

Devising Skills

Responding to a stimulus

- What ideas initially come to mind?
- What does this make you think of?
- How does the stimulus make you feel?
- What themes do you associate with your stimulus?
- Which characters do you associate with your stimulus?
- Which settings do you associate with your stimulus?

- What research will you undertake?
- What did you find out once you had completed research?
- What do you want to show through your character? What do you want the audience to see about them?
- What was the initial purpose of your piece overall? What message do you want to show? How do you want your audience to feel?

Movement

Gait – the way you walk.
Posture – the position you hold your body when standing or sitting.
Stance – the way you stand.
Body language – how you express your emotions through your body.

Expression

Facial expression – showing your character’s emotion by using your face.

When describing, focus on the eyes, eyebrows and mouth.

Gesture

A movement, using the hand, that expresses an idea or communicates meaning.

When describing, describe in detail e.g. “I used a gesture where I outstretched my hand to show I wanted to ignore the other character”

Interaction

Eye contact (or lack of).

Proxemics – the distance between the characters that communicates their relationship/situation.

Voice

Pitch – how high or low your voice is.

Pace – how quickly you speak.

Volume – how loud you speak.

Use of pause – pausing before a line of speech.

Tone – showing your character’s emotions through your voice.

Audience

What effect does this have on the audience?

What do you want the audience to see/feel?

How do you know your performance was successful? How did the audience react?

Practitioners and their techniques

Constantin Stanislavski Naturalistic

Bertolt Brecht Non-naturalistic

The Magic “If”

Stanislavski said that the character should answer the question, ‘What would I do if I was in this situation?’ Also known as the ‘magic if’, this technique means that the actor puts themselves into the character’s situation. This then stimulates the motivation to enable the actor to play the role.

Verfremdungseffekt (The V effect OR the alienation effect)

Distancing the audience from becoming attached emotionally to the characters/the narrative by reminding them constantly they are watching a play. This enables the audience to think about the subject(s) and themes of the play and possibly take action rather than just being entertained.

Emotional memory

Emotional memory is when the actor finds a real past experience where they felt a similar emotion to that demanded by the role they are playing. They then ‘borrow’ those feelings to bring the role to life.

Breaking the fourth wall

Addressing or acknowledging the audience directly in order to remind them they are watching a piece of theatre.

Subtext

The subtext is the actual meaning and motivation behind the lines that are spoken and the actions taken.

Gestus

Gestus is a clear character gesture or movement used by the actor that captures a moment or attitude rather than delving into emotion.

Objectives and super-objectives

An objective is the reason for our actions. What are we trying to achieve? The super-objective is an over-reaching objective, probably linked to the overall outcome in the play.

Narration

Narration is used to remind the audience that what they’re watching is a presentation of a story. Sometimes the narrator will tell us what happens in the story before it has happened. This is a good way of making sure that we don’t become emotionally involved in the action to come as we already know the outcome.

Given circumstances

The information about the character that you start off with and the play as a whole. How old is the character? What’s their situation in the play and in relation to the other characters?

Placards

A placard is a sign or additional piece of written information presented onstage. Using placards might be as simple as holding up a card or banner. What’s important is that the information doesn’t just comment upon the action but deepens our understanding of it.

Method of physical actions

Imagine a simple activity like cleaning your teeth and then imagine a husband cleaning his teeth whilst deliberating on how to tell his wife about his mistress. This is a simple illustration of how a physical action can release the necessary emotions.

Non-linear structure

Scenes are episodic, which means they stand alone and are constructed in small chunks, rather than creating a lengthy and slow build of tension. Epic theatre often has a fractured narrative that is non-linear and jumps about in time, including flashbacks/flash-forwards.

Realistic settings and characters

The objective of naturalism is to create a performance that is as close to real life as possible. Therefore, settings and characters should be realistic and believable.

Spass

Making jokes/including comedy to stop the audience from connecting emotionally to the characters. The audience will laugh and then question why they laughed.