Histories, Horizons, and the Theatre Arts

A Hermeneutic Study of the Theatre Texts

An Actor Prepares and *Theatre of the Oppressed*

by

Thomas Turner

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Donald Blumenfeld-Jones, Chair
David Lee Carlson
Johnny Saldana

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the question: what are the ways in which the texts *An Actor Prepares* (1936) by Constantin Stanislavski and *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) by Augusto Boal intersect with each other and diverge from each other such that in their intersection/divergence a new horizons of understanding may emerge? This question is important in the context of rethinking theatre education. The principle methodology of analysis used is what Shaun Gallagher (1992) terms a "moderate hermeneutics" in which the aim is a "dialogical conversation" leading to a "creative communication between the reader and the text" (p.10). The reason for undertaking a hermeneutical analysis of the two texts is that hermeneutics offers an approach in which the researcher may deeply analyze texts and therefore create new understandings and meanings from those texts. Through the use of hermeneutical analysis, the relationship between the writer and text, and a reader and text becomes a dialectical relationship. A "dialectical relationship" is a conversation between writer, reader and the text. This conversation leads to new interpretations.

To my first and most important teacher my mother Linda!

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

The world of theatre arts education in colleges and universities has a fundamental flaw to which students, instructors and administrators turn a blind eye: the odds of students making a full-time living exclusively through performing are extremely unlikely. According to the Theatre Communications Group website: “just 18,000 of its (Actor’s Equity) 47,000 members were working in 2006–07, with the average number of work weeks at 17 weeks per actor in a year. Nearly 70 percent of these working actors earned $15,000 or less from work on stage; just 6 percent earned more than $75,000” (http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/Jan08/exec.cfm).

The United States Department of Labor describes the wages an individual in the performing arts will make:

> Median hourly earnings of actors were $11.28 in May 2004. The middle 50 percent earned between $7.75 and $30.76. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $6.63, and the highest 10 percent earned more than $56.48. Median annual earnings were $15.20 in performing arts companies and $9.27 in motion picture and video industries. Annual earnings data for actors were not available because of the wide variation in the number of hours worked by actors and the short-term nature of many jobs, which may last for 1 day or 1 week; it is extremely rare for actors to have guaranteed employment that exceeded 3 to 6 months. (http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos093.htm)

The news is no better for those who work in film and television. In May 2008, *The Los Angeles Times* reported 93.8 percent of the 122,000 members of the Screen Actors Guild were making less than $50,000 a year, with 72.1 percent making less than $5,000.00 a year (http://www.latimes.com/classified/jobs/news/la-052808-fi-sag-g,0,3566589.graphic).

Actors who are protected by a union "endure long periods of unemployment, intense competition for roles and frequent rejections in auditions" (United States Department of Labor), and yet, defenders of the current system argue that many non-union opportunities are available for performers. This position, however, ignores the challenges non-union actors face including lower wages and increased competition.

Despite the evidence that nearly 3 out of 4 actors make less than $5,000 a year, the existence of theatre arts education opportunities is widespread and varied. The National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST) has accredited approximately 160 colleges or universities to offer undergraduate and graduate degrees in theatre arts. In addition, some universities and colleges have programs or departments that are accredited through different organizations, and many community colleges offer associates degrees or certificates in theatre arts. According to the department of labor: "Formal training through a university or acting conservatory is typical; however, many actors, producers and directors find work on the basis of their experience and talent alone" (http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos093.htm#training). This phenomenon makes non-traditional paths to theatre

arts education (e.g. private instruction, workshops and self-teaching texts) valid, practical and financially attractive.

What might the student who decides to attend a four-year Bachelor's program expect for his time and money? The Yale School of Drama and Yale Repertory believes that its "highest aim is to train artistic leaders in every theatrical discipline who create bold new works that astonish the mind, challenge the heart and delight the senses" (http://drama.yale.edu/about_us/index.html). Northern Kentucky University explains: "With over 250 Theatre majors, we understand the importance of giving the theatre student opportunities to work on stage and backstage" (http://www.nku.edu/~theatre/about/index.php). At Florida State: "The primary mission of the School of Theatre is to offer students a comprehensive education in theatre and to prepare emerging artists to enter the professional theatre industry" (http://www.theatre.fsu.edu/pages/about/). Finally, UC Santa Barbara's mission "is to develop and nurture students' capacity for self-expression and critical thinking; to train actors, dancers, designers, directors and playwrights for professional work" (http://www.theaterdance.ucsb.edu/).

Four theatre departments from different regions of the country all share the primary goal of training students for careers on stage in professional theatre; however, as demonstrated earlier, the majority of these students will have little or no opportunity to have a career in theatre arts. The cited mission statements are not the exception, but rather the rule of most universities and colleges in the United States. If theatre arts education's current focus and goals are only attainable by a small few, then what should be the purpose of theatre education?

Should it even have a place in today's university and colleges? Is it ethical for universities and colleges to send students (many of whom leave with financial debt) into the working world with an unrealistic understanding of their actual opportunities? While these questions are not the primary focus of this study, they must be raised in order to begin to explore today's theatre education and its possible alternatives.

Moving forward, the next question to be addressed is: "why should we re-examine theatre education?" In his book *Hermeneutics and Education*, Shaun Gallagher offers a concise answer: "That which is taken for granted is that which call for more philosophical questioning" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 124).

In order for the theatre arts to survive it must change. It must change because as technology advances, theatre faces continuous competition from more sources (Kotler, Scheff, 1997, pp. 158-160). Sports, video games and the internet are all competing with the theatre arts. Theatre education, teachers, theorists and practitioners must begin to re-examine the current culture of theatre arts if it is to survive this growing onslaught.

In the introduction of the text *Bourdieu and Education* (1998), authors Grenfell and James discuss the concept of a "paradigm." Grenfell and James describe a paradigm as "shared commonalties, to the knowledge that is shared in typical patterning" (p. 8). Contained within each culture there are "vastly different standpoints; making different assumptions" (p. 8). They go on to explain that "behind all these paradigms, ways of constructing and understanding the world are at issue, and it is not simply coincidental that considerable competition exist

between them" (p. 8). Through research, analysis and new information, it is possible for paradigms to "shift in perspective" and be "replaced by a new paradigm" (p. 8). Then by using the introductions of "standpoints" and "assumptions" outside of the culture of theatre arts, the creation of a new theatre education paradigm could produce graduates who are educated for the world rather than a non-existent career. The creation of a new theatre education paradigm could also lead to the creation of new ways in which theatre education could be used in "traditional" classrooms.

In *The Kind of Schools We Need*, arts education scholar Eliot Eisner describes the power of creative dialogue:

> The act of making something is not only an occasion for expressing or representing what you already know, imagine, or feel, it is also a means through which the forms of things unknown can be uncovered. The creative act is an act of exploration and discovery. (Eisner, 1998, p. 27)

As explored above, theatre arts training is thought to be for the stage and screen with very little classroom application.

In this dissertation, I will engage in a creative dialogue intended to be between the researcher (myself) and my discoveries. It will also be a dialogue between the researcher and you, the reader of the research. The dialog will be based on the research question: "what are the ways in which the texts *An Actor Prepares* (1936) by Constantin Stanislavski and *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) by Augusto Boal intersect with each other and diverge from each other such that in their intersection/divergence a new way of analyzing theatre arts education may

emerge?" I selected these specific texts because they have been very influential on me as an artist and as an educator.

The main methodology will be the use of a hermeneutical analysis. Through the use of hermeneutic analysis, the relationship between the writer and the text, and a reader and the text becomes a dialectical relationship. A dialectical relationship is a conversation between writer, reader and the text. This conversation leads to new understandings. In the text *Truth and Method, Hans*-George Gadamer describes understanding:

> Understanding is not, in fact, understanding better, either in a sense of superior knowledge of the subject because clearer ideas or in the sense of fundamental superiority of conscious over unconscious production. It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all. (1975, p. 296)

Any new understandings I discover from the texts are not absolute and finite. They will be new ways of interpreting texts with which I have a great deal of familiarity. Gadamer believes that "interpretation is the explicit form of understanding" (p. 306).

Another reason for this study was the intellectual challenge of undertaking the project. By spending the time researching and writing such an extensive project, I wanted to see what I might learn about myself as an educator, researcher, performer and, most importantly, a person. Through a hermeneutical study, the researcher develops new interpretations about the text, but more importantly the "interpretation ends in self-interpretation with the consequence

the interpreter understands himself better as a result of doing the interpretation" (Reynolds, 1989, p. 48).

Through the process of a hermeneutical analysis, interpretations are based on both the historic conditions of the writer as well as the reader. "The historical distance between reader and author, between their relative circumstances and concerns account for a difference of meaning, an interpretive productivity that goes beyond original intention" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 126**).** Differences in meaning result from the separate historical consciousness's between the author and the reader which creates a "tension between the text and the present" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 305). It is through the intersection of the reader's and the writer's historical consciousness that opportunities arise for new understandings of the text. Hermeneutic analysis is important in that it fosters the conditions for self-understanding. This occurs as a result of the self-reflection that takes place during the reading of the text. Self-reflection is important in assessing the results of the study and the ways in which those results supported or differed from the initial hypothesis.

Dissertation Focus

Many of the foundations of my philosophy on both performance and theatre arts education were directly influenced by these selected texts. I have read both of the texts several times, and upon the completion of each reading, I have always found what I thought were new layers of understanding. I have discovered that it was, in fact, a "relearning" of the same information. In other words, it became a memorization of more and more passages of the text and not new

insights into the material. To move forward to new ways of understanding the texts I suggest that new research approaches of the material from new research perspectives are necessary. This will allow me to use these new approaches to critique other texts along with formulating a perspective about where the two theorists coincide and/or contradict each other as well as themselves.

Chapter 2: Methodology: The Hermeneutic Process

The use of hermeneutics as a research method offers the opportunity for a "dialogical conversation" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 10) between the reader and the text. I have already outlined my approach to a hermeneutic reading which Reynolds terms the "hermeneutic arch." This arch is a journey that "consists of the movement from the initial reading and naïve understanding of the texts through the critical reading or explanation to a comprehension and new self-understanding through texts" (Reynolds, 1989, p. 2). The way in which I have read the texts up to this point in my educational journey have all been limited to the first "naïve" reading of the texts or what Reynolds calls a "habitual perception" of the texts. In such a reading the reader only finds what they have been conditioned through habit to find. Through this type of reading I may simply "glean the apparent meanings from the texts" (Reynolds, 1989, p. 2). An example of my "habitual perception" is found in the ways in which I have approached Stanislavski's text *An Actor Prepares*. The first time I read the text it was new information, but each time I have reread the text, I have known what I was going to find. Rather than look for new information, I simply focused on the passages that I connected to in previous readings. My perception of the text was limited to looking for what I knew was there rather than what additional information may have been found within the text.

Up to this point, this is where I have always ended my analysis of the text. In order for me to move forward into new levels of understanding (Paul Ricoeur describes this as "unfolding a new world of meanings in the text") I must perform

a close reading of the content as the next phase of the study. This phase will be called the “Structural” reading.

The researcher must be careful during the structural reading to describe discoveries and not make judgments or conclusions about his discoveries. “This reading explains the sense of the work. But, we have not interpreted it” (Reynolds, 1989, p. 47). Interpretation of the work is the third and final stage of the hermeneutic arch called the “Understandings” reading. In this final phase the researcher is able to come to new understandings of the text. These “new understandings” are not final understandings that are complete, but are the possible beginnings of a new hermeneutic arch in which the researcher may begin another textual analysis of the same texts. The new hermeneutic reading may once again lead to even newer understandings and not result in only a memorization of a new passage or section of the text.

The understandings discovered in the final phase of the hermeneutical arch are based on appropriation. Appropriation is defined as “the act of setting apart or taking for one’s own use” (http://www.thefreedictionary.com/appropriation). Appropriation occurs when “the reader interprets a text and the interpretation ends in self-interpretation with the consequence the interpreter understands himself better as a result of doing the interpretation” (Reynolds, 1989, p. 48). The concept of appropriation will be discussed in much greater detail in this paper in the section “Understanding.”

Naïve Reading

The naïve reading involves a simple description of the author's subject matter and content. Reynolds describes it as "a description of our initial reading to the text" (Reynolds, 1980, p. 45). It is through a naïve reading that the reader discovers passages which hold significant meaning to his understanding of the subject matter. In a naïve reading the researcher must consider several questions such as: What is the initial experience of reading this text? What do I take away initially? Who is being addressed and how? What are the themes of the text during this initial reading?

For my study the naïve reading will consist of an initial reading in which I will pull out and describe sections of the text that I feel have a particular importance or point of interest. This reading will be conducted as if I were simply reading the texts for the first time. Essentially the "naive reading" is what my initial perceptions of the text are. It also asks the question: what did I take away from the experience of reading it? In keeping with the nature of hermeneutics the "synopsis" is filtered through my perspective. It must be pointed out that it is "through my perspective" because the researcher must "be aware of one's own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 258). This means that the researcher must make every effort to undertake a reading in which they are avoiding the placement of their opinions, theories and thoughts upon the text. This is important in order to facilitate an understanding of the author's positions, both theoretical and historical.

Once the reading has taken place, the reader will lay out those portions of the text in which he must "recall those particularly meaningful passages and construct them, first descriptively, then in formal descriptive terms" (Gerhart, 1979, pp. 266-267). After I have completed a naïve reading of the entire text I will move onto the next phase of the hermeneutic arch.

Structural Reading

It is through the structural reading that the reader discovers "the sense of the work, but, we have not interpreted it" (Reynolds, 1989, p. 47). It is also the beginning of a closer relationship between the author and reader in which the reader is placed, through the text, into the world of the author. In writing the text the author has an idea of what he would like the reader to learn, and through the style of writing he has chosen how the reader will come to the conclusions that the author desires. This will lead the reader into a further understanding of the text, but he must continue to avoid his personal biases, both positive and negative, regarding the information in the text.

For Paul Ricoeur the structural analysis creates a communicative relationship between reader and author. This is opposite of what I will call a non-communicative reading in which the reader treats the text as "a wordless and authorless object" (1981, p. 152). In other words, a text in which the reader has no understanding or knowledge of the historical, cultural, and social conditions experienced by the author. The aim of the researcher is to "reproduce meaning or intention of the author by following well-defined hermeneutical canons that guide reading" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 9). A communicative reading seeks to "conjoin a

new discourse to the discourse of the text. This conjunction of discourses "reveals in the very constitution of the text an original capacity for renewal with its open character" (Ricoeur, 81, p. 158). A non-communicative reading remains locked in only limited possibilities of interpretation while a communicative reading is free to be reinterpreted and reintroduced to meanings which transcend time, history and culture.

The one commonality between the author and the reader is that they are "both concerned with the same subject" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 295). In addition to their own historical perspective the author and the reader bring individual understandings of the subject matter. The author has written a text about a subject matter, and the reader approaches this text in an attempt to gain insight from the author's understanding of the subject. The common bond of the subject matter, the author's knowledge, the reader's desire to seek understanding through the author, Historical differences between author and reader causes the creation of what Gadamer calls the "in between" (1975, p. 295). For Gadamer the "in between" is a tension that is "in play between the traditionary text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition" (1975, p. 295). The problem of the in between resides in the reader not being a "clean slate" of knowledge but rather someone who comes from his own cultural, social or historical background with pre-understandings and pre-conceived notions about the information in the text. I will use the term "horizons." The author is writing the text from within the culture of his own personal history, and the history and culture of his time. This horizon intersects

with the horizon of the author but never coincides. The “in between” is the meeting place of these horizons. From these separate horizons the author and reader meet. This meeting of horizons takes place through the text. As the meeting is taking place the reader is located “in between” his horizons and the author’s horizons. Out of this “in between” there is the possibility of the creation of new understandings of the subject matter. The reader may discover how the ideas behind the text could create re-interpretations and/or make better sense of what is unfamiliar.

I will also utilize some features of what Shaun Gallagher describes as critical hermeneutics as a way to analyze the text for hidden ideological meanings. He describes critical hermeneutics as follows:

> In its most idealistic form, critical theory requires a hermeneutical ability to escape from the domination of repressive traditions and to attain an ideologically neutral, tradition free, prejudice-free communication. Critical hermeneutics thus attempts to get to the objective truth behind the false consciousness of ideology. (1992, p. 40)

Critical hermeneutics is interested in discovering both the author’s hidden and overt ideologies. The reader is able to foster an understanding of the text which is based on a complete picture of the author’s ideological foundations. Undertaking a critical hermeneutics analysis allows the opportunity to open the texts in new ways separate from the author’s ideological, artistic and educative perspectives. By understanding the influences on the author’s thoughts, I hope to gain insight into the author’s ideology.

Developing an understanding of the author's ideologies is only one aspect of critical hermeneutics. One of the most important aspects of critical hermeneutics is through the process in which the reader must face his own ideologies. Through my interpretation of the author and his source material, I will be facing my own preconceived and hidden ideologies. In the text "Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences" author Paul Ricoeur outlines a defense of a hermeneutical critique of ideology: "The critique of ideology is the necessary detour which self-understanding must take, if the latter is to be formed by the matter of the text and not by the prejudices of the reader" (p. 144). Only through the reader's awareness of his own ideologies and prejudices is he able to develop an ideological neutral understanding of the text or what Gallagher encourages as "reflectively identifying the objective constraints and power structures within which the interpreter operates" (1992, p. 244).

The process of ideological self-understanding is crucial if the reader is to truly make a more complete interpretation. Without this understanding the reader simply "reiterates, and reproduces tradition, cultural values, ideology, and power structures" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 241).

Once I have completed my structural analysis, I will then move on to the third phase of the hermeneutic arch.

Understandings

The third and final phase is the interpretation of the text. It is through this phase that the reader begins to develop an understanding and comprehension of the text. It must be stressed that the interpretive phase is not a finite and closed

understanding. In *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* we find a description by Ricoeur:

> If reading is possible, it is indeed because the text is not closed in on itself but opens out onto other things. To read is, on any hypothesis, to conjoin a new discourse to the discourse of the text. This conjunction of discourses reveals, in the constitution of the text, an original capacity for renewal which is its open character. Interpretation is the concrete outcome of conjunction and renewal. (1981, p. 158)

In other words, it is through the conjoining of both the author's thoughts, and the reader's interpretation that a re-understanding of the text occurs. The "re-understanding" is possible because of the change which takes place within the reader.

Ricoeur describes the characteristics that take place within the reader during the hermeneutical analysis as "self-understanding, the overcoming of cultural distance and, finally, appropriation" (1981, pp. 158-159). Self-understanding occurs as a result of the self-reflection that takes place during the reading of the text. Ricoeur describes it like this: "the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself" (1981, p. 158). Cultural distance is a result of the writer and reader coming from different social, economic, historical and cultural backgrounds. The reader must recognize his own cultural position and that of the author. Once this takes place the result will be in the reader, "genuinely making one's own what

was initially alien" (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 159). Appropriation is made possible by "the overcoming of cultural distance and of fusing textual interpretation with self-interpretation" (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 159). It allows the reader to understand the text, but more importantly the reader begins to understand himself whether more in depth or for the first time.

Chapter 3: Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*

I approached the idea of a hermeneutic reading of *An Actor Prepares* with great trepidation. To me Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* was the first official text I remember being assigned to read. As a young undergraduate student it was considered the acting bible to the professors at my undergraduate school Northern Kentucky University.

As I progressed through the program, I would be exposed to other theorists such as Grotowski, Artaud and Brecht; however, they were only superficially covered and never came close to being treated with the same reverence as Stanislavski. Later in my academic career I was introduced to Sanford Meisner, who himself was a disciple of Stanislavski. Meisner's foundational acting technique is based solidly in the theories of Stanislavski. So am I, it seems, and here was the source of my previously mentioned trepidation.

How would I be able to objectively make a hermeneutical study of something that is so close to my canonical core? But then again, isn't the reason I chose a hermeneutic study because it allows the reader the opportunity to see that which has been hidden from him previously? Curriculum scholar William M. Reynolds describes most readers as having "habitual perceptions." These habitual perceptions are described as a "way of being" (Reynolds, 1989, p. 3). Like people watching a movie, we become so "consumed with being-in-the-picture and acting correctly as others in the picture do that we forget it is a motion picture and we can step out of this taken for granted perception" (1989, p. 4).

Hermeneutics is the vehicle I can use to step out of the screen (or "off the page," as it were) and into a world in which I am an active participant in creating new understandings of long-held beliefs about Stanislavski's ideals and methods. But before we can begin, I believe it is important to start with a basic historical understanding of Stanislavski the person, as well as where *An Actor Prepares* sits within his writing as a whole. It is imperative that before beginning a hermeneutical analysis, the reader have an understanding of what the world of the author looked like. The reader must know what events were taking place during the author's lifetime that may have shaped and developed the author's understandings of both his work and the reason for placing it into the world.

The structure of this section will begin with a historical and literary review of Stanislavski's life; second will be a naïve reading in which I describe any overall findings I may have about Stanislavski's choice of writing style or technique, and an examination for whom he is writing. The second section will be a more in depth analysis of the discoveries made in the naïve reading. Once I have established who the reader "is," I will explore the idea of "what he wants from the reader" in the "Structural" section of my analysis. In addition I will describe and explain what I call the "Stanislavski Pattern," and how it may affect the reader's understanding of the text. Finally, in the section titled "Appropriation," I will describe what the text has to say about the world in which Stanislavski lived and believed in.

Introduction to the Biography

The cultural, social and political history of Russia between the years of Stanislavski's birth in 1863 and his death in 1936 were years of great change. The country in which he was born became a very different county at the end of his life. While history is fluid and many events flow from one to the next, Russian history is delineated by several major events. These events affected the lives and social structures of three social-economic classes: the peasants, the nobility and the merchants.

Stanislavski was also very much a part of the modernist movement during the turn of the 19th century. Many of the choices made by Stanislavski throughout the course of his career are influenced by the foundational ideas of modernism. I will begin my examination during the time period in which Stanislavski was a modernist thinker and practitioner.

Stanislavski and the Modernist Movement

Before any analysis can begin on Stanislavski's text *An Actor Prepares*, it is necessary to demonstrate how Stanislavski is both a participant in and was influenced by the modernist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is necessary to describe the modernist movement and the ways in which many of the modernist ideas are found within *An Actor Prepares.* The development of Stanislavski's system of acting can be seen as a modernist reaction and ultimately rebellion to the theatre education of his early actor training.

According to the New World Encyclopedia modernism is defined as follows:

> Modernism, here limited to aesthetic modernism (see also modernity), describes a series of sometimes radical movements in art, architecture, photography, music, literature, and the applied arts which emerged in the three decades before 1914. Modernism has philosophical antecedents that can be traced to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment but is rooted in the changes in western society at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Modernism encompasses the works of artists who rebelled against nineteenth-century academic and historicist traditions, believing that earlier aesthetic conventions were becoming outdated. (http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Modernism)

Essentially many of the early modernist thinkers were reacting against the traditions of the past. Artists such as the dancer Isadora Duncan (whom Stanislavski saw dance in 1907 and later became friends with) as well as the painter Pablo Picasso were offering a response, “to a widespread sense that the ways of knowing and representing the world developed in the Renaissance, but going back in many ways to the ancient Greeks, distorted the actual experience of reality, of art, and of literature” (Lewis, 2007, p. xviii). In other words, modernism was a reaction to what modernists saw as outdated methods of the past unduly influencing the rapidly changing world of the present.

For the modernists, the present had seen some of the greatest technological advancements in civilization. Train travel, electricity and the light bulb are

examples of how the western world had moved from a rural culture based on agriculture into an urban cultural based on manufacturing. For those in the modernist movement, it was now necessary to find "new methods of representation appropriate to life in an urban, industrial, mass-oriented age" (Lewis, 2007, p. xvii). From these methods arose such art movements as Modern Dance, Cubism, Surrealism and Stanislavski's System of acting.

One of the central themes of modernism is that "the innovative artist also needs to be supported by the evidence for the diffusion of the idea, as inspiring an unsettling analysis of conventional methods and beliefs" (Butler, p. 13). Stanislavski's "analysis" and contribution to modernist art would be through the rejection of Russian theatre arts training, which led to his creation of a new system of actor training.

Early in his career Stanislavski struggled with the ways in which actors were trained. All of his previous experiences with actor training were not the "logical, 'scientific' training he wanted but an imitation of the worst kind" (Benedetti, p. 20). In his autobiography Stanislavski describes his experience at the Moscow Theatre School. During his days as a young performer the school was considered the best in Russia.

> At the time of which I write students were expected to have a broad general culture in which many disciplines were included. Learned professors stuffed the students' heads with all sorts of information about the play they were rehearsing. All this provoked thoughts but feelings remained unmoved. They spoke vividly and brilliantly about the role of

> the play, i.e., about what the end result of our creative process should be, but did not tell us the way to achieve the desired creative result or the method by which to do so. We were taught how to play the role in general or in particular but we were not told how to act. The pupils were taught just to read and act according to demonstration, so that each of us copied his teacher. The pupils read more or less correctly, following the commas and full stops, all the rules of grammar and were all like each other outwardly, in a uniform that concealed the inner meaning of man. (2008, pp. 60-61)

Stanislavski quit the school after three weeks, and everything he would do throughout the rest of his life would be in service of destroying the old outdated methods of actor training. Stanislavski would use the tools of the scientific method to tear down these old methods and build his new system.

The use of the scientific method in research was not new to Stanislavski, having been developed in the 17th century it would have been something in which he would have had encountered during his early educational experience. The scientific method is a process in which one makes an observation of something, and then creates a hypothesis on why that may have occurred. Finally, through experimentation, he attempts to discover the cause of the observation thereby either proving or disproving the hypothesis. In science an example would be observing water boil, hypothesizing that it is because of heat, and then through experimentation discovering that it begins to boil at a specific temperature. Stanislavski's use of the scientific method is important to the literary and stylistic

choices he makes in *An Actor Prepares*. Those choices will be examined in depth in the Structural section of this paper.

Stanislavski was interested in finding a new method of acting in which an actor would experience truthful emotions under the imaginary circumstances of the character he is portraying. Stanislavski himself had experienced "truthful emotions" and had witnessed them in other performers, but he found that both he and the other performers were often unable to repeat the experience from performance to performance. In Stanislavski's time truthful emotions were not even considered part of the canon of actor training. The actor was to only repeat what he was told and/or copy the performance of a master actor. Stanislavski's contribution to the modernist world was the introduction of the scientific method into the artistic world of theatre arts training. He rebelled against the previous system of actor training and set about creating a new system for an actor to follow.

Stanislavski wanted to create a system in which the actor could reach the subconscious where (according to Stanislavski) emotion lies. However "our subconscious is inaccessible to our consciousness. We cannot enter that realm. If for any reason we do penetrate into it, then the subconscious becomes conscious and dies" (Stanislavski, 1936, p. 14). Stanislavski made the observation that emotion comes from the subconscious, and his question became "how does one reach the subconscious for inspiration when it is destroyed once it becomes conscious?" *An Actor Prepares* is Stanislavski's examination, explanation and,

ultimately, the answer to the question. Stanislavski's introduction of the scientific method was a modernist approach to the ages-old practice of actor training.

Rebellion of old ideas in and of itself does not place Stanislavski into the modernist movement. In the text *MODERNISM: Movements in Modern Art*, Arts scholar Charles Harrison describes four "tendencies" found in the early modern arts movement. In each tendency there is a direct correlation with Stanislavski's ideas on actor training. Below are the four tendencies described by Harrison and a brief explanation of how those tendencies are found within Stanislavski's development of his system.

The tendencies are intended to serve as examples of how Stanislavski is situated in the framework of modernism. The comparisons of Stanislavski's ideas of the four tendencies are only intended as brief introductions to the major themes which will be explored throughout the complete analysis of *An Actor Prepares.*

First Tendency

> Confidence in the possibility of progress and betterment in human societies, to be brought about through the exploration of technological advances and the application of rational principles. In the Kantian philosophy of the time, it was seen as an inescapable obligation of the educated that one should strive for the elimination of error through processes of rational self-criticism. (Harrison, 1997, p. 18)

Stanislavski's entire system of acting instruction is set up so that the student may "strive for the elimination of error through processes of rational self-criticism" (Harrison, 1997, p. 18).

Throughout this analysis the reader will find example after example of the ways in which the actor must critically examine and then reexamine himself as a human and as a performer.

Second Tendency

"A determination to break with the legacy of classism in its aristocratic forms" (Harrison, 1997, p. 18). In the introduction we learned that Stanislavski was rebelling against the "aristocratic forms" of his day which included "stilted melodramatic performances and staging." These were shows that were geared towards glorifying a star performer and "ham acting." Stanislavski set out to create a new and modern way for the actor to perform a role.

Third Tendency

"A commitment to skepticism in the face of received ideas and beliefs, however apparently authoritative, combined with an inclination to regard direct experience as the true source of knowledge" (Harrison, 1997, p. 18). Within this third tendency is the modernistic idea of "making cross-cultural allusions, or of looking for a quasi-scientific analytical pattern" (Butler, 2010, p. 12). It was through his use of the scientific method that Stanislavski made the "cross-cultural connection" to the theatre arts. Stanislavski, through the use of the scientific method, was able to directly challenge the established methods of teaching acting. The key principle of the scientific method is experimentation. The scientist and the actor must both actively participate in the experiment in order to prove or disprove the hypothesis. Stanislavski did not want the actors to imitate the instructors; rather, he wanted them to be active participants in discovering what it

means to “play true.” In *An Actor Prepares* he describes what this means and how it should be experienced by the actor. He also gives specific examples and exercises in which the actor is an active participant in his own training.

Fourth Tendency

> To stress the role of the imagination in safeguarding human freedom and in realizing human potential. It could be said of this last tendency that it represents the synthesis of all others. The capacity to imagine a different order of things is a necessary condition of critical and self-critical activity. It is a form of creative projection in thought, which is mere idealism unless it is grounded in those values that one’s direct experience confirms. (Harrison, 1997, p. 18)

Stanislavski himself admitted throughout his life that he was only attempting to create a system for actors to accomplish what the great actors could do naturally. He was the first to imagine this new type of system and the first to put his discoveries and ideas into an acting manual which should be considered a modernist text.

Stanislavski’s Early Life

Stanislavski (considered the founder of modern acting) was born in Moscow on January 5, 1863, into a wealthy textile manufacturing family under Czarist Russia and was baptized under the name of Konstantin Sergeyevich Alekseyev. He lived through the Russian revolution, a world and civil war and finally died under the Stalin-controlled USSR on August 7, 1938. When Stanislavski began to perform, actors were considered to be barely a step above

serfs and just on par with prostitutes. In order to keep performing without his parents finding out, he took the stage name of Stanislavski.

Born into a family who owned a textile factory, Stanislavski was firmly planted into the wealthy merchant class. As a result, Stanislavski benefitted from all of the privileges afforded to the son of a wealthy merchant. It was actually his father's insistence on his children developing a love of the arts that pushed Stanislavski into theatre. The young Alekseyev children attended the theatre, ballet and musical concerts. They were also encouraged to put on concerts, plays and performances for family and friends. When Stanislavski was a teenager his father turned a wing of their mansion into a theatre. While Stanislavski was encouraged to enjoy and even participate in the arts, it was meant merely as a diversion and hobby. Stanislavski eventually entered into the family business where he worked during the day and secretly performed at night.

In 1888 his secret was discovered when his parents unexpectedly attended one of his performances. Shocked at the subject matter of the play, his parents insisted that he create his own amateur drama company to ensure that if he were to continue to perform, it would at least be in plays with acceptable subject matter.

Stanislavski encouraged the famous opera singer Fyodor Komissarzhevski to join him and, together they founded The Society of Art and Literature. It was during his time with the amateur theatre group Stanislavski earnestly began searching for an acting technique that would allow an actor to consistently create a role in which they were truly "feeling the role."

In the past Stanislavski had relied on tricks with his voice, old acting styles and even copying the performance of famous actors that he had seen both in Moscow and on his holidays in Europe. Stanislavski wanted to find a way to consistently repeat the experiences he had had on several occasions in which he fully experienced the fictional life of the character he was portraying on stage. In other words, Stanislavski strove for the actor to live, experience, feel and react as the character the same way they would if they were truly living in the world the character inhabits in the play.

The theatre training of Stanislavski's youth and early adulthood was dominated by popular actors who would train apprentices by having them learn how to copy exactly each and every physical move, as well as the vocal and emotional intonation of their performance. In many instances the performance would involve the star standing center stage and having all the other performers move around them.

Seeking a more advanced training, Stanislavski auditioned for the Moscow Theatre School and, even though he was accepted, he left after three weeks. Stanislavski's frustration arose when he was asked to "copy his masters' interpretations, their manner of playing a role, their tricks" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 21). In his autobiography Stanislavski describes the experience: "I felt like a piece of dough being kneaded and baked into a loaf whose taste and shape had already been decided" (2008, p. 61).

While Stanislavski received accolades for his work as an actor and director with The Society of Art and Literature, he felt frustrated with the

challenges of working with predominantly amateur actors. Stanislavski had always had difficulty dealing with non-professional actors. The amateur theatre companies of Stanislavski's early years often "consisted of men whose only object was to get the actresses into bed and women whose virtue had long ceased to be a matter of concern to them" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 24).

In the few reputable companies he worked, Stanislavski was frustrated by the "lateness, laziness, willfulness, hysterics, bad character, not knowing the lines" (Stanislavski, 2008, p. 163). In short, he was upset with the complete unprofessional behavior of the amateur performers with which he was forced to work.

Stanislavski's opportunity to move to the professional level arrived in 1897 in the form of the theatre critic and writer Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. While on holiday Stanislavski received a post card from Nemirovich asking to meet. Upon Stanislavski's return to Moscow the two met for lunch. After 18 straight hours of discussion they had created The Moscow Art Theatre. Stanislavski's 18-hour meeting with Nemirovich serves as an example of how, for Stanislavski, "art was the be all and end all, a surrogate for religion, an attainable ideal, unavailable in everyday life. In this sense, he was wholly a man of theatre" (Stanislavski, 2008, p. xxiv). Throughout his life everything would be subordinate to his life in the theatre; this included work in his family's textile mill, his family, truly everything. Outside of the theatre Stanislavski was "apolitical and unreligious, or rather was an instinctive liberal and believer, without inflexible convictions in either realm" (Stanislavski, 2008, p. xxiv).

It took one year to raise the necessary funds to begin the theatre company. Over the next 40 plus years Stanislavski and Nemiroivich worked together (often contentiously) to create one of the most famous theatre companies in the world. Their disagreements arose from Nemoirovich's belief that "the theatre was a branch of literature; it was its handmaiden" (Stanislavski, 2008, p. xxvi). This idea was sharply opposed by Stanislavski who believed that "the theatre was an art itself, with the actor at its heart" (p. xxvi). Even though their relationship would become strained over the years, they both agreed at their first meeting that the goal of the new company would be something they could agree on despite their theoretical differences. They would create a theatre which would be in direct opposition to what they each considered poor theatre.

Stanislavski explains in his autobiography his displeasure with Russian theatre of the late 1900's. He was upset with how within Russian theatre the "shining traditions of the past had been turned into simple workable technical tricks" (Stanislavski, 2008, p. 159). This included stilted melodramatic performances and staging as well as shows that were geared towards glorifying a star performer (as motioned above), and ham acting. In Stanislavski's theatre the performers would be "an ensemble which would place artistic aims above individual vanity" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 61).

The company would eventually be known as the Moscow Art Theatre; however, the initial name of the company was actually the Open Art Theatre. One of the key founding principles of the new theatre company was for there to be a focus placed on creating productions which were aimed at "middle- or lower-

middle-class audiences" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 69). In the text *Stanislavsky: A Biography* author Jean Benedetti quotes Stanislavski's reasons for placing his focus with the people rather than the bourgeoisie:

> Remember, we are attempting to bring light into the lives of the poorer classes, to give them a few moments of beauty in the darkness that surrounds them. We are trying to create the first rational, moral public theatre and it's to this lofty aim we dedicate our lives. (Ibid) (Benedetti, 1988, p.69)

In their first season the Open Art Theatre had planned a performance for local factory workers; this performance drew the attention of the Chief of Police, who informed them that they needed special clearance from government censors who would "vet material intended for working class audiences" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 85). The company saw through this veiled threat, knowing it was truly a warning of probable fines, possible closing of the theatre and potential imprisonment, so they canceled the performance and changed the name to the Moscow Art Theatre.

Rather than abandon his goal altogether, Stanislavski spent the next six years building "a fully-equipped theatre at his factory for the workers" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 85). The initial proletariats' focus of the company and Stanislavski's altruistic act would play a large role in the Moscow Arts Theatre's survival of and support from the Lenin and Stalin controlled Soviet Republic.

1904-1914 Revolution

Wanting to “develop 'spheres of influence' in the Far East” (http://www.russojapanesewar.com/intro.html), Russia went to war with Japan in 1904. Though the war only lasted a year, Russia suffered a humiliating defeat. The result of an unpopular foreign war and continued declining economic conditions led to a mini-revolution.

As Russia fought its war with Japan the rural farmers were fighting against famine and disease in the countryside. In the cities a new class of factory workers was struggling with extremely harsh conditions of its own. Crowded into cites in which the “urban population of Russia had doubled” (Thompson, 1990, p. 163), these workers “worked and lived under deplorable conditions” (Thompson, 1990, p. 163). As with the peasant farmers, the harsh working and living conditions led to outrage among the factory workers, and this led to “a succession of city-wide strikes in St. Petersburg’s textile industry in 1896-97” (Zelnik, 1997, p. 206).

While there had been strikes and labor unrest in the past it had never “been so widespread and so well coordinated” (Zelnik, 1997, p. 207). It was particularly disturbing to the Russian leadership since the unrest had taken place “in the imperial capital, seat of royal authority and center of imperial administration” (Zelnik, 1997, p. 207). In the text *Russia and the Soviet Union* author John Thompson describes how the proletariat factory workers began turning towards revolt and ultimately revolution:

> Almost as important as their physical situation in creating a revolutionary frame of mind was that most workers found adjusting to factory discipline and city life difficult. Away from the traditional routine and values of

> family, village, and church, they sought some new purpose and anchor for their lives. Some fell into drunkenness and petty crime; others readily joined social or discussion groups. Open to new ideas, such as workers' circles debated Marxism and other revolutionary creeds, under leaders who were usually intellectuals, not workers. (1990, p. 164)

The intellectuals who were leading the discussion groups were often members of the Russian intelligentsia and were "the first group to embrace socialist teachings and make a strenuous attempt to bring socialism to Russia" (*Russian Culture at the Crossroads*, Paramov, 1996, p. 16).

From the intelligentsia a new organization would emerge known as the Bolsheviks. From the socialist ideals of the intelligentsia they "inherited and perpetuated this lofty, paternalistic vision of the people as a toiling mass that would be led to freedom and happiness by the revolutionary intelligentsia" (Paramov, 1996, p. 16).

The key to the revolution of 1905 was that "each of the historical actors---workers, peasants, soldiers, liberal intelligentsia, radical political parties, national minorities, students, even clergy---followed a distinct trajectory, even if at times displaying a modicum of co-ordination" (Zelnik, 1996, p. 215). In other words, the revolution was the majority of the populace against the ruling aristocracy. Even groups which might seem at odds with one another were united against the Czar.

Like many of the previous revolts, the 1904 revolt started when "the peasants began to protest" (Thompson, 1990, p. 176), and those protests spilled

over to the factory workers. In the cities “hundreds of thousands of workers were on strike” (Thompson, 1990, p. 176) with workers demanding “political reform, as well as insistence on higher wages and shorter hours” (Thompson, 1990, p. 176).

In what became to be known as “Bloody Sunday,” a priest Father George Gapon “led a crowd of peaceful working-class petitioners, men, women, and children carrying icons and pictures of the tsar, to the imperial palace” (Thompson, 1990, p. 176). The crowds hope for peace while reading a petition to Nicolas II ended with government troops opening fire and leaving “well over a hundred” (Zelnick, 1996, p. 215) marchers dead.

Anger at Nicolas II and his government turned to outrage. In 1906 as the strikes progressed and acts of revolution against the government grew, Nicholas II was forced to make large scale concessions to the people that resulted in “a quasi-constitutional political order, based in principle on the rule of law and in some respects comparable to the troubled constitutional order in Germany” (Zelnick, 1996, p. 215). There are several factors which led to the changes:

1. As already demonstrated, the participation in the strikes from all levels of society.
2. Many of the government troops which could have quelled the rebellion were “off fighting the Japanese on Russia’s eastern frontiers” (Zelnick, 1996, p. 217).
3. The 1905 revolution was marketed differently from past revolts and strikes in that it was “an impressively broad national

> movement for change, manifesting itself in speeches, meetings, proclamations, mutinies, strikes, riots, assassinations, land seizures, and demonstrations" (Thompson, 1990, p. 177).

Though Stanislavski himself was not a "political sophisticate" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 235), as the figurehead of Russia's most famous theatre, he often found himself at the forefront of the revolutionary changes which swept through Russia. His detachment from events outside of theatre is another example of Stanislavski as a modernist thinker. The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism explains that:

> Because of the difficulty and self-referentiality of their works, the modernists have sometimes been isolated from the historical currents of their time. However, many were actively involved in political debates, and even those who disdained from politics were shaped by the broad social changes of their era. (Lewis, p. 11)

Stanislavski deciding he could no longer ignore the events taking place around him during the 1905 October strike, put himself and the Moscow Art Theatre in danger when, like many of the Russian University educated intelligentsia and merchant class, he signed a revolution party protest document in support of a general strike. These actions put Stanislavski at risk of retaliation by the Czar's secret police.

In *Stanislavski: A Biography* author Jean Benedetti gives an account of a performance shortly after the strike:

> During the performance Stanislavski's character is shot and the audience mistakenly believed that it was an actual assassination of Stanislavski by

> the secret police. The crowd rushed the stage to protect the fallen actor and it was only after Nemiroivich came on stage and explained that it was part of the production, and Stanislavski himself waved from the floor of the stage that the audience calmed down and the production continued. (pp. 154-155)

As a result of the nationwide revolts, a new constitutional order was created and titled the “Duma” (Thompson, 1990, p. 177).

Along with the new representative government the Czar made additional concessions including “freedom of the press, assembly, and speech” as well as “legalizing trade unions, canceling the remaining redemption dues owed by the peasants, and relaxing restrictions against minority nationalities” (Thompson, 1990, p. 177). The concessions were begrudgingly accepted by all sides particularly the “educated public, especially the middle class and professional classes” (Thompson, 1990, p. 177).

Two groups would emerge from the concessions of 1906. First, the Octoberists named after the month in which the treatise was signed. They were composed of the educated, middle class described above. The second were the “Soviet, or Council, of Workers Deputies” (Thompson, 1990, p. 178). This group “began to exercise a number of welfare, administrative, economic, and political functions and was the forerunner of the soviets that, after being reestablished in the Revolution of 1917, became the basic institutions of the new revolutionary state” (Thompson, 1990, p. 178).

Over the next eight years Russia would experience “a brief interlude of ‘normal’ development” (Thompson, 1990, p. 179) during which it experienced “renewed economic growth, rapid social evolution, basic changes in agriculture, and a remarkable spurt of cultural creativity” (Thompson, 1990, p. 179). This would all end with Russia’s entrance into World War I which would ultimately lead to the Russian Revolution of 1919.

Stanislavski Mania

In 1906, as the Russian government began to struggle with the challenges of creating the new Duma System of government, Stanislavski began developing a system of his own. In his autobiography Stanislavski describes his reasons for wanting to discover a system of acting:

> In my many years of work on the stage, from the Alekseev Circle to my wanderings through amateur groups to potboilers and finally the Society of Art and Literature and a few years at the Moscow Art Theatre, I had learned much, understood much, come across a great deal by chance. I was continuously looking for something new in the actor’s inner process, in directing and principles of staging. I rushed this way and that often forgetting important discoveries and being attracted to the fortuitous and the superficial. By the time of which I write, as a result of my artistic experience, I had collected a ragbag of all kinds of technical tricks. Everything was throw higgledy-piggledy, without discrimination or system, and so it difficult to use my own artistic treasures. I had to put

> things in order, sort out, examine and evaluate and, as it were, put all the material on the right mental shelves. (Stanislavski, 2008, p. 253)

Stanislavski began to look for ways an actor to reach what he called the “creative state” (2008, p. 254).

During this time many performers, including Stanislavski, relied on “signs to express human passions, actor’s tricks, poses, vocal inflexions, cadences, decorative flourishes, theatrical tricks, and acting techniques that ostensible express exalted feelings and thoughts ‘in the grand manner’ for such occasions” (Stanislavski, 2008, p. 256). In other words, the actor is giving a performance in which he is outwardly showing what he does not inwardly experience. Stanislavski called this style of performance the “actor’s state” (2008, p. 254). By contrast, the actor in the “creative state” has an emotional experience (inward) which is then actualized through the physical (outward).

The challenge of the “creative state” was to be able to create and maintain it from role to role, and - even more challenging - from performance to performance. Ultimately, Stanislavski was searching for an inward emotional truth from the actor. He had recognized it in actors with great natural ability and even by inexperienced performers who discovered it through luck. The challenge was how to make it accessible and consistent to all actors every time. Stanislavski wanted “truth and that could only be attained by the right methods which enabled the raw material of behavior to be transformed into significant theatrical statements” (Benedetti, 1988, p. 176). In his autobiography Stanislavski explains what he means by truth: “External truth is not important to me in itself but the

truth of my attitude to this or that event onstage, to the objects, sets, my fellow actors playing other roles, to their thoughts and feelings" (2008, p. 261). He continues by clarifying the truth an actor is seeking is how they would respond "if everything around me were true, this is what I would do, this is how I would relate to this or that event" (2008, p. 261). Stanislavski wanted the actors to respond truthfully to the artificially circumstances within the production.

For the remainder of his life and career Stanislavski's focus would be the development of a system that an actor could use to consistently reach the "creative state." His ideas were discovered and practiced through working with the actors in rehearsals and productions at the Moscow Art Theatre.

Stanislavski's newfound obsession with the creation of a new system of acting was called "Stanislavski mania" (Stanislavski, 2008, p. 257) by his friends and colleagues. In his autobiography he describes the reaction to his acting experiments from his company members at The Moscow Art Theatre: "They grew angry and said that I had turned rehearsals into an experiential laboratory and that actors were not guinea pigs" (2008, p. 257). While Stanislavski understood their frustration he felt that since they were some of the top performers in the world, they were the ones who "more often than others were always in the creative state when onstage, so who was I to study if not them" (2008, p. 257)?

Stanislavski had always been a popular actor and director. He always took great care to create productions which would be both enjoyable to the audience and commercially acceptable; however, for the rest of his life "the rehearsal

process and the discoveries it produced became more important than the actual performance" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 175).

There were three influences which led to Stanislavski's mania. The first, as we have discussed previously, was Stanislavski's experience within the theatre. Biographer Jean Benedetti discusses the second and third in *Stanislavski: A Biography*: "On a trip to Germany Stanislavski met a man who introduced him to two books by the French psychologist Theodule Armand Ribot which were *Les Maladies de la Mémoire* and *Les Maladies de la Volonte"* (1988, p. 180). Ribot attempted to "account for memory loss as a symptom of progressive brain disease, iterated in his *Les Maladies de la Mémoire* (1881; *Diseases of Memory*), and constitutes the most influential early attempt to analyze abnormalities of memory in terms of physiology" (http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/502175/Theodule-Armand-Ribot).

Stanislavski became interested in Ribot's discovery that the "will has a positive role to play in the patient's recovery" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 180). The patient who had a will to get better would spend less time recuperating. Ribot also discovered that memories could be evoked by different stimuli. For example: "a touch, a sound, a smell may enable a patient to relieve not just one experience but a grouping of similar experiences which merge to create a single emotional state" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 180). Ribot's influence may be seen in Stanislavski's ideas on emotional memory and imagination.

The third influence came from an unexpected source, the famous dancer Isadora Duncan. In Duncan, Stanislavski had found a kindred spirit who, like

himself, was looking for a way to reach “one and the same thing, only in different branches of art” (Stanislavski, 2008, p. 286). Stanislavski called it the “creative state” while Duncan called it the “creative motor” (Stanislavski, 2008, p. 286). In his biography Stanislavski explains an encounter with Duncan:

> At the time I, too, was looking for the creative motor that I could locate in my mind, as an actor before going on. It is understandable that, in doing so I should observe Isadora as she performed, as she rehearsed, as she searched, when the birth of feeling changed her face and when, with shinning eyes, she would reveal the secrets of her heart. (2008, p. 286)

Like Stanislavski, Duncan was attempting to break down old traditions of performing. Stanislavski was energized by her “artistic energy and fresh approach” (Benedetti, 1988, p. 177) and was influenced by her “concept of physical expression and scenic movement which would release personal energy” (Benedetti, 1988, p. 177). Though their interaction was brief, Duncan’s energy and influence on Stanislavski would last throughout his lifetime.

World War, Revolution and Civil War

In 1914, despite strong opposition from the newly formed Duma, Russia entered World War I on the side of Britain and France. With it forces poorly trained and equipped it wasn’t long before Russian troops began to fall. In “early 1915 German divisions had dealt a string of shattering defeats” (Orlovsky, 1997, p. 232) to Russian troops. In 1915 alone, the fighting on the western front resulted in “2 million Russian casualties” (Treadgold, 1987, p. 87).

The initial reaction to the war was patriotic, but as the defeats mounted and as the ill-prepared country struggled with supplying the soldiers on the front, “inflation and food shortages reached critical levels at home” (Orlovsky, 1997, p. 235). The shortages caused anger and frustration which quickly began to spread to both soldiers and civilians.

In February of 1917, the frustrated Russian people took their anger to the streets. In the capital city of Petrograd, crowds began rioting “in a protest at the shortage of bread” (Treadgold, 1987, p. 87). As the Czarist government attempted to take control of the city, many of the military forces brought in to protect the city began to join the people. By the end of February the members of the Duma had organized into a separate government and along with the support of the military within the city “seized arsenals, emptied the [jails], and burnt the central headquarters of the hated police” (Orlovsky, 1997, p. 235). In addition, most of the ministers of the Czarist government were placed under arrest.

Czar Nicholas raced back to Petrograd to attempt to regain control of the government but found himself stranded at a small town far from the capital. Seeing no way of regaining power and “at the urging of his own generals and Duma politicians, he agreed to abdicate” (Orlovsky, 1997, p. 235) the throne. He and his family would be “executed by Bolshevik forces in July, 1918” (Thompson, 1990, p. 195).

A new Provisional Government was formed and announced “its ‘Programme’ of democratic principles and goals” and promised “to end bureaucratic hegemony over political life and to create self-government at every

level" (Orlovsky, 1997, p. 235). Attempting to "govern in an atmosphere of unrealistic popular expectations, revolutionary euphoria, and widespread feelings of liberation that impelled people to reject authority" (Treadgold, 1987, p. 195), the Provisional Government was doomed from the beginning. The government soon faced a challenge from a "group of revolutionary activists" (Treadgold, 1987, p. 196) who were member of the Soviets. The Soviets were key participants in the revolt of 1905, and now had strong support and active participation from the revolutionary military.

"One of the key groups within the Soviet party was the radical left wing group the Bolsheviks and, on April 16, after ten years in exile, their leader Vladimir Lenin returned to Petrograd" (Treadgold, 1987, p. 197). Upon his return Lenin shocked many within his own party when he "called on the Russian people to struggle against, rather than support, the Provisional Government; to begin at once the transfer of all power to the Soviet; and to end the war immediately" (Thompson, 1990, p. 198). Lenin may have shocked many in his party but his slogan of "Peace, Land, and Bread" was exactly what the Russian people wanted.

The Provisional Government quickly saw its popularity plummet because of their reluctance to take any real type of control, institute any immediate changes, and more importantly their continued support of the debilitating war. On November 7th, fully supported by the military, the Soviets led by the Bolsheviks, "took control of key locations in the capital—banks, post offices, railroad stations, and government buildings—most often without a struggle" (Thompson, 1990, p. 201). Lenin assumed power on November 8th and "formed a Soviet government

called the Council of Peoples Commissars" (Thompson, 1990, p. 202). He created "a one-party dictatorship over the country, which existed until 1991" (Thompson, 1990, p. 203).

Within six months Lenin would face his own challenges to the new government - this time in the form of a three-year civil war. On one side was the Red Army composed of Lenin's communists forces, on the other was the "White armies of patriots and anti-communists" (Orlovsky, 1997, p. 253) who were led by Generals just returned from the western front.

After three years of fighting, Lenin's Red Army was victorious and finally had control of all of Russia. In the text *Russia: A History,* author Daniel Orlovsky describes one of the lasting effects of the civil war: "War made the Red Army the largest, most important institution in the new state: it absorbed vast resources and, to ensure political reliability, deliberately conscripted the most 'class-conscious' elements of the working class and party" (1997, p. 257). In short, the new Soviet Union became a military-administrative state.

Theatre in Revolution

In his autobiography *My Life in Art*, Stanislavski dedicates a mere seven pages to the Russian revolution and civil war. Most of his comments are about the challenges and rewards of bringing theatre to new audiences:

> In 1917 revolution broke out in February, and again in October. The theatre was entrusted with a new mission. It had to open its doors to the widest possible audience, to millions of people who up till then had not been able to enjoy the pleasures of culture. (2008, p. 318)

Stanislavski goes on to explain that one of the discoveries which was made by the company was the realization that “people came to the theatre not to be entertained but to learn” (2008, p. 319). He also describes his frustration with having to “teach an uninitiated audience to sit quietly, not to chat, to take their seats in time, not to smoke, not to bring tidbits or eat them in the auditorium” (2008, p. 321). He ends the brief section titled “Revolution” by chastising theatre companies that he believed were exploiting the new audiences by “clinging like leeches to commercial rubbish which was presented to a gullible public who were interested in the theatre” (2008, p. 322).

In 1919, after the Russian revolution and civil war, Stanislavski found his family’s factories and personal fortune confiscated by the new government. Despite the personal hardships Stanislavski was in favor of the new government. In an article titled “The Aesthetic Education of the Popular Masses” Stanislavski writes: “Let there be no end to the opening of schools, people universities, let there be general education classes and seminars, lectures etc., to encourage the intelligent development of the masses” (Benedetti, p. 235).

For most of his life Stanislavski was part of the bourgeoisie. The new communist party was arresting, jailing and even executing members of that former ruling class. Stanislavski was able to survive because of his early support of Lenin as well as the popularity of the Moscow Art Theatre. Many members of the new communist party wanted to close the theatre seeing it as a relic of an oppressive era. However, Lenin believed that if “there is one theatre from the past, which we must save and preserve, it is, of course, the Art Theatre”

(*Stanislavski for Beginners*, Allen, 1999, p. 94). The sentiment was felt by both Lenin and the eventual ruler Stalin.

Another reason for Stanislavski's protection by the communist hierarchy may be found in Karl Marx's belief in realism as the best art for the proletariat because it "seemed to him to represent the class struggle clearly" (Lewis, 2007, p. 20), and "his twentieth-century followers, especially in the Soviet Union, generally maintained this preference for realism" (Lewis, 2007, pp. 20-21). Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre were world-renowned and State-celebrated for their realism theatre.

Tour of the United States

In 1922, the Moscow Art Theatre embarked on a world tour. The tour began in Europe and was put together in the hopes of alleviating some of the financial difficulties the company faced. On January 22, 1923, The Art Theatre arrived in Manhattan. Upon arriving in the United States Stanislavski, an international celebrity had the difficult task of navigating the tensions between the United States and the newly formed communist government of Russia. The United States did not officially recognize the new Russian government and was extremely leery of the reasons for the Moscow Art Theatre choosing to visit the United States. Many in the United States government expressed concern that the real reason for the trip was to drum up sympathy and support for communism.

Stanislavski felt pressure from the Russian government which kept a close eye on the Moscow Art Theatre, expecting them to serve as an example of what may be accomplished under communist Russia. Over the next year The Art

Theatre traveled throughout the eastern half of the United States. While the company barely made enough money to continue the tour, it left an indelible mark on American theatre.

It was also in the United States that Stanislavski was asked to write the two texts that would forever change the world of acting. The first was an autobiography of his life titled *My Life in Art* which was eventually published in the United States in1924. Stanislavski's second publication in the United States was an actor's manual which he initially titled *An Actor's Work on Himself*. It was intended to be a text divided into three sections. The first section would deal with the actor's internal work, the second section would focus on the development of the actor's physical instrument, and the final section would teach the actor how to combine everything into the creation of character in a play. Unfortunately, the three sections would be divided into three texts published over a span of 25 years.

The first section published was the text *An Actor Prepares*; thirteen years later section two was published and titled *Building a Character*. Twelve years after that, the third and final section, *Creating a Role*, was published.) There was a span of 25 years between *An Actor Prepares* and *Creating a Role* which left a misconception about Stanislavski's acting technique still lingers in the acting world today. Stanislavski himself would only live to see the publication of *My Life in Art* and *An Actor Prepares*.

The Final Years

Stanislavski returned to Moscow with the Art Theatre in no better financial shape than when he left. The only bright spot was that, due to the

advanced money from his autobiography, he was able to ease some of his personal financial issues. Despite the financial difficulties, The Art Theatre continued to put on hundreds of productions.

In 1928 The Art Theatre celebrated its 30th anniversary. In celebration of the event the theatre put on scenes from many of its most popular plays. During one of the performances Stanislavski suffered a heart attack. Despite his pain he completed the performance; however, it would be his last. His final years of life are described in *Stanislavski: A Biography*:

> In the case of a number of important figures—artists and intellectuals of international repute—Stalin followed the policy known as 'isolate but preserve.' Stanislavski's routine, his meetings were carefully controlled by his doctors, who were under instruction from Stalin. He was not allowed out of the flat in Leontievski Lane, which was almost hermetically sealed, except to commute to the nursing-home in Barvika. He was thus virtually living in internal exile in the middle of Moscow. (Benedetti, p. 344)

Stanislavski spent the early part of his life trying to find a system of acting which would overturn what he saw as the outdated and antiquated techniques of the previous generation. Upon his death Stanislavski's discoveries became the new system which even today influences a new generation of performers. He built a system to overturn the establishment which, in turn, became the new establishment.

Stanislavski spent the last decade of his life directing plays, working with students on his system, and writing *An Actor Works on Himself*. In 1936, *An Actor*

Prepares was published in the United States. Sadly he would never see his text published in his native Russia.

Stanislavski died on August 7, 1938, three weeks later his wife received an advanced copy of the Russian version of *An Actor Prepares*.

Stanislavski's Texts

Throughout his life Stanislavski wrote many articles, kept journals and copious notes on all of the productions he performed in and/or directed. However, it is the four books he wrote for which he is most remembered.

My Life in Art

Stanislavski's official autobiography was published in the United States in 1924, and the revised Soviet edition was published in 1926. Stanislavski reluctantly agreed to write his autobiography out of financial necessity. In *Stanislavski: A Biography* author Jean Benedetti describes Stanislavski reluctance to writing an autobiography, explaining that he had "expressed his contempt for works of this kind" in the past. She quotes Stanislavski as declaring "actors should be banned from talking about themselves and forever trotting out how they were praised" (1999, p. 275). Stanislavski worked quickly to turn in what he considered an "anecdotal" (p. 282) text into his American publishers.

He spent another year working on a revised Russian edition in which he hoped to "discuss artistic problems seriously" (p. 282). That edition combined several chapters, contained additional material and, in accordance with the Soviet Union's mandates, removed all religious references. Most of the religious references were not reflections on religion but were simply comments on a

character's action in a play. One example is Stanislavski's description of a character in *Uncle Vanya*. His example that the character is reading a letter "as if they were reading a bible" (Stanislavski, 2008, p. xx) was changed to the character "reads avidly" (Stanislavski, 2008, p. xx).

After its United States publication in 1924, it would become an instant bestseller in the American and British acting community. Many of the actors used Stanislavski's descriptions on how he approached a role as a curriculum for their own personal development. This would last until the publication of Stanislavski's next book *An Actor Prepares*.

An Actor Prepares and *Building a Character*

In 1923, when Stanislavski was on his tour of the United States, he met Elizabeth and Norman Hapgood. Elizabeth, who spoke fluent Russian, presented Stanislavski with the idea of writing a book about his acting system. This was the text he had always wanted to write, but he had already made the financial commitment to write his autobiography. Elizabeth suggested that she serve as Stanislavski's power of attorney, and once he returned to Russia (and completed his autobiography) she could negotiate the global publication rights, copyrights and any advances on the new publication. She would also serve as the translator of his new book. Stanislavski agreed and began organizing his notes for the acting text that would finally give students in other countries the opportunity to learn his system.

Stanislavski used the working title *An Actor Works on Himself*. Hapgood describes Stanislavski's desire to create an acting text that taught "the inner

preparations of an actor and the external technical means of bringing a character to life before an audience" (*Building a Character*, 1950, p. 3). It would take 12 years between the publication of *My Life in Art* and the publication of Stanislavski's acting text.

There were several factors for the delay. First were the previous obligations in Stanislavski's life. He had his obligations to The Moscow Art Theatre where he was performing (until his heart attack in 1928), directing and organizing new productions (both of which he continued until his death in 1938). Second was Stanislavski's declining heath which forced him to take breaks from his work in order to recuperate. Also because of his poor health he was unable to focus on his writing. Lastly was Stanislavski's dedication to the system. He insisted on creating a text/book which completely and comprehensively presented his theories. The resulting text/book "would have run to 1200 pages, which was unmanageable" (Hapgood, 1988, p. 315). Hapgood was concerned that no publisher would print such a large text.

Stanislavski reluctantly agreed to allow the book to be split into two texts rather than two sections which was his original intention. He would also continue working on the third section which would become *Creating a Role*. In 1936, the first text published in the United States was titled *An Actor Prepares*. It would take 14 years before the second section would be published under the title *Building a Character*.

Stanislavski's reluctance in splitting the initial text into two was based on his fear that new readers and students of the system would think the first half (*An*

Actor Prepares) was the entire system. He was particularly concerned that due to its focus on the internal approach of his method (as opposed to the external in *Building a Character*) that his theories would be seen as being a system which has a focus on only the internal or psychological world of the actor. He feared that his ideas on the necessity of actors to also develop their physical instrument would be forgotten and/or ignored. Stanislavski's fears were realized because of the 12-year gap between the two books. Benedetti points out that because of the great length of time between the two, western theatre has an "overemphasis on the 'naturalistic' aspects of the System and to the assumption even among the well-informed that *An Actor Prepares* is the system" (1988, p. 316).

The misinterpretations of the system were not limited to the disregard of the physical aspects of the actor. The foundations of Stanislavski's system were actually comprised of three parts: (a) the actor's work on the internal self, (b) the actor's work on the physical self, and (c) the actor's work on the character in the play.

Unfortunately, it would then take 25 years between the publications of *An Actor Prepares* and his final text *Creating a Role*.

Creating a Role

The final text of Stanislavski's trilogy was published in 196l. The third text dealt with the actor's "preparation of specific roles, beginning with the first reading of a play, and the development of the first scene" (*Creating a Role*, Stanislavski, 1961, p. iv). Stanislavski placed this training at the end of his system

because he believed it should only be approached by an actor who has obtained "mastery of the other two [sections]" (1961, p. iv).

The first two sections worked in conjunction to give the actor a full mastery of himself. *Creating a Role* was intended to give the actor the tools to develop a fully realized character within a production. While Stanislavski believed the ideas contained in *Creating a Role* are every bit as important to the overall system, it is often a forgotten text. In David Allen's book *Stanislavski for Beginners* an entire chapter is given to explaining the concepts in *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*, while there is no mention of *Creating a Role*.

Naïve Reading

The Narrative "How To" Novel

The first feature anyone who begins reading *An Actor Prepares* will notice is that it is written as a semi-fictionalized narrative. Stanislavski uses a narrative story to place the reader directly into a "living and breathing classroom." Stanislavski's choice to place the reader into this environment creates an illustrative rather than an argumentative or logical text. Merriam-Webster.com defines "illustration" as "an example or instance that helps to make something clear" (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/illustration).

In *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski paints for the reader a clear mental picture of what his character's world looks like; he does this through writing choices such as stories, metaphors, and examples. From the very outset of the text the reader learns that Kostya, the writer of the diary, is an inexperienced actor. Kostya describes in detail his experiences both inside and outside of the

classroom. The descriptions in the journal serve as clear illustrations of both Stanislavski's ideas and the ways in which the reader can recreate the exercises and/or experiences in the text. The reader is also given clear descriptions of the successful execution of what Stanislavski calls his system.

An Actor Prepares was written by Stanislavski for actors, in particular those actors who have no experience with his System. As previously stated it is a fictionalized diary of an acting student, two instructors and the students in the class. With only a couple of exceptions the setting of the story is a classroom and a main stage located in a theatre. The few times people who are not in the classroom are discussed, they are used to illustrate points and ideas being made by the Director and/or one of the students about the theories, challenges or discoveries of actors learning the System.

For example, in chapter seven Kostya is invited to dine at the house of the famous actor Shustov (1936, p. 121). During that dinner, Shustov uses the carving of a turkey to explain "units and objectives."

In chapter eight the Director describes helping a fellow actress whose struggles with the system are causing her to consider retiring from the theatre. The Director diagnoses her problem as a lack of understanding of the idea of a "super-objective" (1936, p. 298) and teaches her the unifying power of the concept. The young actress not only rediscovers her love of performing but is also "rewarded for all of her sufferings and doubts over a period of years" (1936, p. 121) through the adulation of an audience that cheers her through "innumerable curtain calls" (1936, p. 121).

The first chapter of the book introduces many of the bad habits that young and/or inexperienced actors must avoid. It is in the second chapter that Stanislavski begins to introduce the concepts which will help the inexperienced actor overcome his bad habits and mistakes. The title of the chapter is “When Acting is Art” and the chapter serves as the introduction of the System also known as “the Method.”

The following passages are examples of the foundational ideas of Stanislavski’s System which are found in chapter two of *An Actor Prepares*:

- Tortsov explains that the actor must “play truly” every part. Tortsov describes this further: “To play truly means to be right, logical, coherent, to think, strive, feel and act in unison with your role” (p. 15). This occurs when an actor fits “his own human qualities to the life of this other person” (p. 15). He continues by saying: “the fundamental aim of our art is the creation of this inner life of a human spirit, and its expression in an artistic form” (p. 15). Tortsov believes that this is accomplished by the actor physically experiencing feelings every time they perform the role.
- In order for an actor to be ready for the mental challenges, they must be physically and vocally prepared.
- Actors should avoid the “art of representation” (p. 19), which is “a form and method of acting which is permanently fixed, and which is produced with a certain inner coldness” (p. 20). In other words, it is an acting style which “represents” emotions, rather than “living” them in the moment during the performance. In order to avoid this style of acting, actors should

always avoid rehearsing in front of a mirror because “it teaches an actor to watch the outside rather than the inside of his soul, both himself and in his part” (p. 20). According to Tortsov many actors perform in front of a mirror until they discover a physical representation of their inner feelings. Rather than repeating what they felt, these actors repeat the emotionally empty physical gestures. Tortsov also refers to this as “mechanical acting” (p. 25).

- In direct opposition to the “art of representation” is Tortsov’s “art of inspiration” in which the technique calls for “natural emotions at the very moment in which they appear before you in the flesh. They call for the direct co-operation of nature itself” (p. 24). The training for this technique requires an actor to understand everything he is feeling. As humans we always feel something, but the actor must know the difference between personal feelings (i.e. tired, hungry, hot, etc.) and those which match the feeling necessary for the portrayal of the character.
- Actors should avoid clichés such as “showing your teeth or rolling the whites of your eyes when you are jealous, or covering up the eyes and face with your hands instead of weeping; tearing your hair when in despair” (p. 26).
- One of the worst types of acting is one in which the actor tries to impress the audience through overacting a role. This style is found in those who overact a part based on assumptions rather than on lived or learned experience. Tortsov stresses to Kostya and the class, “never allow yourself

externally to portray anything you have not inwardly experienced and which is not even interesting to you" (p. 31).

- The worst type of acting, according to Tortsov, is that which comes from the actor who is performing for personal pleasure and/or gain. Tortsov explains that many people in the theatre are only onstage to show how beautiful they are or to "gain popularity or external success or to make a career" (p. 32). He considers these performers the "deadliest enemies of art. We have to use the sternest measures with them, and if they cannot be reformed they must be removed from the boards" (p. 33).

In each of the examples above, Stanislavski is addressing a very specific audience: actors. He is setting the foundation of his system on three things: (a) explanations on what an actor should strive for (i.e. use of the subconscious, play truthfully, etc.), (b) techniques for the actor, such as a physically prepared body and voice, natural emotions, etc., and (c) examples of what an actor should not do like rolling his eyes, performing to impress the audience, etc.

Now that we know for whom Stanislavski was writing, we may turn our attention to question number two: "why use a narrative structure?"

Dear Diary

The chapters of *An Actor Prepares* are broken up into the fictional diary entries of the novice pupil Kostya. The diary entries encompass a year in the educational life of Kostya, his fellow students as well as the personal life of Kostya outside of the classroom. Stanislavski uses the struggle of the young actors who are learning Tortsov's "psycho-technical method" as a way for the

reader to learn his System. Throughout the text the students struggle to overcome bad habits, misunderstandings and outdated or incorrect acting methods. Stanislavski (through Kostya) describes the students' challenges with the different exercises Tortsov assigns.

Because Stanislavski has made the choice to write this like a series of diary entries, the reader is immediately drawn into the world of the text. The reader is not simply given a list of problems experienced by Kostya and then shown how they were solved, but rather by reading Kostya's diary, the reader participates in his actual experience.

From the first page, Stanislavski creates the challenges, successes and discoveries which will be experienced by Kostya and - by proxy - the reader. For example, on the first day of lessons for the young actors of the theatre company, they have been tasked with preparing a small scene to demonstrate their abilities. They were to be given several days of rehearsal before performing their scene in front of Tortsov. Kostya describes in his diary how he decided on a scene from *Othello* with his acting partner Paul: "we began to discuss Shakespeare, and my own choice fell on Othello. When Paul agreed to play Iago, everything was decided" (p. 2).

Kostya begins rehearsing late into the night, taking objects from around the room to dress up into his idea of Othello. In his diary he describes how he uses watered down icing from a chocolate cake as make-up for his rehearsal of the Moor. The next morning he arrives early and begins to set the stage for his and Paul's scene confessing: "for me the external were of great importance" (p. 4).

While Paul has his lines memorized, Kostya has to read from the text and begins to struggle with the scene because he cannot recreate the external conditions of his boarding house room where he rehearsed his scene. The rehearsal room had different chairs, lighting, no chocolate cake make-up, etc. In addition, Paul's interpretation of his part does not match what Kostya imagined it would be. He realizes "I had read the text of the role by itself; I had played the character by itself, without relating one to the other [Paul]. The words interfered with the acting, and the acting with the words" (p. 5).

After the disappointing class Kostya returns home frustrated, and as a result of reading his diary, the reader is able to sympathize with Kostya's frustration. We learn through the events and experiences Kostya describes in his diary.

Stanislavski chose the narrative style (as expressed through a fictionalized diary) because he believed that "the fictional form conveys the sense of a working method, of something learned through practice; the System is not presented as an abstract theory to be learnt and then consciously applied" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 319). In other words, rather than create a text that is comprised in a theoretical world of terminologies, examples and exercises, Stanislavski wanted to place his ideas into a physical world inhabited by fictional characters. These characters could serve as an illustration of living examples of the ways in which students should physically and psychologically progress through his system. In addition, the text would serve as an example of what students would experience should Stanislavski himself teach their acting class.

Stanislavski has his students in *An Actor Prepares* challenge, disagree and question the Director (and instructor) Tortsov. He could have simply laid out his technique in a "how to" text or written his fictional characters as students who blindly accept his ideas as gospel. This type of text creates very little room for the questioning of the information. The student who reads the text must take all of the information as strict fact which must be stringently adhered to. For example: compare the way in which the author Katherine Mayfield of *Acting A to Z: The Young Person's Guide to a Stage or Screen Career* writes how an actor approaches a text with Stanislavski's approach to the same subject in *An Actor Prepares*. We begin first with Mayfield and the way she approaches the concept of objectives:

> To being getting in touch with the character, ask yourself questions. As you gain more experience with the characterization, you'll know quickly what kinds of questions will be most helpful to you. Here are some that most actors would start with:
>
> - What's the most important thing that a character does in the play?
> - Why does the character do what he does?
> - What does she want most, and what lengths will she go to get it? (2007, p. 59)

Mayfield ends the section with the advice:

> There are endless questions that you can ask to get a clearer picture of who your character is. These are just a way to begin, a way to stimulate your imagination. The more thinking you can do about your character and his

or her behavior and motivation, the more interesting you portrayal will be." (2007, p. 59)

Now compare that to the way in which Stanislavski approaches the same subject:

> Another important point about an objective is that besides being believable, it should have attraction for the actor, make him wish to carry it out. This magnetism is a challenge to his creative will.
>
> Objectives which contain these necessary qualities we will call creative. It is difficult to cull them out. Rehearsals are taken up, in the main, with the task of finding the right objectives, getting control of them and living with them.
>
> The director turned to Nicholas. 'What is your objective in that favorite scene of yours from *Brand*?' he asked.
>
> 'To save humanity,' Nicholas replied.
>
> 'A large purpose!' exclaimed the Director half laughingly. 'It is impossible to grasp it all at once. Don't you think you had better taken some simple physical objective?'
>
> 'But is a physical objective—interesting?' asked Nicholas with a shy smile.
>
> 'Interesting to whom?' said the director.
>
> 'To the public.'
>
> 'Forget about the public. Think about yourself,' he advised. 'If you are interested, the public will follow you.'

> ‘But I am not interested in it either,’ pleaded Nicholas. ‘I should prefer something psychological.’
>
> ‘You will have time enough for that. It is too early to become involved in psychology. For the time being, limit yourself to what is simple and physical.’ (p. 131)

In Mayfield’s text the reader is given an introduction, some examples of questions an actor might ask and finally the conclusion that by simply thinking more about your characters “behavior and motivation,” the performer will have a more interesting “portrayal.” Mayfield never explains what this portrayal would be or even look like to the actor and audience, only that it would be “interesting.” An actor approaching this text would have a tremendous amount of information on what questions an actor should ask of the character before approaching a role, but no practical understanding of why or how to apply the information during rehearsal.

In the Stanislavski example he begins by describing a particular type of objective, one that is both “believable” and has an “attraction for the actor.” He then asks his student Nicholas to give him an example of an objective he uses. Through Tortsov’s questioning of Nicholas we learn what an appropriate objective should be: first, an objective that is easy to “grasp,” possibly one tied to a “physical objective.” Second, it must have its focus within the performer and not out in the audience. When the actor chooses an appropriate objective, he will gain the interest of the audience. Third, there are additional types of objectives but

these are ones that may only be used once the actor has mastered the simplest ones (physical vs. psychological).

Through the use of narrative, Stanislavski introduces a concept and then gives an example of how and why that particular concept is or is not effective. He gives the reader an introduction to a concept, how an actor should use the concept and a clear idea of the progression into more complicated ideas. In other words, Mayfield's text is a step-by-step "how-to guide" for the actor, and Stanislavski's text, while also a form of a how-to guide, is an illustrative text in which he shows the reader examples of how his Method should be understood and practiced.

Yes, But?

Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, the translator of *An Actor Prepares*, gives another reason for Stanislavski's choice of narrative style:

> Stanislavski felt the need of a freedom of speech, especially about the faults that harass actors that he would not have if he would have used the names of his actual players, from Moskvin and Kachalov down to the very beginners, and therefore decided on a semi-fictional form. (p. vii)

The use of fictionalized characters gave Stanislavski the freedom to chastise and even poke fun of the mistakes that inexperienced actors often make.

He was also concerned that some of his former pupils may take offense in what they may perceive as Stanislavski using them as an unflattering example. In the following example we see an exchange between Tortsov and the student Maria Maloletkova:

> ‘Let us give a new play,’ said the Director to Maria, as he came into the classroom today.
>
> ‘Here is the gist of it: Your Mother has lost her job and her income; she has nothing to sell to pay for your tuition in dramatic school. In consequence you will be obliged to leave tomorrow. But a friend has come to your rescue. She has no cash to lend you, so she has brought you a brooch set in valuable stones. Her generous act has excited you. Can you accept such a sacrifice? You cannot make up your mind. You try to refuse. Your friend sticks the pen into a curtain and walks out. You follow her into the corridor, where there is a long scene of persuasion, refusal, tears, gratitude. In the end you accept, your friend leaves, and you come back into the room to get the brooch. But---where is it? Can anyone have entered and taken it? In a rooming house that would be altogether possible. A carful, nerve-racking search ensues.
>
> ‘Go up on the stage. I shall stick the pin in a fold in this curtain and you are to find it.’ (p. 40)

Maria proceeds to go to the stage and begins running around the stage, breathing heavily, wringing her hands and “alternately holding her head or beating her breast, apparently to represent the general tragedy of the situation” (p. 40).

The result of her overacting was stifled laughter among her fellow students. Once the scene was completed Tortsov asked an excited Maria for the brooch. She exclaimed “oh yes… I forgot that.” The director tells her to get the brooch or else she will be thrown out of school. This time a panicked Maria really

looks for the missing brooch. After a few moments the director stops the panicked Maria and states:

> ‘No, do not try to make us believe that the first time you were looking for the pin,’ said he. ‘You did not even think of it. You merely sought to suffer, for the sake of suffering.
>
> ‘But the second time you really did look. We all saw it; we understood, we believed, because your consternation and distraction actually existed.’ (p. 42)

Stanislavski uses the interaction between Tortsov and Maria to set up his concept that on stage the actor must be focused on truly completing the action in the given circumstances. It is not enough to simply pretend to be doing something, you must actually do it.

Through the fictional character of Maria the director Tortsov places his student in an extremely embarrassing and narratively impactful situation. There are several ways in which Stanislavski could have presented the lesson, but he chose one in which a vulnerable student is placed in an unattainable situation (demanding she find a brooch that was not actually placed on stage) in which failing is the only option. It is also one in which the reader can experience Maria’s embarrassment and fear.

In addition, had Stanislavski used the real names of students on whom he used this exercise, he may have caused an embarrassing private classroom situation to become public knowledge. Stanislavski’s belief in the importance of a safe classroom environment for the actor may be seen in his choice of changing

the names to protect the innocent. It can also be seen in *An Actor Prepares* when he scolds the students for laughing at Maria: “The Director turned and said quietly: ‘My friends, you are in a schoolroom. And Maria is going through a most important moment in her artistic life. Try to learn when to laugh, and at what’” (p. 35).

Stanislavski’s use of “freedom of speech” is not limited to the protection of his former students. He also uses free speech interaction between himself and the students as a teaching tool. Most teachers have experienced the challenges of students questioning their methods and/or ideas. Stanislavski uses students’ challenges to add realism to the educative experiences. In doing so it fosters a realistic world for the reader. It is one in which they become part of a class where, like the students in the text, they feel free to ask questions, have doubts and make challenges of both themselves and the system.

The examples in *An Actor Prepares* range from the students simply asking questions, to Nicholas challenging Tortsov with the statement that he “is not interested in either” and that he would “prefer something psychological” (p. 131), to the following exchange between Tortsov and Grisha about whether or not a classic play can be updated and/or adapted for modern times:

> [Tortsov] ‘A play with that kind of deformed, broken backbone cannot live.’
>
> Grisha protested violently against that point of view.
>
> ‘But do you not rob every director,’ he burst out, 'and every actor of all initiative and individual creative capacity, as well as every possibility of

renewing old masterpieces by bringing them to the spirit of modern times?'

Tortsov's reply was calm and explanatory:

'You, and many who think as you do, often confuse three words: eternal, modern, and momentary. You must be able to make fine distinctions in human spiritual values if you are to get at the true meaning of those words.'

'What is modern may become eternal if it deals with questions of freedom, justice, love, happiness, great joy, great suffering. I make no objection to that kind of modernity in the work of a playwright.' (p. 299)

Stanislavski shows that he understands that students are not (nor should they be) unquestioning, passive vessels to be filled up with information. Rather, they are living breathing human beings with their own thoughts and ideas.

Stanislavski, through his choice of words used to describe the dialog between the two characters, is also showing both the impetuous nature of an inexperienced student and the calm wisdom of a master teacher. In the text Grisha "protested violently" and Tortsov's reply was "calm and explanatory." This shows us that Grisha, the inexperienced student is speaking first with his heart, not having fully listened to the initial explanation, and that his passion for the subject reveals his misunderstanding of the information. Tortsov calmly explains to a heated Grisha that he is not necessarily disagreeing with Grisha's argument that masterpieces can and should be updated to "modern times," but that it is the

reason behind the modernization that will determine an effective update of a classic.

For Tortsov it must always be located in internal and external concepts, not in the externality of simply updating it to make it look modern. Throughout the text Stanislavski gives the reader example after example of the students' interactions with Tortsov. Through these exchanges the reader is able to "live in the classroom' with all of the characters.

What's in a Name?

As described previously, one of the reasons why Stanislavski uses fictitious names in *An Actor Prepares* was to protect the reputation and egos of the actors on whom he based some of the characters. In the *Stanislavski: A Biography* Jean Benedetti describes how Stanislavski decided on the names for the book's characters:

> When opting for the semi-fictional form Stanislavski had decided to give the characters generic names, rather in the manner of Johnsonian or Restoration Comedy. Thus the teacher is called Tvortsov (Creator) from the word 'tvorchestvo' – creation. Other characters represented other abstractions – Chuvstvov from 'chuvstvo,' feeling, Rassudov from 'rassudok' reason. These were subsequently modified, though without entirely losing their etymological roots. Tvortsov thus became Tortsov and Chuvstvov, Shustov. (1988, p. 316)

Stanislavski uses "restoration comedy" as his inspiration for the names because in plays such as William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* the characters have names

which match their personalities such as “Lady Fidget” and “Mrs. Squeamish.” Like Wycherley, Stanislavski did not simply give the characters names based on “other abstractions,” he used the characters’ “abstractions” as their personalities.

The character of Paul Shustov (meaning “feeling”) is used to describe two of Stanislavski’s concepts that center on the actor and the use of feelings. The first is the “art of representation.” In the “Narrative How to Novel” section of this chapter this is described as how actors should avoid the art of representation, which is “a form and method of acting which is permanently fixed, and which is produced with a certain inner coldness” (p. 20). In other words, it is an acting style which “represents” emotions rather than “living” them in the moment during the performance. In order to avoid this style of acting, actors should always avoid rehearsing in front of a mirror because “it teaches an actor to watch the outside rather than the inside of his soul, both himself and in his part” (p. 20).

According to Tortsov many actors perform in front of a mirror until they discover a physical representation of their inner feelings. Rather than repeating what they felt, these actors repeat the emotionally empty physical gestures. Tortsov also refers to this as “mechanical acting” (p. 25). Many of the examples of “the art of representation” come from a discussion with Paul Shustov about the mistakes he made during an exercise. His mistakes revolved around feeling or - in Paul’s case - the reproductions of previous feelings, and not what Tortsov would like, which is true feelings experienced each time the actor performs.

The second time Paul is prominently featured is in Chapter Four when Tortsov has him describe what he would hear if he were a tree. As Paul begins to

describe what he imagines he would hear, his imagination begins to be stimulated, and as a result the imagined sounds create an emotional experience for him.

In both circumstances Stanislavski is tying together his concept through a character which is named after the idea behind the concept. For example when he uses Paul Shustov, whose name is a derivative of the Russian word for feeing, to describe the ways in which an actor should produce emotion. As we have seen so far, Stanislavski makes use of several types of literary methods, styles and techniques throughout the text. He also uses different students to illustrate his ideas on acting and the student/teacher relationship. While Stanislavski uses his own personal experiences for the characters of Kostya and Tortsov, it is my contention that he uses Kostya as the example for his core theories.

The Pupil is the Master

In the "Note by the Translator" section of *An Actor Prepares*, Hapgood states:

> That he himself [Stanislavski] appears under the name Tortsov can scarcely escape the astute reader, nor is it difficult to see that enthusiastic student who keeps the record of lessons is the Stanislavski of a half century ago who was feeling his way toward the methods best suited to mirror the modern world." (p. viii)

To find evidence of this one need only to once again look at the way in which Stanislavski uses the names of the characters and how those names corresponds to their personalities. As we have learned previously the name of the Director, Tortsov has its root in the word "creator." Stanislavski himself is most certainly

the creator of both the text and the "system." Stanislavski the student is evident in the choice of the name Kostya which is the Russian familiar version of Konstantin, Stanislavski's first name.

There is also strong evidence through the comparisons made between the mistakes Kostya makes and the solutions given by Tortsov. So far there have been several examples of Stanislavski's use of other students to demonstrate an acting concept, but through Kostya we learn several of his core ideas.

Stanislavski titles his first chapter "The First Test." Throughout the chapter Kostya describes his experience in preparing for an audition performance of a scene from Shakespeare's *Othello*. The performance is intended to give the director Tortsov a better understanding of each of the students' level of skill and experience. Stanislavski's focus in the first chapter is on describing the various ways in which Kostya prepares for the audition performance.

In the second chapter titled "When Acting is Art" Stanislavski has Tortsov critique the performances and explain the things which should be avoided by actors. Both in the second chapter and throughout the remaining text, Kostya discovers the mistakes he has made in preparing for his audition performance. Kostya is consistently used as an example of mistakes and/or discoveries made by inexperienced performers throughout the remaining chapters of *An Actor Prepares*.

Stanislavski chooses Kostya as the main character to drive home his most important concepts. In Chapter One Kostya arrives late to class and rather than apologize, he carelessly remarks: "I seem to be a little late" (p. 3). The assistant

director Rakhmanov chastises Kostya for both his lack of apology and killing the enthusiasm of creativity, stating: “To arouse a desire to create is difficult; to kill that desire is extremely easy. If I interfere with my own work, it is my own affair, but what right have I to hold up the work of a whole group? The actor, no less than the soldier, must be subject to iron discipline” (p. 3). Then to reinforce his point, Rakhmanov cancels class for the remainder of the day.

Stanislavski could have chosen any student to illustrate his point, but by using Kostya, the reader experiences firsthand his laissez-faire attitude about being late, and then the extreme embarrassment experienced by Kostya when he writes “I was so embarrassed” (p. 3) for having disrupted an entire day of class. Had Stanislavski used another student it would have been as a secondhand account of Kostya with much less impact to the reader. But through Kostya, the reader discovers the consequences of being late: Kostya’s “embarrassment” and the canceling of a day’s classwork for himself, Rakhmanov and his fellow students.

Numerous additional examples can be found of the Kostya/Tortsov connection; I have selected two to highlight. The examples of Kostya’s mistakes and/or discoveries and the corresponding feedback from Tortsov are one from the first chapter of the text which demonstrates the introduction of Stanislavski’s foundational idea on how an actor should perform. The second example is from later in the text and demonstrates how the Kostya/Tortsov relationship evolves into much more complicated acting concepts.

The first part (a) of the following examples is Kostya's experience, and the second part (b) is Tortsov's feedback.

Example One:

a) Kostya prepares for the physicality of his role as the Moor, Othello by dressing up in a makeshift costume. A letter opener in his belt as a dagger, a towel around his head as a turban, blankets serve as a tunic, and a big tray for a shield. He also walks around like an animal in order to experience the "primitive life" of Othello's "African" origins. Kostya takes his initial discovery as Othello as "savage" and incorporates it into his performance (pp. 1-2).

b) As the Director is criticizing another student for overacting and mechanical acting, Kostya questions the Director "I at least did not have any of that?" (p. 28) The Director explains that Kostya did indeed use both through his "exaggerated imitation of a savage" and that it was "the most amateurish kind of rubber stamps, in which there was no trace of technique" (p. 28).

Example Two:

a) One evening, after class, Kostya went to dinner at a famous actor's house. The actor used the carving of the dinner turkey as an analogy of units and objectives. He told Kostya to "imagine that this turkey is a five act play," and explained that "you cannot make a single mouthful either of a whole turkey or a five act play" (pp. 121). "It is much easier," explained the actor, "to carve both the turkey and the play into smaller and smaller units

until one is finally able to devour both." After the dinner, Kostya decides to break his walk home into "units." Counting steps, opening of doors, the walk home, washing for bed and finally covering himself up for sleep Kostya counted 216 units. When he arrived at class the next day he explained his "216 unit" trip home to the Director Tortsov (pp. 121-124).

b) Tortsov then explained to Kostya how "going home" was his main objective, and along the way he made a couple of stops which became independent units. However, once returning to his objective he returned to an already established unit. All told, Kostya only had four units rather than the original 216. He cautioned the students to remember that "the division [into smaller units] is temporary. The part and play must not remain fragments" (p. 125). "It is only in the preparation of a role that we use small units. During the actual creation they fuse into large units," he continued (pp. 124-127).

In each of these examples we see the mistakes and discoveries of Kostya the student. These examples are used as the springboard for Stanislavski (through Tortsov) to unfold many of his foundational concepts. Each time that Stanislavski uses Kostya it is to highlight the beginning and/or the discovery of either new information.

In "Example One" we discover Kostya's focus on the externals of a performance, and just as important his inability to see that he is an external performer. In his rebuke of Tortsov, Kostya both reiterates Stanislavski's hatred of

this type of acting, and makes the reader aware that they may have bad habits which they themselves do not realize.

In “Example Two” on how an actor should build the script into small units which then are spliced together to create a characters full journey through the world of the play, it is Kostya’s experience with having dinner with the famous actor that gives the reader an understanding of Stanislavski’s concepts. Through Kostya’s experience and Tortsov’s clarification, the reader might come to a stronger understanding of Stanislavski’s process of script analysis.

The first chapter is Kostya making virtually every inexperienced actor mistake possible, but as the text continues he is able to learn how to overcome and improve on his previous mistakes. It is when we examine all of the mistakes (and a few successes) of Kostya that we, the readers, discover Stanislavski the student. When Tortsov points out and then corrects those mistakes (or praises the success) we see Stanislavski the Master Teacher (creator). Through the combination of the two, the reader may develop a stronger understanding of the Stanislavski System.

Conclusion

The style of *An Actor Prepares* is that of a narrative analysis in the form of a fictionalized diary. Through the use of the diary, Stanislavski attempts to create for the reader an illustration of his key concepts and the ways in which those concepts are both practiced and actualized. All of the stylistic and literary choices made by Stanislavski are in order for him to create within the reader the conditions which will lead to a greater understanding of his acting method which he calls the system. Stanislavski, like many of his modernist colleagues of the day

believed that “once you master a technique…you can do something you couldn’t do before” (Butler, 2010, p. 12).

Stanislavski wrote *An Actor Prepares* for young and/or inexperienced actors who he believed needed a technique to become not only actors but artists. Stanislavski saw the reader as someone who is ready to become a professional actor. This is apparent through the examination of the students in *An Actor Prepares*. Each of the characters in the book has come to the theatre to train with the famous director Tortsov. They are students who have had various degrees of training and experience but are all considered to be novices. They are now ready to undertake the serious study and training necessary to become professional actors.

The text is not directed at an actor with little or no experience; it is not an “intro to acting” manual. Throughout the text Stanislavski mentions several playwrights and their plays such as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Gorki’s *Lower Depths*. While it may not be necessary for the reader/characters to know these specific plays, it is important that they have a foundation in the analysis of complex plays. If Stanislavski’s intended reader was a beginning actor he would have had to explain script analysis before he could use specific plays as examples. *An Actor Prepares* begins with the notion that the reader understands not only what a play is, but other types of theatrical definitions as well such as a director, a prop, an orchestra pit, a stage manager, a monologue, etc. The reader of *An Actor Prepares* must have a verbal understanding of the experience of participating in a theatrical production.

Now that we understand how *An Actor Prepares* was written and for whom, we may now turn our attention to the next phase of the hermeneutical analysis: “what understandings does he want from the reader, and how does he go about ensuring he successfully receives it?”

Structural Reading

Introduction

In Paul Ricoeur’s text *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences* he credits Hans-George Gadamer with developing the “idea that the distance between two differently situated consciousness’s occurs by means of fusion of their horizons, that is, the intersection of their views on the distant and the open” (1981, p. 62). In other words, we do not live with only one consciousness, but rather with many - all of which create a tension between what we know and what is foreign to us. It is through the fusion of the two horizons which create a new consciousness that in turn expands into new horizons. It was the fusion between the conflicting horizons of Stanislavski’s desire to create an acting system which he believed would lead to what he called “playing true” and the ineffectiveness of his past experience with actor training to accomplish “playing true” which led him to develop a new horizon in the form of his acting system.

Throughout this paper I have described the types of actor training Stanislavski encountered in his youth as well as the ways in which Stanislavski reacted to what he saw as the ineffectiveness of that type of training. In the “Structural Analysis” section I will give a description of Stanislavski’s concept of playing true as well as the reasons why he sees this as the ultimate goal of an

actor. I will then explore the ways in which Stanislavski structured his text in order to create a multi-layered pedagogical structure to effectively communicate the different ways his System may develop a “truthful” actor. Through Charles Harrison’s “four tendencies” of Modernist art I will also demonstrate the ways in which his structural choices are examples of Stanislavski the Modernist artist.

To Play True

In each chapter Stanislavski’s attention is placed on the ways in which actors can combine technique and impulse in the service of a fictional character. But where do we discover what Stanislavski would like from the reader? What should that reader do once he has placed the book down? The answer is once again found in chapter two “When Acting is Art.” The actor must “play truly” the role she has been asked to perform. According to Stanislavski “To play truly means to be right, logical, coherent, to think strive, feel and act in unison with your role.” In other words, the actor must have an emotional connection with the character in the play. This connection is then presented to the audience through the performance. It is not enough for the actor to step upon the stage and recite the words or give a performance which is devoid of emotion. The actor must “take all these internal processes, and adapt them to the spiritual and physical life of the person you are representing, we call that living the part” (p. 15). The actor must also avoid using technical tricks to give the appearance of emotion such as shouting to give the appearance of anger or physically cringing and screaming to give the appearance of fear. Stanislavski believed that the actor must actually feel

anger and fear. The actor must live the part the same way they should live their daily lives as a feeling, reacting and living person.

According to Stanislavski the subconscious is the place where "truth" takes place. When an actor is able to tap into the subconscious "he lives the part, not noticing how he feels, not thinking about what he does, and it all moves of its own accord, subconsciously and intuitively" (p. 14). Stanislavski goes onto explain that the actor "must fit his own human qualities to the life of the other person, and pour into it all of his soul. The fundamental aim of our art is the creation of this inner life of a human spirit, and its expression in artistic form" (1936, p. 15). In the above quote we also see an example of Stanislavski's use of spiritual and/or religious terminology. His use of words such as "soul" and "human spirit" while religious in nature are not intended as religious references; they are, in fact, meant as a way to describe the subconscious. Because the study of consciousness and the subconscious were in the early stages of discovery during Stanislavski's lifetime, he had a very limited framework with which to describe this new examination of the conscious and subconscious state an actor must tap into. We find the reason for his spiritual and naturalistic language to describe the psychoanalytical term "subconscious" in chapter two:

> It is only when an actor feels that his inner and outer life on stage is flowing naturally and normally, in the circumstances that surround him, that the deeper sources of his subconscious gently open, and from them come feelings we cannot always analyze. For a shorter or longer space of time they take possession of us whenever some inner instinct bids them.

> Since we do not understand this governing power, and cannot study it, we actors call it simple nature. (p. 16)

Stanislavski is using words that actors of his time can understand when he states "pour into it all of his soul" and "the fundamental aim of our art is the creation of this inner life of a human spirit" (1936, p. 15). An actor of Stanislavski's day would know very little about the work of psychologists such as Sigmund Freud.

There is no evidence that Stanislavski himself knew of Freud's work with the subconscious. However, as is demonstrated throughout the text through many references and choices of words, Stanislavski believes that the actors of his time would understand concepts based on religion and/or naturalism to explain the emotional and physical experiences which arise through what he terms the subconscious. In Benedetti's biography she believes that Stanislavski meant "those regions of the mind which are not accessible to conscious recall or the will" (1988, p. 163). Through the use of the word "natural" Stanislavski is able to place the experience of tapping into the subconscious into a term that he believed actors could relate to conceptually, experientially and eventually - via his system - intellectually as well.

In chapter two the reader discovers Stanislavski's key tenet that the actor must always play true. The reader also learns that the way to "truth" is through the subconscious. The remainder of *An Actor Prepares* is spent outlining the various paths the actor may take in achieving the goal of truth.

In order to assure that the reader fully understands the necessity of playing true in all facets of a performance, Stanislavski uses repetition of concepts as a

key structural element. Once the concept of playing true is introduced, Stanislavski continually reinforces the idea throughout each of the chapters. While many of the techniques are different in their approach, some being physical and others mental, all exercises are focused into the achievement of playing truly every role, every time.

In each new chapter where Stanislavski is seemly explaining a different exercise, making a different point or giving a new explanation of a theory or idea, he is in fact using different examples and expressions for the same repeated message that an actor must always “play true.”

In Stanislavski’s desire to create a new system of actor training one also finds an example of Stanislavski as a Modernist thinker. As Harrison discussed, the second tendency on a Modern artist is “a determination to break with the legacy of classism in its aristocratic forms” (p. 18). The contemporary actor training experienced by Stanislavski was based on imitation and superficiality. With *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski is attempting to create a new system which was radically different from anything that had come before. While some of the ideas may not have been new, the way in which Stanislavski structured the ideas was.

The remainder of the analysis will be spent in demonstrating the different ways in which Stanislavski attempts to clarify, inform, and instruct the reader on discovering a method of reaching the subconscious in pursuit of truth.

Mind-Body Dualism

Mind-Body Dualism (also known as Cartesian psychophysical dualism after its founder Rene Descartes) is the theory that "duality consists on the one hand of the mental psychological, conscious kind of reality and, on the other hand, of the physical, material, spatial, extended kind of reality" (Lavine, 1984, p. 122). In other words, a person is composed of a thinking mind and a feeling body. Throughout *An Actor Prepares* there are constant examples of how an actor is able to play true a role either through physical or mental/emotional techniques. Merely reading the names of the chapters, the reader is given clear insight as to which side of the mind-body dualism that chapter lies. Titles such as "Emotion Memory," "Inner Motive Forces" and the "Inner Creative State" give the reader an instant idea that the chapter is focused on the mind, while "Action," "Relaxation of the Muscles" and "Units and Objectives" are all indications of Stanislavski's physical approaches. For the most part the chapters are presented in an alternating pattern in which one or two will be focused on mind/emotional exercises and the next one or two chapters will be based on physical exercises.

The interaction between the mind-body dualism used by Stanislavski could have a potential for the creation of tension within the text. This would occur if one would take precedence over the other or if one was in service of the other. However, there is no tension in the way in which Stanislavski uses the pair in *An Actor Prepares*. Both are seen as equal partners in the struggle for the creation of a truthful emotional life.

As Stanislavski gets to the final chapters he begins to explore the ways in which the body and mind work together. In Chapter 12 he finally puts them together. Stanislavski describes the trinity of forces which he believes propels the actor towards playing true. They are:

1. Feelings: Feelings are the most important, but because they are "not tractable nor willing to take orders," actors must use another master which will allow them to consistently access feelings.
2. Mind: The mind is important because it "initiates and directs creativeness" (p. 264). The mind is used to motivate and stimulate the "psychic life, for your creative process" (p. 265). It is the door to accessing feelings.
3. Will: Actors must have a will to put their "creative apparatus to work and direct it spiritually" (p. 266). In other words, an actor must have a will put in the necessary and often difficult work needed in the creation of a role.

The character of Tortsov explained that the "power of these motive forces (feelings, mind, will) is enhanced by their interaction. They support and incite one another with the result that they always act at the same time and in close relationship" (p. 267).

When an actor calls something to mind, he will also stimulate his will and feelings. All of these are expressed through the actor's body. Like the canvas for a painter, the body is the canvas for the actor's emotions. Even if the emotions are experienced by the actor, they are useless if trapped within a tense and/or lifeless body.

According to Tortsov it is when everything is working in harmony that an actor "can create freely" (p. 268). In the end he cautions that it is "necessary not to allow any one of the three elements to crush out either of the others and thereby upset the balance and necessary harmony" (p. 270).

Stanislavski's conception of mind-body dualism is one in which, while separate, the mind and body must work together in order to facilitate the idea that "through conscious means we reach the subconscious" (p. 191).

Units, Stories and Objectives

As a pedagogical text Stanislavski does not rely on one singular instructional method for the reader. He could have written a textbook in which the reader is given exercises to practice, and in fact many of his theories in *An Actor Prepares* are first described in his autobiography. Stanislavski could have written any number of types of texts. In *An Actor Prepares,* however, Stanislavski chose a fictionalized narrative in the form of a student's journal. This choice allowed Stanislavski numerous ways to convey his system and how it should be practiced. Stanislavski was also a performer and what better way for an actor to clarify a key concept than to describe it through a performance. On stage this can be done through the physical act of performing your ideas; in a text it can be accomplished through narrative choices.

The narrative choices made by Stanislavski also serve as examples of Stanislavski's fusion of horizons between his understanding of the necessity of an actor to play true and the use of the scientific method to accomplish that goal. The scientific method of observation, hypothesis and experimentation are found within

what I term the “Stanislavski Pattern.” It must be pointed out that as with the mind-body dualism used by Stanislavski, there is also the possibility for tension between Stanislavski’s use of the scientific method and his use of religious or spiritual terminology. However, as explained previously, the religious references were used as a tool to bridge linguistic gaps in his theories, and were not meant to be taken as religious/spiritual statements or facts which may conflict with his artistic principles as explored through the scientific method. If the religion/spiritual language would have taken away from his argument I believe that Stanislavski would have simply removed them as he did with the religious references in the Russian version of his autobiography.

An Actor Prepares is the fictionalized journal of the student Kostya, and through this journal Stanislavski creates a world for the reader in which a pattern of how the reader should learn emerges. The pattern is a triumvirate which is composed of the introduction of a problem, the technique that will overcome that problem and a story which either serves as an example of the problem or a way to a solution.

First, I will describe the three pieces of the Stanislavski Pattern, and then I will give examples of the three main ways these patterns are found and used within the text. Each of these patterns is used to push the reader into a fully realized understanding of Stanislavski’s System and in many situations to serve as examples of truth. They are called “Bad Habits and Mistakes,” “The Solution” and “Storied Examples.”

Bad Habits and Mistakes. As we have already established, Stanislavski is using *An Actor Prepares* to teach performers how to play true in every role that they undertake. Through a life spent in the theatre Stanislavski developed an understanding of the many challenges and bad habits which are made and used by inexperienced and/or young actors. Stanislavski uses the students of the acting class as the tool for him to illustrate those challenges. In other words, through their fictionalized experiences Stanislavski demonstrates what he sees as the biggest mistakes and bad habits of actors.

The Solution. Stanislavski introduces the reasons why the mistakes and bad habits are problematic and then the proper techniques and exercises used by actors experienced in the system.

Storied Examples. Stanislavski uses different types of stories to either illustrate or reiterate an important idea. While the entire text is written as a fictionalized story about the experiences of the student Kostya, I call a "storied example" any point in the text in which Stanislavski uses a story within the story of *An Actor Prepares*.

These storied examples take three main forms. The first type is when Tortsov or Kostya gives an example of something which was taken outside of the classroom. Second are the moments in the text in which one of the characters uses a metaphorical story or analogy to illustrate a point. The third type is when Tortsov gives the students an imaginary situation to perform as an exercise.

The Stanislavski Pattern also contains Harrison's second and third "modernist tendency" which are:

1. "…confidence in the possibility of progress and betterment in human societies, to be brought about through the exploration of technological advances and the application of rational principles. In the Kantian philosophy of the time, it was seen as an inescapable obligation of the educated that one should strive for the elimination of error through processes of rational self-criticism" (Stanislavski, 1936, p. 18).
2. "…a commitment to skepticism in the face of received ideas and beliefs, however apparently authoritative, combined with an inclination to regard direct experience as the true source of knowledge" (p. 18).

According to Stanislavski the ultimate goal of an actor would be for him to truthfully live the role on stage.

In *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski (through Tortsov) describes how truly great theatre can lead to progress and betterment in human societies)

> Suddenly, I found myself in a mass of people in the square of the theatre. Bonfires were blazing; people were sitting on campstools, on the snow half asleep, some were huddled in a kind of tent protected from the cold and wind. The extraordinary number of people—there were thousands of them—were waiting for the morning box office to open. I was deeply stirred. To appreciate what these people were doing I had to ask myself: 'What event, what glorious prospect, what amazing phenomenon, what world famous genius could induce me to shiver night after night out in the cold, especially when this sacrifice would not even get me the desired

> ticket, but only a coupon entitling me to stand in line on the chance of obtaining a seat in the theatre?'
>
> I could not answer the question because I could not find any happening that could persuade me to risk my health, perhaps even my life, for its sake. Think of what the theatre meant to those people! We should be deeply conscious of that. What an honor for us that we can bring such a high order of happiness to thousands of people. (1936, pp. 331-332)

Here we see how Stanislavski believes theatre has an impact on society, and for Stanislavski it is the actor's duty to make sure their performance in a production lives up to the dedication from the audience. The way in which the actor can achieve this is through the development of a technique created to awaken their sub-consciousness. It is through the experience of practice and then the analysis of that experience that an actor grows and develops.

However, unlike the experience of many acting techniques of Stanislavski's time, the actors do not use set texts; rather, they use stories to create the experience of performing. It is through the conflict within the story that Stanislavski makes use of the scientific method. The students must first recognize the conflict within the story, make choices on how to perform and then discuss with Tortsov whether those choices have led the actor to play true.

Stories as Acting Exercises

Stanislavski demonstrates the necessary role of the teacher in the education of actors. It is through the experience of Tortsov that the students are guided through all of the challenges and discoveries made through their year of

training. Stanislavski believes in the wise and all-knowing teacher as the catalyst for learning. But Stanislavski's "wise and all-knowing" teacher was different from the teachers who were teaching during Stanislavski's lifetime. In his autobiography Stanislavski describes his experience with the Moscow Theatre Arts School: "In a word, students were required to copy their teachers. Which they did, but, of course, notably less well because they didn't have the talent or the technique to do as well as real actors did" (2008, p. 61).

Before Stanislavski, students were taught through practicing and studying specific roles with an experienced mentor. Often an actor would learn how to play the role of Hamlet by copying the way their mentor played the role. In chapter one of *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski demonstrates the uselessness of this method for inexperienced actors. He does this through Tortsov's assignment to the students in which the actors were to perform in scenes they selected themselves (Kostya chose the character Othello). As we have explored previously, Kostya and his fellow students struggle with and ultimately fail in the performances.

So then how does Stanislavski's "wise and all-knowing" teacher teach the students how to act? It is done through the use of exercises in which the teacher gives the students a made up and/or improvised scenario. By freeing the students of the text, Stanislavski also frees them to concentrate on his system of acting. Tortsov has all of the knowledge, and Stanislavski uses him to point out the mistakes of the students through their participation in the imaginary situations. It is through trial and error that the students develop an understanding of the concepts of the system.

To illustrate the use of action Stanislavski uses a wide range of imaginary exercises. The point of action is for the actor to fill every moment on stage with truthful activity. In order for the actor to practice action Tortsov gives the students a variety of exercises. These range from small moments such as when Tortsov asks Kostya to go onto the stage, imagine he is cold and to start an imaginary fire (p. 45), to larger group exercises in which the students are to imagine that they are in Maria's apartment, and that there is a "madman" outside getting ready to break into the apartment (p. 48).

The first example is used to illustrate the point that even if it is an imaginary fire, an actor must be able to create the illusion that there is smoke and heat. In the second example Stanislavski is using the exercise to introduce the idea of "if" as in: what would you do "if" the madman were outside the door. While the "fire" exercise is used as an introduction to action, the "madman" exercise is much more involved and complicated. The exercises and stories begin with simple ideas. As the reader progresses through the text they both become much more intricate and difficult.

Eventually the students begin to understand one concept such as why an actor must learn to make an imaginary fire: "On the stage do not run for the sake of running, or suffer for the sake of suffering. Don't act in general for the sake of action; always act with a purpose" (p. 42). Stanislavski adds the next exercise which will serve to push the actors forward in their training. This more advanced "madman" exercise fosters an embodied understanding of one of his most important ideas: "the magic if." This magic if is when the actor is asked to

honestly answer the question: what would you do in real life if a madman broke down your door? The “if” creates the possibility for the imagination to create the conditions and responses to the question.

In both examples Stanislavski uses the imagined story to illustrate the problem and then explore the ways in which the physical exercise leads to a stronger understanding of the solution.

One of the first imaginary story exercises used in *An Actor Prepares* is one in which Tortsov has Kostya and his fellow student Maria enact a scene in which they are married and have a baby. Living with them is Maria’s mentally disabled brother played by Vanya. During the scene Kostya’s character is a banker who is counting money at home. As he grabs a stack of bills he tears off the paper bindings and burns them in a fire to the delight of Vanya’s character. Maria calls Kostya into the kitchen to see the baby in his bath, and when he returns he finds Vanya happily burning all of the money. In a panic he pushes Vanya out of the way. In his fall Vanya violently hits his head. Hearing the commotion Maria runs into the room and sees a panicked Kostya pulling the one remaining burning bundle out of the fire. Maria notices her brother on the floor, and that he is bleeding from the head. She rushes into the kitchen for some water and a rag. Once in the kitchen Maria discovers that the baby has drowned (pp. 79-80).

The introduction of the story in this exercise is important because the characters constantly practice it throughout the text. Each time the exercise is used, it is to move the reader onto another more complicated acting theory.

The first time the exercise is used is for the introduction of the concept of "Concentration of Attention" (p. 79). The actors begin the exercise with excitement, but each time they reach the dramatic portion they are not experiencing truthful emotions. Tortsov explains that their problem lies with their "lack of power to concentrate your attention, which is not yet prepared for creative work" (p. 81). Tortsov uses the storied exercise to introduce the students to the necessity of concentration within a scene.

In the next chapter the trio returns to the burning money exercise. Again the exercise starts well, but upon reaching the dramatic portion of the scene Kostya becomes frustrated by his inability to commit fully to the emotion of the scene. In an effort to "give [himself] some support from the outside" (p. 102) he presses with all of his strength "against some object under [his] hand" (p. 102). The object he presses against cracks apart and cuts an artery.

Because of this, Tortsov decides to lecture the class on the need for the actor to be relaxed physically. As the actors return again and again to the exercise they express their frustration on not being able to fully realize the emotions needed to truthfully portray the scene. It is here that Stanislavski (through Tortsov) explains his purpose of using a storied example as the basis of an acting exercise:

> I did not give you this exercise because I thought you could play it. It was rather because by taking something beyond your powers you would be better able to understand what your shortcomings are, and what you need to work on. (p. 149)

This demonstrates that Stanislavski, through the creation of imaginary storied exercises, could both illustrate the mistakes and bad habits of actors as well as describe the techniques necessary to overcome any obstacles to their growth as performers.

The exercises were also intended to challenge and push the students past their previous understanding of themselves. While Stanislavski understands the necessity of character development, he uses the storied exercises to facilitate emotional development within his students.

Stories of the Outside World

Stanislavski also uses stories to serve the scientific method purpose of observation. Stanislavski uses stories about situations experienced by the characters in the text which take place outside of the classroom. These stories are told by both Kostya and Tortsov and are used for either discussion or to clarify important ideas. These stories can be quite brief as when Tortsov describes his experience of working with a famous actress who is struggling with the System (pp. 297-298). Once Tortsov teaches her about the use of the “super-objective” the actress recovers her career and becomes a success. Here is a clear example of Stanislavski introducing the problem (the actress is not able to effectively play true), the solution (super-objective) and the solution is proven true through the story (the actress becomes a success).

While the story of the actress is a short story intended to prove a point, Stanislavski also uses this type of story to explain much larger concepts. Previously in this paper we have seen an example of another use of a story from

outside the classroom. This was in “Chapter Seven: Units and Objectives” (p. 120), when Kostya describes in his journal the experience of visiting the famous actor Shustov.

One evening, after class, Kostya went to dinner at the Shustov’s house. The famous actor used the carving of the dinner turkey as an analogy of units and objectives. He told Kostya to “imagine that this turkey is a five act play” and explained that “you cannot make a single mouthful either of a whole turkey or a five act play” (p. 121). Shustov goes on to explain that it is much easier to carve both the turkey and the play into smaller and smaller units until one is finally able to devour both.

Stanislavski uses this outside experience of Kostya to introduce the concept of units and objectives. This story is important because it takes place at the beginning of the chapter; however, it is used to describe the concepts of the chapter (units and objectives) rather than actually giving the concepts and reinforcing them with a story.

The chapter begins with Kostya describing a placard in the classroom on which the words “units and objectives” were written. Kostya then interrupts his own description by interjecting: “However, before I write about that, I want to put down what happened after the lesson was over, because it helped me to appreciate more fully what he had said” (p. 121). Kostya then proceeds to describe his experience at Shustov’s dinner party. For the concept of units and objectives Stanislavski obviously believes that the Kostya story is more effective than the ways in which he had described previous concepts. Rather than introduction of

the problem, explanation of technique and then supporting story (or no story), than introduce the problem, explain the problem and then support the story (or no story), Stanislavski begins with the story, then moves to an explanation of the concepts through the storied example of the carving of the turkey, and then back into the classroom for confirmation and clarification from Tortsov. Units and objectives are an extremely important element to Stanislavski's system. Through the use of the turkey carving story, he gives a powerful example of units and objectives in a storied form.

In order to set up what could be a difficult concept; Stanislavski takes Kostya (and the reader) out of the classroom, and - through story – delivers to him what Stanislavski will be clarifying throughout the rest of the chapter. While I have chosen to use Kostya's visit to Shustov to illustrate Stanislavski's use of "stories from the world outside of the classroom," it also serves as an example of the next story type used by Stanislavski: metaphors and analogies.

Metaphors and Analogies

Stanislavski uses metaphorical stories as a way to clarify many of his examples. After Kostya returns to class following his dinner with the famous actor Shustov, he explains that he understands the idea of breaking the script down into smaller units and why they should lead to a clear objective. He is, however, confused as to how many units are necessary.

Kostya says that on his way home from dinner he divided his walk home into "units." Some of these units include counting steps, opening of doors, the

walk home itself, washing for bed, and covering himself up for sleep. In total Kostya counted up 216 individual units of his walk home.

In order to clarify for both Kostya and the class, Tortsov uses a metaphorical story. The story tells of a boat pilot who was asked how he remembers all of the "minute details of a coast with its turns, shallows and reefs" (p. 124)? The boat pilot replied that when navigating along a coast he is not concerned with the small details but sticks "to the channel" instead (p. 124). Tortsov explains: "so an actor must proceed, not by multitude of details, but by those important units, which like signals, marks his channel and keep him in the right creative line" (p. 124). Tortsov then explains to Kostya how "going home" was his main objective and along the way he made a couple of stops which became independent units, but once returning to his objective he returned to an already established unit (his channel).

All told, Kostya only had four units rather than the original 216. He cautions the students to remember that "the division [into smaller units] is temporary. The part and play must not remain fragments" (p. 125). He continues: "It is only in the preparation of a role that we use small units. During the actual creation they fuse into large units. The larger and fewer the divisions, the less you have to deal with, the easier it is for you to handle the whole role" (p. 125).

Tortsov finishes his story with the analogy that the units act like buoys in the channel, and the channel "points the true course of creativeness and makes it possible to avoid the shallow reefs" (p. 125). He gives the initial story of the turkey carving as a way of outlining units and objectives, and then he uses the

metaphor of the boat pilot to clarify how an actor should structure the units of his script.

The boat pilot story is only one of many which use either metaphor or analogy. The following are additional examples that Stanislavski gives of both types in *An Actor Prepares*:

- The way in which an actor must "lure" out their emotional memory: "Do as a hunter does in stalking game. If a bird does not rise of its own accord you could never find it among all the leaves of the forest. You have to coax it out, whistle to it, use various lures" (p. 207).
- The comparison of actors to travelers: "'Have you ever made a long journey?' he began. 'If so, you will recall the many successive changes that take place both in what you feel and what you see'" (p. 160).
- The two types of memory are described using the story of two travelers who were "marooned on some rocks by high tide" (p. 180). In the story one traveler remembers only the physical actions of climbing the rocks while the other traveler remembers "only the emotions he felt. In succession, came delight, apprehension, fear, hope doubt and finally panic." (p. 180).
- Tortsov asks the class: "if a painter uses a canvas to create art, and a musician uses an instrument to express herself, what does an actor use?" The answer is "His mind, will and feelings" (p. 228) as they all "combine to mobilize all of his inner elements" (p. 281). When all of the "inner elements" are fused together they create "The Inner Creative

> Mood" (p. 282). Thus the inner creative mood is the new definition of what was previously referred to as "artistic talent, qualities, natural gifts and several methods of psycho—technique" (p. 282).

Conclusion

In each of the examples we see in Stanislavski the writer, a person who is not interested in merely giving the reader both the problems and the solutions. Stanislavski is interested in reaching the reader on as many levels as possible. By creating the pattern of introduction of the problem, techniques and supporting story based on the scientific method, he is creating a text in which the learner has several ways to approach their own challenges as a performer. If he only used storied examples or an acting manual approach, Stanislavski would have created a text which would have had a much more narrow focus. As we have learned, Stanislavski wants the text to speak to the young and/or inexperienced actor. He wants that actor to learn how to play true in every role he undertakes. He does all of this by using the Stanislavski Pattern of writing to make his ideas, concepts and techniques as clear and accessible as possible.

His pattern is also an example of Stanislavski the modernist artist. He is challenging the contemporary ideals of his day regarding how an actor should be trained, and in doing so he fulfills Harrison's fourth tendency which is to stress the role of the imagination in safeguarding human freedom and in realizing human potential. It could be said of this last tendency that it represents the synthesis of all others.

The capacity to imagine a different order of things is a necessary condition of critical and self-critical activity. It is a form of creative projection in thought, which is mere idealism unless it is grounded in those values that one's direct experience confirms.

Appropriation

Introduction

In the book *Reading Curriculum Theory*, author William Reynolds lists what he considers to be the three characteristics of "appropriation." They are as follows:

1. "…appropriation occurs when a reader interprets a text and the interpretation ends in self-interpretation with the consequence that the interpreter understands himself better as a result of doing the interpretation" (1989, p. 48).
2. It is the "overcoming of cultural distance. The distance means any distance between the time period of the text and the reader" (p. 49). He concludes: "appropriation is the attempt to make that which is foreign, one's own" (p. 49).
3. "…it becomes a fusion of horizons. The fusion is between the horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text" (p. 49).

A hermeneutical study is often called a "hermeneutic circle" because the understanding of the whole are based on the understandings of the individual parts which are, in turn, based on the understanding of the whole. A hermeneutical

analysis continually “circles” between the two understandings. If it is truly a circle… then where do I begin?

When I was nineteen years old I watched the romantic comedy *When Harry Met Sally*. Released in 1989, it tells the story of a man named Harry and his chance encounters over a twelve-year period with a woman named Sally. The first time the two meet is on a cross country drive to New York City. They meet again after Harry’s painful divorce, become friends and, as in all romantic comedies, fall in love, break-up, make-up and live happily ever after. But what does this story have to do with a hermeneutical analysis of Stanislavski’s *An Actor Prepares*?

When I first saw the movie I took a girl whom I had been recently dating. I enjoyed the romantic connection between Harry and Sally, transferring myself and the beautiful woman to my right, into their trials and tribulations. At nineteen, I was filled with the romantic wonder of falling in love. Since I was still in college the movie also stirred an excitement about the possibilities of growing up, falling in love, having my own cool apartment and living life’s adventures.

Almost twelve years later (also the span of time in the movie) I found myself sitting on the couch one night with nothing to do but watch television. Switching through the channels I discovered that *When Harry Met Sally* happened to be on. It had been several years since I had seen the movie so I decided to watch it again. This time I was in my early thirties, and like Harry, I was going through a painful divorce. I had also lived life, if not exactly the life (the apartment, the adventures, etc.) that I had fantasized about. As I sat there on my

couch twelve years after I had originally seen the movie, I was amazed that I was watching a completely DIFFERENT movie! Of course the movie was the same, but I, however, was not. I discovered a whole new love for the movie. I was no longer the naïve, young man who imagined a romanticized version of what it would be like to have similar experiences to Harry. I was now a man who had had many of those experiences. Rather than wanting to be "like" Harry, I "was" Harry. It was a profound moment of discovery about myself and the experience of life. I realized that life was also a lot more painful, joyful and stressful than I could have ever imagined sitting in a darkened theatre at the age of nineteen.

My first experience with *When Harry Met Sally* was my naïve reading of the movie. The second experience was my understanding reading. My coming to terms with how I have changed and grown both with and separate from the movie was my appropriation reading.

So, again what does this story have to do with a hermeneutical analysis of Stanislavski of *An Actor Prepares*?

When Tommy Met Stanislavski

I was first introduced to Constantin Stanislavski in 1988 when I was in my first acting class at Northern Kentucky University. *An Actor Prepares* was one of the two required texts by my professor Mike King. Even though it was twenty-three years ago, I remember the experience of reading the book, and that experience is analogous to the first of three worlds that are found within *An Actor Prepares*.

The first world is that of the young student. When I first read the book I myself was a young student and it did not occur to me that Stanislavski was both the student and the teacher. To me, a young and inexperienced theatre student, I considered it the diary of the young student Kostya. I knew that the fictional name of Kostya was Stanislavski, but I assumed he had merely changed the names to "protect the innocent." I assumed that the theatre in which the students in the book attended classes was the same one that Stanislavski himself had attended. The character of Tortsov was (I thought) the actual master teacher of Stanislavski. To me the text was assigned as a way to experience an actor's journey through his educative experience. I knew that the text was Stanislavski's system of acting and in that world I would discover everything necessary to become a famous actor.

While many students, like me, were entering universities for degrees rather than the studio training system popular from the 1930's-1980's, most of those universities based their training on one or more of the theories of a Master Teacher. Many of those Master Teachers like Sanford Meisner, Lee Strasberg and Uta Hagen had, in fact, based their systems on one or more portions of Stanislavski's system. In fact the second book required by Professor King was Uta Hagen's *A Challenge for the Actor*.

As a young and inexperienced actor all I knew was that you learned an acting system which was given to you by a Master Teacher and/or someone who studied with one. My world was reflected in the world presented by Stanislavski: the classroom. Throughout *An Actor Prepares* the students are given both the

techniques needed to become a professional actor as well as the rules for both the classroom and the theatre.

On the first level Stanislavski's world is a place to learn. There are many examples of how to behave in the classroom such as when Kostya is reprimanded for being late with the lecture:

> To arouse a desire to create is difficult; to kill that desire is extremely easy. If I interfere with my own work, it is my own affair, but what right have I to hold up the work of a whole group? The actor, no less than the soldier, must be subject to iron discipline. (p. 3)

Another is when the students are chastised for laughing at the struggles of a fellow student: "My friends, you are in a schoolroom. And Maria is going through a most important moment in her artistic life. Try to learn when to laugh, and at what" (p. 36).

The latter quote also is an example of Stanislavski's world in which the students should feel safe to succeed and fail in an environment of trust. In Stanislavski's world, students are encouraged to participate in an open and caring environment. It is safe, and, in fact, they are encouraged to fail.

> I did not give you this exercise because I thought you could play it. It was rather because by taking something beyond your powers you would be better able to understand what your shortcomings are, and what you need to work on. (p. 149)

In Stanislavski's world, failure is not something the master teacher enjoys or holds over the students, but rather it is a means to and end of growing as artists and people.

In *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski clearly tells the reader what his world is not. Throughout the text he gives the reader gives numerous examples such as:

- The actor must develop their imagination "or else leave the theatre. Otherwise he will fall into the hands of directors who will make up for his lack by using their own imaginations, and he will become a pawn" (p. 60).
- One of the worst types of acting is one in which the actor tries to impress the audience through overacting a role. This style is found in those who overact a part based on assumptions rather than on lived or learned experience. Tortsov stress to Kostya and the class, "never allow yourself externally to portray anything you have not inwardly experienced and which is not even interesting to you" (p. 31).
- The worst type of acting (according to Tortsov) is that which comes from the actor who is performing for personal pleasure and/or gain. Tortsov explains that many people in the theatre are only onstage to show how beautiful they are or to "gain popularity or external success or to make a career" (p. 32). He considers these performers the "deadliest enemies of art. We have to use the sternest measures with them, and if they cannot be reformed they must be removed from the boards" (p. 33).

These examples show that while it is a classroom of trust, there are conditions and attitudes that are not acceptable within his system. Those who are not interested in the philosophy of his technique (to "play true") will not be allowed in his classroom nor - if he had his way - in the Theatre. His last words in *An Actor Prepares* are: "Nature's laws are binding on all, without exception, and woe to those who break them" (p. 336).

The first time I read *An Actor Prepares* I held many of the same naïve notions as Kostya and his fellow students about what it took to be an actor (such as a loud voice, handsome or interesting face, make-up, an ability to memorize the lines, etc.) I also shared their views on why you should be an actor (which was for fame, fortune, fun, etc.) After reading *An Actor Prepares* I realized the discipline and dedication that was necessary to pursue a life in the theatre. I was Kostya the young student learning the rules and regulations of the system as well as how to use the system to become a better performer. I knew the basic background of performance but I did not know how to be consistent in every role at every performance. I needed guidance.

You CAN Teach an Old Dog New Tricks

Six years after I was introduced to Stanislavski, I was again assigned to read *An Actor Prepares*. This time I was a graduate student at the University of Montana. Not only was I furthering my theatrical education, but between my undergraduate and graduate educations I had steadily worked in the world of professional theatre. I was no longer the naïve young actor who had first encountered the fictional journal of the acting student Kostya. As I reread the text

I was a different person. As with my experience with watching *When Harry met Sally*, I had a whole new perspective on something I thought I knew inside and out. By this point in my education I had discovered that Stanislavski was both student and teacher. As I made my way through the hermeneutical analysis I realized that when I was rereading *An Actor Prepares* as an experienced graduate student. I was reading it from a new "textualized" world perspective.

In *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski does not simply create a text that gives the problem and then the solution like that found in a math textbook. Instead, Stanislavski creates a world in which there is interaction between people with their environment, themselves and each other. The first time I read Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* I was placed concretely within the classroom from the beginner's perspective. It was that of student struggling to understand what I didn't know.

The second time I encountered *An Actor Prepares* I was a much more seasoned performer and person. I came to the text with a greater wealth of experiences. For the reader with this perspective, Stanislavski has set up the conditions for discovering which of his techniques can allow you to move towards what he considers the ultimate goal of an actor: to play true every role you undertake.

One of the strongest examples of the existence of this world is through the story of the struggling actress described in the "understanding" section of this paper. That actress already had an established, yet spiritually unfulfilling career. In order to improve and grow she turned to the system, but rather than improving

her, it almost destroyed her. She could conceptually understand what was necessary to play true but could not actualize it in her performances. Tortsov explains to her the piece she has been missing is the super-objective and once truly understood she would be able to experience a fully realized “creative state” within her performance. For the actress in Stanislavski’s example it was the discovery of the “super-objective.” For other actors it may be from experimenting with Stanislavski’s ideas on the relaxation of the body.

When a more experienced performer reads *An Actor Prepares*, he should no longer need to learn the rules and regulations of the system. He can now use the various techniques, examples and theories offered by Stanislavski in *An Actor Prepares* to continue his growth as a person and an actor. When I saw *When Harry Met Sally* and read *An Actor Prepares* for the first time, I had a very limited perspective of both myself and the world. As a result I saw them both from a very limited horizon. When I encountered them the second time I was a different person because of the life experiences I had had. I was now viewing them from a much wider horizon. The question becomes: what is my current horizon?

It’s What’s On The Inside That Counts

In order to close this hermeneutic circle, we must now address the question of the fusion of horizons. The fusion takes place between the “horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text.” The reader of the text brings their own understandings of the text through their own history and the texts themselves “speak of possible worlds and of possible ways of orientating oneself in those worlds” (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 177). It is from the fusion of the reader’s history along

with the interaction of the “possible worlds” of the text that new meaning may be created from the texts which will have new applications and understandings for the current world of the reader.

How might *An Actor Prepares* be returned to today’s world? Fortunately, Stanislavski himself answers the question for us. The answer to the question is found in a disagreement between Tortsov and Grisha. This exchange was used during the naïve reading to demonstrate how Stanislavski allows the students in the text to challenge the instructor Tortsov but like so much of *An Actor Prepares* there are many levels of information. Tortsov addresses his class:

> ‘We have agreed, have we not, that the main line of action and the main theme are organically part of the play and they cannot be disregarded without detriment to the play itself. But suppose we were to introduce an extraneous theme of what you might call a tendency into the play. The other elements will remain the same but they will be turned aside, by this new addition. A play with that kind of deformed, broken backbone cannot live.’
>
> Grisha protested violently against that point of view.
>
> ‘But do you not rob every director,’ he burst out, ‘and every actor of all initiative and individual creative capacity, as well as every possibility of renewing old masterpieces by bringing them to the spirit of modern times?’
>
> Tortsov’s reply was calm and explanatory:

> ‘You, and many who think as you do, often confuse three words: eternal, modern, and momentary. You must be able to make fine distinctions in human spiritual values if you are to get at the true meaning of those words.’
>
> ‘What is modern may become eternal if it deals with questions of freedom, justice, love, happiness, great joy, great suffering. I make no objection to that kind of modernity in the work of a playwright.’ (p. 299)

In the above discussion Grisha is criticizing Tortsov’s approach claiming it does not allow for the interjection of new ideas, thoughts and perspectives into classical pieces of playwriting. He mistakenly believes that Tortsov is not allowing room for individual interpretation.

In his reply Tortsov explains that it is not the introduction of new ideas and perspectives which will break the back of the play, but rather it is the introduction for its own sake which will cause the break. True ideas and perspectives are successful when they are “grafted on to the stock of another sort and a new fruit produce.” In other words, *An Actor Prepares* should be returned to the world not as a stringent set of guidelines nor as a dead carcass in which the modern reader may pick off those elements necessary to fill their creative stomachs. *An Actor Prepares* should be returned to the world as a body of work which was created only to contain the soul within.

Often people mistake Stanislavski’s system as a collection of ridged rules and exercises. That idea could not be further from the truth. In fact the exercises are only to be used as tools to reach a place where an actor can mentally and

physically embody the ideal plane of playing truly the role. This is what is meant by Stanislavski through the use of the word the “soul” in *An Actor Prepares*. The body or text is merely the way in which Stanislavski has chosen to express the ideas or soul of the text. How you arrive at playing true is not what Stanislavski is truly interested in. To Stanislavski that is the superficial. The system contains the tools that he used to reach that next level of creativity. An architect would not use a hammer to draw the designs of an amazing building, nor would a carpenter use a pencil to drive home a nail. Both use different tools in order to create the same piece of art.

How you get to the place in which you play true every role you undertake is irrelevant. It is only important that you play true each and every time you cross the boards.

Discoveries of Self

One of the most my significant insights into the world of Stanislavski was his absolute dedication to the concept that theatre should be played with truthful emotion each and every time the actor takes the stage. Throughout Stanislavski’s long life the world outside of the theatre went through an unprecedented amount of change. As discussed throughout this paper, Stanislavski witnessed new inventions such as the automobile, human flight, medical advances, movies and the radio.

Politically he lived through several uprisings, a revolution, a world war, and a civil war. He began his life as a wealthy, factory-owning, aristocrat member of the bourgeoisies, and ended his life as a protected and cherished member of the

communist Soviet Union's highest proletariat leaders. Stanislavski did not ignore all of the social, cultural and economic changes which occurred during his lifetime; however he wasn't an active participant either.

Stanislavski continued his quest for a way to train actors so they would artistically live the life of the character. He did this regardless of what was taking place in the world around him. When forced to enter the world because of political and economic reasons, he did so, but only until he could once again return to the theatre to train, teach, direct and perform.

I find it fascinating that despite his overwhelming desire to create a system with such a specific intended outcome, Stanislavski was extremely open to the various ways in which an actor might achieve the goal of playing true. I began the introduction of this section stating that I entered this study with great trepidation. The trepidation was a result of the ways in which *An Actor Prepares* had been built up in my world as a canonical text: a blueprint for how to be an actor. It was similar to an advertisement in the back of a comic book stating, "follow these simple steps and you too will be an incredible actor!"

After my study of Stanislavski and his text *An Actor Prepares,* I realized that Stanislavski is not interested in how one arrives at truth, only that they do. His text is not a blueprint but rather a guidebook filled with information, stories, and historic landmarks and maps so that the reader can create the journey that will allow him to arrive onto the shores of theatrical truth.

Chapter 4: Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*

Introduction

"Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error – and this is a political attitude" (Boal, 1979, p. ix).

Augusto Boal is an internationally renowned director, theatre educator and the creator of several types of acting systems. Unfortunately the knowledge and practice of his ideas are relatively limited within the theatre educational institutions of the United States. My first introduction to Augusto Boal did not take place in any of my previous educative or professional theatre experience. In fact it was not until entering my doctoral studies in Curriculum and Instruction that I first encountered Boal's work. My introduction to Boal was through his first book *Theatre of The Oppressed*.

Theatre of the Oppressed was written shortly after Boal was tortured and then exiled from his native country of Brazil. In the text Boal introduces the reader to the idea that theatre can be used for the "liberation of spectator, on whom theatre has imposed finished visions of the world" (Boal, 1974, p. 155). For Boal the "finished vision" is one in which the people are dominated and controlled by the bourgeoisie. Theatre, in fact all forms of visual performance (television, movies, etc.), are all used by those in power to "purge all of the spectator's aggressive tendencies" (Boal, 1974, p. 47). Once they have been purged by what Aristotle calls "catharsis," the spectator will be less likely to rise up against the oppressive social, economic and political conditions under which

they live. According to Boal, theatre is ultimately a tool for the few to control and oppress the many.

Boal's aim in writing *Theatre of the Oppressed* is to first demonstrate how the dominant art of western theatre, through Aristotle's *Poetics*, laid the foundation for theatre to be used as a form of control. Once he proves how that control was created, he discusses how it is used today and how through his Theatre of the Oppressed, "the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks for himself! Theatre is action" (Boal, 1974, p. 155)! Once the spectators are freed, they will be able, through theatre, to create effective solutions to overcome the oppression of the bourgeoisie, and in the Marxist tradition, the proletariat will rise up in revolution and take control.

In this chapter, I will begin with a biography of Boal as well as the historical conditions which were taking place during the years leading up to his exile. In the hermeneutic tradition I will examine the interaction between Boal and the larger historical events which surrounded him and how that interaction led to the creation of *Theatre of the Oppressed.* I will then explain how Boal makes use of what the Russian literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin calls "the Epic Genre" to create a text which is "an absolutely completed and finished generic form, whose constitutive feature is the transferal of the world it describes to an absolute past of national beginnings and peak times" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 16).

Finally, I will make a hermeneutic and contextual analysis of *Theatre of the Oppressed*. The Naïve section will show how *Theatre of the Oppressed* is

divided into four types of categories. First, it is a political text; second it is a critique of Aristotle's definition of "what is art?". Third, it is a historical analysis of the theatre arts and fourth, it is an autobiography.

The Structural section will examine the ways in which Boal uses the Socratic Method and Critical Hermeneutics to first lay bare the way in which western theatre is used as a form of control, and finally how through his use of Critical Hermeneutics, and as a Marxist theatre revolutionary manifesto, he sets up the ability of the spectator to free himself and act "for himself" (Boal, 1974, p. 155)!

In the final Understandings section I will present the fusion of my horizons as a reader with that of my discoveries from Boal's text and the ways in which the fusion of the two may offer possibilities for today's theatre arts practitioner.

It is imperative to understand that for Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* is about liberation which "all must be protagonists in the necessary transformations of society" (Boal, 1974, p. x). Everything about his text is guided towards the creation of the artistic conditions in which "the oppressed people are liberated themselves, and, once more are making theatre their own" (Boal, 1974, p. 119).

Augusto Boal Biography

Early Years

In 1914, Jose Augusto Boal, Augusto Boal's father, was exiled from his native Portugal for refusing to participate in World War I. Sixty years later his son would also be exiled from his native land.

Boal was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1931, into a prosperous family. From an early age Boal expressed a love for theatre by writing and performing plays in the living room for family and friends. Despite his early interest in performing Boal would graduate from the University of Brazil with a degree in Chemistry. Boal wanted to study theatre but in his autobiography explains "I wanted theatre! Theatre, theatre. But how could I find the courage to tell my father? He would never understand, still less allow it" (Boal, 2001, p. 103).

He goes onto explain: "my father always said we would have the total freedom to choose a profession…as long as we got a doctor's degree" (Boal, 2001, p. 103). His explanation for choosing chemistry was:

> When I was 17, trying to help me to make a decision, my father asked Fleischmann the yeast-vendor how much he earned. Very little. How much did the chemist responsible for producing the yeast earn? A huge amount. From then on, the profession of chemist began to be valued. It was a *serious* profession! Sagely, my father commented: 'It is better to be a chemist than a yeast vendor.' (Boal, 2001, p. 101)

During his first semester Boal quickly realized that he did not enjoy chemistry. He states:

> …at no point did I think about giving the course up. My father was worth sacrifices: he wanted his children to be 'doctors!' I swore that I would not be the black sheep, or the scapegoat. Whatever it cost, I would be a *doutor* (doctor): neither sheep nor goat! (Boal, 2001, p. 106)

While studying for his degree in chemistry, Boal still maintained a love and connection to theatre, and served as the "director of the School's Cultural Department" (Babbage, 2004, p. 5).

As the director he was given the opportunity to "meet important people I admired, and the opportunity to get into theatres free; theatre companies used to invite university students as their guests" (Boal, 2001, p. 108). Because he finished his university studies early at the age of 21, Boal's father offered to allow him to continue his study of chemistry abroad. Knowing he would have to "study plastics and petroleum, mixed with theatre" (Boal, 2001, p. 117), Boal decided that Columbia University in New York City would be perfect for both.

Boal Studies Abroad

After graduating from the University in 1952, Boal continued his education by spending two years studying at Columbia University in the United States. While his official focus was again on Chemistry, Boal could no longer resist his love of theatre and split his time between the two disciplines. Boal chose Columbia because it offered him the opportunity to "study playwriting with drama critic, historian and artistic-producer John Gassner" (Babbage, 2004, p. 5). Boal wanted to study with Gassner since he was the man who "had taught Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and other famous playwrights" (Boal, 2001, p. 122).

During his time at Columbia, Boal found a strong and lifelong influence in the theories of the Russian actor, director and teacher Konstantin Stanislavski. In his autobiography *Hamlet and the Bakers Son: My Life in Theatre and Politics* Boal describes Stanislavski's influence on him as an artist: "The study of

Stanislavski was a cornerstone of my career. It was he who systematized a method which helps the actor to seek, within him-or her-self, ideas and emotions attributed to the characters" (p. 147). Stanislavski's system would have a strong influence on Boal the director once he returned to Brazil.

During his studies in New York, Boal met and became heavily influenced by the poet Langston Hughes. Though he was never a close friend of the poet, Hughes would invite Boal to functions and parties around New York. In his autobiography Boal describes one of his experiences:

> The following week I went to listen to black poetry and literature. Hughes introduced me to several of his friends, black and white, men and women. They were all determined anti-racists—that struggle, that determination, united them. How beautiful is the friendship between the people who struggle for the same just cause. It does not matter what the skin color, sex, age, nationality is. What matters is the passion! (Boal, 2001, p. 127)

His two years in New York officially ended shortly after Boal and several students mounted two of his newly written plays in a small off-Broadway theatre. The overinflated prestige of the small off-Broadway production would have great implications for Boal's future.

Boal described leaving New York: "When you are young, two years is a long time. Later on, the years rush by. What a shame! In July 1955, I returned to Rio de Janerio. The aeroplane was full, and I was empty" (2001, p. 139). His "emptiness" was based on the fact that he was returning to Brazil not to practice

and pursue theatre but rather to a job “as a chemist at Petrobras” the national petroleum company. For the young Boal, the emptiness would be short lived.

Arena Theatre

Shortly after his return to Brazil, Boal was asked to become the Director of the Arena Theatre Company. Not wanting to become a chemist Boal had been working as an English translator for a Brazilian book company. A friend, Sabato Magaldi, whom Boal met when he was the Cultural Director at his university, was now a director at a small theatre in Sao Paulo. He was looking for someone to serve as a director of his company called the Arena Theatre. Magaldi invited Boal to come to Rio and join the company.

In his autobiography Boal describes the first time he attended a play at Arena: “I almost asked naïvely: ‘Where is the theatre?’ Being timid, I kept quiet, wanting to see the stage, the scenery, lights and cycloramas. Slowly it dawned on me that this *was* Arena’s arena: a minuscule five meters by five. Little larger than a regular dining-room” (2001, p. 142). Boal had no way of knowing at the time that from this tiny womb of a theatre space, a new revolutionary style of theatre would emerge.

For his first production Boal was contracted to direct a play based on John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*. In his autobiography Boal discusses the way in which he used Stanislavski’s *An Actor Prepares* as a study guide for his rehearsals in which they instituted “The Laboratory Theatre of Acting” (Boal, 2001, p. 153). In addition, having studied playwriting with Gassner at Colombia University, Arena tapped Boal to teach a playwriting class.

As Boal began to gain experience and confidence as a director and teacher he began to ask himself: “For whom is one making theatre? For oneself or for the public – and which public” (Boal, 2002, p. 159)? Was he and the Arena Theatre (a popular theatre), “presenting a high-quality classical or modern repertoire at reasonable prices, in a comfortable theatre, so that ‘popular’ spectators could sit in the same soft seats and enjoy the benefits of the same culture as the middle and upper classes” (Boal, 2001, p. 188)? The answer was no but the question remained.

The early years at the Arena Theatre were composed of reproducing classic plays, and in 1958, the company staged a play by a Brazilian author. The extreme success of the production caused the Arena Theatre to begin producing more plays from Brazilian playwrights. The company’s first production by a Brazilian author was a financial success and “a gigantic step – for the first time our actors played a script which truly spoke of our people” (Boal, 2001, p. 167). Again they asked:

> To whom should our theatre be addressed? Our audience was middle class. Workers and peasants were our characters (in itself an advance) but not our spectators. We did theatre from the perspective which we believed to be ‘of the people’ – but we did not perform for the people! What was the point of representing working class characters and serving them up, as a pre-dinner treat, to the middle class and the rich? (2001, p. 175)

While the focuses of the plays by the Brazilian playwrights were often about the lives of Brazilian peasants, the company struggled with the lack of those same peasants seeing the productions.

The members of the Arena Theatre wanted to take the plays about "the people" to the actual people. However at the time they did not realize "the people: we did not define what this was, where it worked, what it ate, how it loved, what it did. We knew what it was not: middle class, our audience. We wanted to be at the service of this mysterious and much loved 'people', but…we were not the people" (Boal, 2001, p. 175). Boal would later discover what it truly means to be "the people."

The People

Brazil has always been a country of have and have-nots. Throughout its history the country has been dominated by a small minority of families who controlled the majority of Brazil's vast land, wealth and resources. The have-nots can be divided into two groups: those who live in the urban slums and the peasants who live in the countryside.

Nowhere is the plight of the urban poor more prevalent than in hillsides that surrounds Rio de Janeiro. The area is called "Rochinha," and its history dates "back to the 1920's" (Page, 1995, p. 178) when "a modest settlement near some farms in forest clearings" (Page, p. 178) slowly emerged. It was composed of migrant workers from the countryside who put up small shacks. It grew into a shantytown in the 1950's when "migrants from the drought-stricken Northeast sought living space reasonably close to the city" (Page, p. 178) while they worked

in the industries of Rio. The migrants, fearing that the police would come in and tear down the settlement, built their small shacks out of “wood, cardboard, and metal” (p. 178), so that they could be quickly and easily dismantled and moved.

As more people moved into the area, the slum began to crawl up the hillside. Utilities and services were always limited in Rochinha, and they became less the further one moved up the steep hills above Rio. As a result “the higher the elevation, the more dilapidated the dwellings are” (Page, p. 179). This forced the newest and poorest of migrants further away from the limited services available. The living conditions in Rochinha are deplorable. In the text *The Brazilians* author Joseph Page describes them:

> Life in slums like Rocinha is an exercise in Social Darwinism. Health hazards are as varied as the tropical vegetation, and include assorted diseases caused by excessive humidity, deficiencies in nutrition, vermin bites, and a lack of elementary sanitation. The high density of the population and the fact that large family groups often live together in a single room facilitates the spread of many of these illnesses. (p. 179)

Healthcare is limited, if not non-existent; mortality is high especially among the young, and crime is rampant.

It is important to remember that while conditions were deplorable within slums like Rochinha, the migrants of the 1950’s were filling them up to escape the even worse conditions found in the Brazilian countryside. In *The Brazilians*, Page also describes the conditions of Brazil’s peasants:

> In the middle of the twentieth century, Brazil remained what it had always been, a primarily rural society in which the great majority of those who lived in the countryside were ill housed, ill fed, illiterate, disease ridden, and underproductive. Farming was labor intensive, which made it profitable for land owners because they were able to continue paying starvation wages. (Page, p. 183)

The conditions of both Brazil's urban and rural populations would remain unchanged and little improved throughout Boal's lifetime.

How to Reach "The People?"

The company believed that the solution to reaching the people of Brazil was to take the play out of the theatre and to the peasants in the country. In the early 1960's the members of the Arena Theatre wanted to inspire the peasants of Brazil to understand their oppression and hopefully rise up against the oppressive landowners. While this sounds easy sitting in rehearsals in the relative comfort of their theatre, the actual experience of attempting to create critical consciousness in real world conditions was both a hard and embarrassing for Boal and the members of the theatre company.

In his autobiography Boal tells the story of a play performed for peasant farmers in northern Brazil. He describes how the company, through the dialogue and anthems, so inspired the peasants that they asked the actors to immediately come with them and fight the hired security guards of the landowners. Boal explained to the farmers that they were only actors and not actual revolutionaries. It was then that Boal realized that "we, the genuine artists, talked of giving our

blood for a cause; in fact we were talking of giving their blood, the peasant farmers', rather than our artists' blood, because we would go back to our comfortable homes" (2001. p. 194).

As a result of this experience Boal realized the futility of the "messenger" style of theatre in which the actors deliver the message without actually participating in the resulting outcomes of the message. This also caused him to ask the question: "How could we teach them what they knew better than us" (2001, p. 194)?

The Coup

In 1961, following the unexpected resignation of the Brazilian President, the Vice-president Joao Goulart becoming the new leader of Brazil. In the *Penguin History of Latin America*, Author Edwin Williamson describes the difficulties faced by Goulart:

> He faced the dilemma of rectifying the nation's finances without alienating his nationalist supporters on the left. The times could scarcely have been less propitious for the introduction of a program of economic austerity: the universities were in a ferment of revolutionary socialism after the recent success of Fidel Castro's revolution in Cuba, Trotskyist and Communist activists were organizing peasants into rival unions and encouraging illegal occupations, which infuriated reactionary landowners; industrial strikes occurred frequently as high inflation ate up real wages; revolutionaries launched a campaign to give trade-union rights to the rank

> and file in the armed forces, a dangerously provocative tactic in view of the political record of the Brazilian officer caste. (p. 424)

Rather than upset his nationalist base, Goulart threw his support fully behind their struggles. Many within Brazil's upper class and military began to deeply mistrust Goulart. Fearing he was secretly a communist, some began to try and "link the president to what they claimed were subversive groups (most prominently including the communist party) that supported him" (Page, p. 211).

In 1964, Goulart made two critical errors. The first error was throwing his administration's support behind a strike called for by "The Sailors' Association", The group was organized "in the struggle for sailors' rights and better pay" (Fausto, p. 276). The military hierarchy wanted the arrest of the 2000 sailors who participated, but Goulart "angered the armed forces by granting the mutineers a pardon" (Williamson, p. 426).

The second mistake occurred in March of 1964, when "overconfident leftists persuaded Goulart to sponsor a mass rally in Rio de Janeiro" (Page, p. 212). During the speech Goulart announced "a series of decrees that would nationalize all private oil refineries and expropriate vast amounts of underutilized land" (Page, p. 212). What followed was a bloodless military coup in which Goulart was forced to flee Brazil, and for "the first time in Brazilian history, the military had come to power and intended to stay there" (Fausto, p. 277).

In his autobiography Boal describes his experience involving the military coup of 1964:

> In the dark street, on my way home, for the first time in my life I listened to silence. And heard it. How full of sounds silence is! It can be heard from kilometers away. The further away, the more frightening. A police siren…or was it an ambulance? My shoes on the street…a strange noise. I kicked a stone in the road. Would they be arresting people before dawn? It was prohibited by law…what law? Or were they taking wounded mutineers to hospital? Silence. (2001, pp. 229-230)

After the coup many of Boal friends were arrested. Fearing that they were next on the list, Boal and the members of The Arena Theater "decided to abandon the Arena for weeks, for months. After wondering from friendly house to house, each night in a different bed – some of us with children -- we discovered that the State Police did not know about the deeds of the persecuted in other states, so, if we moved to another state we'd be clean" (Boal, 2001, p. 232).

After several months hiding with friends in the mountains, Boal and the other members of the theatre company reconvened and once again began producing theatre. He describes his reasons for finally returning to Rio: "The first coup was not deadly. They imprisoned, but torture had not yet been instituted as the usual method of interrogation: the armed forces still displayed tenuous vestiges of civilization" (Boal, 2001, p. 232). All "vestiges of civilization" would disappear four years later.

The new repressive government created a desire in the members of the Arena Theatre to combat the oppressive conditions faced by Brazil's citizens. The challenge became how to attack the oppressive conditions, inform the public and

avoid the attention of the authorities. Having learned the futility of “message theatre” Boal and the Arena Theatre turned their attention to more subversive styles of theatre productions.

They began to mount productions with a seeming pro-Brazil message, but in fact, these shows contained hidden criticisms of the current government. It was also their desire to openly criticize the government which led to one of their most famous musical productions, *Arena Conta Zumbi*. In *Theatre of the Oppressed* Boal describes the goal of the musical *Zumbi*:

> Its fundamental aim was the destruction of all of the theatrical conventions that had become obstacles to the esthetic development of the theatre. Still more was desired: to tell a story not from the cosmic perspective, but from an earthly perspective clearly localized in time and space – the perspective of the Arena Theatre and members of its company. (1974, p. 166)

The production of *Zumbi* was a mixture of historical play, musical, farce and narrative play. At the time of the creation of *Zumbi*, Boal realized: “We were creating a new theatre form – I wanted it to be theatre, not just a musical show” (2001, p. 235). Boal continues by explaining “*Zumbi* was, for us, a revolution. We needed to understand it before moving on” (Boal, 2001, p. 246).

While the production contained many elements it was not in a strict sense a musical, drama, comedy or circus, but all of those genres combined, mixed, deconstructed and reconstructed in an attempt to “destroy all the stylistic conventions which were inhibiting theatre’s development as an art form and clear a space for a new system to emerge” (Boal, 1979, p. 166). In *Theatre of the*

Oppressed Boal explains the birth and development of this new uniquely Brazilian form of theatre.

Through the first production and subsequent productions of the late 60's and early 70's, the Arena Theatre used the production of *Zumbi* to covertly criticize the oppressive dictatorship of Brazil. The show's popularity allowed the group to receive invitations to tour the production throughout The United States and Mexico. However, its popularity would come at a cost as the government censors began to focus more and more attention on the Arena Theatre productions. Staunchly anti-government, the members of the Arena Theatre were continually fighting with the government censors about the scripts. The clashes eventually led to a showdown with the police.

> The singers were going straight to jail after the show: they could not be arrested while they were working. They took the opportunity to sing songs that had been banned – since they were going to be arrested anyway, why economize the transgression? (Boal, 2001, p. 245)

After the military coup of 1964, one of the first creations of the military controlled government was the organization known as the "Police and Military Investigations or IPMs" (Page, p. 281). The new organization was established to "deal with the people responsible for 'crimes against the state or its patrimony, as well as for crimes of a social or political nature, and for acts of revolutionary war'" (Page, p. 281).

In the text *A Concise History of Brazil*, Boris Fausto describes the tactics of the new organization: "violent repression occurred in the countryside,

especially in the northeast, where peasant leagues were singled out. In cities, many unions and worker federations were taken over, and their leaders were jailed" (pp. 281-282). The government also "imposed censorship on mass media, purged the universities of suspected subversives, destroyed what limited independence the judiciary still enjoyed, and placed further restrictions on political activity" (Page, p. 214).

While conditions were harsh after the 1964 coup, they reached a particularly brutal level beginning in 1969. Due to the harsh social and economic conditions in Brazil, members "of the left had decided to take up arms against the dictatorship, and the armed forces met the threat of force with overwhelming counterforce" (Page, p. 238). The catalyst for the new uprising was "the death of a student who was killed by the military police" (Fausto, p. 287) during a demonstration. The student's death led to nationwide strikes and protests, and also violent attacks on Brazil's military and banking industry by "robbing banks and bombing barracks" (Williamson, p. 428).

After a militant group kidnapped the ambassador to the United States, the government increased its use of force and "the guerrillas were ground down by harsh repressive methods, which included the systematic torture of suspects by the secret police and the use of shadowy paramilitary death squads to root out subversives" (Williamson, p. 428).

After the events of 1969, the government cracked down on anyone it perceived to be the opposition. Due to its relentless overt and covert criticism, the

Arena Theatre as well as other theatres became prime targets. In his autobiography Boal describes the environment:

> They threw sulphur gas bombs into our theatre, provoking a stampede: the door was narrow, people were hurt. Students came to do security guard duty. Every day, fifty students or more searched the spectators on their way in. The offered security…in exchange for seeing the show for free. Whole faculties came.
>
> At Arena, they kidnapped Norma Bengell as soon as she came off stage. A few days later she was set free in Rio de Janerio – she had been kidnapped by the army. From that day on, Norma only went out into the street to travel from the hotel to the theatre, accompanied by two elite bodyguards: Mauricio Segall and myself. Hands in the pockets of our jackets, finger on the trigger. A minor detail: none of us was qualified to shoot. It would have been a disaster if we had been pounced upon: our own feet were at considerable risk.
>
> Following the *Roda Viva* incident, the cast of the *Feira* began to do an additional warm-up routine: physical and vocal exercises, then down to the basement for target practice. Since we were armed, better learn how to use our weapons.
>
> On stage, actors worked their finger on the trigger -- really! One day, a rifle appeared in the theatre, from who knows where. The person who had the best aim inherited the rifle. It was not paranoia, I swear! It was tragic: in the commedia dell'arte, actors used masks to hide from the police – we

> used revolvers! In what country, in what other epoch, would such a thing have happened?
>
> At the end of a show, actors prepare themselves for applause. We prepared ourselves nervously for invasion: There were two students on either side of the stage, watching the audience, one arm inside the curtain, with us lined up behind, revolvers and rifle pointing at the auditorium. The students had orders to make a signal with their arm if armed spectators were to advance on the stage. That would be the moment to raise the curtain; take aim…and may God's will be done. Thank God, he did not will. (Boal, 2001, pp. 267-268)

In 1971 Boal was himself kidnapped by the Brazilian government's secret police. He was tortured, and in his autobiography he describes his experience beginning with: "Torture is a hateful process. Like love-making it is done naked" (p. 290). He continues:

> The body is hung by the knees on an iron pole running under handcuffed hands which in turn are crossed under the knees, taking the weight of the tortured person who is effectively tied in a knot. In the begging the pain is bearable. Then it is not. The fingers become violet balls of blood not circulating. Cries resound in the solid silence, death wishes. (p. 290)

Boal would spend the next three months in prison. He was released only after an international outpouring of support from hundreds of artists. The support was spearheaded by the famous American playwright Author Miller.

Shortly after his release Boal, his wife and young son were exiled from his beloved Brazil. Escaping to Argentina, Boal discovered he had left one nightmare for another. Shortly after his arrival in Buenos Aires, the Argentine government underwent its own oppressive revolution. Boal would spend the next three years between Argentina and Peru.

During his time working with peasants in Peru he met and worked with Paulo Freire who would become a lifelong mentor and friend to Boal. Since theatre work was extremely limited, Boal was able to make ends meet by writing. In the five years he spent in Argentina, he published several books including his most famous text *Theatre of the Oppressed* published in 1974. He named the book as homage to Paulo Freire's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Epic Text

The structure of this paper will be a hermeneutic and contextual examination of Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed.* The analysis made will be with the understanding that the overall structure of the text is written in what literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin calls an epic text. According to Bakhtin:

> The epic as it has come down to us is an absolutely completed and finished generic form, whose constitutive feature is the transferal of the world it describes to an absolute past of national beginnings and peak times. The absolute past is a specifically evaluating (hierarchical) category. In the epic world view, "Beginning," "first," "ancestor," "that which occurred earlier" and so forth are not merely temporal categories

but the valorized temporal categories, and valorized to as extreme degree. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 15)

In other words, it is a text in which the story has an absolute conclusion based on a world that already existed. The story which evolves out of that completed world is based on a series of events which cannot be changed, or questioned by the reader but rather must be considered "solely as tradition, sacred and sacrosanct, evaluated in the same way by all and demanding a pious attitude towards itself" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 16).

The first two sentences in *Theatre of the Oppressed* demonstrate how Boal is constructing an Epic text in which everything has been created: "The argument about the relations between theatre and politics is as old as theatre and…politics. Since Aristotle, and in fact since long before, the same themes and arguments that are still brandished were already set forth" (p. xii).

In the above passage Boal sets the reader up with the idea that "relations between theatre and politics" is something that has been established throughout the known history of mankind. Not only have they been established, but humans continue to use the same arguments today. In this statement Boal leaves no room for a challenge to the relationship between "theatre and politics" because they are being "brandished" even today.

Boal's use of the word brandished is a particularly strong choice of words since by definition it means "to shake or wave (as a weapon) menacingly" (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/brandish). The relationship is one that is so strong and codified that it is being used as a form of weapon. A weapon

is something used for attack or defense, when used against someone who is unarmed there is little if any availability for discussion only acceptance.

Bakhtin describes how within the Epic there is no place for “openness, indecision, indeterminacy” (1981, p. 16) and according to Boal it is the same for the relationship between theatre and politics.

At the end of the introduction Boal goes states his intentions for writing *Theatre of the Oppressed* as:

> Aristotle declares the independence of poetry (lyric, epic, and dramatic) in relation to politics. What I propose to do in this work is to show that, in spite of that, Aristotle constructs the first, extremely powerful poetic-political system for intimidation of the spectator, for elimination of the ‘bad’ or illegal tendencies of the audience. This system is, to this day, fully utilized not only in conventional theatre, but in the TV soap operas and in western films as well: movies, theatre, and television united, through a common basis in Aristotelian poetics, for repression of the people. (p. xiv)

Boal’s intention is not to allow the reader to come to his or her own conclusions, but rather to show the reader how Aristotelian poetics is used “for the repression of the people” (p. xiv).

Boal sees theatre as a tool for control of the people; any other argument for theatre (such as for entertainment, education or enlightenment) is used in service of the sole purpose of control. It has been a tradition passed down from one group of controlling masses to the next. In Boal’s closed and finalized conception of western theatre’s tradition of control, we find Bakhtin’s belief that

"tradition isolates the world of the epic from personal experience, from new insights, from any personal initiative in understanding and interpreting, from new points of view and evaluations" (1981, p. 17).

Boal describes the Aristotle system as "fully utilized" in that the system seems to have reached it full and completed intention. Since it is "fully realized" it cannot be changed or altered in the epic sense that it "completed, conclusive and immutable, as a fact, an idea and a value" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 17).

Boal begins *Theatre of the Oppressed* as an examination of Aristotle's *Poetics*, and the final two sections of the text are his description of his work with the Arena Theatre in San Paulo, Brazil. He moves from a Socratic examination into an autobiographical style of writing. While his style of writing changes, Boal never abandons Bakhtin's epic genre.

In the introduction of his section titled "Poetics of the Oppressed" Boal describes how he is going to "attempt to close the circle of this book" (p. 119). Again this is a return to what has happened previously. Boal's reasons for doing this is to show how he has developed a system which has the ability to return theatre once again to the people stating that the oppressive people are liberated themselves and, once more, are making theatre their own. On the surface this may seem to be a break from the closed epic style in which everything has been historicized and closed to the possibility of change.

However it is because of Boal's choice of where the people return that he remains in the epic style. What the oppressed people return to is not something of their creation, but rather the completed and finished world that Boal sees. In

Boal's world, the theatre that the people are creating is based on an image of what was created in the past, a return to a previous condition. Boal even provides a description of what theatre looked like when it belonged to the people: "In the beginning the theatre was a dithyrambic song: free people singing in the open air. The carnival. The feast" (p. 119).

This return to the traditional past is a key to the epic in that "absolute conclusiveness and closedness is the outstanding feature of the temporally valorized epic past" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 16). In other words, the oppressed people are liberated. However, they are only liberated to return to Boal's romanticized imagined theatre of the past. In Boal's description of the freedom of the past we again experience the epic in that the people practicing theatre in the beginning "are raised to the valorized plane of the past and assume there a finished quality" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 18). The "singing" people of the past are complete, ideal. Boal's use of punctuation in the above quote also alludes to a strong finite expression in that the people are "singing in the open air. The carnival. The feast" (p. 119).

In making a choice for the reader of the journey of theatre first being practiced freely by the people, then used as a tool for domination by the church and feudal lords, then the bourgeoisie and finally returned to the people to once again practice as they had in the past, Boal has created an epic text. A text in which the world described within the pages is "an utterly finished thing, not only as an authentic event of the distant past but also on its own terms and by its own standards" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 17). In other words, Boal presents a closed text in

which he demonstrates how theatre was created, subverted and to what it will be returned. He does this while not allowing the reader to offer a point of view based on their experience.

It is important to stress that Boal may not have realized that he was writing an epic text. In certain contexts the examination of the appearance of the epic genre as being described as “utterly finished,” “closed” and “raised to a valorized plane” may seem as if they are criticism of either the epic genre or of Boal’s choice to write in such a style.

There is the particular possibility that Boal’s use of a closed epic may be in conflict with his ultimate goal of the liberation of theatre from the bourgeoisie. Boal's use of a closed epic appears to be in extreme conflict with his ultimate goal of liberation. The reader may ask, “How can such a closed text lead to true liberation?” It is because of Boal’s desire to lead the reader to a very specifically intended outcome (away from oppression and into liberation) that the use of the epic is effective. Boal does not create a text in which the reader is guided to several types of explorative outcomes. He is interested in leading the reader to a specific understanding and epic is the perfect tool for him to accomplish his goal.

The epic is not necessarily a negative genre, and for Boal it is an effective literary device that allows him to clearly identify what he sees as a problem and offer what he believes is a clear solution for the reader, the spectator and, in the end, society as a whole.

While Bakhtin's description of the epic is the overarching style of *Theatre of the Oppressed,* I will now, through a hermeneutic and contextual analysis, discuss the specific stylistic and linguistic choices made by Boal.

Naïve Reading

Introduction

In his book *The Brazilians,* Joseph Page describes Brazil: "The romantic vision embraced by many outsiders has always been somewhat misleading, for Brazil and things Brazilian have never been exactly what they seem" (p. 2). He later clarifies this statement: "The well-publicized sensuality that Brazil seems to exude – and that reaches its apotheosis in the frenzy of the annual Carnival in Rio – in fact hides the repressive and repressed attitudes about sex that permeate much of Brazilian society" (p. 3). It seems that Brazil is a country of contrasts, and so too is Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

When beginning to read the text, one is immediately grabbed by the political nature of the language used in the text. Boal uses descriptions such as "all theatre is necessarily political" (p. ix), "change is imperative" (p. ix) and "theatre can be also be used as a weapon for liberation" (p. ix). The reader is expecting to find a text geared towards revolutionary theatre with the expectation that he will not be reading a history of western philosophy and theatre. However, for the first two thirds of the book, this is exactly what takes place.

Boal begins to lay out a criticism of how the medieval church, feudal lords and eventually the bourgeoisie, through the ideas of Aristotle's *Poetics*, took theatre from the people and used it as a "tool for domination" (p. ix). He uses the

very western, dialogical technique of the Socratic Method to destroy the western notions of theatre practice and its origins. He is in fact using the master's tools to destroy the master's house. It is not until the final sections of the book that Boal completely shifts his focus and his writing method to set the stage explaining "the oppressed people are liberated themselves [from the bourgeoisie] and, once more are making the theatre their own" (p. 119).

In order to explain how the people can reclaim theatre practice, Boal changes his writing style into an autobiographical explanation. On the surface, the use of two writing styles and methodologies may seem like a deliberate choice on Boal's part; however it is a direct result of the time periods in which the essays for the book were written.

The first four sections of *Theatre of the Oppressed* were written at different times with the initial sections written in the early and mid-1960's as director/dramaturge introductions to productions which took place at the Arena Theatre. The final two sections (ones in which Boal turns to his discoveries both at the Arena theatre and his work in Peru) were written in the mid-1970's when Boal had been exiled from Brazil. He took his earlier writings and combined them with his new discoveries to create the complete book *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

It was from this point of understanding that I began the naïve reading. As a result of that reading, I divide the text into four types of categories:

1. It is a political text.
2. It is a critique of Aristotle's definition of "what is art?"
3. It is a historical analysis of the theatre arts.

4. It is an autobiography.

Political Philosophy Text

According to the peer-reviewed *Internet Encyclopedia of Political Philosophy (IEP):*

> Political philosophy begins with the question: what ought to be a person's relationship to society? The subject seeks the application of ethical concepts to the social sphere and thus deals with the variety of forms of government and social existence that people could live in – and in so doing, it also provides a standard by which to analyze and judge existing institutions and relationships. (http://www.iep.utm.edu/polphil)

From the first sentence of *Theatre of the Oppressed* the reader knows that he is reading a political text. Boal begins the forward with the statement: "This book attempts to show that all theatre is necessarily political, because all of the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them" (p. ix). Theatre is political because it is an "activity of man," and Boal considers all activities of man to be political, therefore theatre is by nature political. But for Boal recognizing theatre as being political is not enough, it is also a "weapon," one which is used by the ruling classes "as a tool for domination" (p. ix). However, according to Boal all hope is not lost; theatre may also be used as a tool for "liberation."

Boal finishes the forward with his explanation of how "Theatre" went from being something in which the people were "singing freely in the open air" (p. ix), to being a tool through which the aristocracy (and later the bourgeoisie)

used to shape social, religious and moral attitudes for their own interests. This domination of theatre by the bourgeoisie remained relatively unchallenged until the theatre writer, director and theorist Bertolt Brecht began to use theatre as "an object of social forces, not of the values of the superstructure" (p. x).

Through Boal's discoveries in *Theatre of the Oppressed* the cycle will be completed and theatre will be returned back to the people. Boal believes that Theatre is able to return to the people by removing them from the role of passive spectator "into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (1974, p. 122). The audience must become participants in the action in order for theatre to be used as a political weapon for change. Boal strongly believes that "theatre is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it" (p. 122).

As a political text, *Theatre of the Oppressed* becomes an instruction booklet not only for professional actors, writers and directors, but for anyone who wishes to use Boal's techniques as a tool for political and social change in the form of a "weapon." In order to change the passive audience into a socio-political weapon, Boal outlines four stages.

First Stage - Knowing the Body. According to Boal "the first word of the theatrical vocabulary is the human body" (p. 125). In order for participants to become actively involved in theatre for liberation, they must have an understanding of their bodies and, in particular, "its limitations and possibilities, its social distortions and possibilities of rehabilitation" (p. 126).

Second Stage - Making the Body Expressive. Participants begin to partake in a "series of games by which one begins to express oneself through the

body" (p. 126). Most of these games involve the use of non-verbal communication. Boal stresses that no matter what games are used, the participants should "always be encouraged to invent other games and not to be passive recipients of an entertainment that comes from the outside" (p. 131).

Third Stage - The Theatre as Language. The participants begin to experience theatre as "living in the *present*, not as a finished product displaying images from the past" (p. 126). It is in this third stage that the spectators become participants in the actual performance.

Fourth Stage - The Theatre as Discourse. In this stage the performances are more finished than the improvised games and exercises of the previous stages. However, it is important to understand that they are not finished productions in the traditional style of theatre with audience and actors separated, each knowing their role as well as the idea of a completed production. Discourse theatre "allows and encourages the spectator to ask questions, to dialogue, to participate" (p. 142).

In each of these stages Boal is encouraging the participants to examine, through theatre, their current social, political and economic conditions. Through this experience, the participants find solutions to overcome any oppression they are currently experiencing as a result of their conditions. Boal is attempting to overcome the control of what he calls "bourgeoisie theatre" (p. 142), in which the "bourgeoisie already knows what the world is like, *their* world, and is able to present images of this complete, finished world" (p. 142). When theatre is taken from the control of the bourgeoisie, "the oppressed people are liberated

themselves and once more, are making theatre their own" (p. 119). In taking theatre back, the people are creating a political statement.

Philosophical Analysis of Theatre

In *Theatre of the Oppressed* Augusto Boal makes a complete study of the ways in which different historical time periods and philosophers have contributed to the historical development of theatre. The first section of his text is an analysis of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Boal titles the second section of his book "Machiavelli and the Poetics of Virtue" (p. 51), and the third "Hegel and Brecht: The Character as the Subject or the Character as Object" (p. 80)?

In each section Boal advances the argument that "tragedy" is a form of control and that the controlling culture is "interested in the transmission of that knowledge which helps it to maintain its power" (p. 53). Tragedy is a tool for those in power because "the dominant art will always be that of the dominant class, since it is the only class that possesses the means to disseminate it" (p. 53). Though the ways in which the dominant class uses theatre may take on seemingly new forms (Shakespeare as opposed to melodrama, for example), it continues to be used as a tool for control. According to Boal this is because "of its immediate contact with the public, and its greater power to convince" (p. 53).

According to Boal, Aristotle laid the foundation for other societies to mold theatre into their own tool for control. Through his analysis of Machiavelli, Hegel and the theatrical theorist Brecht, Boal demonstrates the ways in which the bourgeoisie class manipulated theatre in order to maintain its domination of other classes.

Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle is arguably the most influential of all Greek philosophers. Aristotle was a student of Plato and his philosophy is "regarded as the most complete synthesis of knowledge ever constructed" (Lavine, 1984, p. 76). Aristotelian philosophy crossed many boundaries of knowledge from politics, biology, metaphysics and - most important to Boal - the arts. Aristotle's influence on the arts, and in particular theatre arts, comes from his writings titled *Poetics*.

In his writings Aristotle attempts to define the question "what is art?" In *Poetics* he places his focus on the idea that true poetry (including drama) "imitates men in action and states of mind" (Woodfin and Groves, 2006, p. 155). This definition is often interpreted as "art is an imitation of life" which Aristotle called "Memesis." In the world of theatre Aristotle's ideas on dramatic theatre, tragedy and, to a lesser extent, comedy are "the single most influential work on the subject" (Dukore, 1974, p. 1). In *Theatre of the Oppressed* Boal describes Aristotle's theories and their strong influence on western theatre arts as an "extremely powerful poetic-political system" (p. xiv). This system is ultimately used by the ruling classes and "is designed to bridle the individual, to adjust him to what pre-exists" (1974, p. 47). In other words, Aristotle's *Poetics* have been developed by the ruling classes and bourgeoisie as a way to both placate and control the masses.

Feudalism. Boal begins his critique by describing the way in which the church and the aristocracy manipulated theatre during the middle ages. Since both the church and the aristocracy were a very small minority compared to the vast number of the peasant class, they maintained their power through strict physical

and mental control. Peasants were tied to both the church and the landowners who ruled them through the feudalist system. If they left the lands of the lord who owned them they would lose their life. If they left the church they would lose the after-life. Boal explains that this led to art which was “authoritarian, coercive, inculcating in the people a solemn attitude of religious respect for the status quo” (p. 55).

All theatre of the period encourages the populace to give up their individualism in the service of the greater good which were the church and the nobility. Theatre of the era was overwhelmingly composed of morality plays in which “the good were rewarded and the bad were punished” (Boal, 1974, p. 57). For centuries feudalism was the prevailing system of control; however, with a new ruling class there arose a new group taking social and political control and instituting their new system. With the new social and political system came new trends in theatre.

Renaissance. The downfall of feudalism came at the hands of commerce. Boal describes that in the eleventh century “life started moving from the country to the newly found cities, where warehouses were built and banks established, where commercial accounting was organized and trade was centralized” (p. 59). Power slipped out of the fingers of the church and the nobility and into the hands of the new merchant and banking class. This class - the bourgeoisie - rebelled against the notion of sacrifice for the greater good and instead believed in the power of the individual. For the nobility it was birth that determined one’s station in life. For the bourgeoisie, it was through hard work and individual struggle.

With a new conception of the role of man came a new conception of theatre. Theatre moved away from the morality plays in which the characters were objects controlled by higher powers and as Boal describes they "became a subject of the dramatic action. The character was converted into a bourgeois conception" (p. 63). Beginning with the great writer William Shakespeare we see the individual having an impact in the outcome of the play. While Hamlet is a member of the nobility, it is his desire for revenge that is the catalyst for the action of the play.

Machiavelli. In the introduction of section two, Boal explains that the section was written his as a director's notes for a production of Machiavelli's play *Mandragola.* He included the essays as a continuation of his argument that theatre was a form of social and political control.

In the previous chapters, Boal outlined the journey of theatre which began as a tool for feudalistic churches and nobility and ended up being a glorification of the bourgeoisie. The remaining two chapters of the section are used to demonstrate how Machiavelli, through his play *Mandragola*, is the first to establish the bourgeoisie belief that power is obtained through "cold, calculating reason, free of any preoccupations of moral nature and entirely directed toward the feasibility and efficacy of the scheme to be adopted and developed" (p. 66). According to Boal these ideas are expressed by the new bourgeoisies through the concepts of "virtue and praxis."

During the middle ages the virtuous person was the one who sacrificed himself for the greater good. Under the bourgeoisie the virtuous person was one

who lived for himself at all costs, and through praxis, experienced and encouraged others to live the same way. However, as the bourgeoisie became the dominant power, they began to realize the danger of allowing everyone to act strictly for their own interest. If that ideal continued on toward its logical conclusion, the resulting system would be anarchy. In order to maintain their social, political and economic control, a tweaking of the system (and by proxy, theatre) would be necessary. According to Boal the tweaking would be made by Hegel.

Hegel. If Machiavelli was the founder of the bourgeois notion that man should be liberated from "all moral values" (Boal, 1974, p. 73), then (according to Boal) Hegel was the father of the concept: a man is free to make his own choices, but those choices must be made with a foundation in "ethical necessity" (1974, p. 73). In other words, Hegel tamed the anarchist wing of the bourgeoisie through the use of ethics. The choices of an individual were dependent of the idea of universal values. These values were, of course, created by the bourgeoisie in order to maintain the control of all of the participants within the system.

Boal points out that Hegel created a system in which choices would be made "regarding situations and values common to all mankind or nationality – eternal powers, moral truths such as love, filial love, patriotism, etc." (p. 74). However, the systems would ensure that the "choices" made would maintain the bourgeoisie's socio-economic control of the proletariat. Out of Hegel arose what would become the dominating force of theatre arts in the 20th century: "realism."

Realism. Boal describes "realism" as containing the idea that "the work of art will be as good as its success in reproducing reality" (p. 76). Realism as an art

form strove to reproduce the world as is, not what the artist thought it may be or may become. In the hands of Hollywood or Broadway “a new ‘exemplary’ type of play or film came into existence, which tries to reinforce some of the values revered by capitalist society, such as the art and ability to achieve success in life, through free enterprise” (p. 77). Hand and hand with the creation of a realistic world came the idea that the protagonist of the play must feature “the external collision of forces originating internally – the objective conflict of subjective forces” (p. 87). Boal believes that the first real challenge to realism came from the German director Bertolt Brecht.

Brecht. Boal claims that with the introduction of Marxism, there came a new way of looking at the social and political landscape. Unfortunately, the new idea had to be described with “the old vocabulary” (p. 83). The result of this mixing of new ideas with old terminologies led to confusion about what precisely was an artist’s intent. One particular misinterpretation was the German theatre director and philosopher Bertolt Brecht’s use of “Epic Theatre.” Brecht used “Epic Theatre” to describe his theoretical ideas about the practice of theatre arts.

Boal explains that in philosophy the use of the work “epic” was intended to describe the differences in style of poetry. According to Boal, “Brecht uses the expression epic theatre mainly in contraposition to Hegel’s definition of epic poetry” (p. 84). Hegel uses epic to describe the condition of the protagonist in the play as one who is the “absolute subject” (p. 92) of the action, by contrast Brecht sees the protagonist as “the object of economic or social forces to which he responds and in virtue of which he asks” (p. 92). More specifically, under Hegel’s

understanding of epic, “the hero is born a complete being with all of his flaws and attributes. The character passes through a pre-ordained world into the story’s logical outcome. For Brecht, the character is born incomplete and is transformed by the “characteristics that happen to be acquired in social life” (p. 99). And rather than living a pre-determined existence, the hero is “dissected, dissembled, and reassembled” (p. 99). Boal explains that having differing ideas on the journey of the protagonist hero in the play will result in different reactions from the audience.

Boal outlines several key differences between Hegel’s system of control and Brecht’s system of liberation. He also explains the differences between their ideas on the intended reactions from the audience. Below are three of the twelve main differences described by Boal:

1. Hegel: “It creates empathy, which consists in an emotional compromise of the spectator, depriving him of the possibility of acting” (p. 95). Brecht: “It ‘historicizes’ the dramatic action, transforming the spectator into observer, arousing his critical consciousness and capacity for action” (p. 95).
2. Hegel: “At the end, catharsis ‘purifies’ the spectator” (p. 95). Brecht: “Through knowledge, it drives the spectator to action” (p. 95).
3. Hegel: “It arouses feelings” (p. 95). Brecht: “It demands decisions” (p. 95).

In each of the examples selected we see that in Hegel's theatre the audience leaves the theatre emotionally and spiritually purged. Brecht's audience leaves with the desire to take action in both their own lives as well as the world around them. Boal does not limit his comparison of Hegel and Brecht to the characters of the play and the audience in the theatre. He also points out that while Hegel is focused on the entertainment of the Bourgeoisie, Brecht believes the following:

> The popular artist must abandon the downtown stages and go to the neighborhoods, because only there will he find people who are truly interested in changing society: in the neighborhoods he should show his images of social life to the workers who are interested in changing that social life since they are its victims. (p. 105)

It is through the examination of Brecht's theories that Boal brings the reader into his ideas of the *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

It is Brecht who brings the reader into Boal's ideas or into what becomes the practice of Boal's theories; however, it is important that the reader not ignore or forget Boal the scholar. As explored in this section, Boal created his ideas based upon the interaction between his personal experiences and his interactions with the various historical styles and philosophies of the practice of the theatre arts. Boal would not have developed his style of performance that he discusses in the second half of *An Actor Prepares* had he not conducted the examination of the historical developments in theatre. In the hermeneutic tradition Boal must understand the histories, social economic conditions and theorists as well as their

reasons for practicing theatre in order to understand how he could break apart what he considered the oppressive system of bourgeoisie theatre. While the focus of this study will now move towards the "practice" of Boal, the reader (and the theatre practitioner) must not forget the theories of Boal because it is in this intersection in which praxis occurs. In *An Actor Prepares* Boal states: "Praxis must be the only determining factor in the behavior of man" (p. 67).

Autobiography

The final sections of *Theatre of the Oppressed* are titled "Poetics of the Oppressed" and "Development of the Arena Theatre of Sao Paulo." In these final two sections Boal moves away from his analysis of the philosophical foundations of theatre into an autobiographical telling of his experiences which led to the development of many of his early conceptions and theories on theatre arts. In both sections Boal uses specific examples from his experiences: such as how the group with which he was working created an "invisible theatre."

Boal describes a scene at a busy hotel restaurant in which the performers turn the act of paying for a meal into a public forum to explore the ideas of "labor-power." While Boal is explaining one of his styles of theatre, he is using a personal experience to demonstrate his message. He also uses these two sections to describe the experiences of two key time periods in his personal, political and professional life.

The first section is called "Poetics of the Oppressed" and is a description of Boal's experience of working with the People's Theatre of Peru. This was a project that Boal participated in shortly after his exile from Brazil. Boal uses the

section to discuss the objective of his system or what he terms the "Poetics of the Oppressed." That objective is "to change the people – 'spectators,' passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, into actors, transformers of dramatic action" (p. 122). He then sets about informing the reader on the ways this is accomplished by relating his experience of bringing literacy to the peasants of the Peruvian cities of Lima and Chiclayo.

The second section is called "Development of the Arena Theatre of Sao Paulo." Though this is the second of the two chapters within the section, the experiences and theories discussed in this chapter actually took place in the years before Boal's exile. In this chapter Boal describes the development of the Arena Theatre beginning with his joining the company in 1956. He describes the journey of the small theatre company as passing through four stages:

1. Boal calls this the "realist" stage. During this time the theatre company focused on authors from other countries. They performed plays such as an adaptation of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men,* and Sean O'Casey's, *Juno and the Peycock*. The company also used Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* as the company's key acting text for rehearsals.
2. Known as the "photography" stage, Boal describes this stage as ushering in the age of the Brazilian playwright. He explains that "it was a long period during which the Arena Theatre closed its doors to European playwrights, regardless of their high quality, opening them to anyone who wished to talk about Brazil to Brazilian audiences" (p. 162). It was called

"photography" because, like a camera, the lens was now focusing on the realities of life in Brazil.

3. The "nationalization of the classics" stage was a return to classic works with the idea of taking Brazilian struggles and placing them into universal themes. For example: the Arena Theatre's mounting of Moliere's *Tartuffe* because the company wanted to show that "religious hypocrisy was being practiced widely by our own Tartuffes, who in the name of God, Country, Family, Morality, Freedom, etc., marched along the streets demanding punishments both divine and military for the impious" (p. 164). In other words, they could use classical works to covertly address current problems with the new oppressive military dictatorship.
4. The final stage is "musicals." In this stage all forms of theatre are combined with the fundamental aim being:

> The destruction of all theatre conventions that had become obstacles to the esthetic development of the theatre. Still more was desired: to tell a story not from the cosmic perspective, but from an earthly perspective clearly localized in time and space – the perspective of the Arena Theater and members of its company. The story was not narrated as if it existed autonomously; it existed solely in reference to the narrator. (p. 166)

The production was a melding of historical events, current events, music, and dance. The works were put together "in such a way as to stimulate the spectators' response" (p. 166).

The remainder of the second chapter is Boal's clarification on the musical and in particular the development of what he calls the "Joker" system.

> 'Joker' is the system proposed as a permanent form of theatre --- dramaturgy and staging. It brings together all the experiments and discoveries previously made in the Arena Theatre; it is the sum of all that happened before. And in bringing them together, it also coordinates them. In this sense, it is the most important leap forward in the development of our theatre. (p. 172)

The Joker system contains the "wild card" character who acts outside of the musical as a way for the characters in the play and the audience to instantly examine the action of the play. The wild card character also directly involves himself in the action on behalf of the audience.

Conclusion

The majority of Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* is a systematic and Socratic examination of the philosophical foundations of western theatre. In each of the first two sections, Boal sets up the argument that western theatre is based on the oppressive ideas created by Aristotle, taken up and manipulated by the bourgeoisie, brought under control by Hegel and ultimately challenged by Brecht.

Once the reader has a foundation in the development of western theatre, Boal is finally ready to share his contribution. It is also at this point in the text that Boal changes the style of his writing from analytical to autobiographical.

For Boal, his "Poetics of the Oppressed" and discoveries with the Arena Theatre are extremely personal experiences for both the spectators and the

audience. In many of the different forms that his discoveries take ("Invisible Theatre", etc.) the performers are the audience. The only way for Boal to express his ideas and concepts about performing to the reader is through his own personal experiences; thus, he uses the form of an autobiography.

Structural Reading

Socratic Analysis of Aristotle

In the Naïve Reading we learned in the conclusion that Boal believes Aristotle's concept of tragedy is extremely effective. Boal also believes that because tragedy's main goal is the "purgation of all anti-social elements" (p. 46), it cannot be used "during revolutionary periods" (p. 46). It can be used "before or after the revolution…but never during it" (p. 46)!

Boal reaches this conclusion through the use of the Socratic Method. He begins by asking questions about Aristotle's theories. Then he questions the ways in which those theories were taken up and expanded by other philosophers in the name of social and political control. Boal's use of the Socratic Method was an effective way for him to systematically analyze and ultimately show the danger in Aristotle's definition of tragedy. The reason for Boal's choice of the Socratic Method an inquiry method in the text *Socrates Café*: "…it is not just any type of inquiry or examination. It is a type that reveals people to themselves that makes them see what their opinions really amount to" (Phillips, 2001, p. 20).

In order for Boal to introduce his revolutionary ideas about the role and practice of theatre arts, he needed to reveal the hidden oppressiveness of Aristotle's tragedy. Only then would the reader be able to understand why it is

necessary for theatre to change for the better. The critical tool he chooses is the Socratic Method.

The "Socratic Method" is named after the Greek philosopher Socrates. Though this method was named after him, Socrates never officially created it. It was in fact introduced by Socrates' main pupil Plato. The Socratic Method is "a form of seeking ('boxing in') knowledge by question and answer" (Lavine, 1984, p. 22). Essentially one person proposes a question in which a definition is given. The other person in the debate then gives a "counter example designed to show that the definition which was offered is too narrow, too restricted, or is biased or uninformed" (Lavine, 1984, p. 22). The ultimate goal of using the Socratic Method is "the sustained attempt to explore the ramifications of certain opinions and then offer compelling objections and alternatives" (Phillips, 2001, p. 20).

In the first section of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal uses the Socratic Method as a way to show that the Aristotelian ideas of tragedy were created to be used by a small ruling class for the control and oppression of the masses. In each of the chapters Boal issues a question about one of Aristotle's theories on tragedy, offers a definition and, finally, shows how the definition is used as a form of social and political control.

In his autobiography Boal describes his thoughts on the Socratic Method: "Socrates in his philosophizing process – the philosopher is the midwife who makes the student discover what s/he already knows, without knowing s/he knows it, by means of questions which provoke reflection, thus opening up the path to discovery" (2001, p. 147).

In *Theatre of the Oppressed* Boal puts his thoughts and Socrates' method of questioning into practice as he systematical moves through Aristotelian ideas such as: "What is the Meaning of 'Imitation?'" (pp. 7-8), "What then is the Purpose of Art and Science?" (p. 9) and "The Ultimate Aim of Tragedy" (pp. 26-32). In each section, Boal introduces a question, answers the question with each answer leading to another question and ultimately reaches the climactic question of "How Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy Functions?"

Boal begins this section with the explanation that as the play begins "the tragic hero appears. The public establishes a kind of empathy with him" (p. 36). He then introduces the term "peripeteia" which takes place when the tragic hero, due to their hamartia (tragic flaw), finally has their tragic downfall (which must be from a great height). For example: Oedipus is the King and, because of his fall of pride, gouges his eyes out, abdicates his thrown and becomes a beggar. While the physical action is taking place on stage, the audience members, through empathy, are participating in the action as well. According to Boal peripeteia serves to "lengthen the road from happiness to misfortune" (p. 36) in both the character and the audience.

In order to keep the audience from becoming emotional and mentally detached from the character's tragic downfall, Aristotle uses what is known as "anagnorisis," which is the character's "recognition of his flaws as such and, by means of reasoning, the explanation of it" (p. 37). In other words, the audience see themselves with their own flaws in the tragic hero.

Again the audience vicariously participates in the characters' revelations. In order to encourage the audience members not to repeat the mistakes of the characters, Aristotle "demands that tragedy have a terrible end which he calls catastrophe" (p. 37). Once the spectators witness the catastrophe, they are purified of their personal hamartia which is experienced as a catharsis. The resulting aim of Aristotle's system is "to eliminate all that is not commonly accepted, including revolution, before it takes place" (p. 47).

Conclusion

Boal's conclusion from his Socratic analysis of Aristotle is that Aristotle's concept of tragedy is extremely effective. Boal also believes that tragedy's main goal is the "purgation of all anti-social elements" (p. 46). He believes that once purged of their anti-social elements, the proletariat will not seek to end their oppression. Theatre is a tool to keep them placated and under control.

Boal uses the familiar genre of "the western" to illustrate how this process takes place. Essentially he begins with the "bad guy" who begins the performance by preying on society. Through the bad guy the audience's hamartia is stimulated and/or recognized. The "hero" comes in and overcomes the bad guy, and order is restored. Boal stresses that an important phase in Aristotle's process is missed: allowing the bad guy to experience anagnorisis in which he recognizes and accepts his flaw (hamartia). But instead he dies and the townspeople and the hero celebrate.

According to Boal, westerns, "like children's games, serve the Aristotelian purpose of purging all the spectator's aggressive tendencies" (p. 47). With the

relief of the “aggressive tendencies,” the audience also has their revolutionary impetus transformed from one of revolution and change to maintaining the status quo. However Boal believes that “if, on the contrary, we want to engage in revolutionary action…we will have to seek another poetics” (p. 47)!

Critical Hermeneutics

Boal uses the Socratic Method in the first half of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, but taken as a whole, the text actually uses critical hermeneutics as a key methodology. While Boal never explicitly stated he was using critical hermeneutics, there is ample evidence of its use. Author Shaun Gallagher describes critical hermeneutics:

> In its most idealistic form, critical theory requires a hermeneutical ability to escape from the domination of repressive traditions and to attain an ideologically neutral, tradition free, prejudice-free communication. Critical hermeneutics thus attempts to get to the objective truth behind the false consciousness of ideology. (1992, p. 40)

Through the discovery of both the writer’s hidden and overt ideologies, the reader is able to foster an understanding of the text which is based on a complete picture of the author’s ideological foundations.

An example of the author’s “ideological foundations” may be found simply by examining Boal’s title: *Theatre of the Oppressed*. The title leaves little doubt that he has an ideological perspective. Through the phrase “of the oppressed” we see that he is writing for a very specific group which has both a political and ideological perspective. It is intended to be from an epic perspective.

The book is not written “for” the oppressed; it is written with (of) the oppressed, and they are seen as direct participants in the story.

Understanding an author’s ideological foundations allows the reader to understand the areas in which the information in the text is placed and/or might be placed in the true understanding or desire to further an ideological principle. In the introduction Boal states that:

> In this book I also offer some proof that the theatre is a weapon. A very efficient weapon. For this reason one must fight for it. For this reason the ruling class strives to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilize it as a tool for domination. In so doing, they change the very concept of what ‘theatre’ is. But the theatre can also be a weapon for liberation. For that, it is necessary to create appropriate theatrical forms. Change is imperative. (p. ix)

There is no doubt that Boal has the “understanding or desire” to make an ideological change in the practice of theatre. His change also has the stated political purpose of taking it out of the hands of the dominant class and returning theatre to its rightful owners: the people.

It is in this section that the reader finds the first example of Boal’s belief that it is through cultural revolutionary violence that the change will take place. What Boal is returning to the people is “a weapon.” Boal wants to take this weapon from the oppressors and give it to the oppressed. This weapon will be used by the oppressed in order to effect change which Boal sees as “imperative.” The use of the word imperative suggests that this is not something that may be

done on a whim or at leisure, but rather now. In returning the weapon back to the people they - through a revolution - may overthrow the “dominate class” using theatre as “a weapon for liberation” (Boal, 1974, p. ix).

Undertaking a critical hermeneutics analysis allows the opportunity to open the texts in new ways separate from the author’s ideological, artistic and educative perspectives, as well as understanding the influences on the author’s thoughts. Developing an understanding of the author’s ideologies is only one aspect of critical hermeneutics.

One of the most important aspects of critical hermeneutics is that the reader must face his own ideologies. In the text *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences* author Paul Ricoeur outlines a defense of a hermeneutical critique of ideology: “The critique of ideology is the necessary detour which self-understanding must take, if the latter is to be formed by the matter of the text and not by the prejudices of the reader” (p. 144). It is only through the reader’s awareness of his own ideologies and prejudices that he is able to develop an ideological neutral understanding of the text or what Gallagher encourages as “reflectively identifying the objective constraints and power structures within which the interpreter operates” (1992, p. 244). The process of ideological self-understanding” is crucial if the reader is to truly make a complete interpretation. Without this understanding the reader simply “reiterates, and reproduces tradition, cultural values, ideology, and power structures” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 241).

In the introduction of *Theatre for the Oppressed,* Boal states his ideologies. Once stated the reader knows where Boal lies in opposition to the

philosophers in the text he will be analyzing. Once this understanding is established, Boal then moves into his Socratic Method of inquiry. He takes great pains to lay out the arguments with non-judgmental analysis. Of course, there is a bias based on his ideologies. However, Boal expresses them through the analysis and not personal conjecture. He then turns his attention to explain his ideas on the role of theatre arts in society.

In the section "Poetics of the Oppressed," Boal explores his own experience and his pre-conceived ideas on what would be best for the "peasants" he worked with in Peru. Only by realizing that his experiences should be in service of the peasants' experiences and needs would he be able to co-create an effective literacy program. He explains: "the illiterate are not people who are unable to express themselves: they are simply people who are unable to express themselves in a particular language" (p. 121).

The final phase of any hermeneutical analysis is the interpretive phase in which the author expresses what he has learned from the experience of the hermeneutical analysis. In the first three sections Boal discusses his understandings of the origins of western theatre. In the final two sections he discusses how his understandings of those traditions allowed him to break from them. Boal's new understandings allow him to complete the hermeneutic arch. Though he does not call it a hermeneutic arch he does explain that "what was lacking to complete the cycle was what is happening at present in Latin America – the destruction of the barriers created by the working class" (Boal, 1974, p. x). The second half of *Theatre of the Oppressed* is his description of Latin American

Theatre, but it is also describes the end of his initial critical hermeneutic examination of western theatre. In completing his "cycle," Boal is also writing a Marxist revolutionary manifesto.

Marxist Theatre Revolutionary Manifesto

Boal's intention of writing *Theatre of The Oppressed* is to turn the reader, through theatre, into a cultural warrior. In this section I will examine the ways in which Boal overtly demonstrates his desire to create a theatrical cultural warrior. I will also demonstrate how his use and choice of language suggests that a form of theatrical revolution is necessary to accomplish his goal. Finally, I will show how the *Theatre of the Oppressed* is a Marxist revolutionary manifesto.

According to Merriam-Webster.com, a manifesto is "a written statement publicly declaring the intentions, motives and views of its issuer" (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/manifesto). Boal does not simply create a collection of "intentions, motives and views," he structures his manifesto around a form of Marxist ideology which has a distinctive revolutionary tone.

I have shown how this ideology is first found in the forward to *Theatre of The Oppressed* with Boal's desire to use theatre as a weapon to take control from the ruling class. Below are several additional examples of Boal's use of *Theatre of the Oppressed* in what I will call a "Marxist Theatre Revolutionary Manifesto." The examples are divided into two categories: "Theatre as Revolution" and "Marxism and Theatre."

Theatre as a Revolution. In this category Boal describes the ways in which theatre is either a revolutionary practice or can be used for the creation of a revolution.

1. "We want to stimulate the spectator to transform his society, to engage in revolutionary action; in that case we will have to seek another form of poetics" (p. 47).
2. "…all of man's activities – including, of course, all of the arts, especially theatre – are political. And theatre is the most perfect artistic form of coercion" (p. 47).
3. "If I utter the word 'revolution,' obviously everyone will realize that I am talking about a radical change" (p. 138).
4. "Maybe theatre in itself is not revolutionary, but these theatrical forms are without a doubt a rehearsal of revolution" (p. 141).
5. "Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself. But have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution" (p. 155)!

It's interesting to note that in his 5th quote, not only does Boal repeat the same quote as number 3 above, but he adds an exclamation point.

Marxism and Theatre. In each of the following examples Boal uses Karl Marx's theories and ideas as the foundation for both the necessity of restructuring theatre arts as well as the ways in which Marxism can be used to improve theatre arts.

1. "This has been the path of the development followed by the theatre since the appearance of the bourgeoisie. In opposition to that

theatre, another must rise; one determined by a new class and which will dissent not only stylistically but in a much more radical manner" (p. 79).

2. "Art is immanent to all men, and not only to a select few; art is not to be sold, no more than are breathing, thinking, loving. Art is not merchandise. But for the bourgeoisie everything is a commodity: man is a commodity" (p. 109).
3. "The bourgeoisie already knows what the world is like, their world, and it is able to present images of this complete, finished world. The bourgeoisie presents the spectacle. On the other hand, the proletariat and the oppressed classes do not know yet what their world will be like; consequently their theatre will be the rehearsal, not the finished spectacle" (p. 142).
4. "Contrary to the bourgeoisie code of manners, the people's code allows and encourages the spectator to ask questions, to dialogue, to participate" (p. 142).
5. "I, a proletarian, am oppressed; we proletarians are oppressed; therefore the proletariat is oppressed" (p. 150).

It is from the combination of revolutionary practice and Marxist thought that Boal creates a carefully constructed manifesto for the reader. Boal is not interested in using theatre to entertain the masses, he is using theatre to enlighten and train the masses. His goal is to create the conditions in which:

> The Communists' disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Proletarians of all countries, unite! (Marx and Engels, 1848, p. http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch04.htm)

Understandings

Liberation

One of Boal's objectives with the techniques he describes in *Theatre of the Oppressed* is "the liberation of the spectator, on whom theatre has imposed a finished vision of the world" (p. 155). That finished vision is one in which the spectator is expected to leave the theatre released from any desire to truly examine the often harsh and difficult aspects of his life. Many of these aspects are caused by the need of the bourgeoisie to have both a continuous source of labor as well as consumers to purchase the goods created by said labor. The spectator is also socially conditioned, through watching the dominant traditional western theatre for ways in which to behave. The good succeed, the bad are punished, and as long as everyone participates as exactly as they should, stasis is returned and there will always be a happy ending. The question for Boal then becomes: how is the spectator able to break out of the world in which he is a passive being and perceive what he is seeing as not merely entertainment, but as a tool of control?

Boal's answer is to "change the people – 'spectators,' passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (Boal, 1974, p. 122). This change takes place through what Boal calls the "Poetics of the Oppressed" in which the spectator is encouraged to leave the audience and become a participant in the action of the story. Through different types of improvised games and stories, the spectator becomes the catalyst for change; he "delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonist role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change – in short, trains himself for real action" (Boal, 1974, p. 122).

The reason for turning the spectator into protagonist is so that he will be able to examine for himself, his own social conditions, and - once discovered - he will also, through the use of performance, discover ways in which he may be able to make changes to his world. According to Boal, through theatre, he will "have the opportunity to try out ideas, to rehearse all possibilities, and to verify them in practice, that is in theatrical practice" (1974, p. 141). Why does Boal believe that theatre is such an effective and efficient tool for discovering both the problems and possible solutions to oppressive social conditions?

For Boal "the truth of the matter is that the spectator-actor practices a real act even though he does it in a fictional manner" (1974, p. 141). Once the spectator is removed from one of passive observer, he becomes a protagonist in the action. He has a say in both the experience as well as possible solutions to the

problems presented. Boal's form of theatre "allows and encourages the spectator to ask questions, to dialogue, to participate" (1974, p. 142).

While the "experience" is created in an artificial and fictitious environment, "within its fictitious limits, the experience is a concrete one" (Boal, 1974, p. 141). Even a fictitious experience is an experience. When the spectator-actor is "acting out his attempt to organize a strike, he is concretely organizing a strike" (Boal, 1974, p. 141). Theatre becomes a tool for liberation.

According to Boal, the Aristotelian style of theatre is used for control. The structure of western theatre creates conditions in which the spectator is led into a cathartic experience and is purged of all desire to act against his oppressive conditions. Boal's theatre evokes in the spectator-actor "a desire to practice in reality the act he has rehearsed in the theatre. The practice of these theatrical forms "creates a sort of uneasy sense of the incompleteness that seeks fulfillment through real action" (Boal, 1974, p. 142). The spectator-actor leaves the theatre not only aware of his oppressive condition but ready to take the actions necessary to improve his world. In addition, he has been given the opportunity to rehearse possible outcomes to his action.

In *Theatre of the Oppressed* Boal gives the example of how the oppressed workers of a factory were able to use theatre to investigate the ways in which they could possibly improve the conditions at the factory. A key component is by rehearsing the ideas proposed; the participants were able to examine the possible outcomes of their choices. "The solutions ranged from the violent (blowing up the factory), to the non-violent (organizing a union to speak for the workers)" (Boal,

1974, pp. 140-141). The latter was chosen; however Boal stresses that, “It is not the place of the theatre to show the correct path, but only to offer the means by which all possible paths may be examined” (Boal, 1974, p. 141). In other words, theatre becomes the tool for the spectator-actor to discover for themselves the correct path. This is far different from a tool of their oppression.

The Power of the Media

Throughout this dissertation I have examined how Boal believes that, through theatre, people are taught (a) how to behave, (b) who is good, and (c) who is bad. In addition, the oppressors (in today’s world the bourgeoisie) “already know what the world is like, *their* world, and are able to present images of this complete, and finished world” (Boal, 1974, p. 142). In other words, theatre is a way for the bourgeoisie to control the masses through the reproduction of social and political ideals. These ideals are always in service of the bourgeoisie.

Through watching theatre the spectator not only learns what is right and wrong, he also learns how to behave and how to be controlled. This concept is not limited to theatre; most mass media, in general, tells us these things. In *Theatre of the Oppressed* Boal demonstrates how the media (Hollywood, in particular) creates programs that enforce a system of control. Boal describes his thoughts: “I am convinced that Hollywood has done more damage to our countries with the ‘innocent’ movies than with those that deal directly with more or less political themes” (Boal, 1974, p. 114). Boal believes that the Aristotelian system or what he calls the “coercive system of tragedy” (Boal, 1974, p. 46) appears in “disguised

form on television, in the movies" (p. 47) and is used as a powerful tool to "bridle the individual, to adjust him to what pre-exists" (p. 47).

While I was never told by my family and friends growing up that I was better because of my race and gender, I was told inadvertently (and at times overtly) by the media. Growing up I was socially conditioned with the understanding that because I was white and male, I was different, special and lucky. These ideas were reinforced through the media. Most of the characters in positions of power on television shows and in the movies were white males.

In movies that had an impact on my childhood, such as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, I did not realize that I was being taught the lesson that I was a member of the "dominate" class. I remember sitting in the theatre enjoying the famous dinner scene in the movie. In the scene, Indiana Jones is at a dinner party in India. He is sitting at the head of the table with the young Raja, a British General and an assistant to the Raja. At the end of the table are Indiana's friends: a white woman and a young Asian boy. Indiana's friends are surrounded by what seemed to me - as a young teenager - like strangely dressed men eating even stranger food (such as bugs and monkey brains.) It was a fun, yet creepy scene.

It wasn't until much later in life that I realized that the head of the table, where the important action was taking place, was set up very differently from the other end of the table. Through visual clues, the viewer is given not-so-subtle insight into who was "civilized and in charge" and who was "savage and buffoonish." Of the four people in position of power, two were white and the third (who was Indian) spoke perfect English with a British dialect.

At the other end of the table, there was very little conversation. Indiana's end of the table used knives and forks; at the other end of the table, they used their hands. Indiana Jones, the General and the assistant were dressed in western garb, while at the other end of the table, they were dressed in colorful Indian dress. Not only were they dressed "funny," the movie's director made a point to show that they also had bad hygiene when he had the woman smell the air, wrinkle her nose and then secretly spray the man sitting next to her.

When I first saw the show as a teenager I laughed at the men from India, they were dressed funny, ate strange foods, lounged around eating with their hands and even had body odor. Indiana, by contrast, was a gentleman, eating with his utensils and dressed appropriately according to my western sensibilities. Indiana was even speaking with ease and confidence, an equal to the young Raja and his assistant.

I began to realize that this innocent scene was not so innocent after all. What was in fact taking place is what Edward Said calls "Orentalism." According to Said, Orentalism is "the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all non-European people and cultures" (Said, 1978, p. 7). I was being told by the movie that my culture is better than the Eastern culture of India. In particular, I was also told through the innocent scene that a white, American male is equal to the ruler of another country and even more powerful than the ruler's own advisors. The hidden message of the dominance of the white male is still very much alive today.

On the TV show *The Bachelor*, the namesake of the show is a white male. In eleven seasons there has yet to be an African American bachelor. Not only is he white but there are 15 women fighting for his affections. I If they are successful they are awarded a “rose” and allowed to remain in the competition. In order to obtain this “rose” the women are willing and even encouraged to verbally, emotional and physically attack one another. Their self-worth and respect for one another is reduced to less than a value of a flower.

Another aspect of *The Bachelor* is that, as of the writing of this paper, only one minority (a Cuban-American) has made it into the later rounds, and several episodes were completely void of an African American participant. The thought of adding a gay or lesbian contestant into the mix does not seem to be even a remote possibility. A white male, is always the winner, and if he is always the winner and, in fact, always the only one in the race (pun intended) then the message is that he is a more desirable sexual partner than all other races of men, women, gays and lesbians. Though this is not said explicitly; the message is clearly there hidden below the surface. Where does this message come from?

In the field of education the hidden lessons learned by students is known as the “hidden curriculum.” Curriculum scholar Peter McLaren describes the hidden curriculum as that which “deals with the ways in which knowledge and behavior get constructed, outside the usual course materials and formally scheduled lessons” (1998, p. 187). In other words, there is the overt curriculum that is what is being taught on the surface (i.e. a history class only featuring white

men as inventors). The hidden curriculum would be that no minorities or women were ever great inventors.

The "overt curriculum" of *The Bachelor* is: this is a show about finding true love. All of the advertising for the program is geared around the innocent-seeming idea that love can conquer all. The "hidden curriculum" is that if you are a white male, you are dominant over all women and other races and you do not have to "find" true love; you simply select from a harem of women, because you are superior. How can you not be? Just look at TV shows like the *The Bachelor* and movies such as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. Like the bachelor and Indiana Jones, I am a white male and a member of the dominate class in the United States. But am I truly better? Am I an oppressor?

Horizons

A hermeneutic analysis ends with a fusion of the horizons of the reader with their discoveries and understanding from the text. The fusion of my horizons with Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* takes place with the understanding that through experience one is able to recognize their oppressive condition, and once recognized, seek ways to improve and change those conditions. For me, to realize that I am both oppressor and oppressed it was necessary for me to have "lived experiences."

In contrast to Boal's "theatrical experience," my path to discovering that I was both oppressor and oppressed was through what I will call a "lived experience." The catalysts for my discoveries were from several key events in my life. I have lived in and/or visited many parts of the United States and Europe. My

father was in the army, and we moved every two or three years. As a result of all the moving, I grew up with neighbors and friends of many different races and religions. The lifestyle in which I was raised afforded me many different kinds of experiences which led me to discover the differences between my life and others'. Those experiences showed me that there is, in fact, racism, prejudice and sexism.

I firmly believe that, like an alcoholic, I have a disease that I must struggle to control and overcome. I have to struggle daily to not fall into the temptation (which would be very easy to do) to support racist, gendered and/or anti-gay comments both from others and myself. For example: it would be very easy for me to want to call the Hispanic woman who cut me off in her car a racist or gendered name under my breath. Only in realizing that I am capable of doing so reminds me that racism and sexism exists within me, and I must continue to improve and fight against it. I believe that most privileged people think a racist thought or say an offensive joke, and then explain it away to others, and - more importantly - to themselves as "they are not racist or sexist" they were just "angry or only joking." No, they are racist and are simply in a form of denial.

Knowledge and acceptance can foster change, understanding, and compassion. Below are examples of situations I found myself in early in life which forced me to recognize that I was in a culturally dominate position. These examples are the key moments in my life when, for the first time, I was the "other."

A Different Color

Growing up I went to two different high schools. My first high school was in Minnesota with a student body that was 95% white. The high school from which I graduated was attended by a very diverse body of students. The student body was comprised of both children of military parents and locals. It was roughly about 40% African America, 40% White, 10% Hispanic and 10% Asian. With such diversity I did not believe that there could possibly be the existence of any racial tensions.

The school held an intramural basketball tournament and because of my size I was asked by some fellow students to play on their team. I was new to the school and enjoyed playing basketball, so I happily accepted. To the best of my recollection, I was the only white person who showed up to participate. As a result of being the only white person, I remember running up and down the court to the chants from the crowd of “throw the white boy the ball” and “give it to the Jew boy!” While I had grown up in a multi-cultural world, this was the first time I can remember being the absolute minority. It was an uncomfortable feeling.

When I made a shot I was laughed at, and when I missed, I was ridiculed. I dealt with it with humor and egging the crowd on either way. The humor was not from a place of joy but from a place of protection, of fear. That day, for the first time, I experienced what it felt like to be the minority.

Do You Speak English?

When I was nine years old my family lived in Athens, Greece. I did not speak Greek. Though we lived “off-base” in a Greek neighborhood, I attended an

English-speaking school. One afternoon after school, I was playing with some friends, lost track of time and realized that I was going to miss my bus. I grabbed my Evel Knievel lunch box, raced to my bus and arrived just as it was pulling away. I remember chasing after the bus, screaming for the driver to stop. As the bus continued to pull away, I realized that I was now stranded in a country where I did not speak the language. How was I going to get home? I was miles away from my house; I had no money, no way to communicate with someone about my situation. I was terrified.

Fortunately I was on school grounds. A bus monitor saw me in tears and took me to an assistant principal who drove me home. Arguments about immigration and English-only policies have a much stronger impact when you see them through the eyes of a nine-year-old, stranded in another country without a grasp of the language. The argument isn't: "what is right or wrong?" The argument is: "how do we help the child?"

The Shower

When I was twenty years old, I had my first truly professional acting job. I was hired as an actor for an outdoor drama in North Carolina. As a part of my contract I was also a "swing dancer," meaning I would take over for one of the hired dancers in case of an injury, or if they needed the night off.

A few weeks into the season I was asked to fill in. The dancers were required to wear body make-up which was extremely difficult to take off. After the show, you had to shower so that your clothes would not be stained. For the first time in my life, I found myself as one of only two heterosexuals in a shower

with twelve homosexual men. I became extremely uncomfortable but not for the reason I expected.

Before the shower I would have thought my discomfort would have been from a culturally-learned fear of being sexualized by other men. In fact, my discomfort was because the gay men were verbally joking around in the shower. The style of humor was the same as I had heard straight men use. It was crude locker room teasing and humor, except in this instance it had a distinctly homosexual context. I was uncomfortable because I had no frame of reference for the joking. I had to play along like I understood and/or agreed with the jokes, and teasing. It made me realize what a homosexual man must feel like in shower full of straight men. I felt uncomfortable, disconnected and, although they knew I was straight and did not mind me sharing the same shower, I felt somewhat guilty that I was an interloper in their world.

While uncomfortable, I did not have the additional fear of the discovery of who I really was to worry about. Openly gay men are not usually openly accepted into a shower. If a gay man is discovered in a shower of a sports team, they face the strong possibility of violence. For the first time, I realized that being homosexual is no more of a choice than my choice of being a heterosexual. I had it easy: all I had to do was leave the shower to feel comfortable. However, that shower was one of the few places my gay friends could be themselves.

Women in the Workforce

One of the most difficult situations I encounter these days is the objectification of women by men, and sadly in some cases even by other women

in the workplace. I would say that 99% of my male friends and colleagues would never dream of telling a racist joke, yet a majority of them have no problem making a sexual or derogatory comment about a female coworker. It is always surprising to me that this behavior ranges from the expected (in bars, sporting events, etc.) to the unexpected (in academia and business meetings).

I have been in professional situations in which a female colleague has left the room, and the men suddenly make comments about her that if those same comments were made about their wives or daughters, they would physically attack the person making the comments. I have to admit I am often at a loss as to how to deal with the situation, and to my shame, I usually take the cowardly role of quiet spectator. However, if I am in a position of power, I do try to put a stop to the comments. Sadly, it seems that while we may have made progress as a society in many areas, the objectification of women in the workplace has a long way to go.

The Truth Shall Set You Free

It was through being placed into the shoes of the "other" that I began to see that there were other perspectives that I had no idea existed. Almost everything that I saw in the media mirrored my experience. The cast of the TV shows were predominantly white, and many of the situations they faced were similar to my white, middle class background. I had heard about racism, sexism and classism, but I wrongly assumed that they were antiquated ideas of the past. I believed that these things had been defeated in the 60's by the Reverend Martin

Luther King and Gloria Steinem. The world was a better place, and it was… for me.

Ultimately I came to realize that I was being told that I was "one of the chosen." This was done so that those who are really in the position of power could use me as a tool to continue oppressing… even me. Boal states that "theatre is the most perfect artistic form of coercion" (1974, p. 39), and here I was being coerced into being a willing participant in the control and oppression of myself.

In the text *The Redneck Manifesto* essayist Jim Goad explains that "people confuse 'good ol' boys' with the 'old boys' network" (1997, p. 39). He continues to explain how these terms are wrongly intertwined:

> The good ol' boys are rock quarrymen; the old boys' network is the Rockefellers. The old boys' network represents the entrenched elites whose white talons have been wrapped around a disproportionate percentage of wealth and power for thousands of years. The good 'ol boys are the guys in the aluminum trailers and rusted-out trucks who keep wondering when they'll finally get a chance to join the old boys' network. (1997, p. 39)

In essence the good ol' boys are used by the old boys' network as a tool for their control. They are afforded just enough privilege so that they fooled into believing they are better than others and, in turn, are used to oppress others. I am a "good ol' boy." Only through the "negative" experience in which I was the "other" was I able to recognize that and begin to work towards true change.

I taught a class titled “Understanding the Culturally Diverse Child.” I had people question “what did I, a white male, know about cultural diversity?” The class was attended by 90%, white, middle class, female students. I may have limited experience with being a minority, but I have a tremendous amount of experience of overcoming prejudice. I knew virtually every argument and act of resistance that would come from the white students because I had to recognize and even continue to overcome them myself. I overcame my resistance to my prejudices because I could no longer ignore that these prejudices led to inequality and injustice. I may not be the best qualified to teach a minority student what it is like to overcome oppression, but I am extremely qualified to teach white students how to understand and realize that they are “privileged” just enough to be used as a tool by the oppressors.

Conclusion

When I began my study of Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* I thought that many of the discoveries I would make as a result of the analysis would be theatrical in nature. In particular I believed that I would come to a greater understanding about his technical approach to acting and directing. However what I discovered about both Boal and myself was much more important than acting exercises. This is not to say that *Theatre of the Oppressed* is not an excellent acting text. I have always said that I believe the first three sections of his text are one of the most interesting and concise examinations of the history and traditions of western theatre. It would be a required text in any “History of Theatre” class I was to teach.

In the last two sections of *Theatre of the Oppressed* Boal takes great care to describe the exercises he has developed which are crucial to the creation of an actor/spectator. He also describes in great detail how he and his fellow performers at the Arena Theatre developed the ideas which led to his theatre of the oppressed. The two sections combined may be used as a blueprint by any artist who would like to create a theatre company based on Boal's ideas. But that is not the heart of what I discovered.

I discovered that theatre is a tool for oppression. I realized I was a tool of the oppressors as well. But most important of all, I discovered that theatre can be a weapon for education. The educational system is dominated by programs such as "No Child Left Behind" which require schools to continually meet standards that are based on how well a student scores on a test. There is very little, if any, opportunity for the students to explore their ideas, challenges and social conditions. Challenging situations such as school bullying are addressed by "experts" who often create generic lesson plans and posters based on their research. These lesson plans can be a "one size fits all" solution to an extremely personal problem. They are also created by those who are not experiencing the bullying themselves.

Boal believes that "those responsible for theatrical performances are in general people who belong directly or indirectly to the ruling class; obviously their finished images will be reflections of themselves" (Boal, 1974, p. 155). In the quote above the word "education" may be substituted for "theatrical performance." The school psychiatrists, teachers and University Academics are

the “ruling classes” of the schools. Since they are the ruling class many of the anti-bullying programs have the potential to be created as a reflection of what the expert believes is the problems and the solution.

I am not marginalizing these experts; however, Boal offers a way for the students to be the co-creators of their own solutions to the problem. An anti-bullying program created on the foundational ideas and exercises found in *Theatre of the Oppressed* would actively involve the students. Students at a school would be given the opportunity, in a safe environment, to demonstrate the particular type bullying they face such as physical, verbal or cyber. Once the educator understands the types of bullying the students face, he would then have the students offer solutions to the bullying. The students would then act out the solutions to discover the most optimal choices to end the particular type of bullying with which they are faced. The students will have the “opportunity to try out ideas, to rehearse all the possibilities, and to verify them in practice, that is in theatrical practice” (Boal, 1974, p. 141).

As a form of education theory, Boal offers an alternative to the “Banking System” in education. Paulo Freire describes the Banking System as when “education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). In other words, the teacher deposits information into the brains of his students, like money into a bank. The students hold onto the information (money) until they need to withdraw it for a test. Once used, it is no longer available because new information is being deposited.

Under this Banking System the teachers task is “to ‘fill’ the students with the contents of his narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance” (Freire, 1970, p. 71). With Boal, the teacher and students are equal as “artists of education,” and thus “Art is a form of knowledge: the artists, therefore has the obligation of interpreting reality, making it understandable” (Boal, 1974, p. 171). Once students are active participants in interpreting their own reality new possibilities and new understandings are limitless.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: A New Beginning

Dialogue

This study began with a quote from arts education scholar Elliot Eisner about the power of creative dialogue. According to Eisner: through creative dialogue "things unknown can be uncovered" (Eisner, 1998, p. 27). We have now reached the point in my study in which I must examine what was once unknown and what has now been uncovered.

The main methodology used in this study was a hermeneutical analysis in the form of a "hermeneutic arch." Hermeneutics offers an approach in which the researcher may deeply analyze texts and therefore hopefully create new understandings and meanings from those texts.

Hermeneutics has many advantages in its use as a tool for text analysis. Shaun Gallagher, author of *Hermeneutics and Education*, explains why hermeneutics was used by the ancient Greeks:

> The relationship between the interpretation of poetry and the acquisition of knowledge in ancient Greek sources shows that the educational value of poetry did not hinge on learning to author it, but on learning to take wisdom from it, that is, on the process of interpretation. (1992, p. 1)

It is in the idea of interpretation of poetry (text) where the theatre arts education researcher may discover new meanings from old and new texts. Hermeneutics "involves building a complex series of bridges between reader and text, text and author, present and past, one society or social circumstance and another" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 5).

Through the use of hermeneutical analysis, the relationship between the writer and text, and a reader and text becomes a dialectical relationship. A "dialectical relationship" is a conversation between writer, reader and the text. This conversation leads to new interpretations. These interpretations are based on both the historical conditions of the writer as well as the reader. "The historical distance between reader and author, between their relative circumstances and concerns, accounts for a difference of meaning, an interpretive productivity that goes beyond original intention" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 126**).** It is through the intersection of the reader's and the writer's individual life experiences that opportunities arise for new understandings of the text.

This chapter will examine the overall discoveries I have made in conducting the study of Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* and Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Many of the discoveries involve the relationship between Stanislavski and Boal; however, it would not be a hermeneutic analysis if I did not examine what I have learned about my understandings of the texts. In the hermeneutic tradition I must also examine what I have discovered about myself.

The Importance of History

My most important discovery made from conducting a hermeneutic analysis is the importance of researching the historical, social and political conditions of the authors in the study. When I began this study I had only a superficial understanding of this importance. I had assumed that what I would learn would only serve as a background to what I might uncover in my analysis. As I began my analysis I started to realize that through the histories (or what I will

now refer to as horizons of the authors) “everything comes to be known within a context and never in isolation” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 60).

I used autobiographies and biographies for the authors’ histories. History books were used to learn about the cultural, social, economic and political conditions of the countries in which the authors lived. I have always been a student of history, but it was not until I began the naïve reading that I began to understand how my knowledge of the authors and their horizons enhanced my understanding of the texts.

Boal’s and Stanislavski’s ideas about the theatre arts did not spring forth into the world as wholly formed theories; rather, they were shaped by the interaction between the authors’ relationships with the worlds in which they lived. Stanislavski was born into a wealthy family who built a theatre in their home. His social-economic conditions freed him to explore theatre. Boal was also born into a family that could afford to send him not only to a University in Brazil but to Columbia University in New York City. In New York, Boal was able to study with some of the leading theatre artists, poets and writers who lived in New York in the mid-nineteen fifties. His time in New York led to an invitation to become a director at the Arena Theatre. Had they each been born into a peasant family, these two theatre theorists may not have had the opportunity to develop their respective systems of performing.

An example of the fusion of horizons which led to a new discovery may be found in the choice of styles each author used. Before I began my study I had always believed that *An Actor Prepares* to be a strict guidebook for the

Stanislavski System. In contrast, I thought of Boal's text as a free and liberating text. These ideas were not based on any close reading of the texts. They were based on superficial readings in which I was looking for information to which I was connected. The conceptions of the two texts were based solely on what I perceived to be the message from each author. To me, Stanislavski's message was a collection of acting exercises, while Boal's message was a unique way to approach what I thought of as a type of community theatre. Because I had always held Stanislavski in such high esteem, I believed it to be a closed canonical text. *An Actor Prepares* was to be study as gospel. *Theatre of the Oppressed* was about liberation and therefore the text was free and open. It was created to overthrow oppression so it could not be a closed text. As discussed in the "Epic Text" section of this study, an open text is one in which the reader is free to create their own interpretations of the text. A closed or epic text is one in which the author leads the reader to very specific conclusions.

The hermeneutical analysis actually revealed the texts to be the opposite of what I initially believed. Stanislavski is seeking different approaches for an actor to live a truthfully lived experience. Since there are many ways this can be accomplished, he chose a semi-fictional narrative. This choice allows the reader to decide for himself what methods would work best. Boal's intended outcome for the reader is to overthrow the oppressive conditions in his life. As a result he chose the epic form for his structure. This epic form leads the reader to very specific conclusions with very little opportunity for him to make choices about what the author would like for him to do.

An equally important discovery was the importance of my own horizon as reader and researcher. It is only through my personal perspective that I can make new discoveries and insights from the text. The conclusion of chapters two and three involve a great deal of introspection. It was only through a clearer understanding of my horizons that I could make a connection between the texts and my discoveries. In the conclusion of the Stanislavski chapter, I describe how I realized my experience with the film *When Harry Met Sally* was analogous to what I learned about *An Actor Prepares*. By understanding how I have changed as a person, I was able to see how I can make new discoveries from old texts. In Boal's chapter, I had to examine my role as both oppressor and oppressed in order to realize what Boal means when he writes that he wants to liberate the spectator and "once more make theatre their own" (1974, p. 119). The meeting of horizons is the linchpin in which all discoveries are held together.

Textbook

The most obvious practical intersection found between Boal and Stanislavski is in Boal's use of Stanislavski in the early years of the Arena Theatre. In *Theatre of the* Oppressed Boal briefly mentions "Stanislavski was minutely analyzed word by word and practiced from nine in the morning until it was time to appear on stage" (Boal, 1974, p. 160).

In his autobiography Boal goes into greater detail on how he was influenced by Stanislavski even titling a section "Stanislavski" (Boal, 2001, pp. 144-145). Boal continues stating "The study of Stanislavski was a cornerstone of my career. It was he who systematized a method which helps the actor to seek,

within him- or her-self, ideas and emotions attributed to the characters" (Boal, 2001, p. 147). The ideas that Stanislavski created were not a passing influence on Boal they were "a cornerstone" to him.

Stanislavski intersected with Boal in the years in which he was creating the foundations he would later use to create his own system of performing. The influence of Stanislavski is found when Boal "asked the actors to study the first chapters of *An Actor Prepares*, and told them we would start experimenting with them on the first day of rehearsal, at 2 p.m. on the dot" (Boal, 2001, p. 144). The choice of the phrase "on the dot" is an obvious reference to *An Actor Prepares* when Kostya was late to rehearsal and was chastised by the assistant director with the explanation: "We all came here full of enthusiasm for the work waiting to be done, and now thanks to you, that mood has been destroyed" (Stanislavski, 1936, p. 3). It was a painful lesson for Kostya on the necessities of being on time, and one that was taken up and championed by Boal.

An important intersection between Boal and Stanislavski is when Boal briefly describes the way rehearsals were conducted in the early years of the Arena Theatre. Due to the small space of the theatre the actors had to rehearse and perform very closely to each other and the audience. Boal saw this as a benefit since the actors now "had to play truthfully, to be expressive in all directions" (Boal, 2001, p. 145). The quote takes place within Boal's "Stanislavski" section in his autobiography. He appears to be referencing Stanislavski's idea that "to play true means to be right, logical, coherent, to think, strive, feel and act in unison with your role" (Stanislavski, 1936, p. 15). Boal's use of the term "play

truthfully" shows that he believed, like Stanislavski, that particularly with a "traditional" production such as his production of Tartuffe the actors must experience the part they are playing.

Ironically, given his strong admiration for Stanislavski, in *Theatre of the Oppressed* Boal levies a strong criticism against realism. Stanislavski is considered to be the father of realism in theatre. One of the best examples of Boal's anti-realism thoughts is when he praises Bertolt Brecht for having the anti-realism view that "the artist's duty consists not in showing true things but in revealing how things truly are" (1974, p. 112). For Boal, theatre should not be about arousing emotions but rather about demanding decisions (1974, p. 106). Why then is Boal such a staunch critic of realism, but not of Stanislavski, especially in light of Karl Marx's support of realism?

In *Theatre of the Oppressed* Boal defends Marx's support of realism by making the contention that most people misunderstand the way in which Marx supported realism. According to Boal, Marx was in fact "referring to realism in the novel, which produced extensive sociological studies of bourgeoisie life" (p. 76). According to Boal: "The main realist limitation in the theatre consists in its presenting a reality which is supposedly already known" (p. 76). Boal believes that the world that is known is the bourgeoisie world, and it presents "images of this complete finished world" (1974, p. 142). As a result, realism in theatre (and film and television) moved from a criticism of bourgeoisie life, that Boal believes Marx sought, into a way for the bourgeoisie "to reinforce the values revered by capitalist society, such as the art and ability to achieve success in life, through free

enterprise" (p. 77). In short, realism went from the Marxist idea of being a tool to show oppression, to a bourgeoisie tool of oppression.

The final question is how does Boal maintain his support of Stanislavski despite Stanislavski's major influence on realism in theatre? I contend that it is because Stanislavski does not argue for "realism" but rather an "artistic truth." That is to say that because Stanislavski himself does not focus or support any one style; he only cares that whatever style chosen (absurdist, realist, etc.) be supported by an artist truthfully living within the given circumstances. This removes Stanislavski from the stereotypical realm of director/actor of realism he is traditionally associated with. Once freed from this stereotype, Stanislavski's theories may be seen as the system he sought rather than a historical acting style. Boal is able to use Stanislavski as a textbook because his System was effective to his needs. If he believed it to be apolitical it would not contradict with his own theories on the role of the performer.

The Government

The treatment each received under their respective governments was extremely different and is a major point of diversion both artistically and politically between the two men. Stanislavski was protected by his government during intellectual and artistic purges. Boal was tortured and exiled during his country's purges.

Stanislavski created many of his foundational ideas during the Marxist revolution in Russia and under the Soviet governments of Lenin and Stalin. Though a supporter of the communist party, Stanislavski did not openly espouse

Marxist ideology, but carefully avoided any overt political concerns. There is no record of Stanislavski attempting to shape the ideas and/or ideals of the new Soviet Union like others in Russian theatre such as Stanislavski's former student Meyerhold. Meyerhold's championing of absurdist theatre would lead to his arrest and murder by Stalin's government. Because of Stanislavski's national and international success and apparent political ambivalence, he was able to fit the mold of true Russian patriot and artist under both the Czarist and Communist governments.

By championing theatre and not political parties Stanislavski avoided the dangers of political upheaval. Stanislavski was able to avoid the dangers because of his early support of Lenin and the popularity of the Moscow Art Theatre. Many members of the new communist party wanted to close the theatre seeing it as a relic of an oppressive era. As discussed in the Biography of Stanislavski in this paper, Lenin believed that "If there is one theatre from the past, which we must save and preserve, it is, of course, the Art Theatre" (*Stanislavski for Beginners*, Allen, 1999, p. 94). The sentiment was felt by both Lenin and the eventual ruler Stalin. Another reason for Stanislavski's protection by the communist hierarchy may be found as discussed previously in Karl Marx's support of realism.

Augusto Boal radicalized his Marxist and theatrical ideas under a fascist Brazilian military government. Boal chose not to ignore the political conditions under which he lived. He openly challenged the political system and as a result his ideas on the uses of theatre became increasingly politicized and radicalized. He would develop different approaches to performance that would challenge the

government. Theatre was a tool to encourage the spectators to oppose the government. The politicizing of the audiences to overthrow the government became very dangerous. When the government cracked down on anyone involved with the opposition, Boal became a key target.

Stanislavski used whatever he needed to do to reach his goal, and had there been no revolution, Stanislavski would have, probably, still developed his system. There's a cult of the individual in play here, a bourgeois focus which is ironic given his station in the Leninist-Marxist regime. This is counter to Boal, who attempts to avoid such individualism but emphasizing the "groupness" or collective of his theatre troupe and his solidarity with the oppressed.

The following sections contain additional examples of the ways in which Stanislavski and Boal addressed confrontations with their respective governments. Stanislavski's reaction may be seen from the perspective of how the individual address the situation. Boal's reactions demonstrate how one man is affected as a result of the choices made by a group of people.

Police Censorship

Stanislavski. Stanislavski believed that theatre should be accessible to all people regardless of their social and/or economic class. As described in the Stanislavski chapter of this study, the initial name of the company was actually the Open Art Theatre (Benedetti, 1988, p. 85). The Open Art theatre was to be created for "middle- or lower-middle-class audiences" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 69). In the text *Stanislavsky: A Biography*, author Jean Benedetti quotes Stanislavski's reasons for placing his focus with the people rather than the bourgeoisie:

> Remember, we are attempting to bring light into the lives of the poorer classes, to give them a few moments of beauty in the darkness that surrounds them. We are trying to create the first rational, moral public theatre and it's to this lofty aim we dedicate our lives. (Ibid) (Benedetti, 1988, p. 69)

Stanislavski's reasons for creating a theatre for the "poorer classes" shows possible insight into his thoughts on the people he would like to reach as well as his thoughts on the theatre they had access to.

There is evidence in the above quote that Stanislavski is viewing the poorer classes from a bourgeoisie perspective. Stanislavski may assume that the poor are living lives surrounded in darkness, a condition which is an absolute. The statement demonstrates that Stanislavski might believe that there is no light for the poorer classes, no hope, and most importantly no "beauty." The concept of beauty is conditioned by one's own personal history and experiences. So how could a wealthy factory owner understand what a poor peasant factory worker would find beautiful? According to the information found within the quote, Stanislavski may have believed that the peasant's certainly did not find beauty, rationality and, more importantly, "morality" in the theatre they were watching. If he wanted to bring them a "moral theatre" then the only theatre experienced by the poorer classes must have been one that was both irrational and immoral. He describes how the poorer classes needed a respite from their dark lives filled with dark artistic experiences.

Stanislavski may have believed the poor lacked the moral and rational bourgeoisie principles he believed in and this may have been another reason he created a theatre for the people. However, this leads to the notion that the theatre he created would have to be his type of theatre, one in which he was going to bring his concept of beauty and morality into the lives of the peasants. This would create the conditions in which his idea of theatre would also lead to plays that were based on his thoughts on what the poorer class needed with no or limited discussion on whether the poorer classes even wanted to watch his type of theatre. According to Stanislavski this would be no easy challenge as he himself calls it a "lofty aim." Lofty in its definition means a type of noble purpose, and Stanislavski may have thought who better to take on that purpose than him? Since he is of a higher class he might have believed he knew what is best for the poorer classes. The idea of a theatre created for a group of people is precisely the type of theatre that Boal is fighting against, a theatre in which the peoples are being shown a "finished version of the world" (1974, p. 155), the bourgeoisie world.

The young theatre company gave a special performance to factory workers without permission from the Czarist government and as a result was warned by the "Chief of Police, Trepov" (Benedetti, 1988, p. 85) that they ran the risk of imprisonment if they ran the production again without proper approval. Trepov explained that the company needed to have approval from a censor who was responsible for vetting material "intended for working class audiences" (Benedetti, 1998, p. 85). Upset that factory workers had limited access to the

theatre, Stanislavski, a factory owner himself, “decided to build a fully-equipped theatre at his factory for the workers” (Benedetti, 1988, p. 85).

There is an additional idea that must be explored, and it is that although Stanislavski may have provided the building, the workers were the ones who actually performed and directed the productions. There is no evidence that Stanislavski turned the theatre over to the factory workers because he felt they should run their own theatre. It may have been that he did so because he was busy with The Moscow Art Theatre since, according to Benedetti “when he could Stanislavski attended rehearsals and gave notes” (1988, p. 85). Because of censorship Stanislavski’s changed his initial goal of bringing The Moscow Art Theatre to the factory workers.

Boal. The Arena Theatre Company was putting on a new musical which had an overtly anti-government message. As a result “the censors cut whatever could be deemed critical” (Boal, 2001, p. 245). After going back and forth, the censor reassured them that everything was fine and the play could take place. Boal learned through a friend that the censor was lying, in his autobiography he describes what occurred:

> …the singers were going to jail straight after the show: they could not be arrested while they were working. They took the opportunity to sing songs that had been banned – since they were going to be arrested anyway, why economies the transgression? (Boal, 2001, p. 245)

Rather than avoid jail by canceling the production, the members of Arena Theatre chose to not only perform, but also to add in the songs which were

banned. They decided that if they were going to jail, they should give the government a real reason to arrest them.

After being released from jail the members of Arena Theatre would continue to pick and choose their battles with the censors, often times having to cloak their political messages through sarcasm and double entendre.

Each man struggled with censorship but chose to fight it in different ways. Stanislavski, as a member of the wealthy merchant class, worked within the system to create a place for the workers to meet and create theatre for themselves. His position as a factory owner might be seen as a reason why Stanislavski decided it would be best to fight government censorship covertly. He may have been reluctant to run the risk of losing his principle source of income and standing within Russian society. If Stanislavski chose to put on the performance the government may have decided to arrest him, take him away and/or ban him from his business. Rather than risk losing everything, Stanislavski used his money and influence in a way he believed would accomplish his goal of bringing theatre to the people (Benedetti, 1988, p. 85) but would not affect him, his business or the Moscow Art Theatre.

Boal was a member of a small theatre group which possessed very little political influence. Boal did not have the same social conditions as Stanislavski. He worked with small theatre company that was struggling to survive; as a result his strongest option to fight government censorship was to defy the government directly and as a result the entire theatre company was arrested.

Government Reactions

Stanislavski. When the Russian revolution took place the new Soviet government confiscated all private property. They arrested, jailed and executed many members of the Russian bourgeoisie. When Stalin came to power he instituted a political purge in which many participants of the intellectual and artistic community were arrested and tortured as enemies of the state. As discussed frequently throughout this study, rather than being jailed (or worse), Stanislavski was celebrated as an artistic hero of the proletariat. Despite losing all of his wealth, Stanislavski was given a salary and nice accommodations by the Communist Party. While others were not allowed to leave the Soviet Union, Stanislavski was allowed to take the Moscow Art Theatre on a world tour. Stanislavski, the former bourgeoisie factory owner of Czarist Russia, died a communist proletariat hero of the Soviet Union.

Boal. In 1964, when the military in Brazil set up a dictatorship, Boal was forced to leave the city for the countryside. He stayed there for several months out of fear for his life. The new government was rounding up and arresting anyone they believed to be a threat to the new régime. Boal learned that he was not being sought and returned to Sao Paulo and the Arena Theatre.

Over the next several years Boal and his fellow artists at the Arena Theatre put on productions which criticized the new military dictatorship and their oppressive policies. In the late 1960's a strike was called for by members of the government opposition. During one of the strikes a University student was murdered by the state police. The student's death led to nationwide strikes and

protests and also violent attacks on Brazil's military and banking industry by "robbing banks and bombing barracks" (Williamson, p. 428). After a militant group kidnapped the ambassador to the United States, the government increased its use of force and "the guerrillas were ground down by harsh repressive methods, which included the systematic torture of suspects by the secret police and the use of shadowy paramilitary death squads to root out subversives" (Williamson, p. 428). Because members of the theatre supported the strikes, workers' rights and criticism of the government, they would be labeled as subversives by the authorities. Boal was deemed an enemy of the state, imprisoned, tortured and eventually exiled from Brazil.

In the examples above, both Stanislavski and Boal experienced political turmoil within their respective countries with very different outcomes. Stanislavski became a hero to the communist cause that he cared very little about. Boal was exiled because of his Marxist beliefs. Stanislavski spent his life fighting for his freedom to practice theatre the way he wanted despite whoever was in the position of power. His focus was on the creation of the perfect stage production.

Boal developed his theories as a way to fight for his belief that theatre can be used as a weapon for change. Good theatre was not the intended outcome but only meant to be a very effective tool for liberation. Stanislavski may be seen as the rugged individual who succeeded on sheer force of will, and Boal as a member of a collective fighting for the rights of others.

Revolution

Through the examination of their lives and the choices they made both men were influenced by the political and social climate. Stanislavski's ideas of theatre were formed in spite of his circumstances because he chose to remain outside politics. Two of the definitions of "revolution" are as follows: "The overthrow of one government and its replacement with another" and "a sudden or momentous change in a situation" (http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/revolution). Stanislavski would use the latter of the two. definitions to create a revolution in theatre arts training. He revolutionized the ways in which theatre artist practitioners approached all aspects of theatre arts. His revolutionary ideas would create a world where new ways of teaching acting, performing on stage, directing and designing sets and costumes would forever be changed.

Stanislavski's ultimate goal was the creation of an acting system that would create truth in the performer and lead to a situation in which the audience would "sense the emotions and discover the thoughts of the people participating on stage" (Stanislavski, 1936, p. 213). The audience has a symbiotic experience with what is taking place and as a result has an emotional connection to the characters in the story.

Stanislavski was rebelling against the styles of performance that he experienced both as an actor and an audience member during the time period in which he lived. These styles often involved artistic tricks which entertained the

audience but did not create a deeper emotional experience for them. This was a revolutionary concept for actors and theatre as a whole.

While revolutionary in its approach to actor training, it was not the revolutionary theatre that Boal would develop. Stanislavski succeeded in spite of the tumultuous world around him. His initial fortune of being born into a wealthy family afforded him opportunities that enabled him to work within the system. For example, the government did not allow him to put on theatre for factory workers, so he built a theatre for them to put on their own productions. His reasons for building the theatre were not to liberate the workers as Boal's reason would be. Stanislavski was interested in bring theatre to the factory workers as a way to culturally improve their lives.

Stanislavski did take an active part in political situations that he felt he could not ignore, such as his support of the national strike in 1904. However, for Stanislavski, theatre always took priority over of the political. In his biography, author Jean Benedetti describes how during one of the particular violent strikes "Stanislavski insisted that rehearsals for *Woe From Wit* continue despite gunfire outside" (1988, p. 156). It was because of the international success of his theatre and Stanislavski's early concern and support for the proletariat workers that he was able to transition from one political extreme to the other.

This transformation, however, is another example of things happening in spite of, rather than the result of anything that Stanislavski actively sought. Despite the fact that a battle was taking place outside his doors, Stanislavski continued to rehearse. He could have taken up arms for one side or the other, he

could have shut down the theatre as a show of support and/or he could have put on plays that would serve to support a cause or expose the opposition. Stanislavski did none of these and, in fact, only stopped rehearsals when the cast finally complained that they were worried about their own safety. While revolutionary in its approach to actor training actor, *An Actor Prepares* was not the revolutionary theatre that Boal would develop.

While Boal's ideas are revolutionary, such as creating the conditions for the spectator to become the actor, it is in the use of his theatre to foster the conditions to create a cultural revolution" or "the overthrow of one government and its replacement with another" (http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/revolution) that he is truly interested.

Boal used the political climate of his time in the creation of his "revolutionary theatre." He intended *Theatre of the Oppressed* to be a manifesto or a blueprint for the artist as revolutionary. The "artist revolutionary" could read *Theatre of the Oppressed* and from the text discover how theatre has been used as a tool for oppression. The artist could then use the exercises described by Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed"* as a weapon for liberation from oppressive social-economic conditions. Boal's theatre is a weapon to take control from the ruling class. Boal's goal was to create a system that would lead to the liberation of the spectator/actor.

Like Stanislavski, Boal came from a wealthy family, however, they did not have the same social-economic clout that Stanislavski's family held. Once he returned from his studies in the United States, Boal chose theatre over the

lucrative career of chemical engineering. His experiences in New York crystalized his desire to work in the theatre, and the Arena Theatre afforded him the opportunity. Stanislavski's initial wealth and subsequent government support freed him of the worries of food, clothing and shelter. Boal did not have those luxuries, and in his autobiography he describes some of the challenges he and his fellow actors faced in creating a theatre for the people: "There was a contradiction, we knew: we were searching for the poor exploited worker, but we ourselves had to eat" (Boal, 2001, p. 182).

Boal and his fellow actors were barely living above the poverty line. When a show was successful they had food, when it was not or they were between productions, they would survive through sharing what little they could afford. Rather than taking advantage of his family's connections, leave theatre and return to a comfortable life as a chemical engineer, Boal remained with his love of theatre. As a result of this type of existence Boal experienced the difficult conditions that most of the people in Brazil lived with, a daily struggle for the basic necessities.

Boal also saw the oppressive conditions imposed by the government which kept political and economic resources in the hands of few at the expense of the many. Through his own economic struggles Boal began to see the need for change and as a result began changing his ideas on what theatre should be. He began to realize that he could no longer simply create theatre as a distraction or for entertainment. Boal began creating a type of theatre in which the spectator "by stages frees himself from his condition of spectator and takes on that of actor, in

which he ceases to be an object and becomes a subject, is changed from witness into protagonist" (Boal, 1974, p. 126). Once they become the protagonist they are given the power to explore, through theatre, the oppressive conditions in their lives and the solutions to overcome them.

Boal's theories on theatre came about as a reaction to his and his fellow countrymen's impoverished conditions. Boal brought his theatre to "the people." In *Theatre of the Oppressed* he describes how he was invited to Peru to work on a literacy program. The goal was to teach literacy to the peasant population who were overwhelmingly illiterate. Boal wanted to create a theatre program that would "show in practice how the theatre can be placed at the service of the oppressed, so that they can express themselves so that, by using this new language, they can discover new concepts" (p. 121). The main challenge was to allow the people he was working with to create theatre around their language.

Boal was an artist from a wealthy family, but he was not interested in creating theatre on his understandings of literacy (an oppression). Boal wanted to "transfer to the people the means of production in the theatre so that the people themselves may utilize them" (p. 122). Boal would use his theatrical knowledge and experience as a facilitator for the peasants not as an all knowing instructor of theatre. The exercises would come from Boal, but the topics to explore would come from the people. Boal believed that theatre may not be the revolution he sought, however, "theatrical forms are without a doubt a rehearsal of revolution" (1974, p. 141).

Internal vs. External

Stanislavski and Boal created different acting systems from their interaction with the historical conditions of the time periods in which they lived. They also had differences in their respective theoretical approaches to performance. Stanislavski's system focuses on creating an artistic truth that comes from the inner experience of the actor. The actor realizes he has achieved Stanislavski's goal once he experiences emotional truth. Stanislavski states that the actor "must live it by actually experiencing feelings that are analogous to it, each and every time you repeat the process of creating it" (Stanislavski, 1936, p. 16).

There are various ways to stimulate an emotional experience which is Stanislavski's reason for writing *An Actor Prepares*. Some of those responses can be external such as physical pain, outside temperatures and scents in the air. Even though the response is generated from the exterior the emotional experience takes place within the human body. The intended outcome (an emotional response) is generated from within and then becomes expressed in an outward response. For example: an actor who is embarrassed may blush, feel nervous or threatened. Each will depend on his personal reaction to the emotional state of "being embarrassed." This will in turn cause a reaction in the audience for whom he is performing. The audience will then have their own emotional response, thus propelling the "truthful action of the scene."

In *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski describes this process. "All that is necessary is for two people to come into close contact and a natural, mutual exchange takes place. I give out my thoughts to you, and you make an effort to

absorb something of my knowledge and experience" (p. 217). It is a constant flow between the two participants and according to Stanislavski this "mutual exchange" happens in life, and should happen on stage as well. For Stanislavski "There can be no true art without living. It begins where feeling comes into its own" (1936, p. 25).

In contrast, Boal's "Poetics of the Oppressed" is seeking the outward goal of changing "the people – 'spectators' – passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (Boal, 1974, p. 122). While the actor/spectators may have an emotional experience within the context of the exercise or production, that is not Boal's ultimate aim with his theories on performance. Boal wants the actor/spectator to take control of the dramatic action, insert his ideas, and in doing so create different outcomes from Stanislavski with the production. Boal creates a theatre in which:

> All actors were grouped into a single category of narrators; the spectacle ceased to be realized from the point of view of each character and came to be narrated by a team, according to collective criteria: 'We are Arena Theatre' and 'We, all together, are going to tell a story, what we all think about the subject.' (Boal, 1974, p. 170)

Boal not only places his intended outcome on the external, but keeping with his Marxist beliefs, the decisions are taken away from the performers as individuals, and placed into a "collective" that selects the dramatic choices of the production. Boal places his focus on the group and their choices.

In contrast Stanislavski places the focus on the individual performer. He uses the identifier “I” such as with his use of the “magic if.” This is when the actor asks himself: “What would I do if I were in this situation?” The decisions come from the individual and the choices made are in the interest of the individual. Stanislavski stresses the individual; Boal, the collective.

As mentioned previously, the differences between the two styles are influenced by each other, as an external stimulus can create a powerful inner emotional response in a performer. Likewise, strong internal emotional reactions could have tremendous influence on the collective outward choices made by the performers. However, for Stanislavski those choices must be influenced by the inner emotional state, if not they are useless: “A role which is built of truth will grow, whereas one built on stereotype will shrivel” (Stanislavski, 1936, p. 31).

Boal believes that, no matter the strength of the emotional response, it is irrelevant if it is one that overpowers the intended message of the production. Boal wants the actor/spectator to “give expression to the collective thought of men and women” (Boal, 1974, p. 134) and as a result the actor ceases to interpret the individual and starts to interpret the group, which Boal believes is “much more difficult and at the same time much more creative” (Boal, 1974, p. 134).

Imagination

> Imagination is not only the power to form mental images, although it is partly that. It is also the power to mold experience into something new, to create fictive situations. It is, as well, the power – by means of

> sympathetic feeling – to put oneself in another place. (Maxine Greene, The Blue Guitar, 2001)

In the above quote curriculum scholar Maxine Greene discusses different types of "imagination." Imagination is not limited to simply thinking about "mental images," it can also be used to develop new experiences and creative ways of living, even ways in which to improve the world. The use of imagination as an important tool for the actor is one found in the theories of both Stanislavski and Boal. Stanislavski dedicated an entire chapter of *An Actor Prepares* to the development of the actor's imagination. He believed so strongly in the necessity of imagination the fourth chapter in his book is titled "Imagination." Below are three examples from this chapter. Each of the examples is a demonstration of the ways in which an actor uses his imagination and the reasons for his choices In each of the examples Stanislavski is using imagination in service to the creation of a truthful emotional state.

1. "Every invention of the actor's imagination must be thoroughly worked out and solidly built on a basis of facts. It must be able to answer all the questions (when, where, why, how) that he asks himself when he is driving his inventive faculties on to make a more definite picture of a make believe existence" (pp. 76-77).
2. "Our art demands that an actor's whole nature be actively involved, that he give himself up, both mind and body, to his part. He must feel the challenge to action physically as well as intellectually because the imagination, which has no substance or body, can reflexively affect our

physical nature and make it act. This faculty is of the greatest importance in our emotional technique" (p. 77).

3. "Every movement you make on the stage, every word you speak, is the result of the right life of your imagination" (p. 77).

Stanislavski uses imagination as a way to access emotions, and a way to assure that they are truthful to the situation in the play.

We see another example of Stanislavski's belief in the importance that everything should be done in the service of playing true through his choice of words. For example: in the quotes above he uses the words "Every intention," "art demands" and "Every movement". These are strong choices of words. Stanislavski is emphatically telling the actors that everything, even the imagination, is in service of playing true. There is no choice to use it any other way because "art demands" it. Imagination is "of greatest importance" but only as part of the actors "emotional technique."

Boal uses imagination for the actor/spectator to explore both his world as it is, and the ways in which his world could be improved. Below are examples from *Theatre of The Oppressed* in which Boal explains the ways in which he uses imagination:

1. "Anyone may propose any solution, but it must be done on stage, working, acting, doing things, and not from the comfort of his seat. Often a person is very revolutionary when in a public forum he envisages and advocates revolutionary and heroic acts; on the other

hand, he often realizes things are not so easy when he himself has to practice what he suggests" (p. 139).

2. "In the forum theatre no idea is imposed: the audience, the people, have the opportunity to try out all their ideas, to rehearse all the possibilities, and to verify them in practice, that is, theatrical practice" (p. 141).

Boal approaches the use of imagination as a way for the actor to first imagine solutions to his problems and then, through performance, see the viability of those choices.

As opposed to Stanislavski, Boal's concept of imagination was not emotional, it was intellectual. He describes how what an actor "envisions" – through theatre – is able to be rehearsed to see if it will work. Stanislavski's conception of imagination is put to the test through the experience of the actor, which is in turn witnessed by the audience. Boal's is seen through the ways in which performers use the imagination to explore and reveal the social-political conditions of their lives.

Boal and Stanislavski both believed in the use of imagination for the improvement of the arts as well as the actor as a human being. Each man held separate ideas on the ways in which this should be accomplished. Whichever idea is implemented/employed by the performer, imagination should always be used "to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected" (Green, 1995, p. 28).

As has been explored throughout this study, Stanislavski and Boal do have uses within today's theatre arts world. However, an important question that must be answered is: are there opportunities for an intersection between Stanislavski and Boal in a theatre production? Stanislavski had a very large influence on Boal, but they seem to have very different intended outcomes for their systems. So where is a possible place of intersection?

Several years ago I attended a performance of the musical *Falsettos* by James Lapine and William Finn (1992) at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. The musical tells the story of a man (Marvin) who realizes that he is gay and leaves his wife and son to live with his lover (Whizzer). The play examines issues such as the relationship between a father and a son, the struggles with living an openly gay lifestyle and losing a loved one to AIDS.

As I settled into my seat I began to eavesdrop on the conversation of four Theatre Appreciation students which was taking place behind me. The group was comprised of two women and two men. The initial conversation was about how they had to see the play and write a paper on their thoughts of the production. The big discussion was on whether they would leave at intermission. I pondered this as the show started.

One of the earlier musical numbers involves two male characters kissing. After the kiss, I heard one of the women behind me say under her breath, "just relax" to the men. It is at this point in the production that several people stood up and left the theatre. To my surprise, the students remained.

The first act ended with a poignant number between Marvin and his son. One of women students made the comment that the final song was “really beautiful.” The discussion turned to the question of whether or not they should stay for the second act. Again, to my surprise they all agreed that the show was “pretty good,” “funny, but sad” and that they “might as well stay.”

The second act had a scene with Marvin and Whizzer in bed together, naked, and I heard one of the female students ask the male students, “Are you okay?” The show ended with musical number that took place at the funeral for Whizzer who has died of complication from AIDS. As the lights came up one of the male students remarked “that was so sad.” They all agreed, but also agreed that it was “a really good show” and that they “were glad they had stayed for the entire show.”

The production would go onto win an award for “Best University Production” and perform at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. I mention the award to support my contention that it was an amazing production in which each actor lived their part truthfully in each and every performance. I believe that Stanislavski would have agreed with that assessment.

So how is this story an example between the intersection between Stanislavski and Boal? From the comments made during the show, and seeing the students at intermission, and at the end of the production I suspect that the men may have been homophobic or at the very least had limited experience with gay and/or lesbian culture. Their reactions to the male love scenes must have been enough of a concern to one of the women to inquire about their comfort level. The

students came to the theatre because it was an assignment for the class. They were forced to confront a subject matter of which they (based on their reactions) had very limited, if any, experience.

The production of *Falsettos* is an example of how theatre might be used to open the critical consciousness of people. There were several people who left the performance because of the subject matter, but for those of us who stayed our cultural biases were called into question. I believe that the reason those students stayed was that they were able to see themselves within the superficial difference of sexual orientation of the characters. They could see, through the performance, that gay men experience joy, love and loss the same way as they do. They were able to understand that homosexual men are not immoral, strange or less of human beings simply because the people they choose to love are the same sex.

The students stayed because of the emotional connection between themselves and the performers on the stage. In short, the production contained subject matter that Boal would find important while it also was presented in Stanislavski's truthfully lived performance style that the students were able to connect emotionally, thus overcoming their possible prejudices.

The opportunity for the audience members (and me) to make discoveries about ourselves and our horizons in the example above is also an example of the possibilities of living a hermeneutic life. Through the ideas presented in the production we faced our own horizons, based on our cultural and historical perceptions. Many of the spectators in the audience (myself, the students, etc.) may not have had homosexual experiences or any understanding of what it means

to be a homosexual man; however, the in-between of our horizons and the horizons presented in the production (the experience of homosexual men) created the conditions in which we (the audience) were placed in the in-between of our horizons and the horizons presented in the production. As a result of residing in this in-between or what Gadamer calls "the true locus of hermeneutics" (1975, p. 295) a tension is created and out of this tension rises the opportunity to create new meanings. A hermeneutic life is one in which the person (and artist) is constantly examining their own horizons and how those horizons create the conditions in which they make their decisions.

Theatre as Life

Stanislavski and Boal believed that theatre should not be limited to what takes place in a production. Theatre was not merely about a performance but a way of living and viewing life. Stanislavski and Boal also believed that the actor should also pay attention to the world around him. Through examining his own life experiences, the actor is able to bring infinite possibilities to his creative choices.

In *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski makes several references to the necessity of an actor actively participating in the real world. The first example is when Tortsov is lecturing the students on the need to "be observant not only on the stage, but also in real life" (p. 99). The more an actor practices his observation of the world around him, the more he will be able to bring that focus and skill to his work on the stage.

Tortsov goes on to encourage actors to look at and experience everything around them such as “a little flower, or a petal from it” (p. 100) and, once observed, “try to express in words what is it in these things that gives you pleasure” (p. 100). Stanislavski does not limit the experiences to only the beauty in nature, he also asks that one pay attention to “the darker side of nature” (p. 100) which includes looking at things such as “the slime of the sea, plagues of insects” (p. 101), asking that we remember that even in the darker side of nature there is something to be learned. Tortsov stresses the importance for actors to “turn to what the human race has produced in art, literature, music” (p. 101), because life experience is an important tool for the actor in the creation of his creative experience. Stanislavski does not believe that the only place for an actor to be truthful is on stage. The actor must “look at and experience everything around them” (p. 100) and through Tortsov, Stanislavski is expressing how living a full life and noticing the world around us we will, as actors and humans, “appreciate it and define its qualities” (p. 100).

Boal believes that a person’s life is the foundation of theatre. The actor/spectator brings his life experiences into the theatre and “he himself assumes the protagnic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change – in short, trains himself for real action” (Boal, 1974, p. 122). In allowing the actor/spectator the power to bring in his own experience, he is expressing his thoughts. Performing those thoughts on stage has the “extraordinary capacity for making thought visible” (p. 137) which, “within its fictions limits, the experience is a concrete one” (p. 141). In other words,

throughout the performance, the actor moves from an intellectual experience into a physical experience that has the ability to clarify, prove or disprove the initial intellectual idea.

An Actor Prepares and *Theatre of the Oppressed* are not only acting texts aimed at performers and directors; they are also guides to show the ways in which we, as people, should approach life. The world of Stanislavski is one in which people pay attention to everything around them; they are living in the present. The people of Stanislavski's world are emotionally connected to all of their experiences both pleasurable and painful. Imagination is a very important part of Stanislavski's world; however, its main function is in the service of the creation of an emotional life. Boal's world has a population in which the people are paying attention to the social conditions around them. The people are affected not by the inner emotional life, but how they treat one another. Through treating one another with total equality they will reach a place of inner peace. Boal uses imagination as a method of seeing the world as it is and how it could be.

Teacher as Director

As I come to the close of my study it becomes time for me to move into the final stage of personal appropriation. Appropriation occurs when "the reader interprets a text and the interpretation ends in self-interpretation with the consequence the interpreter understands himself better as a result of doing the interpretation" (Reynolds, 1989, p. 48).

Boal and Stanislavski wrote acting texts and the majority of this study was spent analyzing their theories on performing. At the end of the study I

remembered that they were also teachers. Boal even used Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* as a type of textbook in the early stages of his development as an artist and teacher. The more I researched both men the more I kept returning to the question: "What type of teacher do I want to be, and what would that world look like?"

Teaching theatre can be more than about making good theatre, it can be about the kind of life you want and how you achieve it both artistically and personally. Stanislavski wanted the actor to pay attention to everything going on around him. He wanted him to pay closer attention to the things in his real life so that he may create truthful emotions based on the fictitious circumstances of the play. This type of performer will be changed as an individual because, as in hermeneutics, seeing new horizons results in intersections between his world and the new discoveries, which in turn lead to new horizons to be discovered and discovered.

Boal wanted to "promote" the spectator/actor "toward national liberation and toward the liberation of the classes oppressed by capital" (1974, p. 106). Boal wanted the actor to take a closer look at the world as well, but he also wanted his spectator to be the actor. Once empowered, he wanted that new spectator/actor to change the world.

My "artistic foundation" is theatrical, and because of this, I view the teacher as the director, the curriculum as the text and the students as the actors. As the director (teacher), I am guiding the actors (students), who are creating a play (curriculum). A great director will facilitate creativity in the actors, allowing them

to bring their own insight, ideas and experience to the role. Boal describes this as the "people code" which "allows and encourages the spectator [student] to ask questions, to dialogue, to participate" (Boal, 1974, p. 142). The curriculum created from this style of learning is what Robin Fogarty labels as "The Integrated model." This model:

> [V]iews the curriculum through a kaleidoscope: interdisciplinary topics are rearranged around overlapping concepts and emergent patterns and designs. Using a cross-disciplinary approach, this model blends the four major disciplines by finding the overlapping skills, concepts, and attitudes in all four. (1991, p. 64)

In contrast, an oppressive director will only allow their ideas and point of view to be expressed. This type of "creative" environment turns actors into robots who are only there to regurgitate only what the director finds valuable or what Stanislavski calls a "nagging critic" which can "drive the actor (student) mad and reduce him to a state of helplessness" (1936, p. 145).

Effective directors will always see the actors as individuals. When directing a play a second time with a new cast, a great director will not force the new performers to perform exactly as the previous cast performed. As a teacher I have tried to see my students as individuals. Like individual actors, it is important to keep the individual student's perspective in mind. Even if I am teaching the same lesson, different students will approach the material from different perspectives. It is also important to remember that the students are real people with real life issues. As the "director" of a class it can be easy to forget how

difficult it is being a student. In the class in front of me there may be students who are going hungry, abused or simply upset that the girl next to them just said they wouldn't go out with them. Things that may seem trivial to me are major points in that student's life. It is important to acknowledge those experiences and, if appropriate, bring the experiences into their role in the performance.

In order to turn those experiences into effective learning, the teacher (director) will have to learn the language of the student. An analogy can be made with Boal's experience with teaching literacy in Peru. He describes how the "illiterate are not people who are unable to express themselves: they are simply people who are unable to express themselves in a particular language" (1974, p. 121). If a student is only given one type of way to learn (one language), he will find it difficult, if not impossible, to "express" himself in an educated manner. This acknowledgement of a "different language" allows students to address their world as a whole, not categorize their life between in-school and out-of-school. This approach would lead to what Tom Barone describes in *Breaking the Mold: The New American Student as Strong Poet* as "breaking the mold" of how we view and asses students. This style of teaching would:

> Offer students and teachers the autonomy of the artists who works toward an end that is emergent, not fully in view. They would be concerned less with molding students in accordance with "national consensus standards" than with providing the growth of unique, powerful, integrated identities. They would support a process wherein teachers assist each student in weaving (and reweaving) of profoundly educational, aesthetic experiences

into narrative, or story, of a unique, autonomous, but responsible self. (1997, p. 148)

I hope to instill a love of knowledge in the students I teach. If I can find a way to keep them forever curious, they will continue to learn. The best way to accomplish this is by making learning fun and engaging.

As an actor I always felt my job was to entertain first, and by doing so I could teach a message. I plan to use that same principle as a teacher. If I can entertain the students, they will want to listen to what I have to say. Engaging students is a major part of teaching. This may seem like a trivial or trite viewpoint, but the teachers that I truly learned from were also the most entertaining. They cared about what they were teaching .That created an excitement for learning the subject and it was truly entertaining to learn from them. It is also important to point out that “entertaining” does not necessarily mean happy, fun, escapism! Like Stanislavski’s ideas on the uses of imagination, entertainers also challenge audiences to confront darker subjects and emotions. Like Boal, a teacher/director can also encourage audience/students to work for social change, by allowing students to confront some of the social problems they face. A teacher may be able to work with the students in finding solutions to the problems.

In a theatrical production, everyone works together, but the director is the final voice of authority. While the students and teacher work together in creating the curriculum, it is important to point out that I do not believe that the students are in control of the classroom. Ultimately, it is the teacher (like the director) who

has the final say in what will take place in the classroom. While I view the classroom as a play, the classroom is not “play” as in a traditional laissez faire school. While elements of play will take place, the classroom is about experience, and experience will occur under many situations, such as students actively engaged in a group project or reading a book on their own.

The teacher as director also has life and education experience that the students do not. To disregard this experience, only serves to undermine the life history of the teacher. In *Experience and Education* Dewy explains:

> It is the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading. There is no point in his being more mature if, instead of using his greater insight to help organize the conditions of the experience of the immature, he throws away his insight. (1938, p. 38)

There must be a balance between allowing the students to bring their interests and histories into the classroom and the direction in which the teacher guides the classroom.

The teacher should not limit the classroom to an outcome, set up in a linear fashion that cannot be altered. However, the classroom is not a place to allow students to focus only on what they want to at any given moment. Students need to understand that there is value in participating in something they might not enjoy. If a student, who loves group work, has to listen to a lecture, he will learn skills that are outside of his comfort zone. There is value in dealing with things he may not enjoy. The teacher as director will find a balance of experiences that the students have in the classroom.

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