Stanislavsky's System as an Enactive Guide to Embodied Cognition?

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A Framework for Comparisons

Abstract

This paper presents a model of the structure of subjective experience derived from the work of Konstantin Stanislavsky, and demonstrates its usefulness as a functional framework of enacted cognitive embodiment by using it to articulate his approach to the process of acting. Research into Stanislavsky's training exercises reveals that they evoke a spatial adpositional conceptualisation of experience. When reflected back onto the practice from which it emerges, this situates the choices made by actors as contributing towards the construction of a stable attention field with which they enter into relationship during performance. It is suggested that the resulting template might clarify conceptual distinctions between practices at the unconscious level, and a brief illustrative comparison between Stanislavsky's and Meisner's practices is essayed. A parallel is drawn throughout with the basic principles of embodied cognition, and correlations found with aspects of Dynamic Field Theory and Wilson's notions of 'on-' and 'off-line' processing.

Keywords: embodied cognition, spatial adpositional, Stanislavsky, acting, attention field.

Towards a conversation

Both acting and embodied cognition address the question of how human beings experience and act in the world: what Varela, Thompson and Rosch called *enactive embodiment*. As Blair points out in the Preface to her exploration of acting and cognitive neuroscience in 2008:

> Since acting grows out of our biological being, what we are learning about learning and imagination, and the way emotion, reason, and physicality are ultimately inseparable in the brain's structure and function, has significant implications for how we understand what happens when we act. (Blair 2008, p.xii)

'What happens when we act' is tied irrevocably to what happens when we *are*: the process of acting offers a rich context from which to explore human experience because the actor has to appear to replicate a human being on stage, and must therefore both know what a human being might be and be able to be one – similar to but different from themselves - despite the distractions of being on stage observed by others.

This paper is intended to initiate a conversational exchange – for as Blair and Cook comment: 'It is useful… if work in one field is in conversation with another – particularly when both are interested in some of the same questions.' (2006, p.2-3) However, despite the parallels, it is not my intention to situate the study of acting within the fast developing field of embodied cognition, which has been achieved elsewhere. (Blair, 2008, Kemp 2012, Blair and Cook 2016) Instead, and in the interest of provoking a conversation, the paper presents a model that came directly out of the study of a particular actor training, offering it here because it appears to be an example of embodied cognition in action, providing a how-to guide to being an actor situated in a wider context of a how-to guide to being human.

The Spatial Adpositional Model of Experience (abbreviated as SAME) emerged during exploration of the narrative of exercises in the fictional actor trainings written by acting practitioner Konstantin Stanislavsky. Research comprising detailed textual analysis of these works discovered that via particular sequencing patterns of exercises and student responses, his fictional student Kostya, standing proxy for the reader, incrementally encounters not just his own subjective experience but the (embodied) structure or model within which that experience is encountered, providing him with a broader perspective of all that human experience could be, as well as situating his own experience within the wider context. (Clare 2016b) The terms of the model itself are implicitly evoked by the exercises and build into a coherent whole before being appropriated in a particular way so that they can be deliberately manipulated for the purpose of acting.

In this paper, the underlying model, the SAME, is made explicit. Once its terms of reference are outlined, the paper shows that turning it back on the work from which it came evinces a new reading of Stanislavsky's acting process, resituating it as the way he uses the SAME for the purpose of acting: an attentional practice that operates within the SAME and can now be described using its terms. Mapping this attentional practice reveals a template for the process of acting that both *describes Stanislasvky's* embodied practice and also offers a fresh perspective on acting *as* an embodied practice. As well as the alignment between the principles of the SAME and embodied cognition, additional correlations between aspects of the model and aspects of embodied cognition have been found, and there are fresh insights into several aspects of Stanislavsky's work.

The SAME and the resulting template therefore appear to offer possibilities for the exploration of other approaches to acting: a brief comparison is made between Stanislavsky and Meisner. The underlying model and the approach to using it for the purpose of acting re-frame

Stanislavsky's actor training as an essential training in a language of embodied experiencing, in which the SAME is the primer expressing a generative grammar of enactive embodiment and the template is the syntax of acting.[1]

Basic principles

Bateson suggests that mind is, in a sense, immanent. (1972, p. 317) This is a precursor to contemporary views on distributed and environmental cognition. From this perspective, mind predicates body - the perception of the body and by the body is literally essential to it - and environment, in which the body finds itself. As individuals, however, individually experiencing embodiment and situated in the moment in space and time, that experience is inherently subjective, and we still lack a common language to communicate our own experience of embodiment – for the embodied experience *is* the language. Dance *is* the language of dance. Gesture *is* the language of gesture. To teach actors to act, therefore, which requires the understanding and deliberate manipulation of human experience, is inherently challenging: how are we to teach acting, or talk about teaching it, if we cannot speak of subjective experience?

It is the premise of this paper that Stanislavsky's fictional training reveals that certain aspects of embodied experience can, however, be brought into awareness by the individual and mapped using a spatial adpositional framework. This subjectively perceived, relational construct unconsciously structures the organization of information such as memory, imagination, computation and thought both abstract and literal, and is evidenced in verbal and non-verbal language such as gesture and facial expression. Conversely, that same verbal and non-verbal language reveals specific information about the unconscious structure that informs it, which is rendered visible and readable to those aware of the underlying framework.

Because the individual student is able to articulate their own idiosyncratic patterns within a broader template whose frame of reference is contingent upon the perceptual and sensory capabilities of the human system, this training is both essential and plural. Further, it is commensurate with the ideas of theorists and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines, from Bateson (1972) to Merleau-Ponty,(2013) and particularly in the field of embodied cognition. Introducing his book *Embodied Acting,* Kemp begins from and therefore elaborates Lakoff and Johnson's 'three major findings of cognitive science' (1999, p.3):

> 1 The mind is inherently embodied… because physical experience shapes conceptual thought… 2 Thought is mostly unconscious… 3 Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical, with the sources of the metaphors originating in our kinaesthetic and perceptual experiences of the material world. These experiences generate cognitive systems that reflect our physical environments and form patterns for higher cognitive activity. (Kemp 2012, p.xvi)

[1] Syntax: noun. '1. The way in which linguistic elements (as words) are put together to form constituents (as phrases or clauses). 2. A connected or orderly system: harmonious arrangement of parts or elements.' (Merriam Webster 2016) http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syntax

Stanislavsky's training addresses all three of these points: it evokes the embodied mind and demonstrates its circularity by extracting conceptual principles shaped by physical experience before converting them back into physical experience for the purpose of acting; it addresses processes of which we are usually unaware; and the metaphorical concepts that originate in perceptual experience of the material world are situated in relation to the body in space and time in three dimensions. But while Stanislavsky's work fits in with these broader principles on which embodied cognition is based, as the latter field has developed it has become less clear in which area the former might be situated. Aspects of the one appear to correlate only with aspects - but not fully realised theoretical frameworks - of the other. This is reflected in this paper, as correlations are remarked upon but the framework as a whole remains true only to the broadest principles.

Physical theatre practitioner Jacques Lecoq based his practice on these same basic principles. He instinctively believed that there is a language beneath words and gestures – what Lecoq called the 'fonds poetiques commun' or common language of expression, and that it emerges from embodied experience of the world (Kemp, 2016). This common language articulates both perception and conception, because as Lakoff and Johnson point out, '…the conceptual system makes use of important parts of the sensorimotor system that impose crucial conceptual structure.' (1999, p. 38). It is this general principle – the conceptual structure derived from sensorimotor experience - that is articulated and rendered in practical form by the Spatial Adpositional Model of Experience.

Behind *An Actor's Work*

It must be emphasized that this is not a model 'from' embodied cognition, applied to the work of Stanislavsky. The SAME framework was extrapolated by this researcher during investigations into the work of Konstantin Stanislavsky. (2014, 2016b) It emerged from a detailed exploration of the narrative of the acting exercises in his fictional training diaries. Having been extrapolated, the model is here presented as an independent entity, as an attempt to articulate a perceptual/conceptual language commensurate with the basic principles of embodied cognition, in other words to provide a grammar of enacted cognition at the processual level.

Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938) was a Russian actor, director, and teacher and the first to set out a systematic acting technique. His work was seminal and remains at the forefront of training and continued study today. Reacting against heightened forms of 19th century theatre such as melodrama, and wanting instead to depict authentic human life on stage, his fundamental belief was that truthful acting came from living through the given circumstances of the part. The problem was that actors did not necessarily know how to do this and had a tendency to 'represent' or show themselves off instead of 'experience' or 'live through'. His 'System' was intended to remedy this. Training to use it was all-encompassing and included relaxation, attention, and imagination as well as learning how to divide up the text, find objectives appropriate to both part and actor, and prepare for performance.

However, what is commonly known as 'Stanislavsky's System' actually resists definition. The term is used in different ways by different authors to refer to different aspects of the work, ranging from the whole body of practice to beliefs, strategies, methodology, training, or rehearsal process. Even single authors offer multiple interpretations, for example Benedetti in one sentence calls it '…an activity and a practice… a working method… a process'. (1989, p. xi). Crucially, Stanislavsky himself said there was no System, only nature, and his work was to get closer to it (Carnicke 2009, p. 67). Furthermore, the translator's note to *An Actor Prepares* states unequivocally that 'There is no claim made here to actual invention' (2008a, no page number

given). This research suggests that what Stanislavsky did invent was a strategy: a systematic way to encounter human process and apply it to acting. He was also the first person to write about training in an accessible way.

First published in 1936, *An Actor Prepares* (Stanislavski, 2008a) influenced generations of English actors and teachers, and even now continues to sell well. The more recent translation reclaims the original title of *An Actor's Work* (Stanislavski 2008c)[2]. My research suggests that Stanislavsky was not just the first person to set out a sequence of exercises and a way of working but that he did so in a uniquely compelling way. He addressed the problem of articulating experience and embodied practice by manipulating the narrative form of the text, and the text itself therefore evidences the strategies he used.

An Actor's Work is fictional. It does not purport to be a 'true account', to contain a 'model acting course', or be a 'how-to' guide. Ostensibly a student diary written by the protagonist Kostya, this imaginary narrative must have been devised for the benefit of the reader, not the student participants, who do not exist, and never did. Stanislavsky's choices about the formulation of that narrative, therefore, are significant and, it turns out, revealing.

Exploring the structure of the narrative using the epistemological constructs of difference, re-iteration and abduction (an analytical methodology derived specifically for this purpose from the work of Gregory Bateson)[3] revealed intricate underlying patterns including rhetorical structure to chapters, repetition of patterns at micro and macro scales, patterns of success and failure, and regular distribution of subjective and objective perspectives (Clare, 2014). Apparently random consequences of practice could now be seen to actually serve the narrative, providing extra information that situates the protagonist Kostya's story within a wider context: human experience itself.

On the face of it, the first part of *An Actor's Work* addresses *Perezhivanie* (experiencing), while Part II (originally published in 1949 as *Building a Character* (2008b)) addresses *Voploshchenie* (embodiment). However, in the first text, the students (and the reader) undergo a systematic, incremental encounter with their own unconscious experience, articulated within an embodied frame of reference: both literally and figuratively situating that experience as being embodied in space (and time). This is deep structure, predicated by the surface structure of the exercises, the narrative and the results of the exercises. The students discover their own (embodied) experiencing. Once the model is fully articulated in the individual, students learn how to work and communicate with other subjectively experiencing bodies before applying the model of experience to the process of acting. In the second book, the (embodied) framework of experience evoked in the first part is applied to the experience of embodiment. Now, the body is

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[2] Different commentators spell the name differently. My own preference is to follow Sharon Marie Carnicke and use the Russian –y ending. Others use the –i ending.

[3] 'The fundamental relation is *difference*. These basic relational distinctions are, Bateson asserted, the basis of everything from the simple cell division that results in human life to the most complex creative work such as Balinese art.' (Clare, 2016b)

articulated in the terms of the deep structure. Now, the students experience their own embodiment.[4]

The conceptualization of embodied human experience evoked in the training diaries takes the form of a coherent experiential model, spatial adpositional in type, and consistent with the experiential realist view of cognitive linguists Lakoff and Johnson (1980). This model exposes at least some of the rules of metaphoric thinking via structure and organisation. Because it functions at the level of structure, it is essentially a meta-model, or model of a model. While superficially different, it also shares structure with other proposed frameworks for understanding human process, such as Pinker's '…space as a metaphor for time…' (2008, p. 26), Damasio's '…spatial and temporal relationships among entities…' (2000, p. 318) and his 'as-if body loops' (2000, p. 281), and Fauconnier's 'space builders' and 'space configuration' (1998, p. xxiii). For while these conceptual frameworks appear to vary, at the meta-level they actually share the referents of space, time, and relationship, and can also be represented or conceptualised adpositionally.

The Spatial Adpositional Model of Experience

The spatial adpositional framework is unconscious, predicated on our subjective experience of ourselves as human bodies physically manifest in space and time. Embodied cognition in action, the unconscious structure profoundly affects how we process information and this is evident in behaviour and language. For example, prepositional phrases litter conversation and are informed by and expressed in gesture. Prepositions combine with their referents to indicate semantic relations between subject and context: they are essentially relational. They are also essentially structural and infer three-dimensional perception of the world. This view literally articulates how we construct understanding of our experience: in terms of perceived reality.

Jacob von Uexkull labelled perception of the world, experienced by and through the capacity of species-specific bodies, the umwelt: literally 'surround-world'. (Brentari 2015). That is to say it is inherently embodied because it is biologically limited by the sensory apparatus of the physical body. Stanislavsky's training implicitly addresses this very subject, teaching the student to contextualize their individual umwelt within a wider framework of the human umwelt: the spatial adpositional umwelt. This both frames the acting process and opens the student's awareness to what is humanly possible. There are two systems here: Stanislavsky's System of acting – or what to do in order to act truthfully - and the system behind the System, referred to by Stanislavsky as the 'system of nature'.[5] This is the SAME. A description of the model first appears in Clare 2016b, and is cited in the outline below.

The key principle of Stanislavsky's meta-system is that '…something is going on inside the human being, and it can be seen and interpreted by others, on the outside.' In other words, there is an *inner world* and we are *leaking information* about it. It shares characteristics with the outer world in three ways. First, 'experience is mediated by *the senses* – sensory data is

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[4] Paradoxically, focus on Stanislavsky's 'inner' world - *Perezhivanie* - is articulated in terms of the world exterior to the body, and focus on the 'outer' world – *Voploshchenie* – is actually on the interior.

[5] There is also a third system – the system of training that allows students to discover both the System of acting and the system behind the System (Clare 2016b).

transformed and re-presented in internal awareness: a kind of virtual reality of the mind.' It is important to note that this is not just about images, and the mind, in this model, is embodied. Furthermore, images are not only visual but fully physically encoded. Second, 'the inner virtual reality is *spatial*… in three dimensions – a virtual space' in which information is experienced as being comparatively closer or further away, up or down, right or left. All sorts of information is subjectively perceived as stored and/or accessed in this way, from sensory to propositional, processual and abstract. As we refer to this data, we might in turn leak information about it, through *gesture* – indicating relative location (both egocentric and allocentric) via spatial referencing; type of information via type of gesture; and characteristics via literal and metaphoric characteristics of gesture (see, for example, Ekman and Friesen 1972) – *body language* – indicating response and relationship both literal and metaphoric via major and minor muscle tension patterns – *and facial expression* – indicating response to and relationship with information via eye movements and complex patterns of expression (see, for example, Ekman 2016).

The third principle is that *relationship* is crucial: '…we can shift perspective in relation to information in this virtual space'. For example, subjective and objective: 'in' and 'not in'. We can shift between egocentric and allocentric perspectives. This correlates with Merleau-Ponty's distinction between 'body schema' – the sense of the body – and 'body image' – a representation of the sense of the body in imagic form, and with Wilson's distinction between 'on-line' and 'off-line' processing (Wilson 2002, p. 635, see below).

The way information is arranged in Stanislavsky's inner world as evoked by his fictional training, then, is orientational, or adpositional, because it is 'orientated in positional relationships to a source in a notional three-dimensional space.' In an adpositional model relationship is key. Therefore, in this perceptual model, the 'circumstances of a person's life at any given moment are located perceptually in space, [adpositionally] *around* the body… At any given moment, we are experiencing a particular configuration of available thoughts, memories, and feelings: I have called this an *attention field*.' (Clare 2016b)

'Time… is conceptualized here as a line: a time line.' Stanislavsky uses multiple temporal sequences: units, objectives, actions, and bits. We can embody these or not by shifting perspective in relation to the line. On the line is subjective, embodied, experiencing the situation that is located on the line. Off the line is objective, not embodied, observing the line and the situation from a distance.[6] If each moment is visualized as a virtual space around us, the passing of time is perceived literally, in relation to the body, creating a kind of virtual passageway or tunnel. A time tunnel, perhaps.

Stanislavsky's work frequently involves making lines of mental images (2008a p.64), and this is often referred to as a two-dimensional projection onto a movie screen. For example, Blair refers to the 'image-stream' and calls this the 'movie-in-the-brain metaphor', pointing out that Stanislavsky was 'adamant about the actor's need for a rigorous image-based score.' (2008, p.78). Similarly, Gillett says 'We create a series of images *that are projected like a film onto the*

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6 It is important to distinguish between Wilson's vocabulary (from computing) - 'on-line' and 'off-line' - and the terminology used here - 'on *the* line' and 'off *the* line' - which states the subject's relationship to the visualized temporal sequence that comprises the embodied conceptualization of time. While they actually denote the same thing, they comprise different perspectives, since the underlying metaphor is different.

screen of our mind's eye.' (2007, p. 113) But the SAME shows that the lines are conceptual, and not so much actual lines as *linear sequences,* and that using two-dimensional movie related analogies might actually be missing a significant distinction in the work, and might actually be intended to be more like what we would now think of as virtual reality.[7] The three-dimensional attention field – that can be dynamically engaged with in imagination - provides a much richer and more complex and responsive context than a 'movie-in-the-brain,' a two-dimensional construct to which the actor can only relate as separate. Reframing this as an attention field facilitates full, dynamic and repeated re-embodiment of a three-dimensional construct.

Within this framework certain phenomena operate, such as emotion memory: I can be minding my own business on my balcony, when the sight of the lantern on the wall reminds me of a ship's lamp and takes me straight back to the Liberty Clipper, and I see exactly what I saw then, experiencing the sights, sounds, and sensations of the sea as I sit (present tense) on deck. This is an example of distortion of present moment experience: I am here, on the balcony; I am also there, on board ship. 'There' is now 'here'. There are other types of perceptual distortion, however, for the actor to contend with, for the inner world is not an accurate representation of the outer world. For example:

> In the 1952 film 'Pat and Mike', Katherine Hepburn plays a tennis match with (the real life tennis champion) Gorgeous Gussie Moran. Director George Cukor and Warren Newcombe, in charge of special effects, show us her subjective perspective when her (evidently unsuited) fiancé is watching her: her racket is tiny, while Gussie's is enormous… (Clare 2016b)

The ball is minute; the net unsurmountable: her in-the-moment perceptions of object size, distance, and relative position are all distortions of the physical world.

Merleau-Ponty is also interested in distortions of perception. He writes that a female patient had described someone looking at her as though it had struck her physically, and she could not recall or describe the person who had done so: 'For her it is not a matter of what happens in the objective world, but of what she encounters, what touches her or strikes her… The hallucination is not a perception, but it has the value of reality…' (1945: 400). He is describing the very type of perceptual distortion that Warren Newcombe illustrated with his special effects. In the work of Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor reveals (leaks) the perceptual distortions that underlie and re-inform experience of the world – metaphors that reflect argument as war, for example, where the perception of the self and the other as 'embodied fighters' characterises arguments as 'attacking' or 'defending', and verbal and non-verbal communication are weapons that have the capacity to 'shoot down', 'wipe out' or 'deflect' (1980, Chapter 1).

Being observed is distorting per se. However, it is essential to the nature of performance. Without an audience there is no performance. Unmanaged distortion is therefore a serious problem for the performer. The chemical, biological or psychological causes of why the awareness of the gaze of the other is distracting are immaterial. What matters is to learn to

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[7] In the chapter on imagination, exercises evoke active and passive engagement with mental images (pp.57-58), being present in the imagined situation (pp,60-63), and three points of view in relation to the image stream: active participation, watching as though present, watching as though not present.

understand, predict and manage the actor's own individual distortions in the interest of performance. To avoid this, we must find a way to maintain attention, resist distraction and respond spontaneously in performance whatever is going on around us. This is fundamental for the actor. Stanislavsky addresses the problem by prescribing a carefully designed and deliberate management of the attention field. Turning the SAME back onto Stanislavsky's work - from which it was derived – reveals the details of how to use it for the purpose of acting.

Generative Relational Attention Field Theory

Tribble refers to 'a certain deployment of attentional resources' in which an actor 'must banish certain forms of thought and harness others.' (2016, p.138) Stanislavsky tells us exactly how to achieve this. It has been established in the SAME that the circumstances of a person's life are situated around the body in a notional field and perceived adpositionally. The given circumstances of a part must be assembled in the same way, with the same disposition to the actor in performance. The attention is limited to a specific and coherent field. That field is the given circumstances of the part.

If the attention field *is* the given circumstances, then the actor's work is to construct the field. Crucially, structural patterns and consistencies within this field, as well as the actor's responses to them, are apparent to the observer as that information is leaked both verbally and non-verbally.

Stability and consistency is also important. If being observed disrupts the actor's attention, then it takes attention away from the carefully prepared programme of 'things to think about' that we have designed for the performance and interrupts the ability to focus. It distorts the perception of both internal and external reality. In order to prevent distortion, we must maintain attention within a stable, pre-prepared, attention field (for Stanislavsky, the given circumstances). Theoretically, once it is stable, an attention field can sustain multiple repetitions, becoming generative and responsive.

The more familiar circles of attention are now re-framed as attentional training devices, and not an end in themselves. They teach the actor to manage attention within the specified field (delineated by focal length), so that they are able to access and maintain the attention field of the given circumstances during preparation and performance.

During preparation the actor moves in and out of the developing attention field to create what they will experience during the play, using 'if' to situate themselves 'in' the given circumstances, until it is stable and they can repeat it again and again (see Figure 1, over). During the actual performance, they assume a subjective relationship with the assembled given circumstances so as to experience them dynamically in moment-to-moment perception: embodying them in exactly the same way that they would in their own lives. The actor is 'in' or 'not in' them, they can tell, and so can others, because it is indicated in their behaviour as they reference the inner world.[8]

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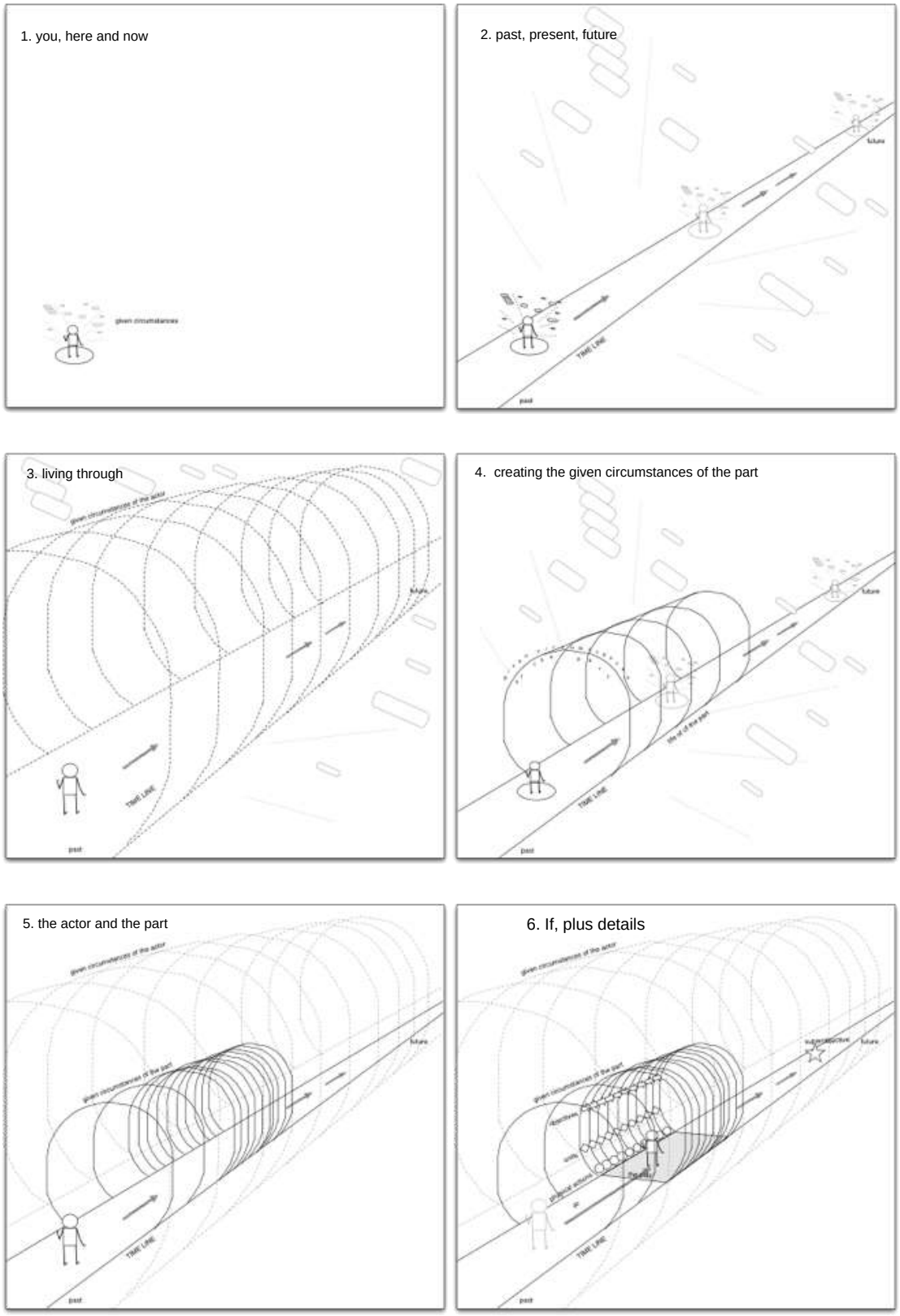
[8] This can be checked subjectively by comparing the eye movements and relational gestures present when thinking or talking about an imagined event as though you are actually in the situation (seeing the environment around you, the ground beneath your feet, the bodily sensations, as they are in that context) with seeing yourself in that situation (including the sense of yourself, but firmly situated in the here and now). This difference is also illustrated in language: there is a contemporary tendency to relate events in a colloquial

Moreover, 'The Stanislavsky actor must generate and assemble the given circumstances of the part in the same spatial relationship to their own body as their own given circumstances occur.' (Clare 2016b). This creates authentic response, on the premise that information is organised in the attention field according to type, and that type of information provokes associated or linked type of response (including emotional response).[9]

'historic present', re-enacting ('I was, like, "don't you talk to me like that") instead of reporting speech and emotion ('I was very annoyed and told her so').

[9] For example, identifying the relative disposition (spatial relationship) and characteristics of information that provokes feelings of abandonment and situating imagined given circumstances here with the same characteristics will provoke those feelings when those given circumstances are accessed. This provides a new reading of the term 'analogous.'

Figure 1: Creating the attention field of the given circumstances.



The attention field as a construct seems to have promise for a broader application. The field itself can vary spatially, temporally and relationally. It seems to perform a useful function of delineating a range of choices arranged in a distinctive way and pre-programmed during rehearsal to be linked to a sequence of actual events to be engaged with in real time during performance. Because both the relationship and the generative quality exemplified in Stanislavsky's usage of the attention field seem important for the process of acting, it was therefore decided to distinguish this particular use of attention fields as something that might be applied to other acting practice and use these qualities in the name: to call it Generative Relational Attention Field Theory (Abbreviated as GRAFT).

Three core principles can be delineated: the underlying principle that human beings unconsciously leak information evidencing process (based on the SAME model); the functional principle of attention fields; and the causes, effects and uses of perceptual distortion.

The GRAFT proposes that actors prepare for performance by constructing an attention field according to the principles of their particular practice and within the framework of the SAME, even if their practice is to work instinctively. They intentionally create 'temporally chained sequences'[10] of attentional acts and possibilities. During the performance actors inevitably leak information about their underlying principles – whatever system or method is employed. Therefore, bringing out the attention fields of different practitioners might make explicit the spatial adpositional differences in the way that they conceptualise and practice acting. This is the very information that is non-verbally leaked during performance via subtleties of body language, gesture and facial expression.

Now that the model and the template have been outlined in full, it is possible to show how they might be situated in relation to the field of embodied cognition by identifying some correlations, how they shed light on certain aspects of the work of Stanislavsky himself by reframing them, and how they can be used to make comparisons between practices by using them as a lens through which to re-view the work.

Correlations

The relationship between cognitive science and the work of Stanislavsky has been observed by commentators such as Pitches (2006) and Wyman (2008), and Blair in particular has set out a case for considering Stanislavsky as a pioneer in the understanding of what he called the 'human system'. (Blair 2000, p. 204). The underlying premise of this article is that the unconscious principles of Stanislavsky's actor training allow the student to encounter in practice Lakoff and Johnson's fundamental proposition that 'Our conceptual system is grounded in, neurally makes use of, and is crucially shaped by our perceptual and motor systems…We can only form concepts through the body…' (1999, p.555). Their view literally and figuratively *incorporates* the subjective; Stanislavsky shows how to do this in practice for the purpose of acting.

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[10] Gallese uses this phrase when writing about mirror neurons and the planning and execution of 'goal-related motor acts': these comprise '…intentional 'action sentences', that is, temporally chained sequences of motor acts properly assembled to accomplish a more distal goal-state.' (2009, p.168). If parietal mirror neurons code the 'overall action intention' then perhaps actors are exploiting this ability on a larger scale. In these terms the actor's constructed attention field is a chained sequence of intentional 'action sentences', that lasts the duration of the performance.

Because Stanislavsky's cognitive architecture is constructed according to the principles of the physical world in which the embodied individual acts, it also has strong correlations with Varela, Thompson and Rosch's *embodied action*. In similar terms to those of Lakoff and Johnson, Shapiro summarises this approach:

> …embodiment involves a deep connection between perception and action. (…) Cognizers make their world, in some sense, as a result of activities that reflect the idiosyncracies of their bodies and perceptual systems. (2011, p.55).

The SAME could be accounted for in its entirety using this basic proposition. Indeed, its three-dimensional, spatial nature could even be considered to be self evident, if as Varela, Thompson and Rosch assert, '…cognitive structures emerge from the recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided.' (1991 p.173).[11]

In addition to the fundamental correlation between Stanislavsky's work and these definitions of defining embodied cognition, however, there are three other developments in the field of cognitive science that are worth mentioning in relation to the task of the actor, and whose relevance is highlighted by the SAME. The value of Wilson's 'on-' and 'off-line' processing as a parallel to associated and dissociated engagement with specific constructs will have become clear during exposition of the model. Also relevant is the work of the Dynamic Field Theory Research Group, and also some of the research that has recently taken place on visual-spatial abilities.

First, acting is a process of both pre- and re-situated cognition. If the SAME is a kind of cognitive architecture, articulating a taxonomy of spatial relationship between concepts and emerging out of 'on-line' embodied cognition, then the attention field is a selection of perceptual and sensorimotor choices, both unconscious and deliberate, operating within that architecture. The attention field is therefore what Wilson calls a facultative system: 'temporary, organized for a particular occasion and disbanded readily… retain[ing] its identity only so long as the situation and the person's task orientation toward that situation did not change'. (2002, p. 630.) In Wilson's terms, the Stanislavsky actor deliberately revisits this particular facultative system - the attention field - when they revisit the situation (given circumstances of the part) and their task orientation (subjective/living through). The organization of the system is relationally distributed between the situation, the person and the orientation, and is open, in that it responds to its environment during rehearsal and performance.

Wilson usefully highlights the same distinction made by Merleau-Ponty when she notes that the claim that cognition is situated does not always apply, for what she calls 'off-line' cognitive activity 'is by definition not situated.'

> …one of the hallmarks of human cognition is that it can take place decoupled from any immediate interaction with the environment. We can lay plans for the future, and think over what has happened in the past. We can entertain counterfactuals to consider what might have happened if circumstances had been different. We can construct mental representations of situations we have never

[11] The very use of the word 'structure' indicates the conceptual relationship between the sensorimotor patterns and the context in which they occur: space and time. Cognitive structures are *structures*, which is to say experienced in spatial, relational terms.

> experienced, based purely on linguistic output from others. …our ability to form mental representations about things that are remote in time and space… is arguably the sine qua non of human thought… (Wilson, 2002, p. 626).

This 'ability to form mental representations about things that are remote in time and space…' is not only the sine qua non of human thought, it is exactly what the actor does in preparation for performance: the sine qua non of acting.

While the preparation of the actor to perform is necessarily decoupled from the situation of performance because they are separated in time, however, this type of what Wilson calls 'off-line' cognition is not, necessarily decoupled from the embodied self. Mental processing, including the use of imagery, is not only visual, and 'images' are not necessarily 'image-like'. She points out that sensorimotor systems are implicated in mental imagery, memory and reasoning: for example 'Phenomenologically, recalling an episodic memory has a quality of "reliving," with all the attendant visual, kinesthetic, and spatial impressions.' (2002, p. 633). Preparation for a role, then, is an example of '…the use of bodily resources for cognitive purposes not directly linked to the situation.' (2002, p. 629)

Second, Dynamic Field Theory works towards a new and intentionally integrated theory of cognition. Spencer and Schoner write in the introduction to the work of the DFT Research Group that they are aiming:

> Toward a unified theory of cognitive dynamics… DFT provides an *embodied* account, that is, neural processes are grounded in sensory and motor processes that are anchored on a body situated in a physical environment. …we are pursuing a general theory that spans perception, action, and cognition. …carrying forward a set of common principles as we move from lower- to higher-level cognition. (Spencer and Schoner 2015, p. xiii-xiv).

In this Primer, the Group discusses a variety of aspects of cognitive dynamics that could be relevant to the consideration of the process of acting. This paper has raised several conceptual differences that might respond to such analysis. The Group outlines different types of attention fields (spatial attention fields; scene attention fields; feature attention fields; transformation attention fields; contrast fields; and retinal fields) within which attentional foregrounding, hills and peaks of activation, and sequential transitions occur. Although these are short-term attention fields, they can be related to the constructed attention field of the actor, a long-term, artificially sustained field with a complex contextual function. It should perhaps be noted that all these fields operate within the parameters of the SAME and are differentiated according to its terms. They are all aspects of the visual experience of a three dimensional environment and can be mapped in relation to each other in it.

Other potentially relevant aspects of DFT include descriptions of working memory fields as feature, spatial, or scene, and the distinction made between sequential versus parallel processing modes. In a chapter on 'Integrating perception-action with cognition' (pp. 197-226), Schneegans, Spencer, and Schoner address the attention field and working memory patterns of individuals in relation to objects in the real world – it would be extremely useful to extend this to imagined objects and the conceptual world within which actors function and construct the

lives of their parts over time. DFT apparently offers several promising avenues for investigation of the process of acting.

Third, a rather different prospect is offered by the exploration of different types of processing abilities. The process of the transformation of sensory-based information into recalled information is highly important for actors (this was the first principle of the SAME). While researching the ability to recall and represent navigational routes, Blajenkova, Motes and Kozhevnikov found that

> …individual differences in environmental representations are related to individual differences in visual-spatial processing abilities that high visual-spatial abilities may lead navigators to produce survey-type representations after only a single exposure to a route. (2005, p. 108).

It follows that if spatial abilities affect the type of representations formed, and Stanislavsky's actor must form clear representations of imagined temporal-spatial environments, then selecting students who might be expected to do well within this framework means identifying and picking those who have strong visuo-spatial abilities during the audition process. Similar criteria might apply to other acting systems and methodologies. For example, Kozhevnikov, Kosslyn, and Shephard (2005) show how the distinction between the processing of object properties and spatial properties in the visual system also pertains in mental imagery and that there is no correlation between object and spatial ability in individuals. 'The results also indicate that object visualisers encode and process images holistically, as a single perceptual unit, whereas spatial visualisers generate and process images analytically, part by part.' (2005, p. 710). Could there be a correlation between the Chekhov actor, operating holistically, and object visualisers? Would this contrast with a similar correlation between the spatial visualizers and the Stanislavsky System that predicates the ability to use space to organise time? Does the SAME only resonate with visuo-spatial thinkers or is it equally recognisable by object visualisers?

In addition, it may be possible to ascertain whether students perceived by teachers to be 'good at acting' might score highly on visuo-spatial abilities if the Stanislavsky System is preferred, and whether different conservatoires are already – knowingly or unknowingly - selecting students who have different abilities, indicating a particular cognitive style, using intuition or evidence in body language.

Reframes

As well as raising points about acting in general, using the model and the template to re-articulate aspects of Stanislavsky's practice highlights several possible shifts or changes in perspective on his own work.

First, as well as re-situating the whole System within the SAME cognitive architecture and the given circumstances as an attention field, the spatial adpositional model provides a coherent framework that *integrates* Stanislavsky's work because it situates the embodied actor within the attention field, bringing all the actor's embodied experience – which includes their embodied use of all aspects of the System - with them. The system is no longer fragmented because everything is related to the body of the actor as the source of the SAME and the attention field. Thus once the attention field is fully realised, it becomes clear how 'if' is not the only way to access the given circumstances: each aspect of the System is related to this central process and can play a part in triggering requisite engagement with the attention field. The

framework allows the actor to discover, develop and deliberately use the triggers that work for them.

Second, there is a linguistic difficulty with the verb 'to act', and related terms such as 'action' and 'enact'. This can lead to opaque statements such as 'the actor has to act'.[12] Now, what the actor has to do (action) can be reframed using the SAME as meaning 'the actor has to fully engage with a generative, relational attention field.' This seems much more specific, understandable, achievable and measurable.

Third, it has been claimed that Stanislavsky's book potentiates in its first part the embodied self in relationship with space and time, and in its second the experienced body in relationship with space and time. The phrases *embodied experiencing* and *experiencing embodiment* express the inextricable relationship between the two terms, and using them avoids the separating effect of saying 'experiencing *and* embodiment'. It circumvents the false polarisation. Furthermore, as well as situating the dynamic body in the context it also situates the body as experiential mediator and qualifies the relationship.

Somewhat tangentially, the SAME can also be used to shed light on conceptual structures. For example, Stevens describes meshed expertise as '…a kind of vertical integration between the low-order flow of embodied coping… and higher-order, more reflective cognitive aspects' (Stevens, 2016, p.178). Since he is referring to preparation (higher order) and performance (low order flow) it provides a parallel with Wilson's on-line and off-line processing cited earlier (2002, p.635) pertinent to the actor's preparatory relationship with the time line, eventually situated within the wider field of the given circumstances. The vocabulary used infers a vertical rather than horizontal organization of the relationship, which 'makes sense' because this more easily allows for simultaneous rather than alternative function. This distinction fits with a model in which the temporal is mapped horizontally and distinctions made using spatial sorting on the horizontal plane. Verticality therefore appears to correlate with the feasibility of integration.[13]

A comparison

Finally, if the SAME does articulate the unconscious terms of some kind of naturally occurring spatial adpositional framework, an explicit version of Lecoq's fonds poetiques commun, then it might be possible to use it, and the GRAFT template, to examine other acting practices. To that end, a brief sample comparison is now undertaken between the underlying principles of Stanislavsky and Meisner.

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[12] Within the System it can be used to designate an objective or task, the *action* that is executed in order to achieve the task, a physical action, or the basic principle of what the actor has to do, depending on the version of his work being used.

[13] It does not presuppose it, because while vertical, Dreyfus's conceptual model does not appear to allow for simultaneity (the edifice of knowledge) invokes alternative location within it. Top-down and bottom-up processing models allow connection on the vertical plane using direction. The linguistic framing of cognitive architectures is inherently revealing only if it is considered as related to the experiencing body.

Sanford Meisner (1905-1997) left the Group Theatre, of whom he was a founder member along with Strasberg, Harold Clurman and Cheryl Crawford, because he did not agree with Strasberg's emphasis on emotional memory. He observed: 'Affective memory has a tendency to make actors more introverted… many actors are *inherently* introverted. Introverted actors tend to retreat into their thoughts, where they can't react fully to what goes on around them.' (Esper, 2008, p. 215)

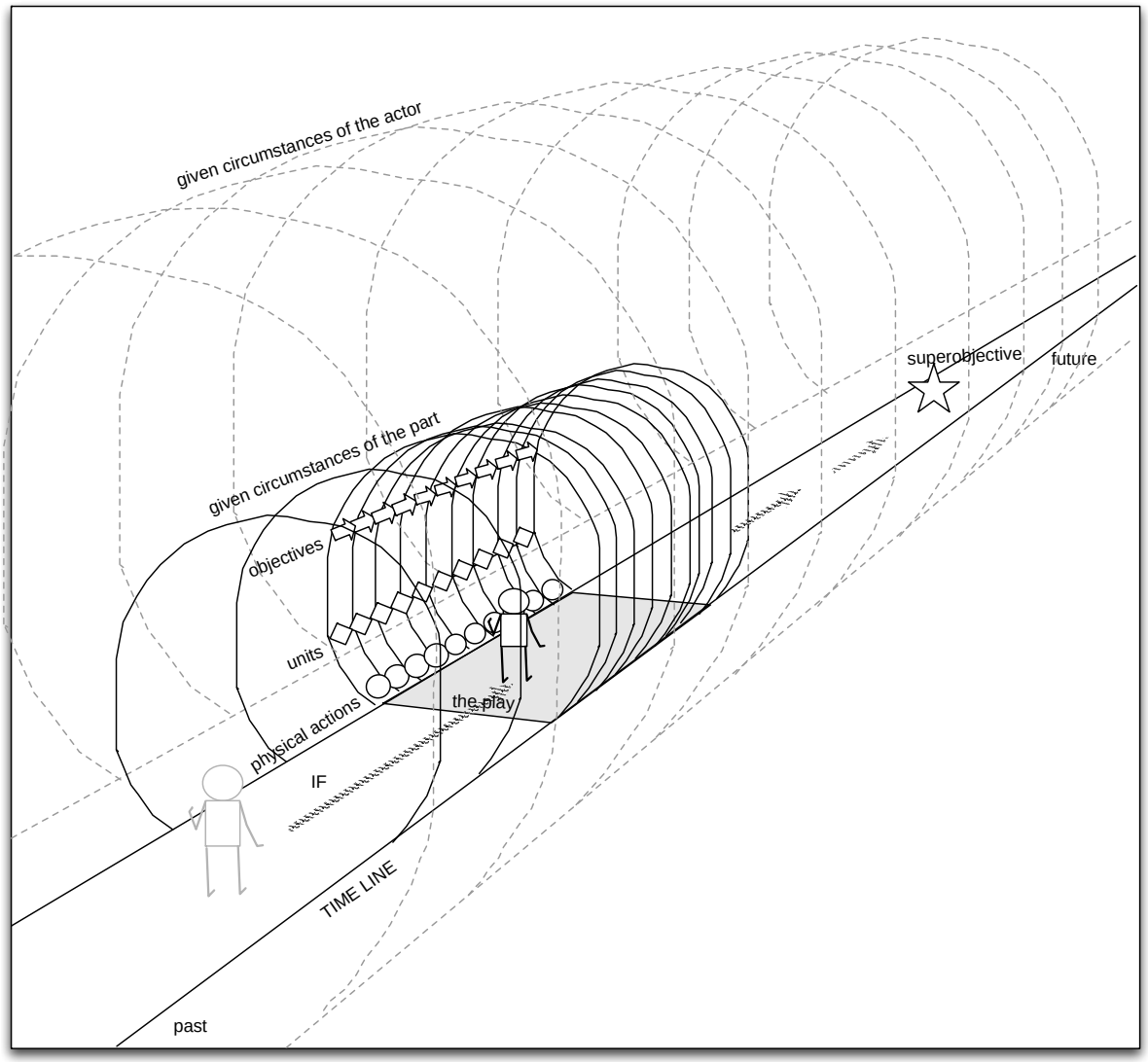
Meisner's approach 'emphasized *doing* and *reacting* as the key to liveness and spontaneity on stage.' (Gordon, 2006, p.87) His fundamental belief was that emotional truth comes from allowing instinctive response to observed reality in the moment, but the problem is that this impulse is habitually inhibited, because thinking prevents access to instinct: we both conceal ourselves and prevent spontaneous response. Meisner worked towards the 'reality of doing': the actor's instinctive response in the moment: the 'pinch and the ouch'. In his training, students repeatedly focus attention on observing and responding to a scene partner in the famous 'repetition exercise', eliminating difficulties and inhibitions as they emerge. In terms of the GRAFT, the result is the ability to focus deliberately within an attention field that includes self and other, and to respond instinctively to stimuli within that field.[14]

What differences are there between the construction of Stanislavsky's and Meisner's attention fields during preparation? Using Wilson's 'on-line' and 'off-line' designations, one might suppose that the performance would take place 'on-line', while the preparation would be 'off-line'. However, there are differences here.

Stanislavsky's attention field consists of the given circumstances (see Figure 2 below), including physical reality, with the exception of the audience (the actor imagines a 'fourth wall' and the attention field therefore does not accommodate the presence of the audience).

Figure 2: Stanislavsky's attention field: the given circumstances and 'if'.

[14] My interpretation is based on training with Scott Williams, who himself trained with Meisner in the 1970s. Scott noted the lack of critical analysis on his work, and attributed it to the difficulty of explaining what Meisner was doing objectively. Nick Moseley's recent book *Meisner in Practice* (2012) talks the reader through the exercises.



The actor is subjectively situated in the field using 'if': asking them the question 'what would you do 'if' you were living through these given circumstances?' This situates choices made - as well as the performance - as being made both 'on-line' and 'on *the* line'. The objective is always within awareness both visual and kinesthetic. There is a sense of forward momentum as the actor moves psychophysically towards the objective. The character does not exist as a separate entity at any point in the process.

Meisner's attention field does feature imaginary circumstances, but the Meisner actor lives not through but *under* these *imagined* circumstances: there is a difference between living through and living under. However, these circumstances recede in the interest of consistent focus on experiencing relationships in the immediate present (see Figure 3 below).

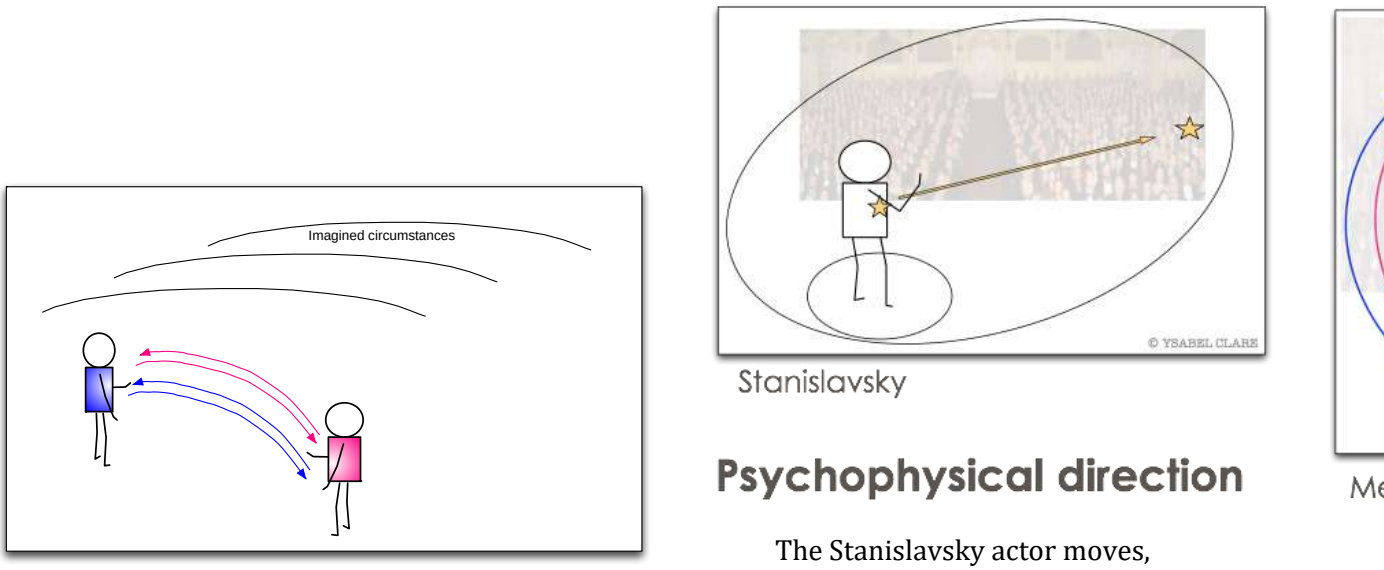
Figure 3: Meisner's attention field: the other.

This attentional sub-field is a dynamic circular process situating the to and fro relationship between on stage partners. It would appear that the actor works almost continually 'on-line', although there is some brief textual analysis that takes place 'off-line' during the process. Like Stanislavsky there is, conceptually speaking, no **character** during the process or in performance.

Comparing the two fields, Stanislavsky's attention field is a linear representation – a perceptual time tunnel - and a subjective perspective to it: no character. Meisner's attention field is dual but simultaneous: the dynamic relationship with the other within a larger attention field of imaginary circumstances. Like Stanislavsky the actor is not separate from the character but subjectively living in the field.

When they are visualized in three dimensions, these practices result in a different psychophysical direction or energy flow in performance and this can also be compared (see Figure 4 below).

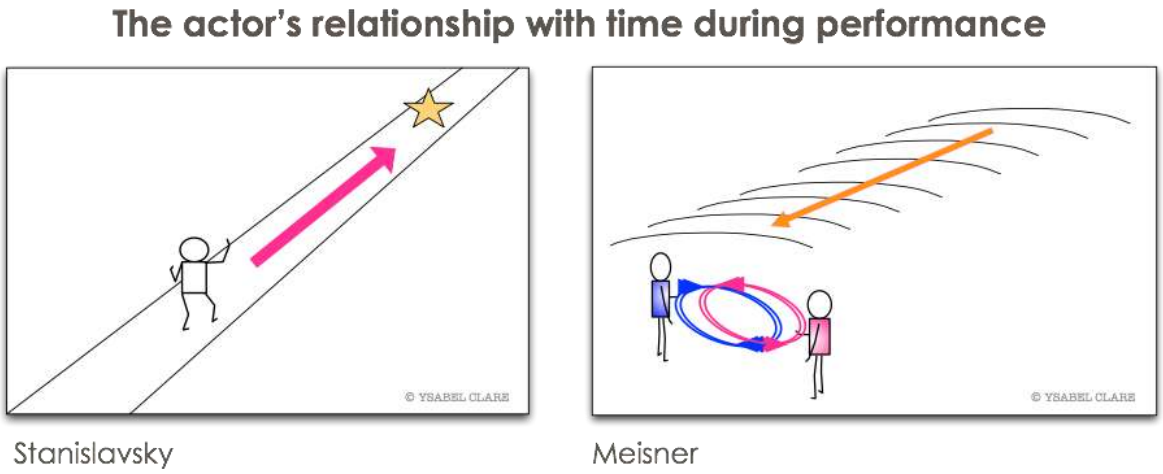
Figure 4: Comparison of psychophysical direction.



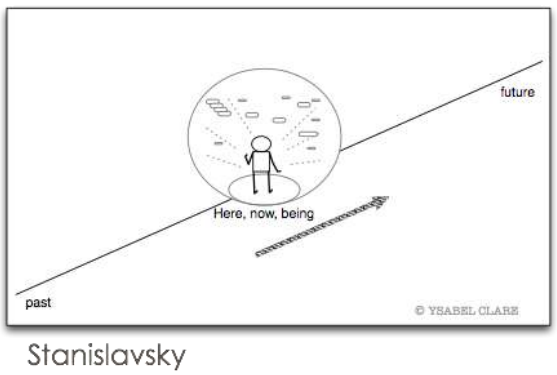
The Stanislavsky actor moves, metaphorically speaking, forward towards the objective, situated in front of them and to which they are drawn by a visual-kinesthetic connection. The energy of Meisner's actor flows back and forth between self and other. 'Meisner's fundamental principle [is that] the other actor is the determinant of your responses and behaviour' (Moseley 2012, p.171) Both can be expressed gesturally, and not just visualised – the diagram expresses an embodied engagement with an intangible energy – visualisation helps to locate and specify it in a kind of visual-kinesthetic synaesthesia. Making the gesture informs understanding of the practice.

Different modes of conceptual progression through the temporally chained sequence of events that is the play are taken: Stanislavsky's actor lives *through the given circumstances* and Meisner's lives *under imagined circumstances*. Within that temporal frame, Stanislavsky's actor moves *towards* objectives, progressing *through* time, while Meisner's appears to *remain* in the same, stable, conceptual location with time passing (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Comparison of relationship with time during performance.



Given the importance of perceptual distortion for the use of the GRAFT, it is interesting to compare this too (see Figure 6). Stanislavsky's process aims for no distortion in cause (sensation); representation (image); or effect (perception). Meisner, like Stanislavsky, appears to focus on undistorted image and perception, but the attention field is actually distorted deliberately to include the other. For Meisner, the other is part of the environment and arguably, therefore, an integral part of the (distributed) embodied self.



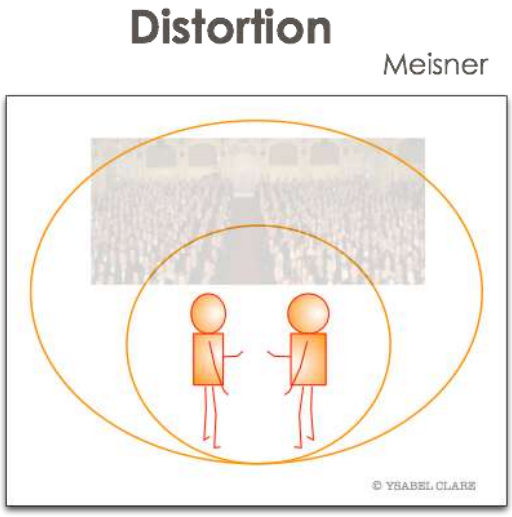


Figure 6: Comparison of distortion.

Conclusions

This research situates Stanislavsky's actor training as a training in conceptualist schematic mapping that accords with the work of Lakoff and Johnson emerging originally out of the field of psycholinguistics. Because Stanislavsky's work comprises a whole system of training, rehearsal and performance practices that use his experience of being human in order to act truthfully on stage, it is perhaps unsurprising that while some correlations relating to specifics have been found, the underlying model correlates most closely with general principles of embodied cognition rather than falling into a particular or more recent theoretical framework.

The article began by stating the aim of beginning a conversation and does not therefore aim to conclude one. However, by laying out the parity between the basic principles of embodied cognition and the Spatial Adpositional Model of Experience, examining other more specific correlations, and showing how the template drawn from the application of the model works both in re-presenting Stanislavsky's work and as a potential medium for comparisons between practices, it is hoped that a case has been made to justify its inclusion in the field and in the conversation between acting practice and embodied cognition.

The paper has offered an articulation of a meta-model of human process, derived from the work of Stanislavsky, and supplemented with a new perspective on attentional management in acting practice. The principles of the framework have themselves reflected back onto Stanislavsky's work, providing a new way to articulate it in specific sensory and perceptual terms, and use those terms to venture an initial comparison with other models of acting practice.[15]

Is this SAME framework, a model derived from the underlying principles of Stanislavsky's System, really an enactive guide to a subjective model of embodied cognition?

What would such a guide do? It would make its terms – which would have to match those of embodied cognition - explicit, lay out a map of the contextual framework, articulate the relationship between map and subject, and show how to operate within the framework and to manipulate it for specific purposes.

The SAME does appear to provide an abstract framework based on sensorimotor and perceptual experience of the world, in which Stanislavsky's Mindful Actor (Clare, 2015) can be seen to be experiencing embodiment and embodying experience. The terms are explicit. They are based on sensorimotor and perceptual experience of the body in space and time. They do represent a conceptual model of embodied experience. The GRAFT makes it enactive: it shows how to dynamically engage with the SAME so that, situated HERE and NOW, and BEING, Stanislavsky's actor is literally 'in' the moment - experiencing unmediated by distortion: situated *within* the attention field of the given circumstances. If that is what an enactive guide to embodied experiencing would do, then the model and template together are just that.

Stanislavsky constantly re-iterates throughout *An Actor's Work* that this work is psychophysical.[16] He was known to have read William James, and as Wilson (2002, p. 625) points out, James was one of the 'early sources' of the movement in cognitive science away from the idea of 'the mind as an abstract information processor' and towards 'the idea that the mind must be understood in the context of its relationship to a physical body that interacts with the world.' Although he did not 'speak' embodied cognition, he does seem to have found another way to put it into practice.

As for this research, limitations are acknowledged. However, the fact that it takes a subjective view could be an advantage when working with actors. Stanislavsky's acting practice is *about* subjectivity. If the model is easily understandable and recognisable in an actor's experience, then it is useful to them. How many actors would be willing and able to understand and extrapolate information from the Primer on Dynamic Field Theory and use it in practice?

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[15] Extended further, they afford a view of history as an encounter with time, geography with space, and maths as a conceptual path-setter for abstract thought processes.

[16] For example: '…in every physical action there's something psychological, and there's something physical in every psychological action' (2008c, p.180)

The SAME and GRAFT can be taught explicitly or implicitly, separate from other practices or alongside, informing them. They are usable and accessible, based as they are on subjectively recognisable principles of embodied cognition in action as experienced by – at least some - individual human beings. As a teacher of acting, I am interested in what works.

As a researcher, I am interested in what comes next, out of these new and untried models. The models have potential as tools for a more thorough investigation of acting practice, to make distinctions between conceptualisations of acting practices, and to investigate how processing preferences might affect innate acting ability. Are these principles evident in the behaviour or observed body of the actor acting? Can they be used to explore exactly how – or whether - the *performance* of, say, a Meisner actor differs from that of a Stanislavsky actor, and whether the differences are observable on stage? There are also possibilities emerging from DFT, and in the wider field, imaging of conceptual structuring, gesture and eye movements.

Certainly, more research is certainly needed before any claims could be made as to whether these models are 'true', 'universal', or 'scientific'. But, if they are useful, and recognizable, as models of subjective experience, then they are usable by subjectively experiencing actors. And if the work of an acting teacher or director is to help the actor to leak the right information, then for now, these models might have something to contribute to that task.

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