



Stanislavski Studies

Practice, Legacy, and Contemporary Theater

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfst20>

Stanislavski training and mindfulness – being in the moment

Dawn Ingleson

To cite this article: Dawn Ingleson (2022): Stanislavski training and mindfulness – being in the moment, Stanislavski Studies, DOI: [10.1080/20567790.2022.2094103](https://doi.org/10.1080/20567790.2022.2094103)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20567790.2022.2094103>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 26 Jul 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 191



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Stanislavski training and mindfulness – being in the moment

Dawn Ingleson

Drama Department, London South Bank University School of Arts and Creative Industries (ACI), London

ABSTRACT

'I understand that an artist must be capable of stopping time and allowing for spaciousness, but now I realise that to welcome and cultivate stillness and quiet into my work, I must welcome and cultivate stillness and quiet into my own life.' Stanislavsky's "creation of the life of the human spirit" is an exciting aspect of his work and the underlying spirituality is something that he kept partially hidden in his writing due to the political situation and Soviet ideology that he was living through at the time. It is this sense of spirituality and a meditative approach to the work of the actor that this paper explores. Specifically, an exploration of mindfulness and drama techniques. Mindfulness helps us to increase our awareness. We learn to do this by paying full attention to all our experiences, including our bodies, thoughts, moods, and emotions and to the small changes within them. There are many parallels between mindfulness and Stanislavsky's thoughts on acting, from the need for an attitude of openness and curiosity and being in the moment through to an awareness of our physical sensations and a control over our attention. Bogart's ideas of spaciousness also influence this examination of the practice of mindfulness and concentration. This article analyses the calmness that mindfulness can bring through the teaching and learning of Acting and Performance students at London South Bank University, and how we can use it to focus on being grounded in our body and the world around us, going about our everyday business in life and on stage. "Let the tenseness come, he says, if you cannot avoid it. But immediately let your control step in and remove it."

KEYWORDS

Stanislavsky; mindfulness; mindful acting; actor training; inclusive practice; qualitative; well-being

Introduction

Through Stanislavsky's own writings, other practitioners' reflections on his System and a personal experience of mindfulness, this article investigates the similarities of the aims of the two disciplines of acting and mindful practice. I look at how they can influence and support each other in relation to actor training, reflecting on the thoughts of Bogart (2014) about time and how practitioners and young training actors, interact with it. I was introduced to mindfulness 4 years ago, I knew it as a meditative practice of non-judgemental awareness, simply responding to and being affected by whatever comes your way. It is an accepting and inclusive practice that you can do anywhere. I took an 8-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

CONTACT Dawn Ingleson  dawningleson@lsbu.ac.uk  Drama Department, London South Bank University School of Arts and Creative Industries (ACI), 103 Borough road London SE1 0AA

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

course.^{1,2,3,4} Having taken this time to practice mindfulness myself and having carved out time from the curriculum to teach its practice to undergraduate students on an Acting and Performance course at London South Bank University, I have seen the benefits and challenges of mindfulness for different personalities, mental health conditions and varied attitudes to preparation and training for acting.

Discussing our perception of time and how we use or misuse it, I want to investigate how it can help us in our training. We seem, in general, to be less able, (with a lack of, or abundance of routine and/or a surfeit of unplanned opportunities thrown at us every day, asking us to make complex decisions at speed), to take time for ourselves in which to do nothing.⁵ This way of being and this imbalance affects our mental health and therefore, potentially the robustness of the young, training actor as well as the professional actor.⁶ For students, I, like all teachers, believe it is of utmost importance for them to be able to get to class on time each day and be prepared to invite their scene partners to affect them profoundly whilst they protect themselves from being impacted negatively by this. Mindfulness and the way it seems to change our neurology may be a way to achieving this.⁷ Therefore, I also borrow some thoughts from psychology and neurology to enhance our dialogue between mindfulness and Stanislavsky's System.

Methodologies and theoretical background

This examination, inspired by Stanislavsky's own writing, struggles and methods, brings his thoughts into our modern-day actor training through the viewpoints of not only his own students, contemporaries, and followers (Rudolph Von Laban, Michael Chekhov, Sanford Meisner, etc.) but also our more recent theatre makers such as Anne Bogart, Mike Alfreds, Bella Merlin, Phillip Zarilli, etc. I focus on Bogart's exploration of time and touch on modern-day living which inevitably includes a thought about stress. My investigation uses as a case study, the experience of working with current LSBU Acting students and their answers to questions about actor training and mindfulness. 48 students were given a questionnaire to fill out anonymously by a drama colleague. The questionnaire (see [Appendix 1](#)) covered various aspects of curriculum content, leisure time activities and mindfulness. The questions that were specific about any class content on the course were about a module that I do not teach. The survey and the methodological approach were approved by the university ethics committee. This enquiry draws on psychology⁸ and some neurology⁹ that heighten our knowledge of how mindfulness can change our way of being and therefore starts to explore whether the prolonged and regular use of it, combined with Stanislavsky's foundations that were also imbued with a Yogic/mindful element, can enhance our acting ability while strengthening our protective layer and bolstering our mental health. Thus, at the same time, increasing our capacity to be able to be in the moment. In fact, it can be considered whether theatre is an inherently mindful activity, "Certain modes of theatre are conducive to mindfulness and can lead to what is variously called proprioception of thought, meta-awareness or meta-cognitive insight."¹⁰

My personalized approach

My background is in applied theatre. As such my teaching and the projects I have conceived and led have always had social justice education at their heart, exploring means to upskill, and level metaphorical playing fields for those who are struggling because they have less opportunities than others. This approach to teaching and learning has drawn me to the work of Paulo Freire (2017) and inevitably Augusto Boal (2008) among others, via the teaching and writing of Sir Ken Robinson¹¹, and it has impacted on my own inclusive pedagogy in actor training. I have taught at all levels of formal and informal education from reception year in U.K. primary schools (aged 4) to post-doctorate level and adult education.

As mentioned above, I have undergone training in mindfulness. Here we can use the official NHS definition of mindfulness, from “Professor Mark Williams, former director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre,” who, “says that mindfulness means knowing directly what is going on inside and outside of ourselves, moment by moment”.¹² We will delve further into definitions later. However, I am specifically interested in Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction techniques (MBSR) and breathing techniques (Vipassanā, Pranayama).¹³ The sharing of these with undergraduate students has inspired me to use it as a constant part of the work, mostly as a warm-up and check-in before class starts, and sometimes as a full session. The similarities between the definitions and practice of affective acting and mindfulness are exceptionally clear, (see table of comparisons below) and I believe are a strong starting point to being self-reliant and proactive in both setting up and participating in a more equal and empathetic environment in which to develop our students’ skills. For me, it links to the more encompassing concept from Phakama, of Give and Gain and the Afro-centric methodologies of embodied practice (Hendricks Method) and SoulWork of C.C. Truscott. Phakama is a collaborative approach to making participatory performance which prioritizes the story of everyone who is involved. It is a network of international practitioners which started its creative life with a month-long residency in South Africa in 1996, between UK and South African artists and educators. Phakama’s principles of Give and Gain are outlined by Lucy Richardson in *Phakama Making Participatory Performance*. She quotes Lucy Neal, who states, “Phakama works with what is in the room ... It invites everyone to sign up to a contract of equity. It is not a nod to collaborative practice, but it puts it at the centre of the creative process.”¹⁴ As Zaidi adds, “It is about co-authorship. It’s an important stance because it’s a position of learning and teaching simultaneously”.¹⁵ Everyone has something to give in this process and everyone has something to gain. Like the SoulWork of Truscott and the ensemble work of Hendricks in America, the use of the circle (with its symbolism of equality) and the presence of community in their creative practices adds to the clear sense of self and where the self fits into the rest of the group. Even the director, in the Hendricks Method gives over ownership and shares it with the company as the audience changes too, via the African American performance tradition and aesthetics that shift from the personal to the

collective, a truly shared event.¹⁶ All these ideas come full circle back to a secure sense of self (and self-care) through a regular mindful practice or at least a mindful approach to Stanislavsky's System in performance.

Mindfulness, pedagogy and performance

I am acutely aware that all higher education students are not equal, and they start their university careers from very different parts of the aforementioned “playing field”. I want all students to be able to access and use their authentic voice, self-assuredly sharing their own perspective with others, telling their own story, “develop [ing] their own voice,”¹⁷ having the confidence to be able to become the holistic theatre makers/actors that they have the potential to be. I see it as my role to inculcate an inner belief in themselves that they can be self-starters and to help them gain the strength to bypass any doubts or susceptibility that prevents them from being the best actors (and best humans) they can be. This training is based in Stanislavsky's System and alongside it the work of other practitioners, plus an approach to mindfulness and meditative practice that seems to help students to, in their words, “focus” further and “de-stress”¹⁸ (during rehearsals as well as in their lives in general).

“I understand that an artist must be capable of stopping time and allowing for spaciousness, but now I realise that to welcome and cultivate stillness and quiet into my work, I must welcome and cultivate stillness and quiet into my own life.”¹⁹

In *What's the Story: Essays about Art, Theater and Storytelling*, Anne Bogart discusses two different kinds of time, Chronos, which is measured, quantitative and sequential – it is how we tell the time each day, and Kairos, a qualitative version of experiencing time, more a readiness, unbound, time outside of time. Kairos is what happens when time runs away from us, or we enter a “flow” in life or performance. These two juxtaposed but completely connected (and interchangeable) concepts of time are reminiscent of Nietzsche's notion of Apollonian and Dionysian forces.²⁰ These too are at once both competing yet complimentary. Borrowing from Ancient Greek mythology, Nietzsche suggests that Apollonian is the rational thinking and order in our art (or life), therefore, liaising with the idea of Chronos. Dionysian signifies passion, emotion, irrationality, chaos, based in instincts, suggestive of when we experience Kairos. Nietzsche's dialectic represents cognitive states that can be useful to our discussion on mindfulness and acting. If we can allow ourselves to enter a state of Dionysian Kairos, we are surely also entering a state of flow and by default mindful acting. As is described by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihályi, quoted in Kendra's recent article on happiness and flow, “The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost.”²¹ This in turn is heightened by Stanislavsky himself when in *An Actor's Work*, as teacher Tortsov, he discusses being, “genuinely creative”. He is in dialogue with a student (his other

alter ego), in itself a brilliant framework and exemplar, or “lighthouse,”²² in Bogart’s words of learning by teaching and vice versa in agreement with Freire, when he states in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, ‘A teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches; but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach’²³:

“Try and tell us what you were aware of, physically, while you were being genuinely creative”.

“I don’t know, I don’t understand a thing about it,” I said, stupefied by Tortsov’s praise . . .

“What?! You don’t remember your agony as you searched for something terrible? You don’t remember your hands, your eyes and your whole being darted here and there, looking for somewhere to go and something to hold on to? You don’t remember how you bit your lip and could hardly hold back your tears?” Tortsov enquired

“Yes, now that you tell me, I think I am beginning to remember how I felt,” I admitted.

“But you couldn’t have remembered without me?”

“No, I couldn’t”.

“That means, you were behaving subconsciously?”

“I don’t know, maybe. Is that good or bad?”

“Good, if the subconscious led you along the right path, . . . it is always best when an actor is completely taken over by the play. Then independent of his will, he lives the role, without noticing *how* he is feeling, not thinking about *what* he is doing, and so everything comes out spontaneously, subconsciously.”²⁴

The downside to this of course, is that this “flow”, experiencing Kairos, is difficult to conjure up at will. Bogart proposes that we must be ready to receive Kairos in our modern day living with not much “in-between time”²⁵ by being strict with Chronos, back to being on time for class for example. Once we have the framework of time right, we can then employ our mindfulness practice to enhance our readiness to enter our focused work, our state of flow and perhaps this is where we can slow down or speed up time as needed. This is emphasized by Stanislavsky’s own need for discipline as Rakhmanov in *An Actor’s Work* berates his student for being late for class:

“I think I’m a bit late.”

Rakhmanov gave me a long reproving look and finally said:

“ . . . It is very difficult to rouse the urge to create and extremely easy to kill it . . . I have far too much respect for our work to tolerate such sloppiness and that is why I feel I have to apply a military kind of discipline when it comes to what we do together . . . in future make it a rule to arrive at rehearsal a quarter of an hour early and not after it has started.”²⁶

Once we are in the room, we then need to be able to access this genuine creativity in rehearsal (as well as in performance), and this is where mindfulness practice (steadily initiating, “neuroplastic changes in the brain”, a suggested, “strengthened awareness of the present moment”²⁷ and, “a greater reflective awareness of sensory processes”),²⁸ can support our training to reach Stanislavsky’s psycho-technique.

I agree with the premise of The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (in the United States) as explored in Plá's recent article, that education should, "revolve around how to integrate introspection and study of the self into pedagogical practice, as well as how to appreciate students' first-hand experiences as keys to the teaching-learning process."²⁹ I want, perhaps, I need, to make sure that I have time (both Chronos and Kairos) for the now, the moments of *being*. For example, I want to be with my students fully when they are struggling to understand a point or get into a character or experience a technique we are exploring. As teachers and directors, we want to be present for them when they, in the moment, discover something, we want to hear the penny drop and watch them gain confidence and in turn, I, for one, get goose bumps (clear objectives and pay-offs for me!). We want them to have the stability and confidence to slow time down, to focus on the moment *now* as it will never be the same as right *now*, again, and that, of course, is the beauty of acting and reacting in the moment to what is happening on stage in the present.³⁰ However, modern life, technology, social media, identity politics, the climate crisis, political upheaval and now, war close to home is making this harder and harder to achieve. Time seems to be moving more rapidly than before, "as the world spins faster and faster,"³¹ we are all trying to pack too much in, yet don't seem to get as much done. We can become more observers of others (via social media mostly) than doers ourselves.

Coping with stress and the system

What do we do with our time and how are we coping with how we spend it? Is it being eaten up by stress? We definitely seem to need a lot of help to guide us through coping with the stresses of modern-day living.³² Humans need stress; we wouldn't have survived this long if we didn't feel stress and respond to it. As Armstrong states in his reflections on neuroscience, "stress is essential to human evolution", we need to be able to activate a flight, fight or sometimes a freeze³³ response at speed. Adrenaline is useful. As we all know though, too much stress can be detrimental. Mindfulness, however, seems to be able to reduce stress by "directly affecting the stress-producing regions [in the brain] themselves – reducing its grey matter."³⁴ This is useful to know. It can also, "increase the grey matter in the hippocampus (learning and memory and emotional control)" and "another area that changes in response to mindfulness is the insula, a region of the brain . . . that is involved in awareness (consciousness) and in regulation of the body's homeostasis."³⁵

The MBSR course I took 4 years ago consisted of 8 weekly 2-hour sessions and a full day of practice including a silent practice and a set of regular tasks and exercises for homework. I was astonished at how similar it was to teaching acting. The parallels between Stanislavsky's System and the training in mindfulness were extensive and covered the same ground that multiple theatre makers were discussing all the time.

A table showing how similar the two disciplines of mindfulness and acting/theatre- making are and how the language, approaches and aims used in both fields are strikingly comparable:

A comparison of approaches and language between mindfulness and theatre practice.

A snapshot on Mindfulness

- Needing an attitude of *curiosity* and *openness*
- Being *in the moment*
- Accepting things as they are *now*
- Simply noticing your thoughts (e.g. during a body scan), as passing events.
- The body scan helps us learn to place our attention in different parts of the body, which anchors our awareness in the *present moment*, and gives us more control over our attention.
- Beginner's mind – allowing yourself to be curious and see things as new and fresh (Stahl and Goldstein 2010)
- Respond wisely rather than react automatically (Kabat-Zinn 2004).
- Be grounded in your body and the world around you. Being more aware of our physical sensations and our mind state allows us to be more present – here and now.

A snapshot on Drama – offers from a selection of theatre practitioners and companies

- Needing an attitude of *curiosity* and *openness* (see Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010, Bogart 2021)
- Being *in the moment* (see Alfreds 2014)
- Accepting things as they are *now* – being affected by what is happening right now 'This physical body is the meeting place of worlds.' (see Goat Island 2000) Given Circumstances (see Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010)
- Having an inner monologue/subtext that you engage with but aim to not let take over your main objective. (see Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010)
- Circles of attention? (see Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010), relaxation of muscles, (see Stanislavski 1988)
- 'See as a new eye, as a novice, as someone who isn't jaded by fixed notions'. (see Goat Island 2000)
- 'If you do something, you really do it!' (see (Hodge, 2000) See Laban (Newlove 1993)
- Be grounded, be aware of our physical sensations and psycho-physicality and be aware of the world of the play (see Chekhov 2002, Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010, Zarrilli 2009, Murray 2003, Oida and Marshall 2013, Alfreds 2014)

The same can be seen in this table below when we explore the individual's needs to successfully be mindful and/or act.

A table showing the comparison of needs for an affective Stanislavskian actor and a mindful way of being:

A comparison of needs for an affective Stanislavskian actor and a mindful way of being

A human's needs to practice mindfulness
body and mind

- Must be physically free – yet erect and dignified
- *Paying full attention* to all our experiences, including our body, thoughts, moods and emotions and to the small changes within them
- Listening and hearing (not shutting out anything) and accepting what is there
- Honesty, not censoring yourself
- In Yoga, a conclusion in the ability to use "the subconscious mind, under orders of the conscious mind" (see Ramacharaka in Tcherkasski 2016)

An actor's needs for "the art of experiencing"
body and mind

- Must be physically free – yet in control of your released muscles
- Infinitely alert in your attention – 'You must be engrossed in what is happening onstage'
- Observe and listen to what's going on around you – be affected and be able to affect others onstage
- To believe in the events onstage – the magic if
- 'the work of the subconscious realm of the mind, which is accomplished by commanding the realm of the consciousness' (see Stanislavsky in Tcherkasski 2016)

"The past is gone, the future is not yet here. If we do not go back to ourselves in the present moment, we cannot be in touch with life".³⁶

Mindfulness, especially mindful meditation, and MBSR have their origins in the ancient practice of Buddhism which in turn has been connected to psychophysical performance³⁷ and is experiential learning.³⁸ It is an embodied experience that takes us directly to the present in any situation. A focus that is to be nurtured and cherished in any acting class.

Mindfulness is, “knowing what is happening while it is happening without preference. It is being completely aware of how we are, including our surroundings, body sensations, feelings, thoughts and emotions, whatever they are.” (Mindfulness Association 2022). We can use this to describe and then expand Stanislavsky’s emotion memory work. If we delve into our own experiences, they may be habitual and therefore cannot help with the present moment in an affected way on stage – if we are to act mindfully, to reiterate the Mindfulness Association, we “are completely aware of how we are, including our surroundings” or in actor speak, we are in the moment and conscious of our given circumstances.

The language used in both mindfulness approaches and Stanislavskian techniques becomes blurred and starts to overlap. As Chamberlain et al state, Stanislavsky said that his “whole system was based on teaching the student the art of self-observation founded on correct breathing, correct posture, ‘concentration and watchful discrimination’ and that everything was based on the breath (see Wegner 1976, 86-7).”³⁹

This is supported by Carnicke too, as she explores his use of yoga in *Stanislavsky in Focus*. She states that his system contained different influences, including: “his belief that great acting activates a mind-body-spirit continuum and his consequent inclusion of exercises from yoga in the system.”⁴⁰ We can take the first part of this discussion on self-knowledge and experiencing further with Stahl and Goldstein, when they explore MBSR definitions. “In *Full Catastrophe Living* (1990), Jon Kabat-Zinn makes an important distinction between a *stress reaction* and a *stress response*. Stress reactions are generally fuelled by unconscious habitual patterns, often learned from past challenges and experiences . . . A mindful, meditated *stress response*, on the other hand, involves acknowledging emotions rather than burying them and developing tools for working with them.”⁴¹ Reviewing actor training and Stanislavsky, we can compare these thoughts and measured approaches to see how we as actors, can avoid clichés, “the art of representation”, “stock-in-trade” or “ham acting.”⁴² Stanislavsky says as his alter ego, the teacher, Tortsov in *An Actor’s Work*, that, “You can experience the role every time, as we do, or you can experience it once or twice, so as to register the outward form a feeling takes. Having noted the form, you then learn to repeat it mechanically with the help of trained muscles.”⁴³ The pitfalls are the same in less than believable acting and not behaving mindfully.

As Iwan Brioc compares the audience settling themselves in the auditorium, to watch a live performance of a play to an individual preparing to practice mindfulness, we can also clearly compare what is happening on stage to his idea of meta-awareness⁴⁴ or as the psychologist, Thalia Goldstein proposes, “the moment of performance, is it a type of mindful meditation?”⁴⁵ In mindfulness we are both aware of our surroundings and ourselves, our thoughts and our breath and the act of bringing our thoughts back to our breath when they wander. On stage, Goldstein states that, “for the moment of performance, mindfulness may be the key to what actors are ‘doing’ because what they are ‘doing’ is ‘being’” but then suggests that actors are perhaps only 80% aware of their given circumstances, scene partners, the world of the play (the “doing”/“being”) as 20% needs to be focused on making sure they know their lines, have found the light, the audience can see and hear them and they remember their props etc. The idea of “presence” in a performance

context and being present in a mindfulness context both suggest “existing consciously.”⁴⁶ This, in turn, as White explores, relates to Stanislavsky’s idea of the “superconscious” (for him, the role) and Samadhi (for Yogis, the divine) and the concept of, “I am” on stage and “I am” in Raja Yoga. Two selves, two degrees. On stage, “You have experienced a portion of yourself in the role and the role in yourself” and in Yoga, the two degrees are a way to “understanding regarding the real self”. The first degree is the consciousness of “I” and the second is the consciousness of “I am” which is more holistic in definition and explains the relation to all life “expressed” and “unexpressed.”⁴⁷

The concept of acting being mindful is therefore not a new one. Psychologists and scholars, Thalia Goldstein and Annie Levy have been exploring this idea with their students in the USA.⁴⁸ It is this idea of “being” as well as “doing” that actors are engaged in that I want to explore in relation to teaching acting and supporting mental health and robustness through engaging with a mindful Stanislavskian approach. His system is clearly highly relevant for this way of working. However, can we expand the system’s objectives to further provoke the actor’s capacity to discover a truth in the moment through mindful (and self-helpful) acting? It is useful to interrogate whether acting is an inherently mindful practice and therefore all acting is by definition, mindful, or, if the addition of honing our sense of mindfulness can enhance our ability to act. I am taking up the gauntlet that Goldstein threw down in her 2015 paper, “While actors do not necessarily use the language of mindful awareness or non-judgmental awareness, a conversation between these two fields could be useful.”⁴⁹ I agree with this and want to explore it further through teaching and learning, acting and mindfulness practice.

While Middleton has already coined the term, “mindfulness-based performance”⁵⁰ and Plá has chosen to use the title, “contemplative,”⁵¹ here, I am using the simple term “mindful-acting”. To me, this is straightforward and inclusive as it encompasses kindness, self-care and is a social approach as well as an individual practice. It relates back to Phakama’s concept of Give and Gain, the inclusive circle, inviting and hearing everyone’s authentic voice and, as individuals, having the presence to be able to be confident in your offers (whether they fail or succeed). The idea of how we all relate to ourselves, others and space and how we, our students and especially our students of colour take up space is key to this too. Our industry is striving to be truly diverse, but it is certainly not there yet. This knowledge trickles down to our training young people. Galvanized by Black Lives Matter, the more urgent call to decolonize the curriculum, the need to increase role models in higher education and the abundance of unconscious bias training, management, and educators alike, are attempting to answer this lack of diversity more effectively. However, it is not a speedy process. Meanwhile, students of colour are still finding their way in institutions with too few people who look like them. Taking up space and making sure your voice is heard, in this scenario is a courageous act. For me, mindful acting is an equalizing idea, a social approach based in starting with yourself and by extension your community. Like theatre making (and by this, I mean having the tools and knowledge to be able to be a self-starter to create your own piece of theatre), it is therefore a social, shared practice. Even as a solo action or performance, you either have your fellow performers or your audience to create a relationship with. We can perhaps go right back to the seeds of Stanislavsky’s thoughts of ensemble playing, actors and roles all being equal. This is also where we can take a moment to look at the similarities between Euro-Centric actor training and American based Afro-Centric work. There is a spiritual

element in the SoulWork approach of Cristal Chanelle Truscott which leans on both phenomenology and mindfulness. With the idea of unending climax, call and response, emotional availability, and the nurturing of the ensemble, “where everyone’s input and voices contribute.”⁵² Truscott asks her actors to draw on their authentic experience (from their ‘cultural conservatory’⁵³) to create soulful performances. “Theater that got soul is theater that has the potential for exploration and surprise at all times” . . . “it can be and should be different every time.”⁵⁴ She goes on to say, “emotional recall gets stale.”⁵⁵ For our diverse cohorts of students an inclusive (mindful) approach to the work (giving space for everyone’s involvement and voices to be heard) is key to being able to explore their own truths. I think Stanislavsky would not argue with, “Emotional availability is being present and open and allowing the body to experience what is happening around it.”⁵⁶

If the discussion is that being a better actor, a more convincing actor on stage is about being more mindful, in the moment, non-judgemental – in Truscott’s words, “giving people things to *do* as opposed to how to feel,” and in Stanislavsky’s words, in “public solitude” as well as in truthful dialogue with a scene partner/s, perhaps, we need to reflect on what the students are practising alongside their actor training and if they think it is making a difference?

The results of the survey

I surveyed 48 Acting and Performance undergraduate students in their first year (LSBU, 2022) and asked them about their thoughts on the focused mindfulness warm-ups and meditative practice, including focusing on the breath before rehearsing, that they all experience in their classes every week. I asked them if they thought it helped them in their actor training and in their life in general. I also questioned them about their use of social media and if they did other things in their leisure time – if they had a hobby or if they took time to do “nothing” – and what that meant to them, how they defined “nothing” or “in-between time” we could perhaps call it. Only one student said, “no, not really” when asked if mindful, meditative and relaxation techniques helped in actor training. Another used a negative when discussing the meditative techniques used in class, but they seemed to acknowledge its usefulness nevertheless, their answer being, “not really, however helps me focus and be present in the lesson,” so I would argue that without them even fully recognizing it, the act of mindful practice is helping them be ready to learn and train, and seemingly focus more on that learning and training. Most students, therefore, (98%) were very clear about how the mindful and relaxation techniques including focusing on the breath, helped them. This felt quite a secular practice. It did not correlate with any sense of spirituality or religious aspect to their lives. Less than half of the students expressed themselves as religious or spiritual when asked, with 42% of students stating that they were neither. However, one student explained that they did not use meditation or mindfulness in their life in general as they used prayer instead. It could be argued that prayer for some students, is akin to meditation or mindfulness. There were many descriptions of what doing “nothing” meant to students, most defined it as “relaxing” (15%), and other mindful practices like being still, meditating, being at peace, breathing and taking a moment, and mindfulness itself making up 38% of the responses to the question: *Do you ever do “nothing”? If so, when? (And what does “nothing” mean to you?)*.

Some suggested that they had no time to do nothing (33%) and a couple – 4% – seemed to infer that there was a judgement attached to this question, and they thought, perhaps, in their minds, controversially, that it was acceptable to do nothing sometimes.

As far as actor training was concerned, the students were asked if they thought the mindfulness practice they did at the beginning of each class, in one specific module helped them in this training. In this module, they have weekly sessions consisting of Buddhist and Yogic meditation practices including Vipassanā breath work and Pranayama breathing techniques. These are both ancient Buddhist practices but are slightly different in focus. Vipassanā is about quieting the mind, not dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Being completely in the present, a non-judgemental approach to reality, not accepting any prejudices or preconceptions. Pranayama’s aim is to strengthen the connection between the mind and the body.

The student responses can be split into four sections:

Relaxation (including, in their words, “helping to cope with anxiety,” “calms me down,” “settles me” and “positivity”) – 46%

Focus (including, in their words, “more in the moment,” “concentration,” “be present,” “awareness,” “ground myself” and “consciousness”) – 73%, 16% of this alone was described as “focus”

Preparedness (including, in their words, “be ready,” “keeps me disciplined,” “in the right mind set/headspace,” “energised,” “centre myself”) – 28% – and

Techniques (including, in their words, “controlling the breath,” “being creative” and “get into character”) – 15%

Other practices that the students have been introduced to are varying lengths of mindfulness sitting practices and body scans from MBSR. A body scan is one of the longer mindfulness practices. It usually lasts 45 minutes (but there are shorter versions). It is a practice normally carried out lying down and focusing on the breath. You simply bring awareness to all the different parts of the body (feeling any tension or relaxation and noticing it as you go). Typically, there is someone narrating or leading you through the session. In their voice class, that was not asked about in their survey specifically, they study yoga for voice postures each week. This includes releasing their shoulders, hips, pelvis and ribcage. This always builds into breathing figures to prepare for sound. Mindfulness is built into the myofascial release exercises that are taught to build kinaesthetic vocal awareness. This includes breath release and Vegas nerve activation. The Estill Voice Training method itself that we teach at LSBU, is very mindful and requires relaxation and isolation of structures.⁵⁷ This vocal training uses an understanding of the science of voice production and kinaesthetic exercises to help the students. In their movement class, students also have a focused class on breathing practices and the practice of Alexander technique and Yoga. I am at the beginning of collating our practice as research findings and other modules need to be studied and added to this enquiry going forward.

Concluding thoughts

The answers that the students gave about their experience of mindfulness as part of their actor training seems to suggest that they are aware of the positive aspects of this practice and that it does make a difference to at least their frame of mind and attitude to the work. They say that it helps with focus and being in the moment, as we would have suspected, and some even say it

helps them to get into character in a direct way. It is beyond the scope of this article, but I think students and young people in general have a better understanding of what mindfulness is than their equivalent cohort did 10 or even 5 years ago. They have a mixed view of what doing “nothing” may be, but the biggest group seem to have a healthier relationship than I expected, with down time (doing nothing), it being a stillness in their lives and they understand it as non-judgemental, meditative, relaxed time. Is this because they are drama students? Is this a direct response to their weekly contemplative exercises in class? As Plá writes, “the technique aims to make one look within oneself . . . actor/performer training is not preparation for speaking, but silence. It is not a matter of filling the void but of producing one.”⁵⁸ This takes us back to Bogart’s notion of “spaciousness”. 15% however, equate doing “nothing” with a negative connotation of unproductiveness, procrastination or even worse, just not being able to sleep. We need to return to Stanislavsky, and listen when he says, “when there’s no tension or strain, I can see everything in detail.”⁵⁹ We can also take heart in the fact that others are asking the same questions in mindfulness and the experience of doing a body scan, “what does nothing or a neutral state feel like?”⁶⁰

A lot of literature on mindfulness and theatre contemplates either a link to the use of theatre in alternate medical or wellbeing practice or mindfulness in Avant Garde theatre and performance art. Stanislavsky scholars and practitioners alike have written about Stanislavsky’s exploration and indeed use of eastern practices – Hatha Yoga in particular and how spirituality was a quiet but essential part of his method. As William Wegner points out, and we have discussed, Stanislavsky was already borrowing from other disciplines when he was creating his System. His “theoretical basis and functional vocabulary are most commonly considered to be derived from the science of psychology. Less obviously however, but deeply embedded in his theory, are concepts from other, non-Western traditions. In his writings, and the works of his commentators, there are scattered references to Yoga.”⁶¹

Reflecting on Bodhi’s discussion of Buddhism’s four foundations and how, “mindfulness is consistently described by words that suggest energy, clear comprehension and lucidity,”⁶² we can directly compare these qualities to Stanislavsky’s call to training and professional actors alike, to engage in the use of inward invisible energy⁶³ and logic and sequence.⁶⁴

I argue that mindfulness in both its Buddhist and Yogic origins and the mindful-based approaches that have been popularized by Jon Kabat-Zinn should be integral now, in some part, to an actor’s contemporary relationship with Stanislavsky’s teachings. Once we embrace Stanislavsky’s own mindful approach and use of contemplative practice and we recognize that mindfulness practice is like a mental workout and can be compared to a physical workout in how it changes us positively, it will be easier for acting students to tune into the specific practice that is useful to them. They will be able to work with whatever they need to concentrate on or improve, in turn, allowing them to be more in touch with, “the life of the human spirit of a role”⁶⁵ and making them more affective and more mindful actors.

Notes

1. (Bogart 2014, 88).
2. See (Tcherkasski 2016; White 2006; 2000).
3. (Stanislavsky 1988, 99).
4. See (Kabat-Zinn 2004)

5. (Bogart 2014, 90).
6. See (Robb, Due, and Venning 2018).
7. See (Davidson and Goleman 2017; Armstrong 2019).
8. See (Goldstein 2015).
9. See (Armstrong 2019).
10. (Brioc 2018, 3).
11. Sir Ken Robinson was at Warwick University while I studied there between 1990-1994 and gave weekly lectures on arts education
12. (NHS U.K. 2022).
13. See (Farhi 1996).
14. (McAvinchey et al. 2018, 59).
15. (McAvinchey et al. 2018, 61).
16. See (Lockett and Shaffer 2017).
17. See (young anitafrika, d’bi, 2022).
18. Ingleson, 2022.
19. See above 1.
20. See (Nietzsche 2000).
21. (Kendra 2022).
22. See (Fryer 2022).
23. (Freire 2017, 53).
24. (Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010, 16–17).
25. (Bogart 2014, 89).
26. (Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010, 7).
27. (Armstrong 2019, 28).
28. Ibid.
29. (Plá, 2022, 5).
30. See (Alfreds 2014).
31. (Robinson 2011, 2).
32. See (Blair 2009, 2014).
33. (Armstrong 2019, 20).
34. (Armstrong 2019, 26).
35. Ibid.
36. (Maroney, 2018, 5).
37. See (Chamberlain, Middleton, and Plá 2014).
38. See (Freire 2017).
39. (Chamberlain, Middleton, and Plá 2014, 4).
40. (Carnicke 2009, 3).
41. (Stahl and Goldstein 2010, 29).
42. (Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010, 22, 16 and 31).
43. (Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010, 23).
44. See (Brioc 2018).
45. See (Goldstein 2015).
46. See (Goldstein 2015).
47. (White 2006, 15).
48. See above 45.
49. Ibid.
50. (Middleton 2017, 1).
51. (Plá, 2022, 5).
52. (Truscott and Gabriel 2017, 2).
53. (Truscott and Gabriel 2017, 3).
54. (Truscott and Gabriel 2017, 3).
55. (Truscott and Gabriel 2017, 7).
56. Ibid.
57. See (Estill 2017).

58. (Plá, 2022, 8).
59. (Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010, 94).
60. (Stahl and Goldstein 2010, 68).
61. (Wegner 1976, 85).
62. (Middleton 2017, 4).
63. (Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010, 372).
64. (Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010, 507).
65. (Stanislavski and Trans Benedetti 2010, 227).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Dawn Ingleson is Course Director of Drama and Applied Theatre and a Senior lecturer in Acting and Performance at London South Bank University (LSBU). She has previously taught on a range of BA, MA and PGCE courses in theatre, writing, education and children's literature at Goldsmiths, University of London. Dawn has directed, produced and project-managed theatre in Britain and internationally. She has also commissioned and created work for young audiences for the National Theatre and has produced work for schools in Japan for the Setagaya Public Theatre. Dawn is a qualified primary school teacher and has trained teachers and performers. She has run sessions on using drama and performance to support children's literacy learning, and she was the Education Manager for the National Theatre's production of *War Horse*. In this role she co-devised and ran student/teacher and actor/puppeteer training sessions in London, New York, and Toronto. Her current interests lie in inclusive pedagogy, participatory and immersive theatre, the relationship between the audience and the performer and the practice of mindfulness in actor training and performance. She uses mindfulness alongside teaching Stanislavsky methods of acting to her students on the Drama degrees at LSBU.

Bibliography

- Alfreds, M. *Different Every Night*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2014.
- Arias, G. L. "In the Wings: Actors & Mental Health: A Critical Review of the Literature." *Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses* 109 (2019). Accessed 27 June 2022. https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/109.
- Armstrong, T. *Mindfulness in the Classroom: Strategies for Promoting Concentration, Compassion and Calm*. Alexandria, Virginia, 2019. ASCD.
- Blair, L. *Straight Talking: Learn to Overcome Insomnia, Anxiety, Negative Thinking and Other Modern Day Stresses*. London: Piatkus, 2009.
- Blair, L. *The Key to Calm*. London: Yellow Kite, 2014.
- Boal, A., *Theatre of the Oppressed*. London: Pluto 2008
- Bogart, A., *What's the Story: Essays about Art, Theatre and Storytelling*. Oxon: Routledge, 2014
- Bogart, A. *The Art of Resonance*. London: Methuen Drama, 2021.
- Brioc, I. "Context Oriented Theatre: A Theatre-Based Approach to Mindfulness; A Mindfulness-based Approach to Theatre." *Journal of Context Oriented Arts* 1, no. 1 (2018). Accessed 29 May 2022. <https://journalofcoarts.pubpub.org/pub/2z0mpe57/release/4>
- Carnicke, S. M. "The Life of the Human Spirit: Stanislavsky's Eastern Self." *Teatr: Russian Theatre past and Present* 1 (2000): 3–14.
- Carnicke, S. M. *Stanislavsky in Focus*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2009.

- Chamberlain, F., D. K. Middleton, and D. Plá, "Buddhist Mindfulness and Psychophysical Performance". International Symposium for Contemplative Studies, October 30 - November 2, 2014, Boston, MA. (Unpublished), 2014. Accessed 29 May 2022. <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/23013/1>
- Chekhov, M. *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting*. Oxon: Routledge, 2002.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. *Creativity: The Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2013.
- Davidson, R. J., and D. Goleman. *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain and Body*. New York: Avery Publishing Group, 2017.
- Donnellan, D. *The Actor and the Target*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2005.
- Farhi, D. *The Breathing Book: Vitality and Good Health through essential Breath Work*. USA: Holt (Henry) & Co, 1996.
- Estill, J., M. McDonald, and K. Steinhauer. *Estill Voice Training Level 1 Figures for Voice Control Workbook*. Pittsburgh, U.S: Estill Voice International, 2017.
- Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2017.
- Fryer, P., Accessed 22 May 2022. <https://www.stanislavskyheretodaynow.com/anne-bogart-interview, 2022>
- Goldstein, T., Mindfulness and Acting: Is What Actors Do Parallel to non-judgmental Awareness of the Self? *Psychology Today*. Accessed 25 May 2022. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-mind-stage/201502/mindfulness-and-acting, 2015>
- Hanh, T. N. *Peace Is Every Step. The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*. London: Bantam Book, 1991.
- Hodge, A., ed. *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Island, G., School Book 2. Accessed 25 May 2022. http://www.goatlandperformance.org/writing_L2YP.htm, 2000
- Kabat-Zinn, J. *Full Catastrophe Living: How to Cope with Stress, Pain and Illness Using Mindfulness Meditation*. London: Piatkus, 2004.
- Kendra, C., 'What Is a Flow State?' *VeryWell Mind*. Accessed 20 May 2022. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-flow-2794768, 2022>.
- Luckett, S. D., and T. M. Shaffer. *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*. Oxford: Routledge, 2017.
- Mahoney, M. "Mindfulness Based Stress Education" Course Handouts. Unpublished. 2018
- McAvinchey, C., L. Richardson, S. Fabio, and Phakama. *Making Participatory Performance*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2018.
- Merlin, B. *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*. London: Nick Hern Book, 2012.
- Middleton, D. "Mapping mindfulness-based Performance." *Journal of Performance and Mindfulness* 1, no. 1 (2017).
- Mindfulness Association. Accessed 28 May 2022. <https://www.mindfulnessassociation.net/what-is-mindfulness/, 2022>.
- Mulligan, B. A. *The Dharma of Modern Mindfulness: Discovering the Buddhist Teachings at the Heart of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction*. Oakland, California: New Harbinger, 2018.
- Murray, S. *Jacques Lecoq*. Oxford: Routledge, 2003.
- Newlove, J. *Laban for Actors and Dancers: Putting Laban's Movement Theory into Practice - A Step-by-Step Guide*. London: Nick Hern Books, 1993.
- NHS U.K., Accessed 23 May 2022. <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness/, 2022>
- Nietzsche, F., Smith, D. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Oxford: OUP, 2000.
- Oida, Y., and L. Marshall. *The Invisible Actor*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013.
- Plá, D. R. "Mindfulness, Meditation and Dharma Art: Clues for the Pedagogy of the Actor." *Journal of Performance and Mindfulness* 2, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.
- "Psychologies, Immersive Theatre: The Ultimate Mindfulness?" Accessed 29 May 2022. <https://www.psychologies.co.uk/immersive-theatre-the-ultimate-mindfulness/, 2019>.
- Robb, A. E., Due, C., and Venning, A. "Exploring Psychological Wellbeing in a Sample of Australian Actors." *Australian Psychologist* 53, no. 1 (2018): 77–86. doi:10.1111/ap.12221.

- Robinson, K. *Out of Our Minds: Learning to Be Creative*. Chichester, U.K: Capstone Publishing Ltd, 2011.
- Shapiro, S., and L. Carlson. *The Art and Science of Mindfulness: Integrating Mindfulness into Psychology and the Helping Professions*. American Psychological Association, 2009. Washington D.C., USA.
- Stahl, B., and E. Goldstein. *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook*. Oakland, California: New Harbinger Publications, 2010.
- Stanislavski, K. *My Life in Art*. London: Methuen, 1980.
- Stanislavski, K., and J. Benedetti. *An Actor's Work*. Oxford: Routledge, 2010.
- Stanislavski, K. *An Actor Prepares*. London: Methuen Drama, 1988. Hapgood, E.R.
- Su, T. C. "Mindfulness and Heightened Consciousness in Phillip Zarrilli's Psychophysical Approach to Acting." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 20, no. 6 (2018): 7. Accessed 28 May 2022. <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol20/iss6/7/>
- Tcherkasski, S., Farber, V. *Stanislavsky and Yoga*. Oxford: Routledge, 2016.
- Truscott, C. C., and G. Gabriel. "Good Theatre Got Soul: Exploring Dr. Cristal Chanelle Truscott's SoulWork Method." *The Journal of African Diaspora Drama, Theatre & Performance* 4, no. 2 (2017).
- Wegner, W. H. "The Creative Circle: Stanislavski and Yoga." *Educational Theatre Journal* 28, no. 1 (1976): 85–89. doi:10.2307/3205965.
- White, A. R. "Stanislavski and Ramacharaka: The Influence of Yoga and turn-of-the Century Occultism on the System." *Theatre Survey* 01, no. 47 (2006): 73–88. CUP. doi:10.1017/S0040557406000068.
- young anitafrika d. Accessed 28 May 2022. <https://dbiyounganitafrika.com/>, 2022.
- Zarrilli, P. B. *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Appendix 1 Stanislavski and Mindfulness

Questions from the anonymous questionnaire
 level 4 *Acting and Performance* students – 2021-22

How would you describe your personality?

Do you consider yourself religious or spiritual? If so, why?

Why are you studying acting?

In Systems of Rehearsal, can you describe what relaxation techniques you have used?

Do you think they help you? Do they help in your life in general, in your actor training, neither or both? If so, how?

In actor training?

In life in general?

How much time do you spend on social media a day?

Do you look at your phone/social media before you go to sleep? Or as soon as you wake up? Neither or both?

How would you describe your relationship with social media usage?

Do you have a hobby or an interest outside of university? If so, what is it, how often do you do it and why do you do it?

Do you practice mindfulness/yoga/any other relaxation techniques outside of class?

If so, how long have you been practising them for?

Have these techniques helped you at all?

If so, how?

Do you ever do "nothing"? If so, when? (And what does "nothing" mean to you?)