great examples of method acting of all time. One of the early scenes of "Streetcar Named Desire," Brando and Tandy.

(Video clip of the 1951 film "Streetcar Named Desire" plays)

- You must be Stanley. I'm Blanche.

- Oh, you Stella's sister?

- Yes.

- Oh, hi. Yeah. Where's the little woman?

- In the bathroom?

- Huh? Well, where you from, Blanche?

- Well, I live in Auriol.

– Auriol? Auriol, huh? Oh yeah, that's right. Auriol. That's not my territory. Man, liquor goes fast in the hot weather. You want a shot?

– No, I, I rarely touch it.

– Well, there's some people that rarely touch it, but it touches them often. Oh, hey, you mind if I make myself comfortable? My shirt is sticking.

– Please, please do.

– Be comfortable. That's my motto where I come from.

– It's mine, too. It's hard to stay looking fresh and hot weather. Well, I haven't washed or even powdered. And here you are.

– Well, you got to be careful. You sitting around in a damp thing, you catch a cold. Especially when you've been exercising hard, like bowling is. So well, you're the teacher, aren't you?

– Yes.

– What you teach?

– English?

– Well, I never was a very good English student. How long you here for?

– Why, I don't know yet.

– You going to shack up here?

– I thought I would, if it's not inconvenient for you all.

– Good.

– Travelling wears me out.

– Well, take it easy. What was that?

– Oh, those cats.

– Hey, Stella. What did you do, fall asleep in there?

– Okay, so hold it there. The reason that I love the scene so much in terms of the ideas of Stanislavski, we ask the basic question, "What is the character's objective?" Or in contemp, that Stanislavski phrase, "What is my objective in the scene for the character?" In the contemporary phrase, it would be the actor will say, "What does my

character want?" Brando wants, he knows this is the sister, obviously, he wants to make sure that he is the boss. He wants to make sure that he rules the space even though he's working class. And the apparent, middle/upper class sister is arrived to visit, he wants to make sure that he has the highest status and that this is his space. The way he walks around, dominates, takes off his jacket, takes off his shirt. Everything is, everything is structured physically and with his eyes and his body and tone to achieve that one objective, "What does my character want?" My character wants to establish his power in the space and his status. He is the leader and the boss. She is never going to be, that's the through line. And then he can act all the detail from that. Jessica Tandy, maybe, what does she want? She wants a place to stay, coming to see her sister. She wants to placate and be nice. You know, that's partly part of the social image of the upper class world of the south that she pretends to be part of and has lost. She wants to maintain something of the southern belle of the past and she wants to present a more, if you like, cultured exterior. And then is challenged by his behaviour. So you have both objectives and that creates the dramatic tension that creates the dramatic conflict and connection between these two. Interestingly, what he is doing far more, he's physicalizing everything. His mouth never stops moving. He's chewing gum and that's what creates such power in the body. His mouth never stops subtly moving. And Brando used that technique a lot in other movies, the mouth never stops, the eyes never stop. The look, the glance, his, the body is totally engaged. So the intention, or the objective, is physicalized. For her it's much harder because she ends up being in the receiving end and she's trying to find a way to top him.

Okay, I want to show another one of Mr. Brando, which we all know the scene only too well.

(Video clip of the 1954 film "On the Waterfront" plays)

– I'm glad you stopped by for me. I've been wanting to talk to you.

– Yeah, sure kid.

– [Driver] Where to?

– You just go to River Street and I'll tell you where to stop. I thought we was going to the Garden?

– We are, but I want to cover a bet on the way over. Besides, this will give us a chance to talk.

– Well, nobody ever stop you from talking, Charley.

– Listen, I, the the grapevine says that you got, you got a subpoena?

– Yeah...

– I mean the guys would know you well enough to know that you're not a cheese eater, but they think maybe you should not be on the outside so much. A little on the inside. Have a few little things working for you down at the docks.

– Steady job, a couple extra potatoes. That's all I want.

– Oh sure, that's great when you're a kid, but you're getting on, you're pushing 30s, Sluggy, you know, it's time to, to think about getting some ambition.

– Oh, I always figured I'd live a little bit longer without it.

– Maybe. Look, there's a, a boss loader slot that's open on the new pier we're opening up. You see now it pays 6 cents on every a hundred pounds that goes in and every a hundred pounds that goes out. And you don't have to lift a finger. That's two, three, $400 a week. $400 a week just for the openers.

– I get all that dough, for not doing nothing.

– You don't do anything and you don't say anything. You understand?

– There's more to this than I thought, Charley, I'm telling you there's a lot more.

– You don't mean that you're thinking of testifying against some people that we might know?

– I don't know Charley. I mean, I'm telling you I don't know Charley. That's what I want to talk to you.

– Listen Terry, you know how much those piers are worth that we control through the local?

– I know that.

– Alright. Do you think that Johnny's going to jeopardise the whole setup for one rubber lip ex-tanker walking on his heels? What the- That better?

– That's not the point.

– I could have been a lot better. The point is, we don't have much time.

– I'm telling you I haven't made up my mind yet.

– Oh, make up your mind before we get to 437 River Street!

– Before we get the where Charley? Before we get to where?

– Listen to me, Terry, take the job. Just take it. No questions. Take it! Terry, take this job. Please.

– Charley.

– Please take it.

– Charley... Oh, Charley. Wow!

– Look, I... Look, Kid, okay. How much you weigh, Son? When you weighed 168 pounds, you were beautiful. You could have been another Billie Conn. And that skunk we got you for the manager, He brought you along too fast.

– It wasn't him Charley, it was you. Remember that night in the Garden when you came down my dressing room and said, "Kid, this ain't your night." "We're going for the price on Wilson." You remember that? This ain't your night. My night? I could have taken Wilson apart. So what happens? He gets the title shout outdoors in a ballpark. And what do I get? A one-way ticket to Palookaville. You was my brother Charley. You should have looked out for me a little bit. You should have taken care of me just a little bit so I wouldn't have to take them dives for the short end money.

– Well, I had some bets down for you. You saw some money.

– You don't understand. I could have had class, I could have been a contender. I could have been somebody. Instead of a bum, which is what I am. Let's face it.

– Okay. And hold it there for this scene. What's extraordinary for me with Brando, we get the idea of the social, physical image of the character that, you know, social class and who he is. But of course he combines it with such inner life. We have that extraordinary moment when the brother pulls the gun, he doesn't get angry and shout. He very gently just taps the gun down. It's such an extraordinary moment in acting. And he's entirely chosen here by Brando, because he's so shocked and surprised. But how do you show shock and surprise when your own brother pulls a gun on you? What do you actually do? You know, do you just react with anger and rage, which would be the predictable stereotype reaction or be so subtle and sensitive actually, and he can't believe it? So what's his objective or what does his character want? He wants to show that he is so sad and disappointed that his brother's pulling a gun. He's not showing, his objective is not to show, "I'm furious and angry." "My brother's putting a gun on me, that I've been betrayed." "I could have been a

contender, "I could have been everything, "but you are the one who destroyed all my dreams." But he doesn't show anger at the brother. He said, "No, I could have been this." So what's he playing? What's he acting? The objective is to act my own loss. Not anger at the brother, but my own loss at my, for my own life. And that creates such empathy for the character rather than rage at the brother, which would lessen our feeling towards him as a character. And that is such an intelligent actor, really working. He's thought through, I love to call it, the beats, the little moments. We have little, this objective, this objective, this objective. Every little want or objective that when you break the scene down into various moments, and he's got so many of these that vary all the time. He never stops working. He's doing a, when he was training, actor studio right at the beginning, I think 19, 20 years old. And it was Stella Adler, one of the great acting teachers who all took up the ideas of Stanislavski, introduced, called it the Method acting in America in New York City and so on. And she set them the example and said, "Right, you're all chickens and an atomic bomb is going to drop on New York in the next three minutes." Play whatever you want in the studio space. And Brando went and sat in the middle of the space, took out a cigarette, lit it and just smoked it nonchalantly and all the other student actors running around, quacking and doing whatever chickens do, freaking and so on. And she came over furious. She said, "hat the hell are you doing?" You know, "Why aren't you acting a chicken?" "And you know, terrified the bomb coming." And he just looked at her and he said, "Do you know any chicken that knows what an atom bomb is?" So it showed, and she said from then on she realised she had nothing to teach him. That's he, it just shows an example of the intelligence of the guy. The intelligence.

So this, this idea of method acting, which he and James Dean and many others and many, and De Niro or or so many actors in the world, it doesn't negate intelligence. The magic "If" of imagination, emotional memory. It doesn't negate, it's got to have intelligence. And I'm going to end with saying that's more the British approach, where it's the intelligence, the thought that produces the emotion. It's "What is my thought in the scene." And when you ask the question, "What's my objective?" "What does my character want?" What's the obstacle to getting what he or she wants in this particular scene, it's driven by thought, and the emotion is produced. The bad acting when you watch it, is when they act emotion itself. And in life, I don't think, we play, we feel for people when they act, when they live emotion itself, we feel for them because of what the thought is doing. And the emotion is being produced. It's a subtle but such an important difference that I'm going to go into much more next week. And in English actor training, the word "intention" is used, which is a much more 60s, 70s word, which is maybe more helpful than the Stanislavski word, the "objective," or even the "want". What is my character's intention in the scene? You know, what's Brando's intention here with his brother? The lost broken dreams, but not self-pity, but sadness at his own

disillusionment of what his life will never be. The intention is to play that. The intention is not to play rage at my brother because he's the one who betrayed me and destroyed my dreams. And that makes all the difference for me with great acting and average acting. Okay, I'm going to go into some other ideas and next week we'll look at, we'll look primarily at some film clips. We'll look at about, you know, seven or eight film clips where I'm going to do it from the examples themselves. Okay so, thank you everybody and let's hold it there.

– [Host] David, do you have time for questions?

Q & A and Comments

– Yeah, sure. Romaine. Hi. Wonder much psychological damage he did, probing into the unconscious. Yeah, well he realised that as he was trying to go more into emotional memory, as I was saying, he realised that it would trigger areas of trauma which were not only questionable, maybe ethically, would not be effective in producing the acting in the four or five or six weeks of rehearsal. So rather stick with I use the example, the banal one, the cat as opposed to a more possibly traumatic example.

– Adrian, thank you. Yes, I'll look at Strasberg and Adler and little bit Meisner next week as well. We're going to some of the, you know, the individuals who took Grandpa Stanislavski much further.

– David, I remember, Olivier, asked by a proponent of the Method, how difficult the process would be, to which he replied, "My dear boy, have you ever tried acting?" Yes, Olivier was very sceptical. Olivier was very much what we call, Olivier's own phrase, was, he wanted to act from the outside in, but he realised that he would use the outside in, which is the body and the physical in order to trigger the inner emotional. So when you watch, I've shown Olivier playing Shylock and other characters, he's working from the body, the outside in: the body is doing things which then triggers emotion from the outside to the inside. So he did. "Have you ever tried acting?" I mean he's been facetious and playful, but I think, I mean, Olivier, it's not simple that he's negating it completely because he's aware of his own approach and aware of what Stanislavsky came to realise, that in the end you come up with a series of what was called a physical actions, you got to physicalize the inner intention, physicalize the inner objective. And it's fascinating when you do this with friends and family. You create an intention at a dinner party or with friends or family and you come into it or a coffee or a dinner, whatever it is, a meeting, a work meeting. And you come in with an intention of how you're going to act it, perform it, and how changes completely. And you can have a lot of fun doing it in all different ways. My mother once said to me when I was a teenager, "When you go on a date, David

just think, I know the other person wants me." Make that your intention. Now whether is right or wrong, I don't know, but you come in with a different intention and that produces another emotion. What's really crucial is not, act the emotion itself, 'cause that's got nowhere to go. It's deathly. It's always the conscious objective or the conscious intention in the scene that you want. It's full inner life, outer body. Yep. We're recording of Hamlet with Ophelia. Okay. Dissonance. Great inner life and outer body. Absolutely. It's a combination. It's working with the two always. For me, Brando is the remarkable one who integrates the body and the inner life, the inner intention with the body all the time. It may be the moving mouth in, in "Streetcar," you know, here it's the eyes, the head and the hands. Yeah. He never stops. And that's why it's riveting, because it's body and intention, which produce the emotion all the time.

– Bev,

Q: "Does this method translate across the film?"

A: Yep. I would say all directors know about it. If they don't use it necessarily, but actors all know it and they'll all be trained in it or versions of it and they will bring it before day one of rehearsal, they'll come prepared. You know, Brando used to come to rehearsals. The character proposition worked out, all these nuances, every intention, every objective, all worked out before day one of rehearsal. And Kazan, in his diaries said what he used to do with Brando, he'd go for walks in Central Park 'cause he'd already worked it all out. So all he had to do was tweak and add and take it a bit further and so on. With Jessica Tandy, he had to go through line by line, every objective, every intention, every obstacle to getting what the character wants, you know? So of course Brando starts up there, she starts here, and at the end he rises. Here she comes up. So, you know, because of all the extraordinary amount of work done before. Meryl Streep as well, you know, many of these do the same.

– Richard? Take issue with the inner outer awareness origin. Freud, Stanislavski, was a reflection of the soliloquy. It's of Hamlet. Yes. The soliloquy reveals the inner thoughts of the character and the thought gives rise to the emotion. The soliloquy gives rise to the inner thoughts. But how do you act it, is what I'm really saying. Not the thought itself or not the giving of a soliloquy. How do you portray it so it's believable, not truthful, that how do you portray her as believable for an audience that I'm really acting Hamlet, who's a prince, you know, he's got a fascist for for an uncle, thinks he's killed his father, his mother's in bed with his uncle, all the rest of it. He's 21 years old, he's university student. How does he act those inner thoughts to make it believable? It it's about the acting, not just the content of the soliloquy. Freud added the unconscious motivation, but not the inward look. Okay, Richard? Yeah, I would say that, you know, through Freud and Stanislavsky working with

psychology, these motivations are often unconscious. So Stanislavsky was saying, make the motivation a conscious intention in the scene. What does my character want here? What's the obstacle to getting what they want? What is my character's intention and what's the obstacle? Make that unconscious a conscious choice. And do it.

– Herbert,

Q: "What's the difference between character acting and method acting?"

A: Great question. Character is more where one will have the idea of the social aspect of a character. You know, acting the CEO or I'm acting the village idiot or the prince, princess or the prostitute, whatever. That's more acting the social character. Method acting is going much more with emotional memory or magic, if going into the inner life of the character and trying to plot that, moment for moment, as we say during the scene. What's the intention? What's the objective? Moment for moment?

– Sorry, it's Vivian Lee. Apologies. Thanks, Alice! Okay. Jessica Tandy was in the play. One of, I was thinking of the play. Thank you very much.

– Karen, "I took classes one summer, Stella Adler studio. I was able to observe a class. She was brutal. She said to a young woman, "You do have some talent, but you're awfully stupid." Loved studying there." Great, Karen, thank you. Yeah, they were, I mean, Stanislavsky actually was ruthless, you know, they all were ruthless. You should never forget they saw themselves as the old European approach of, this is the maestro. The Master. And you know, you come to study at the feet of the master, and that's going all the way through Stanislavski and many, many others. You know, in Sarah Adler Strasberg. It's that old idea of, you know, you, you're studying with the master.

– Margaret, wondered about Stanislavsky. Thank you. Sharon. Vivian Lee. Thank you. Okay, again.

– Bev,

Q: "In "Streetcar," what instruction might the director have given Brando?"

A: Well, according to Kazan's diaries, Brando mostly came up with his own ideas. And he would just take him for walks in the park. And what Kazan tried to do mostly was give him a social awareness of character. That he's a Polish immigrant, he's working class, he doesn't have any status really in the society. I mean, he's really the outside of the outsiders. He's, you know, he's a worker, but that's his outer life. His inner life is very high confidence or in contemporary acting language, very high status. So inside is very high status. The

external image he's looked at by other people, including Blanche's character, is the social image, is low status, Polish, immigrant, working class, you know, factory worker. So the external image that others see of that social class and image is low status, but inside, you know, he's high status. And that combination gives often a brilliant way of acting, especially in, in serious drama. Comedy, you flip it the other way around. Or you play with it, even. Woody Allen, you know, all these characters the neurosis, internal status is very, very high. He believes he's highly intelligent, highly knowledgeable. The character, not Woody Allen, the character believes very high status inside, but the external image, the physical look of the character is not exactly handsome and all those things, nerdy and so on. So you play with the external perception and the internal belief, and you play with it with status, and you can do it in life. It's very powerful.

– Sandra, "An actor's objective is never to show the character's objective." Yep, absolutely. You look for the character's intention of the character's objective. Absolutely, Sandra.

– Barbara, thank you. Lane, Ttank you. Avron, thanks.

– Monty, "The tightness of the scene on the Waterfront is filmed to show just the actors from the neck up." Yep. And the light in the shade and the few sounds from the street and acts to the dramatic tension. And we're not obsessed with a car rushing through the streets or driving. It's all about that tension and relationship between the two brothers. It's fantastically filmed, but it's enough to know that we are in a car. Just hint nothing else. And then of course, you know, the pivotal scene between the two brothers and betrayal.

– Okay. Susan, thanks. Paula. The great character Nehemiah Persoff at 102, 1907, 1947. He was accepted by Kazan into the first class. Okay. The great there. Fascinating. Okay. What you've written here, that's wonderful. And the taxi scene, Persoff was a cab driver. Yes. In, in the final frame. Yep. Thank you.

– As I said, next week, I just want to show seven or eight short film clips, which go into them in a bit of detail.

Q: "How does this compare to the approach of a director like Woody Allen, which the actors are only given an outline of a scene and only at the time of acting the scene, not worked out in advance? It's like improvisation."

A: Yes. Many, many directors will use this in theatre and in film, of course, if there's the time and money to do it. But improvise it first. Use your own words and improvise to find what Stanislavski used to call the subtext and find your inner intention. Find your inner objective for that scene. What does my character want, and what's the

obstacle to getting what he or she wants? The two fundamental questions for all acting. What's my character's intention and the obstacle to achieving my intention in the scene? You know, the Charley character. My intention is to convince Terry, my brother Brando, no matter what, you're going to throw the fight and you're going to go with what I tell you. And then of course, the obstacle is his brother. And how's he going to, he has to resort to pulling out a gun, but he plays it in a more conventional expected way. Whereas Brando, as I've tried to show, has the response in a different way. Okay, so with Woody Allen, it would be and, and many others. Let's just improvise it. Use your own words. Discover the intention, discover the wants and the obstacle. Discover the social aspects, play with physicality. And then we make the choices of what will go into it, you know, in the actual performance, the filming or on stage.

– Okay. That's it. Performance over. Thank you very much everybody. Hope you can have a great rest of the weekend, wherever you are.