

Stanislavski and the Perception of Shared Consciousness

Grant Olson¹

Abstract. Discourse on performance theory is permeated with an implied acceptance of a shared consciousness. The very notion regarding communication of subtext or subscore infers that some information transfers in relative clarity beyond the constraints of semiotic methods. Stanislavski offered the process of Radiation as a unique form of communication allowing direct transference of experience. This process, further explored by many of his successors, most notably Michael Chekhov, contributes to what Stanislavski called the Superconscious. Stanislavski's definition of the Superconscious includes an entwined awareness and ability to comprehend experiences and information transcending the notion and boundaries of self. Unfortunately, these concepts are often dismissed and/or avoided altogether owing to both the intentional, as well as inadvertent, linking with esoteric and mystical explanations and practices. However, current advances in cognitive science, most notably the discovery of mirror neurons and theories proposed by V. Gallese and others, offer both the potential mechanics and framework of philosophy to reconsider Stanislavski's concepts of Radiation and the Superconscious in rational discourse. Although the subject is gaining some attention, most notably with the investigations by R.A. White, the majority of current examinations regarding Radiation in performance overlooks core aspects Stanislavski regards as paramount to the concept. The most significant exclusion is Stanislavski's awareness of a perceived tangible sensation identifying the communication shared by performers and spectators alike. As a distinctly phenomenological experience problems then arise in both articulating and quantifying the perceived sensation thusly diminishing the ability to perpetuate the intended experience in a consistent or regulated manner. This paper suggests that Stanislavski offers a phenomenological response as an indicator of the relationship between action and awareness of moments of shared consciousness. This indication occurs as the Radiation of information beyond the constraints of semiotic communication creates a sense of recognition amongst those sharing in communication. Furthermore, aspects of performance methodology necessitating the spectators inclusion as a mutual creator correlate with the perception of the phenomenological awareness of the sensation of Radiation. This paper examines the descriptions of the perceived sensations from Stanislavski and several of his successors regarding the ability to transfer information beyond verbal or apparently visual means and relates them in context to current understandings in cognitive science. Drawing attention to the sensation described as Radiation offers the potential for further examination of the process via technologies such as fMRI and PET equipment, leading to a greater understanding of the mechanics and implications of Shared Consciousness, not only in performance but also in the greater understanding of cognitive science.

¹ Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Kingston University, London. Email: k1065389@kingston.ac.uk