

In this class, we studied directors and their theories of theatre, from Stanislavsky and his method in the early nineteenth hundreds to Anne Bogart and her ideas of containment and isolation in the present day. We looked at *Stanislavsky Directs*, *Brecht on Theatre*, *Towards a Poor Theatre* by Jerzy Grotowski, and *A Director Prepares* by Anne Bogart, and turned nonsensical dialogues into scenes paralleling the relative director's style.

First, we covered Stanislavsky and his ideas on acting and directing. The first thing that struck me after reading *Stanislavsky Directs* was that Stanislavsky himself appeared in surprisingly sparse quantities. He was certainly around often enough, but through Gorchakov's eyes, he only truly came into the light when dispersing a particular nugget of wisdom or explaining his beliefs to the production team. In truth, the book would have been more accurately represented as "Gorchakov and others Direct while Stanislavsky Interrupts to Fix Things." This is not saying that many of Stanislavsky's points are invalid or moot, but simply his presence only seems to appear when he is needed to employ a certain technique or idea that will create a better stage picture. Gorchakov did an excellent job capturing the feel of Stanislavsky's ideas without inserting too many technicalities, but personally the book felt more like a teacher correcting a student than a portrait of a man and his abilities.

To be fair, Gorchakov's notes probably did portray Stanislavsky as a higher being of the theatre world. He idolized the director, as is very obvious from the word choices he uses from the book. He describes Stanislavsky very early on using the nickname "Himself," representing the man as a god of sorts. Furthermore, Gorchakov's first few meetings with Stanislavsky involve him either asking favors or receiving bits of wisdom from his trove of theatrical knowledge. Up until the first play section, Gorchakov represents Stanislavsky as this person coming in to fix everything wrong with their play, and later their company, without much of their say in the matter. Perhaps from his position as assistant director Gorchakov, already a big fan of the man's work, decided that a godlike approach was the most efficient way of describing

Stanislavsky. His methods as addressed toward the actors certainly seem that way, as in their first meetings he hands them out long questionnaires for them to think about and answer in their heads, then demands straight unwavering answers to questions like the character's objective. Further enforcing his role as a guide and teacher, he tears apart scenes his assistant directors have put together with little explanation behind it and suggestions about the play that sound closer to orders. His ideas about the structuring of crowd scenes, for example: while very sound (and the idea of having all the actors actually walk into a scene where they will be very crowded and have resulting tension is a brilliant maneuver to be executed onstage), they took most if not all control away from Gorchakov.

Most of my qualms with Stanislavsky's directing style and his theories of theatrical realism originate from his elitist appearance. To me, most of the method seems to turn the director into a bully of sorts, pushing his views onto the actors and designers without giving much reason for it, and they having to blindly trust him or her. Theatre to me has always been about collaboration, and when the director takes such omnipotent control over everyone's actions, it can ruin a play. Stanislavsky's suggestion for the actors and actresses to go buy furniture to populate the set with items they would feel attached to, for instance, is logical in theory. If the actors have a physical connection to the set, then in a play like Chekhov's The Three Sisters Olga can seriously lament the changing of the household as beloved items, one by one, disappear, and Chebutykin and Irina can have more of an emotional connection to the clock. However, Stanislavsky forcing the actors and designers to go shopping at that particular store limited their choices and resulting actions. From what I can tell, Stanislavsky's relationship with designers and actors is very much director driven and very little is left up to the actors and designers to decide on their own. In the realm of acting, Stanislavsky's handling of the Sisters Gérard takes a similarly oppressive stance. In order to ground the actress playing Louisa into her role as a blind girl, he takes her through an exercise where she has to rely solely on her ears to figure out who is where, and as a result, she achieves the true feeling of hopelessness Louisa must have. Again, in certain cases, this might indeed work. But to basically insist that an actress

can only know what being left alone and blind is like if she pretends to be so and is put in a similar situation shuts the actress's other means of dealing with the role off. In a much nicer, more polite way, Stanislavsky is forcing his actors into the roles he wishes them to play, controlling the play's concept without overtly showing it. In doing so, he breaks two of the biggest rules of theatre in my opinion--being collaborative and being receptive to other people's ideas.

The book itself is an enjoyable read of different ways to adapt the method based on different play styles; however, I find very little of the method helpful in my own directing experience, with the exception of basic blocking and scripting.

Next was Bertolt Brecht and his revolutionary ideas on estrangement of the actor. All theatrical theories aside, the man was a fantastic writer. The various articles compiled in "Brecht on Theatre" show off the playwright's sarcastic wit and humor about the then-current state of theatre affairs in 1930s Berlin. Even before Brecht touches on his own personal beliefs on theatre, he masterfully paints a scenic portrait of torrid broken-down Berlin theatre houses next to lavish opera houses, as well as directors that refuse to pay a cent to revamp their theatres because no one comes, yet no one comes because no money is put into them. Instantly, the reader is immersed in the ruin of Germanic theatre from Brecht's words. They do not have to worry about the differences between his style in thirties Germany and the present day because he already goes to the trouble of staging the conflict in the thirties to begin with. I was easily sucked into Brecht's world upon reading the book, and while not all of the political issues he brings up within his theatre are valid in the present day, I could understand where he was coming from based on the general aspect of the times.

His theories--Brecht carefully avoids the term method--mainly center around making the audience an active participant in the theatre, rather than just a simple spectator, there to be glossed over and forgotten with before the first scene ends. Within this overall umbrella sit his more individualized theories regarding certain aspects of theatre: the visual aesthetics, the momentum of the play itself, and the alienation and separation of an actor from their character.

He complains from the very beginning that “a theatre which makes no contact with the public is a nonsense,” stating that without engaged, happy actors, there is no way the audience can interact and get into a play (7). “Nobody who fails to get fun out of his activities can expect them to be fun for anybody else,” he notes wryly (7). With passive actors, the audience is lulled into a dreamlike state, taking the character choices and plot points at face value, finding little to no shock in basic details. After all, to an audience already expecting everything, the details have already been prerecorded into their brain, giving them no reason to think outside the typical boundaries of ‘This is a play.’ I agree fully with Brecht on this matter--when an audience expects everything, nothing can really get to their brains. This is one of the reasons I tend to reach out and try directing daunting scenes for my dialogues--I want to test the limits of my audience and not rely on conventional lovers scenes (as is so easy to do using the nonsensical dialogues) or political quandaries. I want my audience to think and so I put them in an uncomfortable position where they haven’t been before and instruct them to look more closely. For instance, my muse concept for the dialogues worked horribly when put into the style of the Stanislavsky method, as realism requires a topic fairly down to earth to ground the audience and illuminate the story for them. However, when done in a Brechtian style, the piece, aided by the staging changes and the props given, gave the little story that much more depth. It wasn’t just two random people onstage exchanging a quiet, reserved dialogue with one another while sitting; instead, it was a visual illustration of one character’s struggle between his love and his duty.

Furthermore, while Brecht stresses and warns directors to not put their message through the visual aesthetics of a play rather than the actors and words, I think the decorations onstage mattered greatly to Brecht--he just preferred they come from the text rather than the director’s view of it. It definitely explains his use of signs to represent facts--for instance, the dates of the Zoo District raid in *Drums in the Night*--but the distinct lack of signs created for his individual characters other than how they are described within the text. To use the example of *Drums in the Night*, the waiter refers to main character Anna as a young girl with “her lily still in her hand.” A Brechtian approach of costuming Anna could involve lilies, and even a bright white lily in her

hair, as a production I was involved in had, but did not interfere with the lily itself (no staining the petals red, or adding thorns to the stem). Brecht wants, or so it seems to me, a literal representation, but only the facts; after all, personal, closer opinion is merely “for [his] poetry.” I think my scene failed in that respect, as I don’t feel I represented the actual struggle as best I could with the box labeled “Art” and the trash can. Filip’s struggling with it seemed ridiculously fake--not even halfhearted, just fake--and I think I could have worked it better with a trash can full of trash already and no sound within the box. The jangling of keys was distracting from the scene itself and only served the purpose to fill the “Art” box with a judgement of my own--the keys to his life. Without the keys, the struggling would have first been far less noisy than need be, and also with the fuller trash can, the opposition between box and can would have seemed a lot more believable.

Brecht also mentions the importance of pacing to any play, impressing the importance of the journey of the play, rather than the climax. The climax should come, he says, almost naturally if the journey is attempted correctly. The audience should be drawn to the struggle, rather than the resolution, and it also keeps the actors in touch the whole play through. If they are constantly worrying about the present moment in time rather than the ending of the play in thirty minutes time, they can put their characters within the specific moment and entice the audience with the snippet of the person’s life, rather than the immense foreshadowing Chekhov and similar artists imply within their plays. His dictation is a rather straightforward one in my opinion, as actors, whether they work in Stanislavsky’s method, complete experimental theatre, performance art, or a Brechtian style, should live each moment within the moment, rather than pawn it off as buildup for the greater good. After all, if two-thirds of the play is forgone for a ten minute climax, the audience will be bored throughout most of it and not even fully appreciate the final moment (going back to Brecht’s first point about involving the audience instead of just letting them sit back and have their eyes glaze over). Again, something I wished I had improved in my Brechtian scene was the pacing, as Filip didn’t focus on the first moment with the dissolution of Art to fully appreciate the second transition to his doctoral phase. I think that was

mostly my fault due to the above problems with the set and props (interesting how various problems are linked all throughout by Brecht's ideas).

Brecht's biggest--and most often misinterpreted--suggestion was on the alienation and separation of a character from the actor. By putting the character on as the ancient Greeks would a mask, the actor can manipulate the character while still revealing himself and his ideals through it. Due to the mistranslation from the original German, some actors take the alienation aspect of the training too hard and imagine themselves to be stone pillars with no emotion at all, when in reality, the reverse is true. The actor's character can still be as emotional as an actor practicing emotional recall; the difference is in the way they go about gathering that emotion, whether through their own memories or research and compilation. This was one of the fields where I felt my actors succeeded, as both Brennin and Filip were able to express themselves through the dialogue without either their own opinions or their characters getting in the way.

Having studied Brecht before and acted in one of his plays, I understood some of his basic theories before reading this book, but afterwards I received a wealth of new information about the structure of theatre that, despite being out of era, is still very useful in today's society (and especially in figuring out revisions for my dialogue scene).

Moving more toward the present day, we looked at *Towards a Poor Theatre* by Jerzy Grotowski. I doubt Grotowski set out, like Brecht or Stanislavsky before him, to change the world of the theatre, to rip up the seams and shape a new method for everyone to follow. His Theatre Laboratory experiments were just that--experiments--done within the smallish town of Opole (and later the metropolis Wroclaw), Poland, to a select few audiences. The Laboratory is described first and foremost as an "institute devoted to research into... theatre art and the art of the actor," not performance-based, but rather focusing on the process (much like Tadashi Suzuki's training method for actors). (9) The three building blocks of his "poor theatre" approach (or at least the most fascinating and prominent ones) consist of the relationship between actor and audience, the actor's body and his mind, and the actors and the text.

As a director, Grotowski focused specifically on the dynamic between the actor and

audience, choosing the most basic of frames to work off, in order to dissect the very essence of theatre. He calls the approach “poor theatre,” where all the bows and ribbons of the rich (elaborate costumes, makeup, revolving stages, etc) are stripped off, leaving only an empty space. He even remarks that the space of a theater itself is not always needed--like the other pieces of “rich theatre,” it is used by default, without any thought going into why it is included. In a scholastic situation where money is rarely if at all readily available, students like myself I think would benefit muchly from his ideas. As students, learning how to manipulate the bare essentials rather than be given a gigantic budget and lavish sets and costumes can be more useful in the long run. Hampshire’s theatre policy believes largely in training students to operate all aspects of the art, and teenagers normally used to cueing up sound systems can find themselves instead running a production as producer. If thrown into that position with an unlimited supply of money and access to a gigantic shop, students would have a lot easier and somewhat careless time with budgeting and putting up a show than they do with the limited budget and theatre space Hampshire provides. With only a thousand or so dollars to work with, the budding producer has to be a lot more careful how it’s spent, and as a result, learn quite a bit more about budgeting a show than someone given an unlimited supply of money. Relating this back to Grotowski’s experiments, works like our scenes in directing obviously can’t take advantage of the rights an actual show would get, so we have to change the notions of theatre typically and use situations, props, and actors in order to get the result we want. Marissa’s scene involved a garden, but rather than recreate a garden onstage (nigh impossible without a dedicated build crew, set designer, painter, and about 30 hours worth of work), she took the scene and the audience outdoors. With this, she achieved what she wanted much more directly and simply than building a caricature in a stage in order to comply with the typical notion of “theatre” in a certain space. Grotowski also warns against the temptation of theatre to imitate television, with it trying to surpass the technical limitations of theatre and likening it to TV with excessive wires and complicated circuitry. True in the 50s, nowadays his note is even more true, with big-budget shows incorporating projection screens and ice skating rinks onto the stage when before action

onstage and suggestive lighting would have done just fine. He says, and I agree, that the two are different art forms entirely, and theatre has a much different charm to it than of that found on-screen, so why try to combine the two?

In relation to acting, Grotowski focuses less on the trappings of particular acting methods, choosing not to worry about the emotional response or the thought processes of the actor. He particularly is more interested in how the actor can choose and control these responses, and how they can get more in tune to their body and mind. One of the first exercises he tries with actors involves them standing up in front of the rest of their company for a minute. They are instructed to do nothing in this period except stand forward in a neutral stance. Having done this exercise myself in an acting workshop this past month, I find it obviously difficult to do “nothing”. It (again similar to Suzuki’s training) is an impossibility, done in order to find everything the actor *is* doing. Peter Brook describes the exercise as a series of shocks “confronting” the actor, making them “catch sight” of their “evasions, tricks, and clichés” and “forc[ing them] to question why [they are] actor[s] at all” (11). And indeed, it certainly shocks the actor at first--people naturally have certain quirks or tendencies when in front of an audience, even of their peers, and when they have nothing else to concentrate on, their flaws and quirks come out full force. An actress may discover that she tends to tap her foot or raise her arms from their sides slightly when she is supposed to be still, or perhaps instead slightly shake her head, or blink excessively. These, while not necessarily bad movements, are uncontrolled, and according to Grotowski, need to be refined, “eliminating... elements of “natural” behavior which obscure pure impulse.” He alludes those movements to distractions, little reassurances the actor does self-consciously in order to justify standing there. In order to truly get in touch with their body, the actor must first try to do nothing in order to discover what they don’t need, and then move along from there. It’s an interesting idea for an exercise. I compare Grotowski’s method to Suzuki’s training quite frequently because both are training methods trying to accomplish this goal, having the actor drop all preconceptions and just *be* on-stage, exercises that help an actor learn about themselves and keep their actions strictly controlled. I think, however, that

Grotowski's training lets an actor more subtly figure out their flaws and jitters, while Suzuki's forces the actor to stop holding tension in their legs or shoulders lest they collapse. Grotowski's training is, of course, physical as well, but comparing the initial exercise of doing nothing to Suzuki's stomping and shakuhachi, Grotowski has a much calmer attitude to his work than Suzuki. However, both trainings, I think, are quite valuable in today's society, where stress levels are much more highly elevated than those of twenty or thirty years ago, and actors and actresses hold twice the tension and exhibit four times the lack of control that past generations would. Training that allows the actor to simply relax and get in tune with everything--especially their breathing--is near-vital, even when doing something in a realistic style. Without control over the body, the actor cannot really control their character (or them within the character) because they cannot get their body to cooperate. They may have been taught to walk in the style of the early 1900s, but put an actor who still doesn't know they tap their fingers against their side when monologuing and the audience is more like to watch the fingers than they are any of the pretty learned walk.

The text, Grotowski stresses in particular, cannot just be a crutch for actors to lean on within the world of theatre. Like the removal of set and costumes in poor theatre, Grotowski mentions that text can be also be taken away and the relationship betwixt actor and audience will still remain in tact. He wryly comments that in the early days of theatre, text wasn't even considered, so the need to make it part of every piece of theatre is a useless idea. He makes a good point. In today's times, especially within the realm of experimental theatre, actors feel the need to add text to a piece to justify it being "theatre" and not just another alternative dance movement. However, the addition of text hardly makes it theatre if it's already being looked at as a dance piece--it just makes it a dance piece with words. The relation of text to actor is much deeper than sticking words in where they do not belong or are not needed. The words are not the essential part of the piece. Words on a page, simply read in class, are no more parts of theatre than a science fiction novel; without the actor/audience interaction, the collection of sentences is just a piece of "dramatic literature." (56) However, what the actor does with the words, how he

incorporates or uses the words, that's what matters. "What gives life to the inanimate words... what transforms them into 'the Word'," to quote Grotowski. Instead of illustrating the concept of the word, if an actor really incorporates the word, even if it is only a single solitary word throughout a two hour play, it will stand out more than thousands of words scattered halfheartedly throughout that same time period. In my experience, certain monologues have innate power like that, where the words can be burnt into an audience member's memory permanently, if they only use them and incorporate them properly. Especially within our current dialogues, we need to be able to interweave the text, rather than just have it sitting there on the surface, never actually used. That's why most of the time, the line "so different" rarely works, because directors and actors alike fail to give a use for the word. They make up reasons abound, but the actors rarely actually use "so different" as anything but a rebuke or an exclamation, without much thought put into it at all. I'm still struggling with how to use "so different" in my directing scene and as an actor, but I've stopped trying to brush past it with hollow reasoning. A nonsensical dialogue can have a purpose even if it says nothing, as long as it has intention.

I personally find Grotowski's theories fascinating. From the tiny bit of training I did with Magin Schantz on Grotowski work and from what I've read in his book, I definitely want to investigate further, especially into his work about isolating the actor's movements in order to make every gesture intentional. It's interesting how he works around the specific methods involving the actor (emotional recall, etc) and instead teaches an actor how to control them, rather than change them. He sports a philosophy that I like to adhere to: Learn everything, pick up what's useful, throw away other stuff, but make sure you can control what you get.

As a nice wrap-up to the class, we read Anne Bogart's *A Director Prepares*. Unlike other prominent directors, Bogart did not write this book as an offset to her fame and fortune; in 2001 the SITI Company was still getting its name out and Suzuki's methods were much less-known than they are today. The book, it seems, was written more as a guide to every young director wanting to put on shows than a publicity outsource. Bogart's ideas are fairly simplistic and should be obvious to most actors, but for some reason rarely are. Her thoughts on the

containment of acting and directing (limiting an actor's movements to produce repetition within spontaneity, working through stereotypes, and using limited conditions to put on a show) are similar to Grotowski's method of "doing nothing" and his thoughts on poor theatre; Bogart herself says at the end of her book to "work with what [the reader] has right now" and not wait for a big break or for something better to come along. However, her suggestions for limited and containing actors are what fascinates me.

First, Bogart acknowledges the need of improvisation in theatre, but also the need to contain and control it. While improvisation is an actor's biggest strength, it's similarly their biggest weakness as the improvisation cannot be repeated without feeling forced and false. In theatre, actors are constantly made to "keep" their improvisations as specific moments; the director can commandeer a scream or a laugh that came out of emotion during one scene and force the actor to "keep it" and put it in at that specific place for the remainder of the rehearsals and shows (45). The problem with keeping a moment of pure improvisation is that the actors try their best to recreate the moment only to fall flat on their faces in truthfulness, because imitating cannot, at its heart, be the original moment. Instead Bogart suggests that actors should not worry about making the emotion "real" and try solely for the end result, but focus more on the struggle of "resurrect[ing] the dead" spontaneity itself (45). The struggle, she notes, is more interesting than the overall end result. Having a director set a specific movement or prop limits the actor to working within that set space and time, and in that, they must struggle for a way to make the moment true. This way, they embody the struggle in the play itself, giving real emotion to a previously flat spontaneous reaction. In my final scene with Filip and Brennin, as I was working with a fairly complex arc and the few words of nonsensical text to guide it, the "eclipse" scenes had to be short and to the point, allowing for few movements or extraneous gestures. In one of the mini-scenes, Filip had to use one word ("Listen...") and step to transform his character from an overbearing tyrant to a concerned parent. With so little movement, and everything precisely mapped out, he had to work within the constraints and focus solely on the meaning and rhythm of the lines. The forced distance between him and Brennin on the other side of the theatre and

his inability to rectify it except with words added tension to the scene which wouldn't have been there had he been given free reign to move wherever he wanted.

Bogart also believes in working through assumptions like stereotypes in order to create heightened characters that live within the form. She says that when first approaching stereotypes, she was cautious and tried to avoid them at all costs in her work, believing them to gum up a piece rather than add to it. Like falsified emotions or reactions, she thought that stereotypes couldn't work within a piece. When talking with Suzuki, though, she found that stereotypes were not so much dreaded theatre taboos as a simplistic form of a final character. She notes that one of Suzuki's finest actresses in his old company had distinct Japanese stereotypes associated to her, and while American audiences found them quaint and American directors even moreso, to get her to do real work and not just use her façade, Suzuki had to work her through the stereotype and "unfocused clichés" in order to get her to use her power. Stereotypes, Bogart explains, are unfocused starting points for an actor. When playing a witch in Macbeth, for instance, the actor starts off with a vague connotation of what a witch means and how to play a witch. It's then the director's job, however, to mold the stereotype's specificity to their concept and then force the actor to apply themselves as specifically as the character is cut out. Again similar to working through the containment of actions and gestures, stereotypes are much more emotionally-related and thus much more a character development than a director-shaped movement. However, Bogart does not imply then that the director should shape the actor's actual emotions--merely provide "the form," and not "the content" (102). By form she means the basic actions--forcing an actor to go through the motions of a stereotypical character--and then letting the actor explore through these limitations the content, the "emotional landscape" (103). Again, in my scene, I chose to incorporate a lot of Bogart's ideas, including her thoughts on stereotypes. Both Filip and Brennin started out as very stiff, stock characters--the stern parent and whiny daughter--and then through the scene and the eclipses, they moved through those initial limitations into a much deeper relationship. I think it's particularly key to start out a scene with the typical idea of a father and daughter, rather than have them move past

the cliché at the beginning, because that way the audience can physically and mentally see their transitions onstage.

Bogart also suggests to use the set conditions, rather than try and avoid them otherwise. If a director finds themselves with only a limited space, they should use it to its fullest extent, rather than keep scouting out for something better. Bogart herself did many site-specific pieces when she was a younger director in New York, in order to get an audience of any kind to come and see her shows. Granted, it wasn't Broadway, but it got her name and reputation out, and she was working. In the actual realm of directing, Bogart notes that both directors and actors cannot hide from the audience. An actor on the stage must have a reason for being there; Bogart quotes Suzuki in that "there is no such thing as good or bad acting, only degrees of profundity of the actor's reason for being onstage" (119). If an actor has no intention, they have no place up there even if they can speak the words marvelously. Without any energy or meaning behind the text and movement, the actor is useless and is simply hiding behind the idea of elegant prose. Bogart specifically stresses the need for meaningful pauses and intervals--containing the overall show by breaking it up. Playwrights put in act and scene breaks for a reason, so similarly the director puts in pauses, space, and silence to shape the play. In my scene, I needed to portray time quickly and efficiently without the actors having to do any sort of extraneous movement to signify it. I eventually decided on blackouts, eclipsing the one scene into six fragments. The result is that the actors had to portray each moment in a limited time and space to the audience, having no ability to use extra words or gestures to justify their right to being because they would have no time for it. Instead Filip and Brennin became intensely specific in every movement they did, every word they spoke, listening intently to each other for the pauses in their speech, timing their responses to fit perfectly within the blackouts.

There's a lot still to learn from Anne Bogart, I think. Her essays are brilliantly thought out, and in person she is just as eloquent as her prose, if not moreso. Also, her thoughts, similar to Grotowski, about limiting and controlling actor and director movement to focus the energy of the scene are presented in a much more accessible way than Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory

ever was. Hopefully this more simple and straightforward presentation will influence the other directors of this day--for an actor (and director) must first be specific in everything he or she does before they can move on anywhere else. *A Director Prepares*, indeed.

This class has really been a turning point for me on the subject of directing. Previous directing classes I had taken were focused much more on letting the director do their own thing after a few basic tutorials in the subject, which was great if the director knew what he or she was doing... not so great if they didn't. I loved open workshops like that because I got to experiment and choose my own material, and when I found out this class wasn't like that at all, I was disappointed at first. However, as we began to parse through the material and actually read about these fascinating people and their methods and styles, I slowly began to warm up to the idea. The dialogues went from stiff and confusing to innovative and exciting, and by the end of the class I think everyone (even me) had enjoyed our romp through the authors of theatrical theory.

I don't want to really focus this retrospective on my early bitterness about the class, because that disappeared pretty much as soon as we started Brecht. I have rather negative feelings toward Stanislavsky, and that combined with my frustration with directing short nonsensical dialogues made the first part of the class difficult for me. Also, my main problem with teaching Stanislavsky is that as vital and basic as his method was to early nineteenth century theatre, without spending a detailed amount of time on the man--and his own writings, not the writings of someone like Lee Strasberg about him--actors can get confused between his actual ideas and what other people *thought* his actual ideas were. The actual Stanislavskian method and Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg's interpretation of that method are two entirely separate things, as Anne Bogart notes in both of her books. Stanislavsky's method is integral to the history of American theatre, but I think that his teachings should be a course's worth of material rather than a month's worth.

That's actually my only beef with the class as a whole--as enjoyable as it was to read all of these different directors and their books, it felt very much to me like we were just skimming

the tips of what each of them was trying to get at, rather than trying to actually take apart their theories and ideas. Which is, of course, perfectly understandable--trying to fit four directors' entire methods into three and a half months is decently impossible--but I wish that with Stanislavsky (and Brecht to a certain extent) we had been able to dissect his theories a bit more. Just calling Brecht an isolationist who believed in social issues barely touches his real troubles with the theatre--which were mainly due to the lack of audience-actor connection. Grotowski says this also in his book, but we barely covered that in class other than an acknowledgment that his idea of theatre consisted of the relationship between an actor and an audience. The other problem with teaching so many directors in such a short time is that methods like Grotowski's poor theatre and Brecht's estranged theatre get stereotyped into a few key points instead of being shown for the multilayered piece they are. Many of us took Brecht's dozens of ideas and advice and turned them into streamlined dialogues about social change and signs. Few of us touched on the idea of estranged theatre--though granted we had little time to prepare it. I would have loved to see someone grapple with the idea of using masks or creating a Brechtian Commedia Dell'Arte scene, though. Similarly, Grotowski's many ideas were conformed within our scenes to a simple involvement of the audience, without any actual relationship implied. Many many café scenes followed, where the audience was a part of the scene but not quite sure why they were, and some couldn't even see the scene from where they were.

This streamlining isn't really a fault of students nor is it of the teacher. When teaching books in short amounts of time, we have to cut a lot out and focus on specific elements. My only worry about it is that by doing so, people aren't getting the real message of the author, similar to when Stanislavsky's teachings were bastardized by an unknowing unthinking American audience. Coming away from a class thinking that Brecht is only about social change and Grotowski likes playing with audience members' heads, and Anne Bogart likes to set things site-specifically is, in my opinion, almost worse than not having read the books at all.

There is one upside in our class versus other courses which do this: we're not reading excerpts, we're reading the whole books. While in class we may not have talked about all of

Brecht's little nuances, we have *Brecht on Theatre* and can read any of his 60 essays, which paint a much clearer picture than any conversation can do. Really, though, there's not much that can be done in the way of fixing or changing this problem. Some people will understand an author better than others, and that's just the way it will go. I do wish that there would be that flag raised in future discussions, though, to not construct a dialogue solely around an author's two major theories. Otherwise, the director is left with a stereotypical "Brechtian" scene and no way to work through the stereotype to create something better.

On the nonsensical dialogues: My first dialogue didn't work out quite the way I planned due to a lack of rehearsal time. At first, I didn't realize that we were going to be given any rehearsal time at all and the entire thing was going to be workshopped in front of the class. I realized later to the contrary, but that first presentation class going the way it went, with all of us picking our actors and then having to present on the spot, that made me wonder otherwise. My scene, as a result, didn't quite come out how I wanted, especially considering that it was fairly complex and needed quite a bit of rehearsal time to pull off. Once I got the hang of what we were doing dialogue-wise, things seemed to flow a lot more smoothly. Also, it was really quite fun to manipulate the same fifteen words in 50 different settings, with words meaning completely different things from one scene to the next. I was skeptical about teaching a director through directing in their style, but it really does work beautifully once the director gets the hang of it. I regret that I didn't have as much time to devote to working with dialogues as I'd wanted--I spent a long time rehearsing my final piece for this course, and that was really the only one I was fully satisfied with. The others all had rehearsal time, but never enough to really focus everything precisely. I also think reading Bogart's book (finally) helped me jump over a barrier I was having when setting actor's movements and gestures in this short scene. With so little text, I felt guilty marking the actor's every move and making decisions for them, and didn't understand what was too much and what was too little. Reading her theories about shaping only the structure of the scene helped a lot. It makes sense that the actors and props and furniture should be placed precisely, as are their basic motivations, but they have to work within those constraints

and find out their character for themselves. I just wish I'd realized how to direct these scenes sooner, because in hindsight, I have a lot of great ideas about scenes I did that I'd love to touch up.

Despite my criticisms and arguments, I really did love taking this class. It may not have been as free as a forum class, but next time I take an all-practical course, I have a lot more structure and specificity to work from, and that, I think, is more important.