

1. No one has had a greater influence on modern acting than Konstantin
2. Stanislavski. Born in 1863, the Russian actor and theater director devised a
3. new set of acting techniques to make acting more realistic. He rejected the
4. stylized, exaggerated speech and gestures that performers traditionally
5. employed to signal “emotions” on the Moscow stage, and instead encouraged
6. the actors to utilize psychological analysis and reflection. In his view, a fresh,
7. truthful performance could only be given if an actor genuinely understood a
8. character’s background, predicament, and motivation. At the core of this
9. system was the technique of “emotional memory,” the idea that actors should
10. draw upon their own lives—in particular, their memories—to create and
11. express a character’s emotions during a performance.



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24. In Stanislavski's view, what must an actor understand to give a fresh,
25. truthful performance?

26. *In his view, a fresh, truthful performance could only be given if an actor*
27. *genuinely understood a character's background predicament and motivation.*

28. Stanislavski's ideas were taken up enthusiastically by American actors Lee
29. Strasberg, Stanford Meisner, and Stella Adler, who studied them in New York
30. theater groups during the 1930s and went on to become famous acting teachers
31. themselves. Meisner taught at the renowned Actors Studio, and Strasberg
32. became its director in 1951. Strasberg formulated the “Method,” a system
33. based on Stanislavski's concept of emotional memory. The Method left an
34. indelible mark on a new generation of American stage and screen actors,
35. including James Dean and Marilyn Monroe. Strasberg's Method indulged the
36. American propensity for self-analysis. It also arrived at a time when, following
37. the horrors of World War II, many critics and moviegoers expected gritty
38. realism in actors' performances. Furthermore, the raw, naturalistic acting the

39. Method elicited proved perfectly matched to the art of filmmaking, with its
40. revealing close-up shots. Method acting became associated with a robust,
41. sincere authenticity. It stood in opposition to the classic British dramatic style,
42. which prized a fine and melodious vocal delivery.

43. **(36) What was one reason Method acting became popular in the United**
44. **States?**

45. 1. American actors were no longer interested in portraying characters from
46. the classic plays that were part of the British dramatic tradition.
47. 2. Actor-training programs had become focused on preparing actors for
48. careers in films, not theater, so there was little demand for traditional training.
49. 3. The style was well suited to the type of acting that American audiences
50. demanded in the aftermath of World War II.
51. 4. The end of World War II saw a dramatic increase in the number of actors,
52. so there was a need for a standardized way to train them.

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66. instructed actors to use imagination, rather than personal memories, to
67. conjure emotions. Stella Adler, having studied with Stanislavski after he
68. revised his system, also began to see emotional memory as unhealthy, and she
69. eventually broke with Strasberg over the issue. Sanford Meisner, concerned
70. that Method actors focused too much on themselves—as opposed to the stories
71. their characters were involved in—began to discourage the technique as well.
72. Playwright David Mamet has echoed this sentiment, insisting that “nothing in
73. the world is less interesting than an actor on the stage involved in his or her
74. own emotions.” In Mamet’s view, an actor’s job consists solely of
75. communicating a story to an audience, which requires little more than a
76. well-trained body and voice.

Further Questions

77. **6) What did Stanislavski himself come to discourage emotional memory?**

78. *He came to discourage emotional memory after witnessing actors become*

79. *psychologically traumatized as a result of applying it.*

80. **7) Why did Meisner begin discouraging using the “Method”?**

81. *He was concerned that Method actors focused too much on themselves, as*
82. *opposed to the stories their characters were involved in.*

83. Although debate over Stanislavski’s ideas continues, his influence on modern
84. acting cannot be doubted. As critic Michael Billington writes, “Almost all the
85. acting we see today, on stage or screen, is either an endorsement of, or a
86. reaction against, his principles.”

87. **(37) David Mamet’s view echoes that of Sanford Meisner in that Mamet**
88. **believes**

89. 1. Stella Adler’s interpretation of the Method relies too much on the physical
90. capabilities of actors to be truly effective.

91. 2. Audiences are ultimately more interested in the thought process of the
92. various characters in a play than the plot itself.

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