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Involvement and Detachment of the Actor in the Creative Process. Stanislavsky System - Brecht System

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Abstract: The two systems – the Stanislavsky’s and the Brecht one – have points in common, even if, at first glance, they are very different in approach. The article aims to describe the two directions regarding the practice and pedagogy of the actor's art. Elements relating to inner or outer inspiration, awareness or the distancing effect are analyzed and counterbalanced between the two systems. Likewise, the discourses that continued the two fundamental aesthetics for the 20th century stage are also presented.

Keywords: Stanislavsky System; Brecht System; actor; involvement of the actor, detaching the actor

The Involvement of the actor (Stanislavsky System)

The basic notions of directing in the Stanislavsky system and his theories about the involvement of the actor in the scenic process of creation had a great influence in the late 19th century and are used by actors and directors to this day.

What exactly is this Stanislavsky system and what does it entail? This technique developed in the early 1900s was designed to help actors create believable emotions and actions on stage through the characters they play. An actor's job is to be truthful, and although this responsibility seems simple, in

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reality it is often complicated. The emotion does not cross the ramp, the actor is not believable, and the story has no emotional impact on the audience.

What does Stanislavsky teach us about involvement? Stanislavsky was the first to outline a systematic approach to using our experience, imagination and observational spirit, all to give birth to emotion, true acting. Stanislavsky created that magical if - What would I do if?

The magic if involves an actor putting himself in the character of a certain scenario/story and asking himself the question: how would I react if this happened to me? This simple question can lead an actor to understand the thoughts and feelings of that character and bring them to the stage. If we were to summarize this system created by Stanislavsky, it would simply boil down to a series of questions:

- Who am I?
- Where am I?
- When does the action happen?
- What I want?
- Why do I want?
- How will I get it?
- What do I need to...?

The major goal of the Stanislavsky method is to understand a character's motivation, obstacles, and goals at every moment. Because of its emphasis on realism, the Stanislavsky method is often used in realistic plays, film and television. This system should not be confused with Lee Strasberg's Method Acting¹.

Strasberg took Konstantin Stanislavsky's system of acting and training and built upon it, focusing much of his training for the inner workings of the actor on merging him with the character. On the other hand, the Stanislavsky method claims that a performer must remain somewhat separate from the

¹ Lee Strasberg (November 17, 1901 - February 17, 1982), was a theater director, professor and actor, is known for his own method of acting, in which actors are encouraged to use their own emotional experience and affective memory, in order to live a role. Between 1948-1982, he was the artistic director of Actors Studio.

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character in order to properly understand their motivations and goals. This occurred over time when Stanislavsky rejected his concept of emotional memory because he realized that it proved to be psychologically unsafe for actors and that people's unconscious minds often shut down during implementing the technique, preventing them from recalling memories and emotions. From this, the physical action method arose, in which emotions appear, or are triggered, through a series of simple physical actions (instead of emotional memory).

Over time these exercises found new life in the United States, when pioneers such as Sanford Meisner², Stella Adler³, and Lee Strasberg (mentioned above) began reconfiguring what came to be known as the method. Important to note is that Stella Adler trained with up and coming artists such as Marlon Brando and Robert De Niro.

While Stanislavsky's musings are theoretical in nature, many actors have decided that it is best to take on certain roles only if they have had similar experience, leading De Niro to drive around New York in a taxi before to star in the movie *Taxi Driver*.

Detaching the actor from the character (Brecht System)

Brecht is part of the air we breathe - David Edgar

Brecht was a Marxist and built a highly political theater. He wanted his theater to awaken public interest in the world. He was totally against a passive audience getting lost in the story of a show. Brecht wanted the audience to think and question the world in which they live. He encouraged them to criticize society. Brecht wanted an objective and unemotional audience during his plays so that they could make rational judgments about the political and social aspects of his work. To do this, he invented epic theater.

2 Sanford Meisner (August 31, 1905 – February 2, 1997) was an American actor and acting teacher who developed the Meisner Technique - the complete abandonment of affective memory. Meisner emphasized the reality of doing.

3 Stella Adler (February 10, 1901 - December 21, 1992) was an actress, acting teacher. She was Stanislavsky's student. He trained the sensory imagination of the actors to create vivid characters. She believed that mastery of the physical and vocal aspects of acting was necessary for the actor to command the stage.

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Epic theater is a type of political theater that addresses contemporary issues. Later, Brecht preferred to call it dialectal theater. Epic theater does not attempt to establish an orderly plot and story, but rather leaves issues unresolved, confronting the audience with sometimes uncomfortable questions.

Verfremdungseffekt, or the estrangement/distancing effect is a main component of Brechtian theater. This distancing effect was used to distance the audience from the play/text, not to have any emotional attachment to the characters or story.

What does the Brecht system mean for the actor? The story can be interrupted at any time, the actors come out of character and interact with the audience explaining what has happened or what is going to happen. Thus the audience sees the actors playing the characters but also coming out of their story. Sometimes the action is anticipated, the purpose is to interrupt the continuity of the story. The viewer's attention is no longer focused on the action but on how the plot unfolds.

From the perspective of the scenography, the casual, ordinary (street) costumes appear, the props are very few and the text in the lyrics appears from time to time. The collective character of the choir is also introduced, which has the role of commentator.

So, actors must maintain a certain distance from the role/character so that the audience cannot form role models, heroes. Characters, for example, become nobody or everybody. The audience is introduced to a largely emotionless story, is confronted with socio-political issues precisely to have a reaction, to manifest, to intervene.

Brecht's epic theater often deals with major social issues – war, economic problems, social discontent among the lower classes. As a result, the spectators witness a manifestation that makes direct references to their social condition and everyday problems. Brecht's characters are often changeable beings.

The action in Brecht's theater is not linear and directed towards a clear goal. Often in epic theater we find flashbacks, changes of location or parallel stories, and the ending is always an open one. Also, the plot does not necessarily unfold chronologically; there are time jumps and twists, periods.

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An important character in Brecht's theater is the Narrator. He is present on the stage and comments on what is happening. He often knows the thoughts of the characters. In epic theater the actors do not identify with their roles, they are only meant to show the types of people and their actions. This constant interaction with the public, the comments, removed the fourth wall. That wall between the audience and the actors on the stage is non-existent in Brecht's theater, which made the audience no longer lose themselves in the story on the stage, remaining somewhat passive.

Some of Brecht's works include songs, music and dance. This helps to remind the audience that they are not watching a real life story. Sometimes the songs are ironically juxtaposed: cheerful, upbeat music, but with dark lyrics (*The Threepenny Opera*).

Another element specific to Brechtian theater is the use of placards or a projection screen to provide additional information to the audience (how many people died in a certain war). Placards can also be used to introduce information about the status of characters: mother, father, to introduce a new scene or to communicate the ending to the audience.

Freeze scenes always appear to break up the action/story and allow the narrator to connect with the audience. They can also be inserted for the actors' exits or entrances to the character, thus eliminating the fourth wall.

If Brecht believed that the actor should not assume a character but rather, present his actions, while reminding the audience that they are attending a theater performance, Stanislavsky was of the opinion that if an actor will believe that he is that character and the audience it will be in the same emotion and story.

Differences between the Stanislavsky system and the Brecht system for actors

Purpose and style of interpretation:

Stanislavsky focuses on emotional realism and deep identification with the character. Actors in the Stanislavsky system try to live the experience of the character in order to reproduce it as authentically as possible. Brecht creates distance between the spectator and the stage action. It promotes a so-

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called "disintegration effect" to make viewers think and analyze instead of emotionally identifying with the characters.

Actor's Role:

In Stanislavsky's system, actors develop their characters based on a deep analysis of the character's motivations, emotions, and context, while in Brecht's system, actors remain aware that they are playing a role and use techniques to emphasize the performative aspect of the performance.

Avoiding the illusion:

Stanislavsky seeks to create an illusion of reality on stage, so that the audience forgets that they are watching a play, a performance. Brecht avoids this illusion and keeps the viewer constantly aware of the fact that he is in a performance hall, in a theater.

Relationship with the public:

Stanislavsky relies on empathy and creating an emotional connection with the audience, Brecht encourages a critical distance and interacts with the audience to make them reflect on the social and political themes of the play.

Stanislavsky's and Brecht's systems influenced and were reflected in different ways in the scenography. Set design within the Stanislavsky system usually aims to create realistic settings that reflect the location and era in which the action of the play takes place. These sets help to create an authentic atmosphere that helps the actors identify better with the characters and convey the emotions in a believable way. Set design can include significant details that support and amplify understanding of characters and action. For example, a detailed camera set of a character can reveal aspects of their personality. Special attention is paid to colors and lighting to create emotional impact and highlight the moods of the characters.

The scenery from Brecht's perspective is often unconventional and unrealistic. She may use stylized elements, symbols or abstract settings to emphasize the theatrical nature of the performance and create distance between the audience and the action on stage. In Brecht's theater, a

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scenography can offer multiple spaces or levels, allowing rapid jump between locations and actions. This supports the non-linear narrative and epic approach.

Brechtian set design can include elements that convey social or political messages, thus helping to challenge the audience to reflect on societal issues.

In contemporary theater it can combine elements of both approaches or choose to adapt to the specific requirements and intentions of a production. It is important to note that both Stanislavsky's and Brecht's systems have left a significant mark on the way set design is approached and performed in modern theater.

Important directors who were associated with the Stanislavsky system or the Brecht system and who implemented these approaches in their works

Stanislavski System

- Konstantin Stanislavsky himself was a key director and actor who developed the Stanislavsky system and applied its principles to productions at the Moscow Art Theater.
- Lee Strasberg was an American director and educator known for developing the Stanislavsky method in the United States and for his influence on American actors and directors.
- Elia Kazan was a noted film and theater director who worked with actors such as Marlon Brando and James Dean and used elements of the Stanislavsky system in his directing.
- Andrei Tarkovsky, known for his films, was deeply influenced by Stanislavsky and sought authenticity and emotional depth in the performances of the actors in his films.

Brecht System

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- Bertolt Brecht himself was a director and playwright who developed and implemented Brechtian epic theater in his productions, using elements such as the use of stylized gestures and distance between the actors and the audience.
- Erwin Piscator was a German director known for his political and social productions that reflected the principles of epic theater.
- Peter Brook, although influenced by other theatrical styles, experimented with elements of Brecht's theater in certain productions.
- Augusto Boal, a Brazilian director and playwright, developed forum theater, a form of participatory theater that borrowed ideas from Brecht to engage audiences in social discussion.

These directors made significant contributions to the development of theater and influenced generations of artists, either by promoting Stanislavsky's emotional realism or by using Brecht's distance and epic theater to communicate powerful social and political messages.

Although their theories are diametrically opposed, Bertolt Brecht and Konstantin Stanislavsky are considered two of the most influential theater practitioners of the 20th century, with strong opinions and ideas about the function of theater and the play of actors. Both systems are considered useful and are used worldwide.

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