

## Actor's Self

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## Acting and the Self

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**Abstract:** *In this paper, Douglas Hofstadter's view of the self as a "strange loop" is used in order to understand how several acting techniques work. As examples of acting techniques I will use the work of Lee Strasberg, Constantin Stanislavski, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner. I will argue that Douglas Hofstadter's view of the self as a strange loop allows us to understand how acting works. I will furthermore argue that because Douglas Hofstadter's view is successful in explaining how different acting techniques work, that is a good indication of its adequacy as a theory of the self.*

**Keywords:** Self, Acting, Acting Techniques, Douglas Hofstadter, Strange Loop.

"A strange loop is a paradoxical level-crossing feedback loop."

Douglas Hofstadter, *I am a Strange Loop*, p. 102

Douglas Hofstadter has created an interesting and original theory of the Self, which he defines as being a "strange loop", a circular multi-leveled looping structure in the brain that would explain our psychological experience of having a self. Hofstadter's Self is created not only with an internal loop, but also with the external interaction of the Self and the world, what happens to the individual becomes formative in the Self's strange loop. Furthermore, one of Hofstadter's most original points is saying that we create these strange loops not only to represent ourselves, but also to represent others, and that there is no essential difference between these two types of loops. Hofstadter's wonderfully complex ideas about the Self loops and loops for Others, can help us understand how acting techniques work and how actors are able to build many characters and personify these characters in their work. Hofstadter's ideas can also explain how *different* acting techniques, or different approaches to acting, work.

This paper will be divided in three parts, in the first part I will introduce Hofstadter's views about the Self as a strange loop, including their original background in Hofstadter's earlier work, *Gödel, Escher and Bach* (1979). In the second part of the paper I will suggest a quick summary of different acting strategies, going from an emotion based acting (Strasberg, 1987), mixed strategies involving imagination (Stanislavski, 1936; Adler, 1988, 2000), and ending with action based acting (Meisner, 1987). In the third part I will use Hofstadter's views of the Self to explain how these different acting techniques can all function in creating convincing Self loops that flesh out the characters built by the actors.

### 1. The Self as a strange loop

In his book, *I am a Strange Loop*, Hofstadter goes through great lengths to explain what he means by a strange loop. A loop is a closed circuit where there seems to be an ever increasing in level, but nevertheless we end up where we started. One of Hofstadter's favorite examples is what we call an enchanting experience he had as a kid when closing a cardboard box and folding the flaps in a cyclical order: "It always gave me a *frisson* of delight (and even today it still does a little bit) to perform that final *verboten* fold and thus feel I was flirting dangerously with paradoxicality." (Hofstadter, 2007, p. 101).

There are many other examples of different types of loops, some are circular, some tend towards infinity. Among the circular loops, Hofstadter includes de "lap loop", a game where each individual is sitting on another individual's lap until a complete circle is achieved and it is hard to say who is holding the group, but the lap loop does not collapse. Another simple illustration of a circular lap can easily be exemplified when we arrange several pens in the following way:

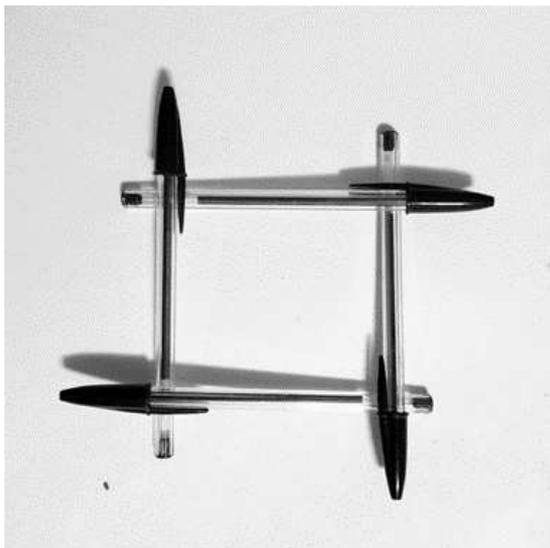


Image 1:  
Pen loop: circular hierarchical system,  
Photo S.F.Bizzaro

This is another version of the original example presented by Hofstadter when we close a cardboard box with overlapping flaps. The infinity generating loops are the ones that happen when we place two facing mirrors or when we have a camera that is plugged into a certain monitor that is showing what it is recording and we turn the camera towards the said monitor, in that case we get a video loop. Here is an example of the mirror loop:



Image 2:  
Mirror loop: infinite regress;

Photo: Sara F. Bizzaro

But what does Hofstadter mean when he says the Self is a strange loop? Does he mean that there is an actual physical loopy structure in the brain that supports what we call the self? Yes and no. Hofstadter does think that there must be *some* structure in the brain that supports the self, but the exact nature of that structure is still unknown to us. What he means for the time being is that we can use this idea of a strange loop and create an abstract theory of the Self:

“What I mean by “strange loop” is - here goes a first stab, anyway - not a physical circuit but an abstract loop in which, in the series of stages that constitute the cycling-around, there is a shift from one level of abstraction (or structure) to another, which feels like an upwards movement in a hierarchy, and yet somehow the successive “upward” shifts turn out to give rise to a closed cycle. That is, despite one’s sense of departing ever further from one’s origin, one winds up, to one’s shock, exactly where one had started out.” (Hofstadter, 2007, p. 101-102)

### 1.1. Gödel, Russell, Strange Loops, Self-reference and Paradox.

Hofstadter started thinking about strange loops in his earlier book, *Gödel, Escher and Bach* (1979). In this book Hofstadter talks about the first Gödel incompleteness theorem. Gödel incompleteness theorem was developed after Russell and Whitehead's *Principia of Mathematica*. In the *Principia of Mathematica* Russell and Whitehead were trying to reduce mathematics to logics, but the first Gödel incompleteness theorem states that there is a truth that cannot be proved in the system presented in Russell and Whitehead. Gödel was able to construct a self-referential sentence in PM by mapping the symbols used by Russell and Whitehead to Gödel numbers, which allowed him to construct what is called the Gödel sentence. The Gödel sentence is a statement that is true, but not provable in PM. Gödel statement is:

"This statement  
cannot be proved"

Russell and Whitehead were well aware of the problems and paradoxes arrived at when constructing Self-referential sentences. In fact, their own system was developed after Russell encountered Self-referential issues in the previous work of Frege (1884) who had tried to reduce arithmetic to set theory. Russell had developed what is known as the Russell Paradox. Russell constructed a set that was defined as the set of all sets that do not belong to themselves, if this set belongs to itself, then it does not belong to itself and if it does not belong to itself, then it belongs to itself. To avoid these types of self-referential paradoxes, Russell had introduced what he called the Theory of Types that was built in order to prevent the construction of paradoxical self-reference logical sentences by keeping hierarchical levels separate, however, Gödel constructed a different interpretation of Russell's symbols broke the hierarchy blocking strategy that Russell had devised and the paradox reappeared.

As a young man, Hofstadter was fascinated by these are other examples of self-reference. However, what touches him the most is not that self-reference in certain systems can create paradoxical contradictions, instead he is delighted by the idea that there is no way to block self-reference if the system presented is sufficiently complex, that is the uptake of Gödel's first incompleteness theorem for Hofstadter. However, the "self loop" that Hofstadter wants to introduce, is not necessarily of the self-destructive kind: "...negation plays no essential role in strange loopiness. It's just that the strangeness becomes more pungent or humorous if the loop enjoys a self-undermining quality. Recall Escher's Drawing Hands. There is no negation in it - both hands are drawing. Imagine if one was erasing the other!" (Hofstadter, 2007, p.159)

Hofstadter's is mainly interested in the idea that sufficiently complex systems cannot help themselves and become self-referential. This is the main vision that arose from Gödel's first incompleteness theorem: "What makes a strange loop appear in a brain (...) is an ability - the ability to think - which is in effect a one syllable word standing for the possession of a sufficiently large repertoire of triggerable symbols. Just as the richness of whole numbers gave PM the power to represent phenomena of unlimited complexity and thus to twist back and engulf itself via Gödel's construction, so our extensible repertoires of symbols give our brains the power to represent phenomena of unlimited complexity and thus to twist back and engulf themselves via a strange loop." (Hofstadter, 2007, p. 203).

### **1.2. Hofstadter's Self**

The original intuition for Hofstadter is then that sufficient complex systems will inevitably be self-referential. But what is this and how does a Self appear and develop? What is a Self? For Hofstadter, the "I" represents a rather large and dominant structure in the brain that is not essentially different from other structures in the brain, but its presence has a larger impact because of its size and complexity. The structure that comprises the "I" includes endless episodic, emotional and introspective memories associated with it. The "I" is built as these memories are constructed and as the person interacts with the world the vision of the "I" changes accordingly:

"The vast amounts of stuff that we call "I" collectively give rise, at some particular moment, to some external action, much as a stone tossed into a pond gives rise to expanding rings of ripples. Soon, our action's myriad consequences start bouncing back at us, like the first ripples returning after bouncing off the pond's banks. What we receive back affords us the chance to perceive what our gradually metamorphosing "I" has wrought." (Hofstadter, 2007, p. 203)

For Hofstadter the Self is therefore a large complex looping structure that is not essentially different from other structures in the brain. The Self loop has a larger impact on our experience and behavior mostly because of its size. The Self loop consists of endless episodic, emotional and introspective memories. The Self also is affected and formed as the person interacts with the world, the Self loop is not completely internal, it reaches out to the world and changes as its experiences develop. One of the most fundamental ideas in Hofstadter is that the Self is not an essentially different from other brain structures and in fact the way we represent others is very similar to the way we represent ourselves.

### **1.3. Others are Strange Loops**

According to Hofstadter strange loops do not only build Selves but they also represent Others. Besides being able to create our ever changing "I" with our

interaction with the world, we are also able to create similar structures to represent others, “you”, “he”, “she”, “Robert”, “Sandy” and so on. When we interact with other people, we assume that they perform the same creation of self that we do and we create a smaller loop to represent what we assume to be their own self-creation. However, since we have less information about others than about ourselves these loops, according to Hofstadter, are less elaborate, but not radically different from ours.

The Other for Hofstadter is a smaller structure, not essentially different from ours, only smaller in size, the fact that it has limited information makes it a less complex system and therefore it might be less rich and complete. One interesting result of Hofstadter’s view of the Other as a strange loop is that one has to admit to some introspective access of the other. Our introspective access to others loops is limited by the amount of complexity of other loops, but in fact, if we know someone very well, we can introspect from the inside of our representation of the other. Of course this probably will not correspond with the experience the other has of his own Self loop, but there is no reason in principle that will necessarily stop the possibility of the introspection of other’s Self loops. In fact, the more we have experiences with Others, the more we can tune our representations of them in our Other loops and the closer we can be having a similar introspective experience as they do. This ability to represent others as we do ourselves opens to way to understanding how acting works and how an actor can be successful in creating a character.

In the next section of this paper I will present several acting techniques in order to understand the tools actors use to create loops that represent the characters they want to embody. There are several types of acting techniques and I will try to give an overview of them in order to have a general perspective of how they work. Finally in the last section I will try to see how the acting techniques can be understood using Hofstadter’s theories of the Self.

## **2. Acting**

In a documentary for the PBS TV Series *American Masters* about Sanford Meisner, Sydney Pollack while speaking about Constantin Stanislavski, defined acting in the following way: “Acting has to do reproducing honest and truthful human behavior in imaginary circumstances.” Even though this is a very good definition of acting, I would tweak it slightly in this way: “Acting is reproducing human behavior in imaginary circumstances in an honest and truthful way.” I think this is probably closer to what Sydney Pollack meant, since not all characters played by actors are honest and truthful, an actor can also represent dishonest and misleading human behavior in imaginary circumstances in an honest and truthful way. After this small tweak I like this definition because it touches on three elements that pertain to all acting: behavior, imagination and truthfulness, which has space for the adequate

emotional content of the behavior being performed. Tentatively I will put forward the three essential elements of acting: emotion, imagination and action and I will try to show how different acting techniques use these three elements, although each kind of technique can stress one element as more important than the others.

In the next sections I will skim through the teachings of the four main acting teachers in theater history. I will organize them not chronologically but by how they stand in the line from emotion to action based acting with imagination being somewhere in between emotion and action. I will therefore start with Lee Strasberg (1987) because he has the most emotion-based approach also known as The Method. Then I will look at the teachings of Constantin Stanislavski (1936) who started as an emotion based acting teacher and later in his career is said to have stressed the power of imagination. After that I will look at the work of Stella Adler (1988) who stresses the importance of imagination in an actor's work. Finally, I will look at the technique proposed by Sanford Meisner (1987) that stresses the importance of action while teaching his acting technique. I will argue that even though each teacher stresses a different aspect of acting, they all agree with the triad of acting as involving emotion, imagination and action.

### **2.1. Strasberg**

Lee Strasberg is an American actor and acting teacher who was the director of the Actor's Studio and who is considered the father of Method Acting in the United States, a method followed by many famous film actors: James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Paul Newman, Robert De Niro, Al Pacino and many others are all said to be followers of Method Acting. Method Acting, as proposed by Strasberg, is a group of techniques and exercises that help an actor connect to a character by using their own personal emotions and memories. Method actors use what they affective, emotional and sensory memory, when they are building a character. A method actor will start by building a complete profile of the character he wants to portray or embody, he will consider his history, relationships, experiences and so on, however, to be able to really embody the character, Method Acting encourages the actor to look into their personal emotional experiences in order to "flesh out" the emotional experiences of the character. The aim of the actor is to move the audience and the idea is that he can only move the audience if he is able to move himself. The basic idea is that a performance can only be experienced by the audience as moving, if it is experienced as moving by the actor and bringing up deeply personal emotional memories is supposed to help in the genuine experience of the performance.

In his book, *A Dream of Passion* (1987), Lee Strasberg talks about the main dilemma of the actor, what is sometimes called "inspiration". How can an actor be moved day in and day out in a theater performance? Does an actor need to be moved in order to move the audience? This topic was analysed by Diderot in his book *The*

*Paradox of Acting* (1883), basically the problem for Diderot is that emotional performers cannot be expected to deliver a consistent performance, we can expect no “unity” from players who “play from the heart”: “Their playing is alternately strong and feeble, fiery and cold, dull and sublime.” (Diderot, 1883, p.8). However, Lee Strasberg did not conclude with Diderot that we must strip emotion from the performances, instead he looked for ways to preserve emotion in performances in a consistent way. He knew that this would be possible after seeing the Moscow Art Theater performances of Chekov plays in New York city guided by Stanislavski. Here is how Lee Strasberg describes these productions: “In the productions we saw in America, the plays were alive with vivid, intense, colorful experiences, while each moment was filled with marvelous creations of the experiences of the characters. There was never anything maudlin or pathetic or sentimental.” It was after seeing the Moscow Art Theater performances that Lee Strasberg decided to become an actor and being that he knew Stanislavski had developed a consistent method for achieving performances of the stature that Lee Strasberg had witnessed, he later looked to develop such a method himself as director of the Actor’s Studio.

After seeing the Moscow Art Theater, Lee Strasberg was convinced that “acting in the process of living on the stage” (Strasberg, 1987, p.63). There are two main parts of the stage experience that have to be dealt with by the actor, one is adequate preparation and the other is adequate expression. When setting up a character the actor in Stanislavski’s method uses what Strasberg calls the “creative if”, where he imagines himself in a certain set of circumstances and tries to see how he would react to such circumstances. Strasberg found that this only worked if the setting of the play was close enough to the actor’s own experience, in classical plays were the experience is very far from the actor’s lived experience, this strategy does not work. Strasberg suggested that the actor can imagine a different set of circumstances that he is familiar with and react with those in mind even if they have nothing to do with the play. By using this strategy the actor’s performance will come across as credible because his emotions are sincere. Sincerity of emotion and experience on stage is the key to a good performance according to Lee Strasberg and the way to achieve this is by using one’s existing previous emotional experiences.

There is a lot to say about each acting technique, but for the purposes of this paper I will just try to concentrate on the essential aspects of each technique and hopefully in the end we will be able to have a general view of acting technique in general and we will be able to try to understand the techniques in view of Hofstadter’s theory of the Self. In the next chapter I will present a summary of the approach developed by the father of all the approaches described in this paper, Stanislavski.

## 2.2. Stanislavski

Constantin Stanislavski was the master of social realism in theater in Russia and inspired all psychological realism in theater in the United States. I am describing his work after Less Strasberg because even though he stresses the emotional content of a performance, he has a more balanced view on how to learn the art of acting. Stanislavski defines acting first and foremost as *action with a purpose*. His main instructional book, *An Actor Prepares*, is a fictional work written from the point of view of one of his students. In this book, the student describes going to the Moscow Art Theater and doing all the exercises proposed by the teacher. In many examples and situations the teacher shows the students that one can only perform an action convincingly if the action to be performed has a defined purpose, one cannot simply perform an action and arouse emotion, one needs a complete set up of the scene's background and character motivation in order to have the emotional content of the scene appear in a natural and honest way:

*“Fix this for all time in your memories: On the stage there cannot be, under any circumstances, action which is directed immediately at the arousing of a feeling for its own sake. To ignore this rule results only in the most disgusting artificiality. When you are choosing some bit of action leave feeling and spiritual content alone. Never seek to be jealous, or to make love, or to suffer, for its own sake. All such feelings are the result of something that has gone before. Of the thing that goes before you should think as hard as you can. As for the result, it will produce itself.”* (Stanislavski, p. 38)

So even though emotion is important for a performance to be moving, it cannot be the starting point for a performance. Stanislavski says that in order to perform a convincing action one must develop the character's situation, motivation, background and so on. In order to do this the actor will use the big “what if” guideline. However, since many of the plays will present the actor with situations that are far beyond what he has experienced in life and because the actor has to perform in a non-realist environment, the stage, one of the actor's main challenges is to develop his *imagination*. Stanislavski proposes several exercises regarding the development of an actor's imagination. In one example he asks the student to imagine that he is a tree, then asks the student to develop this in more detail: the student imagines he is a giant oak tree in the mountain standing alone in a large field, he hears the rustle of the leaves and he sees the birds on his branches but he can't imagine much else. The teacher then suggests that the student should explain why he is alone in a field and the student places the tree in a feudal era and says the feudal lord had all the other trees cut down for fear of the enemy and left that one tree because it created a shadow on a spring of water and in order to climb on it and look out for the enemy. At this point the student has a much more fleshed out idea of the tree. Now, since a tree does not move, it is a particularly difficult challenge

for an actor to create much more with this subject, but at this point the teacher asks the student to look into his personal emotional history and bring up something that stirs him in his real life. The student says he is particularly moved by fights and so the teacher says he should imagine the enemy's army is approaching, he is being attached with arrows and gun shots and so on. The student is able to bring up several strong emotions but since the tree cannot move, his physical dramatic expression is limited. Stanislavski uses this example in order to illustrate how much background and preparation is before any action at all is performed. (Stanislavski, p. 61-66)

Imagination is important in order to create the background for action, but when action is being performed there are other techniques that are important to make the action look natural and real. Strategies like concentration of attention in certain objects and exercises in muscle relaxation are also a part of the actor's preparation. Finally, because an actor must be ready to repeat an emotional and truthful experience on stage day after day, Stanislavski stresses the importance of what he calls sensory and emotional memory. Sensory memory is memory of sensory inputs like sound, tactile memory, smells and so on. If an actor trains his sensory memory he will be able to bring it about on stage and he will be able to flesh out a scene with real sensory experience. Emotional memory is like regular action memory but its focus is on past emotions. If, for instance, one had a close friend who died, it is relatively easy to recall the emotion felt when one heard about their death. The actor must practice the recollection of all kinds of emotions. Then, besides practicing the recollection of emotion, the actor will associate certain actions to a certain emotion in order to create a conditioned reflex where a certain action brings forth a certain emotion. This requires a lot of training, but it is a way to achieve emotionally filled performances on stage that can be consistently repeated.

Summing up Stanislavsky's method: the aim of a theatrical performance is to achieve a truthful embodiment of a play on stage. All action on stage must be with a purpose and in order to establish that purpose actors need to exercise their imagination while fleshing out the characters background. After developing the character's setting the action on stage should bring forth the adequate emotional content for each scene. The actor then needs to develop his emotional memory so that he can repeat the emotional content of the play in a consistent way and in order to develop his emotional memory the actor associates certain actions with certain emotions. So, in Stanislavsky's method he uses the three aspects of acting: action, imagination and emotion, in a balanced way.

### **2.3. Adler**

Stella Adler also witnessed Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theater performances in New York City, she was also part of the Group Theater with Lee Strasberg and

actually travelled to Paris to study with Stanislavski himself. Generally, Adler follows the Stanislavski's system, but her interpretation is different from Lee Strasberg in that Strasberg underlined the importance of personal emotions in the performance, while Adler underlined the importance of imagination. Adler had distain for the idea that actors have to look onto their personal emotional past in order to flesh out the characters. In most plays, the characters embodied by actors where so far from what the general middle class American experience had to offer, that it seemed to her absurd that the actor should look for the emotional content of his performances in such an experience:

"Nowadays a lot of what passes for acting is nothing more than finding yourself in some character. That doesn't interest me. Of course you have to bring your own experience to bear on the characters you play, but you have to realize right from the outset that Hamlet was not "a guy like you"." (Adler, 2000, p. 19)

Adler stressed that the actor should spend large amounts of time reading and becoming more and more knowledgeable about different cultures and different attitudes. The actor, according to her, should be constantly enriching himself and by doing so he will furnish more and more the most important quality an actor needs in order to succeed, his imagination:

"Ninety-nine percent of what you see and use on the stage comes from imagination. Onstage you will never have your own name and personality or be in your own house. Every person you talk to will have been written imaginatively by the playwright. Every circumstance you find yourself in will be an imaginary one. And so, every word, every action, must originate in the actor's imagination." (Adler, 1988, p. 17).

Adler also admits that emotion is very important in order to construct theatrical truth or a sense of being genuine on stage, however she claims that emotion and action in theater must have their root in imagination and therefore most of her exercises are constructed in order to develop this faculty in the actor.

#### **2.4. Meisner**

Last, but not least, Meisner is another follower of Stanislavski's system, however, instead of stressing emotion or imagination, he stresses action. Meisner thought that the most important thing in order to achieve truthfulness on stage was to be completely present in the moment while doing the action. Meisner's motto was:

"The foundation of acting is the reality of doing" (Meisner p. 16)

In order to achieve this presence in the moment Meisner's students start by developing the ability to improvise first, the ability to live in the moment of the scene, to react to the other actors in the moment of the scene. Meisner's most famous

techniques are the repetition exercises where the actor's repeat something to each other until something impels them to move forward, for instance, one actor will say: "Your smart" and the other will answer: "I'm smart", then the first actor will repeat: "Your smart" and the second: "I am smart." The inflection in both actors will change as they repeat this exercise and certain emotions will arise, they might get irritated, bored and so on. The most important thing for Meisner is moment to moment spontaneity. When learning the lines, a Meisner actor will say them with no intonation, the intonation will only occur in the moment and can be radically different from performance to performance. This does not produce consistent performances, but guarantees honesty and truthfulness in each performance. Emotion and imagination are also present in Meisner's method, but the over stressing of each of these made for actor who had a very deep presence but acted with themselves and not with others, not in the moment of the scene.

There is much more that can be said about each approach to acting that I sketched here. However, for the sake of this paper I only wanted to try to show that these approaches all use the same basic elements in constructing a character: emotion, imagination and action. The starting point and the focus is in either one of them in each case, Strasberg started from emotion, Adler from imagination and Meisner from action, while the original teacher being this realist method, Stanislavski, balanced all three. Here is a graphic illustration of this idea:



In the next and last section I will try to understand why this triad works in building a character by using Hofstadter's view of the Self. If the Self is somehow a unique system in the brain that belong only to the person in who it exists, it cannot be easily understood how actors can build convincing and non-artificial characters. If the Self is unique and exclusive of the bearer, then acting is doomed to fail and the aim of truth on stage that the realist Methods try to achieve is a red herring. However, if the Self, like Hofstadter claims, is not fundamentally different from other structures in the brain that we use to represent others, then all the techniques employed by these Methods make sense and we can understand how an actor builds a character.

### 3. The Actor's "Self"

How do Hofstadter's views allow us to understand what happens in the types of acting techniques presented in the previous section? Hofstadter's view of the Self

can help us understand how acting techniques work in several interesting ways: the idea that Self and Other are not substantially different in the brain allows us to understand how it is possible for an actor to create and embody a convincing character; self-referentiality can only be achieved in sufficiently complex systems, this is why the actor needs to create a sufficiently complex body of experiences and background for the character in order to incorporate it; when we attribute selves to others we do not need complete access to their intimate experiences, so we are also willing to attribute selves to the actor's characters when we witness them, however, there is a minimum of complexity in the actor's character self experience, if that is not present we experience the performance as fake or unconvincing; acting techniques also help us understand how selves are constituted by inner and outer relationships, actions and reactions, in the case of real life we have the cyclic triad: circumstances, action, emotion. In acting the circumstances are replaced by imagination, but the cyclic experience is the same; finally Hofstadter's views also allow us to understand why the techniques work no matter what aspect of the experience is underlined as long as all aspects are taken into consideration.

### **3.1. Self and Other**

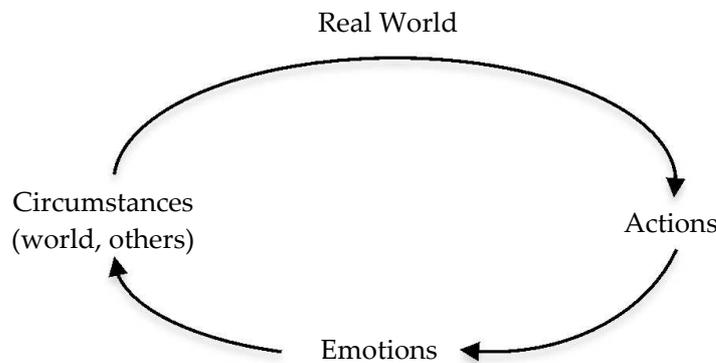
One of Hofstadter's main points about the Self is that the loop that constitutes the Self in the brain is not substantially different from the loops that represents Others. According to Hofstadter, the only difference between our Self loops and those that represent Others is that our loop is much larger and much more detailed than those that represent others. If this is so, then it is easy to understand that actors can *indeed* create and assume a character in their acting roles. Furthermore, Hofstadter's view explains why the actor has to go through such lengths in order to create that character, why he has to include endless circumstances, emotions and actions before the character can come to life. The complexity of the loop an actor creates to represent the character he wants to embody is somewhere in between the loops we create for ourselves and the loops we create for others.

Another of Hofstadter's main insights is that, following Gödel, any sufficiently complex system can become Self-referential, therefore if the actor works long enough and creates a complex enough character, self-referentiality will appear. In other words, an actor does not have to worry about "creating" a character out of the blue, what he needs to do is work on several aspects of a character, circumstances, emotions, actions, experiences, and the self-referential loop will necessarily appear once sufficient complexity has been achieved. In this way, what seems like an incredibly difficult achievement, creating a living character within ourselves, is actually a pretty innocuous result of the acting practices. Acting techniques help in that they speed up the process by picking out on the most essential elements and activities that bring about character creation and therefore make it easier and faster

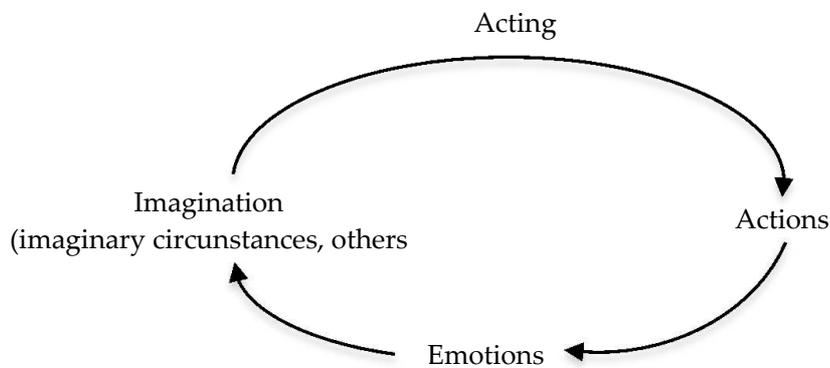
for an actor to find the character in a theatrical setting. The character, therefore, is not created by the actor as a sculptor might create a statue, it appears from the work of the actor because the complexity of the psychological experience and content will necessary bring forth self-referentiality. When this happens, it is easy for a performance to look convincing and moving since in fact the character they are witnessing is a sufficiently embodied Self and can move others just as regular Other selves do.

### 3.2. Self and the World

Yet another aspect of Hofstadter's views about the Self is that the external world, including other selves, also has a constant constitutive role in our ever-changing loops. The loop is not only internal, but also external. The Self constituting loops can be illustrated as something of this sort:



In the real world, our Selves are constituted by elements of the ever-changing circumstances we find ourselves in, our interactions with others, our emotions and our own actions. The Self is a constant construction from these elements and an ever changing loop that becomes more and more complex with every step. In acting what happens is very similar, except the circumstances, the real world, are replaced by imagination:



This understanding of acting also explains how the different strategies presented by Strasberg, Adler and Meisner work. It seems that one can start building character from either of the elements in the above graph, as long as all elements are present, each element is as good a starting point as any other. According to this interpretation of how acting techniques work, it seems that the most important aspect in acting is the extensive work an actor can do in all these elements for only with a sufficiently complex array of them can the character's Self naturally appear. Finally, the fact that Hofstadter's views about the Self allow us to create an understanding of how acting techniques function, can be a good argument for the accuracy of Hofstadter's views on the Self.

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