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The Actor's Second Nature: Stanislavski and William James

This article considers the origins of Stanislavski's system and his insistence that the actor's skills, like the musician's, must be honed through daily exercises. Such practice must become the actor's 'second nature', as Stanislavski terms it. Rose Whyman here compares what Stanislavski has to say about skill acquisition with the psychologist William James's discussion of the role of habit in learning. This raises some problems in theorizing the system today, as it was rooted in the science of more than a century ago, when much less was known about the mechanisms of memory and learning. Rose Whyman worked previously in community and experimental theatre and is now a lecturer in Drama and Theatre Arts at the University of Birmingham. Her book *The Stanislavski System of Acting: Legacy and Influence in Modern Performance* is to be published by CUP later this year.

THROUGHOUT his life in the theatre Stanislavski sought to resolve central questions of acting: how the actor can infuse a role with emotional and spiritual content, and how he or she can repeat a performance time after time without it becoming tired and mechanical. In order to do this he developed methodologies for training the actor. Crucial to this exploration were both Stanislavski's view of *incarnation* – i.e., the external training of the actor's voice and physicality – and the training of inner mechanisms for generating emotion and communicating spiritual truths to an audience, which he termed *experiencing*. The two books translated into English by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood as *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character* are called in Russian *The Actor's Work on Him/Herself Part One: Work on the Self in the Creative Process of Experiencing* (*AWHE*) and *Part Two: Work on the Self in the Creative Process of Incarnation* (*AWHI*).

Stanislavski wrote: 'External incarnation is important as it transmits the "internal life of the human spirit". . . . The voice and body of the artist must be cultivated on the basis of nature itself.'[1] The voice and body of the actor are his/her apparatus or instrument, and must be trained, in the same way as the musician must train to use his/her instrument, by means of exercises.[2] This equation with other art forms is one used by Stanislavski many times in order to justify the need for practice. Moreover his pioneering work in actor training came at the time when the idea of the need for 'exercises' for the actor began to be widespread. Barba states that 'the revolution of the invisible', as he terms the twentieth century's discoveries of hidden structures in physics, sociology, and psychology, marked 'the age of exercises' in the theatre.[3] That which is invisible gives life to acting; the key to finding it is through acting exercises.

Stanislavski's campaign, therefore, was to get performers to recognize the importance of daily work on themselves and preparation for performance, by means of the actors' *toilette*. In a description of rehearsals for Griboyedov's *Woe from Wit* in 1914, Leopold Sulerzhitski, Stanislavski's assistant, describes Konstantin Sergeevich's dream – the whole troupe doing exercises such as freeing the muscles, going 'into the circle'[4] for half an hour before rehearsal, as singers do vocal exercises, irrespective of what parts they are singing.[5] Stanislavski kept arguing for this throughout his career, as a result of which the 'warm up' has become established. Furthermore, in 1931, he stated to the Artistic Council of the Bolshoi Opera Theatre that the teaching of plastic disciplines to young singers

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X07000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

was not taken seriously enough – one or two lessons a week was pointless: daily exercises, if only for half an hour, were the necessity.[6]

The actors' *toilette*, the preparation for performance, was an integral part of Stanislavski's *system.* As well as training the actor in the skills of *experiencing* and *incarnation*, the *system* included approaches to work on a role. What Stanislavski meant by calling his training and rehearsal method for actors a *system* is debatable. In 1907, he read J. P. Muller's *My System*,[7] a book given to him by A. P. Petrovsky, a fellow actor, director, and trainer, working in Moscow and St Petersburg. The book, which Stanislavski annotated, includes a series of stretching and bending exercises, to be practised daily, and other recommendations for health and fitness. Stanislavski worked through the exercises, adapting them as he saw fit, and appears to have fitted them into his own daily routine.

He was at this time developing the actor's *toilette* and his initial idea was that his *system* would be simply the actor's daily warm-up exercises. He began referring to his *system* in 1909, planning a programme of essays under the heading 'My System'.[8] Other 'systems' were in existence at the time: for example, Prince Sergei Volkonsky, who popularized the work of both François Delsarte and Jaques-Dalcroze in Russia, refers to Delsarte's 'system'.[9] But Stanislavski's *system* developed and, as it did so, confusion about its purpose spread. In 1931 Stanislavski tried to issue a disclaimer in a new foreword to *AWHE.*

> The first radical misunderstanding is of the very name of the Stanislavski system. In spite of the fact that it is kept in the name of the book, the name is wrong. In saying 'my system' it seems that someone has invented and thought up something. He has first found some basic theses, which he has developed and made into an entire, well-put-together system. How many such systems passed before us before and during the revolution! I never thought anything up, did not compose any theses. I simply honestly and attentively observed my own and others' natures at the moment of their creative work.[10]

In *My Life In Art* (*MLIA*), he criticizes people who made use of the terminology of the *system* without recognizing the fact that the *system* as such was only a theory which the artist by means of 'working for a long time, habit, and struggle, had to turn into second nature and turn into practice in a natural way'.[11] He goes on to say that it is possible only to 'know' the *system*, i.e. to be acquainted with it intellectually to a degree, but what is necessary is to make it *second nature*. He adds that when what has been learned has become habitual the artist can cease thinking about it and wait for it to manifest itself naturally.

The idea that repetition and practice are needed underlies Stanislavski's methods of training. He thought it was necessary for actors to establish habits by means of repetition of exercises and approaches to work. Stanislavski's understanding of habit and *second nature* and the underpinning scientific theory for these concepts (though perhaps via an indirect route) are rooted in the ideas on habit put forward by William James in his theory of psychology.

William James and 'Second Nature'

The work of William James (1842–1910), the American philosopher and psychologist, was influential across continents and in many fields of work and study. In relation to acting he is best known for what is referred to as the James–Lange theory of emotion. James did not actually work with the Danish physiologist Carl Lange, but describes in *The Principles of Psychology*, published in 1890, the similarities between his own views on emotion and those of Lange. Both James and Lange offered a physiological explanation of emotions rather than describing them as mental or psychological processes, and this idea was popularized in Russia as it was in Europe and the US.

Stanislavski's colleague A. P. Petrovsky recommended William James as well as Muller to Stanislavski.[12] The philosopher I. I. Lapshin, with whom Stanislavski was on close terms, translated Jamess' *Textbook of Psychology* into Russian, publishing it in 1896. Stanislavski's library contained *Elements of Scientific Psychology in the Theatrical Art in Connection with General Questions of Theatre*, published in 1912 by Yevgeni Bezpiatov (pro-

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prietor of the A. S. Suvorin Theatre School in St Petersburg, where Mikhail Chekhov trained), which cites *Textbook on Psychology.*

It was William James who popularized the term *second nature*, writing in *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and Life's Ideals* (1899): 'Habit is thus a second nature, or rather, as the Duke of Wellington said, it is "ten times nature".'[13] Also, James writes in the *Textbook of Psychology:* '"Habit a second nature! Habit is ten times nature," the Duke of Wellington is said to have exclaimed . . . the daily drill and years of discipline end by fashioning a man completely over again.'[14] This sentiment would have been applauded in post-revolutionary Russia – where, like many of his peers, Stanislavski developed ideas prevalent in the late nineteenth century, when physical culture of all kinds, drill, and exercise began to be in vogue. His own education had included instruction in Swedish gymnastics and fencing, among other forms of exercise.

He, Meyerhold, and their contemporaries were influenced by what Segel calls 'the extraordinary modernist preoccupation with physicality' which 'developed in the context of widespread disenchantment with intellectual culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.'[15] Physical Culture movements such as that of the German Turnverein, Slavic Sokol movement, and movements such as the American Boy Scouts, the stated aim of which was to combat degeneracy and promote physical regeneration, all influenced the development of physical culture in Russia. Ideas of the body as machine and the making of the new man were widespread, and took on particular significance in the period of the Revolution. Stanislavski investigated many kinds of training, including yoga and Jaques-Dalcroze's eurythmics. Whatever the exercise system, however, what was crucial was to work at it every day.

Making the Easy Beautiful

The habit of daily exercise, which becomes *second nature,* is in Stanislavski's view the actor's salvation. In 1906, he recognized that in his acclaimed role as Stockmann in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* his performance had become mechanical. He writes in *MLIA* that 'mechanical acting forestalls inner experiencing', explaining this with the example where, as the actor, he copied Stockmann's naivety by making his eyes look childlike and innocent, but wasn't himself naive – did not *experience* naivety internally. The reason for this, he said, was that he the actor had discarded the affective or emotional memories of the actual people on which the role was based.[16]

Stanislavski began the experiments that resulted in the *system* and attempted to apply the results of his experimentation to a production of Knut Hamsun's *The Drama of Life* in 1907. The symbolic drama was successful with audiences seeking a departure from realism, but in Stanislavski's view this was because of the *mise-en-scène* rather than the acting. He had implemented the internal techniques of *experiencing* that he was developing and had stopped the actors using external means of *incarnation* – i.e., gestures and movements – wanting them to be as still as possible while internally expressive. This did not work because there was no internal *justification* for the absence of gesture, and muscle strain resulted from the attempt to force the actors to be internally impassioned.

> There were many days and months of tormenting doubt until I understood the long-known truth that in our business everything must be done through habit, which turns what is new into something that is my own, organic, into second nature. Only after this was it possible to use what is new, not thinking about the mechanics of it.[17]

What exactly did Stanislavski mean when he wrote that habit turned 'what is new into . . . second nature'? He quotes on a number of occasions Volkonsky's aphorism: 'What is difficult becomes habitual, the habitual easy, and the easy beautiful.' Moreover, in Stanislavski's view, habit can 'unburden attention', freeing the performer from having to think about certain aspects of what he or she is doing in order to give his or her attention to more important aspects of performance.[18]

On stage, the artist has to be consciously aware of the inner or spiritual processes of

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attention, *imagination*, *the feeling of truth and faith*, *emotional memory*, *communion*, and *adaptation*. At the same time he or she has to take care of his body and the movements s/he is making with different parts of the body, how s/he is walking, his/her physical expression or *plastique*. Attention must also be given to regulating breathing, placing the voice, diction and the process of speaking, and also the internal line of the role, its score, the *supertask* of the play, the demands of the director, the acoustics of the theatre, the lighting, the noises from offstage and the auditorium, and so on. But some of the 'burden of attention' can be taken by training the actor to respond to the conditions of the auditorium, as to all aspects of performing in public, automatically. If this work is done consciously at first, in time it will become the artist's *second nature*.

The Nervous System as Ally

Stanislavski's concept of the mechanism of habit and its role in learning is close to James's theories as described in the *Textbook of Psychology*. The same two ideas are articulated by James, who writes, 'first, habit simplifies our movements, making them accurate and diminishes fatigue.' As in Volkonsky's aphorism, the role of habit in developing any skill is partly to make easy what is initially difficult. 'Secondly, *habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed*.'[19] He goes on to say:

> The great thing then in all education is to *make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy. . . . For this we must make automatic and habitual as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can. . . .* The more we can hand over to the effortless custody of automatism, the more our higher powers of mind will be set free for their own proper work.[20]

This can clearly be equated with Stanislavski's ideas of the need to 'unburden the attention' by training the actor to respond automatically to performance conditions and to develop, in his term, *the sense of the self on stage*, so the actor can consciously attend to the higher, spiritual aspects of performing.

There is no direct evidence that Stanislavski read William James, though he was obviously aware of his work. It is not that James was the only person to express these ideas in relation to skill development. James was an influence on associationist Theodule Ribot, whose importance for Stanislavski has been widely acknowledged though not sufficiently examined. Stanislavski did read Ribot, who also discusses habit, and noted from his study of Ribot in 1908 that 'automatic activity is the daily routine of life', which is a Jamesian concept.[21]

In addition, we can compare Volkonsky's aphorism ('what is difficult becomes habitual, the habitual easy, and the easy beautiful') with Ivan Mikhailovich Sechenov's idea that habit refines learning and makes performance easier, and by implication, beautiful. Sechenov (1829–1905) studied behaviour as reflex activity, paving the way for the Nobel-prizewinning scientist Ivan Pavlov's work on conditioned reflexes, which was espoused as Soviet science. Stanislavski was encouraged to believe that Pavlov's work would elucidate the theoretical basis of his system, and moves were made from 1934 to 1935 to establish collaboration between the school of Pavlov and the school of Stanislavski, a project that was interrupted by Pavlov's death in 1936. (The work did in fact proceed in a different form after Stanislavski had also died.)

In his considerations of Pavlov's work on conditioned reflexes Stanislavski also developed his acquaintance with Sechenov's work.[22] Sechenov describes the role of habit in someone learning to play the piano:

> The poor beginner not only acts with his fingers, he also moves his head, mouth and entire body. But look at the same person when he has developed into an artist. He runs his fingers over the keys with absolute ease; the movements are so rapid that they seem to be independent of the musician's will.[23]

Stanislavski uses the same example in his discussion of *habit* in *The Actor's Work on a Role* (*AWR*), speaking of the great effort at first needed when children learn to walk, or when people acquire new skills. Eventually there is less need for effort, so that a pianist no longer has to think of each movement of

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his fingers when playing the piano, though he repeated difficult passages for hours before the movements were 'turned into mechanical ones by habit'.[24]

Second Nature or Mechanical Acting

It appears that these central ideas were fairly widespread, and Stanislavski attempted to apply his understanding of habit to his theories of the actor's training. However, this application then becomes problematic. To what extent can the actor rely on habit without the performance becoming mechanical in a bad sense – devoid of inner, spiritual content? Stanislavski writes that the actor's belief in what he is doing, his ability to use his imagination in a role, can also be acquired as a *habit*.[25]

> Daily, systematic work in imagining the given circumstances of a role can create *habit* in the imaginary life which becomes second nature, a second imaginary actuality.[26]

In addition, Konkordia Antarova, who noted Stanislavski's lectures and rehearsals of *Werther* from 1918 to 1922 at the Bolshoi Opera Studio, records him as saying:

> It is absolutely wrong to do any of the exercises laid down in my system mechanically and unthinkingly. It is absolutely wrong to speak your words to no purpose. You must acquire the habit of putting the greatest possible meaning into every word you utter.[27]

In these examples Stanislavski is using the term 'habit' to refer to the daily practice he wishes the actor to undertake. Of course the actor must give attention to that practice and not do the exercises automatically. Likewise, the 'creation of a habitual imaginary life' cannot mean repeating the role habitually in the way that Stanislavski did with the role of Stockmann.

However, habit, though a good thing in this sense for Stanislavski, can cause problems, resulting in mechanical acting. The recognition of this came from the crisis that prompted the development of the *system*. There was then, in Stanislavski's term a dislocation (*vyvikh*), a split between internal and external. In Stockmann the *incarnation* was correct, but the *experiencing* was missing. He expands on this:

> I repeated mechanically exactly those developed and established tricks of the role, the mechanical signs of the absence of feeling. . . . From performance to performance I ingrained in myself the mechanical habit of going through this technical gymnastics that I had once laid down, and muscle memory which is so strong in actors had firmly fixed the actor's habit.[28]

In 1916, in a speech to the actors working on *The Village of Stepanchikovo,* an adaptation of Dostoevski's *Foma,* Stanislavski speaks about his mission as a director, part of which is to

> save nature from actors' habits and conventions of acting which are against nature and pernicious to it. I, like a doctor, will resort to an operation, which regrettably cannot be anything but painful. [29]

In the same period he makes a note of the 'blind alleys' that an actor can be led into. These are: first, 'playing the image'; second, 'playing passion'; and third, 'giving oneself up to the habitual mould of the role', which 'transforms actors into performing dogs and stops for ever the internal life of the role'.[30]

There are a variety of ways in which the actor can fall into the trap of habit. As well as the fact that a role once created well can become mechanical, the actor can produce a characterization which is stereotyped from the beginning – i.e., a *stencil.* Stanislavski describes the *bogatyr*, the Russian warrior hero of folk tales, as the worst *stencil*, a 'banality that is fixed so strongly in the ears, eyes, body, and muscles of actors that there is no possibility of getting rid of it'.[31]

Stencils are thus fixed ways of representing characters or emotions. For example, peasants always spat on the floor, aristocrats played with their lorgnettes; to express despair actors tore their hair, and to express jealousy rolled the whites of the eyes and showed their teeth. These 'ready-made mechanical methods of acting', he writes, are easily produced in the *craft* school of acting.

Here he is referring to one of his two great bugbears, the other being *representational* acting. An example of the first was the German

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Meiningen Court Theatre. The second visit in 1890 of the Meiningen Court Theatre to Moscow had a great influence on Stanislavski's production and directorial methods because of the company's dedication to producing classics with meticulous historical accuracy in every detail of costume, set, and properties. However, he also saw their work as an example of acting that was craft but not art – externally correct but lacking in internal truth. In Stanislavski's view the characterizations were *stencils*. With *craft* 'the muscles of actors trained in this way turn into habit and become their second nature, which replaces human nature on stage'.[32]

The *representational* school of acting was epitomized for Stanislavski by the French actor Benoît Constant Coquelin (1841–1909). Coquelin had kept alive the debate raised by French philosopher Diderot in *Paradoxe sur le comédien* in the 1770s. Diderot asserted that the great actor should be devoid of sensibility, that is, he should not experience emotion when he is acting. Coquelin also saw internal experience as unnecessary – for him, it was a strength that the actor skilfully recreates the external form of emotion but does not experience it. In the art of *representation*, the actor creates a model for himself in his imagination, then 'like the painter he realizes every feature and fixes the likeness not on canvas but on himself'.[33] In his writings and lectures Stanislavski opposed the art of *experiencing* to *craft* and *representation* – both methods leading to mechanical acting.

Furthermore, as well as producing stereotyped characterizations from maintaining an habitual, unexamined way of thinking about the character, the actor can have other problematic habits. Stanislavski mentions his own habit of stooping as a young man, which he was determined to overcome. From the photographs of the statuesque Stanislavski as an actor and in portraits, it appears that he succeeded, which no doubt gave him faith that it was possible to improve postural problems by his methods. He names the habit, common to many actors of 'gabbling the words'.[34]

Stanislavski does not analyze the different types of bad habits himself, but says this must be a result of poor training, or lack of understanding or control. Also, there are warnings against the habit of lying, of being false in acting.[35] For example, the actor should guard against the habit of looking into the stalls where the director or his admirer is, when in accordance with the role s/he should be looking somewhere else.[36] There are also warnings to the actor not to drill him or herself in the words of the role but to recreate its feelings and thoughts.

The Actor's Dilemma

Stanislavski sees that habit is therefore a double-edged sword: the result of repeating the external aspects of a characterization, or working with uncorrected physical or speech habits, becomes fixed, by dint of what Stanislavski calls *muscle memory* in the quotation above from *My Life in Art*, as 'the actor's habit'. He goes on to say that it becomes deeply part of the whole actor's approach, and so much his or her *second nature* that the result can only be mechanical acting, which goes against nature and brings about 'spiritual death'.

Here he is using the term 'muscle memory' as an artistic metaphor, which, interestingly, is still in popular usage. In terms of physiology, of course, muscles cannot remember anything and habitual ways of acting can only be generated by the brain. In Stanislavski's view it is the other kind of habit, the other type of *second nature*, that must be developed in acting. What, then, might he have seen as the mechanisms for generating 'good' habit, or *second nature*?

When the actor has what Stanislavski calls an 'organic ailment', whether it is a speech problem such as gabbling the words or a bodily shortcoming such as hunching the shoulders, it must be corrected until the correction becomes *second nature.* The performer must cultivate the *habit of the controller*, which enables the actor to free his or her muscles when he or she gives attention to different parts of the body such as hunched shoulders or the way he or she is breathing. The role of the *controller* is to check for, and get rid of superfluous tension.[37]

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This *habit* of checking for and letting go of unnecessary tension so that it becomes *second nature* for the artist takes, says Stanislavski, a lot of daily work.[38] And the problem is that insufficient time is devoted to this work. For example, students have only two lessons in diction a week, each of a quarter of an hour. This means that the student talks properly for half an hour a week, then for the rest of the week fails to do so. But Stanislavski says that you cannot devote all your time and attention to this; it is better to 'train the attention itself to make corrections subconsciously, automatically, and constantly'.

Only *habit* can organize continuous, subconscious, automatic self-observation, which is developed by constant reminders over the course of years.[39] There is a circularity here – habit is meant to diminish the 'burden of attention' the actor has to pay, but at the same time the solution to mechanical acting and bodily habits which impede performance is in paying constant attention to the inner content of the role and to the bodily habits that need correcting.

In 1908 Stanislavski wrote various sketches in his notebook about preparation for performance and on 'the manifestation of the will in the repetition of creativity in a show'. According to Vinogradskaia, he writes here for the first time about unity, the mutual link between physical and psychological principles in the creative process. The Soviets made much of what they claimed was Stanislavski's understanding of psychophysical unity and the links therefore between his work and Pavlov's. The aim of Pavlov's work was to investigate the physiological laws of human psychic activity and include psychology in the sphere of natural science – a precept fundamental to Soviet materialist science. In fact Stanislavski did not write consistently about psychophysical unity and struggled to describe the interrelationship between *experiencing* and *incarnation*. In referring to *through action* Stanislavski writes:

> The physiological habit of the role arouses its psychology in the soul of the artist and the psychological *experiencing* of the feelings of the role engender the physiological state of the body of the artist which is habitual for the role.[40]

Stanislavski is thus using the term *habit* to explain the relationship between what he here calls 'psychology' and 'physiology'. It appears that though Vinogradskaia says he is writing about psychophysical unity, he has a further problem here in his conceptualization of 'psychology' and 'physiology', or mind and body, as in some way split and needing to be connected. He is using the term *habit* to attempt to make the connection. In his view, if the actor goes through the physical actions of the role in the way that has been laid down by habit, the correct internal experiencing will be brought about. This idea is the lynchpin of Stanislavski's *Method of Physical Actions*, though this term was not used until 1934.

In 1916, Stanislavski wrote that when belief has been engendered and the artist is living the life of the role,

> unconsciously choosing his feelings and the events, facts known to him though life experience . . . he unconsciously weaves feeling with the soul and life of the role. From habit and time the artist . . . receives features of feeling cultivated and born with the role.[41]

However, Stanislavski does not explain the difference between the occasions when, as he sees it, habit works for the performer and occasions, as in the Stockmann crisis, when the unconscious process does not work productively – and this is the major problem in his analysis. On the positive aspects of habit, he is clear, with James, that habit enables skill development.

> Children learn to walk or speak with great difficulty and effort of attention at first, but we learn to consider all these 'mechanical motor tasks' easy and we don't need to think of them.

In the same way the artist can develop skills, made easy by habit:

> Unconscious mechanical muscle-control memory remembers the most complicated combinations of steps in dances.[42]

It also enables veracity and accuracy in acting. In exercises with real objects, many of the moments constituting the action slide

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past the conscious attention of the creator, because they are taking place habitually.[43] For example, in taking a drink from a carafe in real life we don't think about the actions we are performing, but they are logical and consistent in accordance with motor habit and the necessary 'subconscious feeling'. Though Stanislavski does not define what he means by 'feeling', this chimes with James's assertion that we carry out activities on the basis of sensation of muscular contractions – to which 'we are *usually inattentive* but which immediately call our attention if they go wrong'.[44] Stanislavski's explanation becomes problematic at this point as he does not state how it is that these actions do not become habitual in the bad sense – i.e., mechanical.

James and the Philosophy of Habit

Part of the problem may be that Stanislavski is attempting to make a practical application of a term that James and others were discussing from a philosophical as well as a practical point of view. James asserted that habit has a physical basis; it is an aspect of the intrinsic nature of all things, inanimate as well as animate. He cites from Dumont's article in *Revue Philosophique* (1875) on acquired habit:

> Everyone knows how a garment, after having been worn a certain time, clings to the shape of the body better than when new; there has been a change in the tissue, and this change is a new habit of cohesion.[45]

He gives further examples, such as the fact that it is less trouble to fold a paper once it has been folded. He states:

> habit has a physical basis. The laws of Nature are nothing but the immutable habits, which the different elementary sorts of matter follow in their actions and reactions upon each other.[46]

Habit for James is as much a characteristic of how animate beings function as it is characteristic of inanimate objects.

It seems that Stanislavski concurs with James in his ideas on habit and nature. Stanislavski writes that when a person who has been drowning is made to breathe air in and out mechanically, though the heart and breathing mechanisms have stopped, the other organs of the body begin to function again because of habit. If Stanislavski believed with James that habit was part of the essential nature of all things, then that is the reason why he would think it necessary to describe it in explaining the actor's art.

He goes on to say 'the same organic habit of our nature, the same habitual consistency and logic of tasks, actions, and experiences are used in our art in giving birth to the process of *experiencing*'.[47] Here, however, Stanislavski does not make any distinction between automatic responses of the nervous system and habits which are learned and can therefore be changed. James's philosophical argument does not translate easily into the explanation of acting Stanislavski is trying to give, though the fact that these ideas were being discussed by such an authority as James perhaps explains Stanislavski's adherence to the idea.

James emphasized the ethical and pedagogical importance of the principle of habit.[48] He writes, 'habit is thus the enormous flywheel of society, its most precious conservative agent', and gives examples of how habitual modes of life keep different social strata from mixing, preserving social stability. He stressed the need to cultivate moral habits, to determine how much to smoke during the day by only smoking at set times, to regulate the day by getting up and going to bed at set times, to develop one's moral character by cultivating the habit of applying oneself to unpleasant tasks that need to be done, in order to get them out of the way every day. Though he is speaking of establishing moral habits rather than performance, James recommends, as does Stanislavski, daily work to establish them, and issues dire warnings to those who allow habit to fashion their characters in the wrong way.[49] For James, as for Stanislavski, habit can be good or bad – what is important is to continue to work at inculcating good habits.

Stanislavski urges the actor to make it his or her practice to do daily work, to develop a 'controller', and to establish all the other habits that are beneficial for the performer. In doing so he is drawing on the science of his

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time, over a century ago. Unfortunately, there was then insufficient understanding of the nature of learning for him to be able to develop his theories. As a result, his recommendations can be confusing, and mean that he is unable to deal with the problem of *dislocation*, where the performer may be going through the motions of his role habitually and mechanically, except by means of the circular argument already mentioned, where the establishment of habits enables the actor to pay less attention to certain aspects of performance, but the only solution when the role becomes habitual is for the actor to pay more attention to what he or she is doing.

The question for the performer, therefore, is to do with the practicality rather than the philosophy of habit: does practice in fact make perfect? A re-examination of the mechanisms of how the actor can continue to perform a role spontaneously on the basis of contemporary scientific understanding of the physiological processes involved in learning and repeating a role from memory is needed, and could throw some light on the issues raised by Stanislavski's pioneering work.

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25. Ibid., p. 95.
26. Ibid., p. 107.
27. Antarova's notes were translated by David Magarshack as *Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage* (2nd ed., London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 128.
28. Stanislavski 1, p. 296–7.
29. Vinogradskaia, op. cit., 2, p. 496.
30. Ibid., 2, p. 512. The comment on 'playing the image' perhaps refers to Meyerhold and Mikhail Chekhov's emphasis on *image* rather than character.
31. Stanislavski 1, p. 128.
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