



## THE SKILL OF IMPROVISATION AS THE BASIS OF A LIVE ACTING PRESENCE

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**Abstract.** *The relevance of the study is due to the growing role of improvisational skills as a key factor in ensuring a live actor's presence in the conditions of modernization of modern theater pedagogy. The study was conducted with the aim of comprehensively substantiating the theoretical and pedagogical foundations of improvisation as a mechanism for forming organic behavior, emotional authenticity and creative adaptability of the actor. The research methodology was based on the principles of interdisciplinary analysis and included systemic, comparative, phenomenological and content analysis, which allowed integrating classical psychological and action concepts, modern psychophysiological theories and practices of actor training. The study clarified the specifics of improvisation in various acting schools, established its influence on the development of a sense of proportion, concentration, internal effectiveness and live stage energy, and also systematized pedagogical approaches that provide multidimensional intensification of improvisational skills. The result of the research was the creation of a generalized theoretical and practical model of the development of improvisational skills, which combines psychophysical, partner, motor, imaginative and multimedia components of actor training. The practical significance lies in the possibility of using the obtained results to modernize the curricula of theater institutions, develop integrated training modules and improve pedagogical methods aimed at forming an authentic, flexible and professionally stable acting presence.*

**Keywords:** *traditional and stage forms, development of the latest technical means, unpredictable reactions, creative freedom, pedagogical methods.*

### Introduction.

In modern theater and screen art, the question of authentic actor presence, capable of holding the viewer's attention in the conditions of growing competition between traditional stage forms and technological media products, is becoming increasingly acute. Despite the development of the latest technical means, it is the "live" presence of the actor – the ability to create organic, emotionally authentic and unpredictable reactions – that remains the element of stage action that cannot be recreated artificially. At the same time, in the practice of professional training, there is a tendency to standardize acting techniques, which reduces the level of creative freedom, individual risk and spontaneity. This creates a contradiction between the need for accurate execution of the director's score and the actor's need to react to the situation, preserving the living nature of stage existence.



Improvisation in this context is not just an exercise or a technique, but a fundamental mechanism that ensures the dynamics, naturalness and plasticity of acting. However, in the scientific and pedagogical discourse there is a lack of comprehensive studies that would explain improvisation not as a separate technique, but as a basic condition for the manifestation of authentic acting presence. There is a lack of works that systematically analyze the relationship between improvisational skill, psychological readiness for spontaneity, the ability to partner interaction and the features of "live" stage energy.

In the scientific discourse devoted to improvisation and live acting presence, the desire to understand its psychophysical nature and to determine the mechanisms that ensure the organicity of stage behavior prevails. Considerable attention in this context is attracted by studies that comprehend the origins and evolution of acting in different schools. In particular, T. Tovger [1] in his research convincingly proves that in the practice of K. Stanislavsky a special role belongs to the state of the "zero zone" – the internal readiness of the actor, which precedes the action and determines the quality of his improvisational decisions. The scientist establishes that it is the ability to transition to a state of internal concentration that allows the performer to go beyond the limits of mechanical play and ensure the birth of true action in the moment.

The study by G. Gaurav and S. Bhargava [2] demonstrates that the psychophysical aspect of K. Stanislavsky's system is formed as a result of the combination of emotional memory, bodily action and internal impulse. The authors emphasize that the central result of their analysis is the statement about the need to combine mental and bodily processes in training, since only such an approach provides the actor with the ability to maintain natural behavior and instant reactions. A peculiar expansion of the interpretation of psychophysical action is proposed by R. Wyman [3], who analyzes the phenomenological and methodological consequences of the "psychophysical" actor's existence. The scientist concludes that the actor's action becomes convincing not when it is based on internal experience, but when it occurs in close interaction with bodily processes that form the structure of behavior. R. Wyman also emphasizes that improvisation is a central channel for revealing the interaction between internal



motivation and external form, but leaves out of consideration the pedagogical tools for developing such an ability. In the field of Gestalt and psychodramatic approaches, the contribution of R. Kombil [4] is significant, demonstrating the neurodynamic nature of spontaneous action. In his model, the author shows that improvisation is based on the interaction between the emotional regulation network and the executive functions of the brain, which forms the ability to make quick decisions in unpredictable conditions. R. Kombil proves that spontaneity is not chaos, but a constructive reaction, the support of which lies in the neurophysiological processes of adaptation.

A significant body of theoretical work concerns the psychophysiological training developed by E. Grotowski. T. Richards [5] states that the central result of the work of this school is the disclosure of “inner action” through bodily exploration, liberation from physical blocks and the discovery of the energetic nature of movement. The author emphasizes that true improvisational freedom arises when the performer is able to act, relying on microimpulses and the dynamics of bodily reactions. However, despite the value of these findings, there is a lack of systematization of how such techniques can be integrated into academic programs of acting training. In the direction of the analysis of motor systems, the results presented by J. Newlove and D. Dolby [6] are significant, proving that motor thinking and spatial-dynamic consciousness are formed to a large extent through improvisational research of movement. The researchers emphasize that plasticity and expanded bodily sensitivity are key prerequisites for the emergence of a living actor's presence. At the same time, the authors emphasize that motor improvisations are able to form an individual structural logic of the actor's behavior, although the question of the integration of these practices with mental processes remains open.

The American school of acting technique is represented by the works of L. Strasberg [7], who claims that the emotional truth of the action can be achieved through the flexible use of emotional memory and sensory experiences. The author establishes that improvisational exercises allow to destroy the mechanicalness of emotional manifestations and return to the actor the ability to sincere, "unforeseen" expression. However, L. Strasberg focuses mainly on the internal psychological work,



which forms the need to understand the role of partner interaction - an issue presented rather superficially in his concept. A fundamentally different methodological perspective is offered by S. Meisner and D. Longwell [8], who argue that the authenticity of acting is not formed from internal experiences, but from the actor's ability to respond to the behavior of his partner. Their results demonstrate that the improvisational component - especially in the form of repetitive dialogues - creates a specific structure of presence, based on reciprocity, attentiveness and behavioral sincerity. However, despite the importance of these conclusions, the work does not reveal the mechanisms of combining this technique with psychophysical and motor training.

Summarizing the analysis, it can be noted: modern research thoroughly highlights the psychophysical, emotional and motor nature of improvisation, but insufficient attention is paid to its pedagogical systematization and integration into a comprehensive model of acting training. It is this gap – the lack of a holistic, interdisciplinary concept of improvisational skill in the pedagogical dimension – that determines the relevance and scientific niche of this study.

The purpose of the article is to provide a theoretical justification of how improvisational practices shape the quality of live acting presence and ensure the organicity of stage existence. To achieve the outlined goal, the following tasks are planned: to analyze the main theoretical approaches to improvisation in acting pedagogy and identify key concepts that interpret improvisation as a mechanism of creative presence; to determine how improvisation affects the sense of proportion, concentration, internal effectiveness, and the creation of live stage energy; to outline pedagogical approaches and practices that support the development of improvisational skills as a fundamental component of professional acting presence.

**Research Results.** The analysis of classical psychological and action approaches to improvisation allows us to trace how the understanding of improvisational action as a fundamental tool of acting creativity gradually took shape in the theatrical pedagogy of the 20th century. It was within these schools that the idea of improvisation was laid down not as random spontaneity, but as a structured psychophysical activity aimed at



achieving organicity, truthfulness and the living presence of the actor in stage reality. Consideration of the views of K. Stanislavsky and his followers allows us to outline the theoretical basis of improvisation as a mechanism of content creation and internal action, which determines the quality of an actor's existence (Table 1).

**Table 1 – Theoretical approaches to improvisation and their contribution to the formation of live acting presence**

Theoretical direction / representative	Key understanding of improvisation	Methods, practices, tools	What aspects of actor presence does it develop?
K. Stanislavsky and the classical psychological-performance school	Improvisation as a way of "living the action", renewing emotional experience and finding organic behavior	Etude method; action in proposed circumstances; concentration on the partner	Organic behavior, "truth of the moment", flexibility of reactions, internal effectiveness
J. Moreno and Gestalt-oriented concepts	Improvisation as a spontaneous creative impulse and a mechanism for restoring personal integrity	Psychodrama; role-playing experiments; "spontaneous action"	Emotional authenticity, breadth of psychophysical states, ability to respond instantly
E. Grotovsky (psychophysiological direction)	Improvisation as a path to authenticity, breaking down body blocks and discovering "inner action"	Physical actions; physical training; "visible and invisible impulses"	Increased bodily sensitivity, energetic openness, stage courage
R. Laban and I. Malden (motor systems)	Improvisation as a free structuring of movement that reflects internal dynamics	Laban Movement Analysis; motor impulses; spatial and rhythmic modulations	Plasticity, bodily thinking, spatial-dynamic awareness
Lee Strasberg and The Method	Improvisation as a way of actualizing emotional memory and finding the truth of behavior	Sensory exercises; affective memory; individual impulse improvisations	Emotional depth, psychological authenticity, inner focus

*Source: author's own development*

In the system of K. Stanislavsky, improvisation is considered one of the key ways to achieve organic behavior of the actor at the moment of stage existence. Despite the fact that he did not use the term "improvisation" in the modern sense, his approach is based on the constant actualization of "live action", non-mechanistic response and flexible choice of behavioral solutions in the proposed circumstances. The



improvisational component of Stanislavsky's system consists in creating conditions under which the actor does not reproduce a given emotion, but experiences it anew through the activation of psychophysical processes and openness to internal impulses [1]. Of particular importance in the classical school is the etude method, which is improvisational in nature. Etude in Stanislavsky's system is not a rehearsal exercise, but a way of experiencing the action, discovering the internal logic of the character and forming the actor's organic behavior through a free, unformatted search. Etudes allow the actor to "get rid of clichés", enter a state of creative freedom and form a lively, unpredictable course of stage action, which fundamentally distinguishes the improvisational element of the system from the formal performance of the role score [2]. Improvisation in the classical school performs the function of activating the actor's inner creative nature. Through action in imaginary or conditional circumstances, the actor learns to rely on his own psychophysical reactions, and not on pre-constructed schemes. K. Stanislavsky emphasized the need to transition from "declarativeness" to "the truth of the moment", emphasizing that stage action should occur "now and here", and not be reproduced as an external formality. This is what, according to researchers, makes improvisation a key tool for preserving the vitality and freshness of actor's decisions. Also significant in the context of the improvisational nature of the system is the emphasis on interaction with a partner. The actor's action becomes organic only when it is supported by attention to the partner, that is, when the reaction is born as a result of a real impulse, and not a mechanically reproduced mise-en-scene. Scientific interpretations of the system indicate that improvisation is actually "turned on" at the moment when the actor allows himself to change the trajectory of the action in accordance with the live behavior of the partner, without violating the logic of the scene [3]. In this way, the phenomenon of "truth of the moment" is formed, which becomes the central element of the live actor's presence.

In Gestalt-oriented and psychophysiological concepts, improvisation is considered as a mechanism for releasing spontaneity and restoring the natural integrity of the actor's "self". One of the most influential thinkers in this direction was J. Moreno, the founder of psychodrama, who interpreted improvisation as the basis of creative



self-expression and therapeutic experience. According to J. Moreno, spontaneity is the primary impulse that activates the creative potential of the individual and provides the ability to unpredictable, but internally coherent action. Research emphasizes that psychodramatic techniques form in the performer the skill of instantaneous response to a stimulus, expand the range of psychophysical states and contribute to the emergence of emotional authenticity in stage interaction [4].

E. Grotowski's psychophysiological approach develops the idea of improvisation as a path to authenticity and "inner action". In his trainings, the scientist emphasized overcoming bodily barriers, discovering natural motor energy, and freeing the actor from social and psychological blocks. Improvisation in this system appears not as an element of creative play, but as a tool of self-disclosure, which allows the performer to enter a state of maximum truthfulness. A scientific analysis of E. Grotowski's practice indicates that his training structures were built as a series of improvisational tasks aimed at finding "bodily truth" and the actor's formation as an open, reactive, sensitive to microimpulses subject [5]. A separate vector of the psychophysiological approach is associated with the movement techniques of R. Laban and his student I. Maldin (Laban-Maldinis Approach). Their practices interpret improvisation as the organization of movement based on spatial, dynamic and rhythmic parameters, which allows revealing the individual plastic logic of the actor. Improvisational research of movement focuses on the interaction of internal impulse and external form, forming a deeper bodily awareness and the actor's ability to create qualitatively new movement structures. Modern interpretations of these techniques prove that improvisation contributes to the development of stage presence through the sharpening of bodily attention and the formation of "motor thinking" [6].

In the American acting school, improvisation occupies a central place as a tool for creating true emotional reactions and overcoming acting artificiality. Representatives of the "The Method" system – Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and others – emphasized that improvisation is a means of going beyond mechanical acting techniques and a way of actualizing deep psychological processes that ensure the naturalness of stage behavior. Lee Strasberg drew attention to the importance of affective memory, but



emphasized that its use should be flexible and improvisational, that is, depend on the situation of the moment, and not on formal reproduction [7].

Improvisation acquires a special significance in the school of S. Meissner, for whom authenticity arises only through live interaction with a partner. His “repetition exercise” is built on the principle of an instant reaction to the behavior of another person, which makes it impossible to make a pre-constructed emotional expression. Thanks to this technique, the actor learns to exist in a mode of constant presence, trust the first impulses and create a true dynamic of stage dialogue. Scientific research emphasizes that the Meissnerian approach has formed a new standard of actor interaction, where improvisation is understood as the basis of psychological honesty and creative flexibility [8]. In general, the American school treats improvisation as a way to avoid “game artificiality” – a tendency towards external, superficial performance that has no internal emotional basis. Through improvisational practices, the actor acquires the ability to be in the moment, maintain continuous creative contact with a partner and maintain naturalness, even when working in the harsh conditions of the director’s score or film format.

The development of improvisational skills in modern acting pedagogy occupies a key place, since it is improvisation that provides the actor with the ability to organically be present, flexibly respond, and create unpredictable but internally motivated action. The gradual evolution of pedagogical concepts – from classical psychophysical systems to integrated multimodal practices – indicates a growing interest in improvisation as a universal tool for the professional development of an actor. Modern research indicates that improvisational techniques are not just an auxiliary element of the rehearsal process, but the foundation that forms the actor’s creative adaptability, emotional openness, and ability to live in the moment of stage interaction [9]. In this context, the analysis of pedagogical approaches that allow building a systemic model for the development of improvisational skills is important (Table 2).

One of the leading directions is psychophysical training, which considers improvisation as a way of harmonizing bodily, emotional and cognitive processes. Exercises for “instant reaction”, improvisational situations with a sudden change of



conditions, work with impulse and internal movement are aimed at overcoming the fear of spontaneity and activating the actor's freedom. Psychophysiological schools, based on the ideas of E. Grotowski, emphasize the need to form a sensitive and open body, which is able to instantly respond to stage stimuli, and not rely on mechanical performance schemes [10]. This approach allows the actor to act confidently in conditions of uncertainty and maintain internal truthfulness. No less important is the development of spontaneity as a pedagogical skill. Improvisational exercises serve as a means of liberation from excessive rational control, which often blocks creative impulses. J. Moreno's psychodramatic techniques allow students to experience their own emotional states in a safe environment, learn to act guided by the first impulse, and expand the range of emotional and behavioral reactions [11]. Due to this, improvisation becomes not only an artistic, but also a therapeutic tool that helps actors overcome internal blocks and fear of making mistakes.

**Table 2 – Pedagogical approaches to developing an actor's improvisational skills**

<b>Pedagogical approach</b>	<b>Key focus</b>	<b>Typical tools and practices</b>	<b>Results for the actor</b>
Psychophysical training	Integration of body, emotions and cognition	Impulse exercises, changing circumstances, Grotowski's trainings	Flexibility, inner concentration, organic action
Developing spontaneity	Overcoming control, openness to impulse	Psychodrama, role-playing experiments, rapid improvisations	Expanded emotional range, courage
Partner interaction	Reactivity and dialogicity	"Repetition exercise", improvisational dialogues	Authenticity, living presence
Action in circumstances	The logic of the character's behavior	Dynamic sketches, changing situations	Adaptability, structurality of action
Body awareness	Motor thinking, plastic	Laban Movement, somatic practices	Plasticity, stage expressiveness
Imagination	The inner world of the role	Psychological gesture, atmospheric improvisations	Imagery, emotional coloring
Multimedia formats	Interaction with the digital environment	Improvisation with sound, video, projections	New stage presence

*Source: author's own development*



The central component of the formation of improvisational skills is partner interaction. S. Meisner's techniques, in particular the "repetition exercise", are aimed at developing the actor's ability to "listen to the partner", respond to his micro-impulses and create an organic dialogue without prior construction of schemes. Meisner's pedagogy proves that the authenticity of the actor's action is born not from internal psychologism, but from live interpersonal contact. Such practice forms in the performer the skill of being present in the moment and maintaining the dynamics of stage interaction.

An important component of modern pedagogy is the development of bodily awareness. The movement systems of R. Laban and I. Malden, as well as somatic practices (Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique) form in students the ability to think in movement, to feel space, rhythm, dynamics and internal micro-impulses. Improvisational movement structures allow to create unique plastic compositions that enhance the actor's presence and make the body an open tool of creative thinking [12]. Developed corporeality becomes the foundation for spontaneous stage action. Special attention needs to be paid to creating a safe creative environment, which is formed by the teacher. After all, improvisation involves a high level of openness, so the student should be able to make mistakes without fear of judgment. Inclusivity and supportive group dynamics contribute to the formation of trust and allow exploring ones own creative boundaries. A mistake in such conditions is viewed not as a violation, but as a potential resource for creative search. Newer acting schools increasingly integrate multimedia and performative improvisational formats: working with video projections, sensory environments, soundscapes. In such conditions, the actor learns to improvise not only with a human partner, but also with a technological environment that shapes new types of presence in theater and screen space. It is important to note that modern pedagogy tends towards integrative models that combine psychophysical, partner, motor and imaginative aspects of improvisation. Such models consider improvisational skill as a multidimensional competence that provides the actor with the ability to authentic artistic action in complex, dynamic and unpredictable conditions of the stage process.



## **Conclusions.**

The analysis of theoretical approaches has shown that improvisation is not a spontaneous accident, but a structured psychophysical activity that provides the actor with the ability to natural behavior, emotional authenticity and the creation of realistic stage action. From the classical psychological and performance system of K. Stanislavsky to the movement concepts of R. Laban, and the psychodrama of J. Moreno – in all directions, improvisation is understood as a complex mechanism for the formation of creative presence, based on an internal impulse, attention to the partner, and bodily openness. The conducted research allowed us to determine that improvisation plays a key role in the formation of a sense of measure, concentration, and internal effectiveness of the actor. It provides a balance between freedom and structure, allowing the performer to maintain the logic of action even in conditions of unpredictability. Concentration on the partner, working with bodily micro-impulses, activating emotional memory and motor thinking contribute to the emergence of a living stage energy that supports the plasticity and dynamics of interaction. Improvisation in this sense appears not as a technique, but as a quality of acting existence, which ensures the authenticity and persuasiveness of the artistic image.

The outlined pedagogical approaches demonstrate that the development of improvisational skills requires a holistic, integrated methodology that combines psychophysical training, partner techniques, movement work, imagination, psychological spontaneity, and multimedia forms. Psychophysical training allows forming a flexible and sensitive body, ready for instant action; partner exercises provide the ability to respond to behavioral impulses; motor practices develop plasticity and bodily thinking; imagination creates the internal logic of the role; and multimedia formats simulate the conditions of the modern theatrical and screen environment. The optimal pedagogical model should be based on the creation of a safe creative space in which the actor can take risks, experiment, and reveal unique creative reactions.



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