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## Realistic Acting Methods in Non-Realistic Theatre: Konstantin Stanislavsky's Theories Applied to Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre

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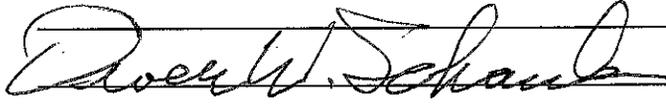
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**Realistic Acting Methods in Non-Realistic Theatre:**  
Konstantin Stanislavsky's Acting Methods Applied to Bertolt Brecht's Epic  
Theatre

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Theatre

and

The Honors Program

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	2
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
Background	7
Stanislavsky	7
Brecht	11
Differences Between Brecht and Stanislavsky	15
<b>METHOD</b>	<b>18</b>
Play Selection and Analysis	18
Production Differences	25
<b>RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>41</b>
Audience response	41
Analysis of results- Personal Response	43
Improvements	47
Conclusions	48
Significance	49
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>50</b>
Appendix A: Survey	50
Appendix B: Brecht/ Stanislavsky Differences Quick Sheet	51
Appendix C: Combined Stanislavsky/ Brecht Night Survey Results	55
<b>WORKS CONSULTED</b>	<b>57</b>

## ***Introduction***

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, western theatre experienced a shift from melodrama to realism. Realist authors including Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen understood that the real world and human behaviors were not as simple as they were in melodrama. Instead, these writers sought to express the deeper complexities of the human condition, and to present them to the audience as convincing human behavior. The realists intended that with the portrayal of truthful behavior, an audience should be completely absorbed in the action of the story and should feel themselves emotionally empathetic towards the characters on stage. In Moscow at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Konstantin Stanislavsky developed acting methods to achieve this effect. His goals were for actors to be able to accurately imitate people's behavior in real life and to replicate this consistently. Stanislavsky achieved this by teaching actors how to make their characters specific, how to communicate these choices to the audience, and how to connect with other actors on stage. Maria Knebel, one of Stanislavsky's students, took this further by developing a technique called active analysis. Her actors used etudes (group improvisations) as a part of active analysis to enhance their ability to apply all of Stanislavsky's goals.

From 1923-1924, Stanislavsky toured with the Moscow Art Theatre in the United States in order to perform for the public, and to also demonstrate aspects of his acting system. His ideas caught on with American actors and acting teachers, and therefore proliferated throughout the mainstream entertainment business. Realism soon became

the dominant style of 20<sup>th</sup> century performance in theatre, film, and eventually television. Stanislavsky's techniques dominated actor training. They have since served as the primary criteria by which the quality of an actor's performance is judged in the West (Carnicke 24).

However, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, some forms of theatre developed which deviated away from realism and Stanislavsky's methods. Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre was one of the most significant of these developments. "The Epic Theatre's goals were to make the spectator a critical observer, who must make decisions and take action, rather than a passive and empathetic one; and to show that change and manipulation of man and his environment are possible despite the deep historical nature of human misfortune" (Harrop 220). These goals of a didactic theatre required a new method of acting which rejected Stanislavsky's ideas. In the Brechtian theatre, actors did not need to behave as though what was happening on stage was real. Actors play themselves and simultaneously present their characters as they function for the play. "In short the actor must remain a demonstrator; he must present the person demonstrated as a stranger, he must not suppress the "*he* did that, *he* said that element in his performance" (*Brecht On Theatre* 125). Brecht's techniques for achieving this included direct addresses to the audience, the incorporation of a physical movement which encapsulated a social group, breaking character, and suggesting that an alternative to their character's behavior was possible.

John Harrop in *Acting with Style* observes that, "One of the clichés about Brecht's theatre is that it requires a non-emotional style of acting" (Harrop 237). This

cliché is not unfounded given some of Brecht's own words in a newspaper interview, "Contrary to present custom they (characters) ought to be presented quite coldly, classically and objectively. For they are not matter for empathy; they are there to be understood. Feelings are private and limited" (*Brecht On Theatre* 15). Brecht later clarifies, "The essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience, the spectator must come to grips with things. At the same time, it would be quite wrong to try and deny emotion to this kind of theatre" (*Brecht On Theatre* 23).

Although Brecht rejected Stanislavsky's ideas of emotional engagement and psychological focus as incompatible with his own, I believe that there are elements of Stanislavsky's technique that can help the Brechtian theatre create a more engaging performance. Having been trained in realistic acting methods and exposed to high quality realistic acting throughout my education, I have an understanding of the basic benefits of these ideas, and think they could be beneficial to another form of theatre. I believe it is possible for a Brecht performance to capture its audience's emotional attention while still being faithful to its intellectual goals. Theatre scholar and director Phillip Zarrilli suggests, "There is no technique that cannot be used in the Brecht-theater, so long as it serves to expose the contradictor in processes in such a way that they can be pleasurably recognized by the spectator and lead to his own transformation" (Zarrilli 238). Specifically, I believe that Stanislavsky's emphasis on the specificity of character choice, the creation of extra-daily energy for the stage, and the

strength of inter-performer connections can assist Brecht's theatre in overcoming the clichés about it.

To prove that there is value to consistent emotional engagement in Brechtian theatre, I will direct a production of Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* to be performed in two different styles: one using only Brechtian technique, and the other a mixture of Brecht and Stanislavsky. The pure Brecht performance will serve as the control for this experiment, while the hybrid performance will communicate the messages of Brecht's play faithfully, but will have a greater emotional impact on the audience. With more emotional investment from the audience, I expect that the audience's outrage at the situation presented and their desire to change the circumstances in the real world will be stronger than it would be with a purely intellectual appeal.

Audience members will be surveyed after each performance in order to determine which performance achieved Brecht's goals better. The survey asks how much audience members sympathized with the three main characters in order to gauge the audience's emotional engagement. In order to also judge the audience's intellectual engagement, it also asks who/ what is responsible for the death of the Coolie, whether or not this situation is unique, and what the title of the play refers to. By naming the play the "Exception and the Rule", Brecht is implying that some characters' behavior in the play is unique and other characters' behavior is not. If the audience blames either the Merchant and society or just society for the Coolie's death, believes the situation is not unique in the world of the play, and understands that the Coolie should be considered

the exception and the Merchant the rule, then they will have understood Brecht's play as he intended it. The answers to these questions will reveal whether or not audiences had an intellectual understanding of the play on both nights, and whether there was more emotional engagement on the Stanislavsky Night.

## ***Background***

### **Stanislavsky**

Like most American theatre students, I have primarily studied methods of realism based upon the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavsky. I also have had the privilege of being exposed to the exercises of one of his prolific disciples, Maria Knebel, who expanded upon his original ideas. My first two years in college were spent performing the basic exercises of these Russian practitioners with their culmination being my study abroad semester at Stanislavsky's own Moscow Art Theatre School. As I was taught, the primary emphasis in these techniques was the development of the ability to accurately imitate people's behavior in real life and to replicate this consistently. In general, this requires the creation of scenes in which actors convince the audience that what they are witnessing is real human behavior even though the actor himself doesn't truly believe that what is happening to him onstage is real. This was all developed in response to the extremes of Victorian melodrama from the previous century, which presented the unrealistic perspective of a world neatly divided by strong moral values of good and evil. As the 19th century moved into the 20th century, social, economic, and political revolutions seemed imminent, and artists realized that their presentation of

human life could be used to reflect this (Malloy 23, 24). Realist authors including Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen understood the world was more complex than what was portrayed in the melodramatic style, and believed in expressing life as it was rather than in an idealized form. In conjunction with these authors and their artistic objectives, Konstantin Stanislavsky founded the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897, produced the works of Chekhov and Ibsen, and dedicated his life there to the investigation of how an actor could convince the audience his character and the situations his character experienced were real (Hodge 2).

### **Elements of Stanislavsky**

Stanislavsky's primary theories on achieving this realism include the analysis of what he calls "given circumstances, super objective, and objective", as well as a collection of techniques for inspiring the actor to engage on stage. In the beginning phases of creating a role, Stanislavsky suggested that actors should first understand their character's given circumstances (Stanislavsky 9). By given circumstances, Stanislavsky means that the actor must understand the answers to the following questions: Who am I? Where am I? When am I? What do I want? Why do I want this? How will I achieve my goal? What must I overcome? These questions establish parameters that help the actor to make choices in interpreting a character and his or her situation specifically rather than generally. An important tenet of Stanislavsky's technique elaborated on the "what do I want?" question. He defined the answer to this question as the character's objective and suggested that this objective may change frequently throughout the play. All of these objectives in relationship to each other can

be generalized under a super-objective which the actor can use to bring a sense of continuity to their character and performance (Stanislavsky 269).

Other sections of Stanislavsky's "system" are intended to train the actor to learn how to manage an interesting stage presence with an accurate performance of what was learned from the earlier analyses. The first step for the actor is the development of a responsive and flexible body and voice so that no physical aspect of the actor inhibits their expression of what they are required to express as the character. The next step is an understanding of the "magic if" which requires actors to train their imagination to empathize with their character's circumstances. With more empathy, an actor can begin to uncover important complexities of their character that might be overlooked otherwise. Last, is the idea of "communion" or consistent connection and truthful communication with the other actors on stage. Without trust between each other and consequently without communion on stage, actors will not be capable of bringing life and believability to their on stage relationships. These concepts were developed by Stanislavsky in the early part of his career and disseminated throughout the world through translations of his books: *An Actor Prepares*, *Creating a Role*, and *Building a Character*, as well as through his tours with the Moscow Art Theatre to Europe and the United States.

### **Maria Knebel**

After Stanislavsky's death, one of his disciples, Maria Knebel, a Moscow Art Theatre School actress and member of his final studio, further enhanced his method. I decided to include her exercises in my rehearsal process as a productive extension of Stanislavsky's ideas. Knebel was able to find better ways of training actors to do what

Stanislavsky wanted them to do. She realized that there was a difference between actors intellectually understanding Stanislavsky's character analysis, and being able to communicate that analysis to an audience (Jackson 166). In her books, *The Verb in the Art of an Actor* and *Action Analysis of the Play and the Role*, Knebel describes a specific process called Active Analysis, which allowed actors to better express the analysis they had worked on. I was trained in Knebel's ideas practically from my experiences at the Moscow Art Theatre School as well as through reading Alison Hodge's *Actor Training*. One of the philosophies of Active Analysis was that on the stage the audience only sees a portion of the character's life, but that as characters are assumed to be real people, the rest of their life will have had a certain impact on how they behave in the segments of their life shown on stage. Therefore, it is useful to explore and improvise other significant parts of their lives in order to get a better understanding of who those characters really are. Like a scene, these improvisations or "études" require the actor to establish a specific set of given circumstances including who they are, where they are, and what they want to accomplish. Sometimes études based on other aspects of a character's life are later incorporated into performances themselves in order to bring a new perspective to an older piece of text. For instance, many of the adaptations of Shakespeare in contemporary Russian theatre incorporate realistic as well as expressionistic études in order to modernize them. These can be anything from abstract movement based pieces, to singing or other musical interludes, to a newly created scene that covers an aspect of a character's life that wasn't shown previously. The études are then utilized in the early stages of the rehearsal processes in

order to test the actor's understanding of a pre-existing scene. Actors are asked to try to remember the basic events and perspectives of a short scene and then improvise it without any assistance from the director. "Their task is to filter the given circumstances through their own sensibility in order to 'evaluate' the facts, to understand their meaning in the context of the play, and to start the process of 'feeling themselves in the role and the role in themselves" (Jackson 170). The intention of this exercise is to struggle against mechanical delivery of the text and to bring an authentic thought process onto the stage (Jackson 170).

These methods revolutionized much of the Western world's approach to acting. They are applied rigorously as a foundation for most actor education today, and serve well in realism, the standard style for Western television, film, and theatre. However, as the 20th century developed, some styles of theatre extended beyond realism, and rejected many of realism's tenets including its ideas on acting. One of these was Bertolt Brecht's political and didactic Epic Theatre.

## **Brecht**

### **Background**

Brecht's plays and theatrical ideas about the Epic Theatre were created in response to the horrors he experienced during World War I and the overall social upheavals of the first half of the 20th century. As a young medical student, he served the Germans in World War I and there witnessed the extremes of human cruelty, and later the despair of a defeated country. Rather than languishing in nihilism, Brecht found the opportunity for social change in the theories of Marx. Brecht believed that

humanity's fate was dynamic, susceptible to improvement, would culminate in the victory of the proletariat, and could be supported by human ingenuity (Harrop 218). Brecht developed a particular style of political theatre designed to propagate his ideas and motivate his audiences into action against current social conditions. "The Epic Theatre's goals were to make the spectator a critical observer, who must make decisions and take action, rather than a passive and empathetic one, and to show that change and manipulation of man and his environment are possible despite the deep historical nature of human misfortune" (Harrop 220).

Brecht officially called the result of achieving these goals "The Alienation Effect" in reference to the emotional distancing or "alienation" that an Epic Theatre audience was intended to feel after seeing one of his shows. This effect was attained through the use of specific literary structures, design, music, and a highly stylized acting technique. The plays themselves are written to be episodic, are often not in chronological order, sometimes include narration in addition to dialogue, often take place in an unspecified time or location, and are purposefully open ended. These techniques are implemented in order to encourage the audience to decide for itself on the relationships between the scenes. The design is generally minimalistic so as not to create any sort of illusion of realism. It may expose the lighting grid or other technical elements to remind the audience they are in a theatre, use projections to comment on the action onstage, and introduce placards which announce when a scene will begin. The music contradicts the events on stage by playing something which represents the opposite mood, often serves to interrupt the sequence of the performance, and incorporates popular culture in

an ironic way (Thomson 281-251). By incorporating popular culture ironically, Brecht means that his music would imitate the styles of popular music of that time, and would use them to produce the opposite effect of what was originally intended with that music. Audience members' attention would be piqued when they heard something they recognized, but would be alienated once they understood it was being utilized in a contradictory manner.

### **Acting In Brecht**

In general, Epic Theatre style asserted the importance of characters as representations of social classes rather than as individuals. It introduced the idea that an actor should "present" their character rather than "becoming" their character, and declared this would help the audience to critically reflect on the character's actions rather than to emotionally identify with them. Brecht developed Techniques to help the actor achieve these goals: they include the incorporation of the "gestus," fixing the "not...but," breaking character, and eliminating the fourth wall.

First, an actor does not look for psychological motivations, as one would when acting in realism according to Stanislavsky, but rather the sociological motivations of the group his character represents. A symbolic physical expression called the gestus encapsulates these motivations. According to *Acting With Style* (Harrop 221), "A gestus may be the physical attributes of a character that project the essential socioeconomic function of the role, or it may be a particular gesture or moment of action that embodies thematic meaning." For example, a realistic Stanislavsky-based gesture might be a character leaning back in a chair to smoke a cigar because the character is exhausted

after a long day at work, whereas a Brechtian *gestus* would be a character over exaggeratedly leaning back in a chair to smoke a cigar while his employees labor tirelessly in front of him since this demonstrates the abuses of capitalism. The external differences between a psychologically motivated gesture and a socially motivated *gestus* are that a *gestus* looks unnatural, is a caricature of a natural gesture, and is obviously symbolic. The difference is the slight change of focus from emotional and psychological goals to political ones as well as the addition of other stylistic alterations to the everyday human being so that he may symbolize something larger than himself. Externally, it is evident that the techniques used in this style are intended to have a profound intellectual impact on their audience members. They are meant to cause people to consider large-scale political or philosophical issues through the interactions of individual characters as representations of different socioeconomic groups.

Once this is established, actors can move into a deeper layer of Brechtian acting by doing what Brecht calls, 'fixing the "not...but"'. As part of an audience's critical reflection on the stage action, Brecht suggested that actors should not only present what their characters are doing on the stage, but also imply what they are not doing. "That is to say he (the actor) will act in such a way that the alternative emerges as clearly as possible, that his acting allows the other possibilities to be inferred and only represents one out of the possible variants" (*Brecht On Theatre* 137). As an audience watches a Brechtian actor, they should be motivated to condemn the actions of the abusive characters and also be able to understand that alternatives to their actions were available. This abstract idea is achieved in a performance by finding key moments in a

play where a character is in the process of deciding what to do. Before they commit to their decision, a character should have a moment of hesitation and should express some doubt that what they are doing is the right thing. In this moment, audience members have the opportunity to consider what else the character could have or should have done. Brecht understood that part of initiating social change is to not present the issues of the world as immutable, but to show that they are subject to alteration if different decisions are made at key opportunities.

To achieve Brecht's goals in their entirety, in addition to the above, actors finally need to ensure that the audience, as members of society, are reminded that they too are impacted by the issues shown in the play. They cannot be so absorbed in the action that they forget that they are a part of the same world as the actors and can therefore do something about the problems the play addresses. Breaking character and breaking the fourth wall will help the actors have this effect on the audience. An actor can break character entering and exiting as themselves without the physical gestus to show that they are separate from their character. An actor can also break the fourth wall by addressing dialogue to the audience, and by using facial expressions towards the audience to hint at how they feel about the stage action.

### **Differences Between Brecht and Stanislavsky**

It is necessary to acknowledge that there are essential differences between Stanislavsky and Brecht in order to better identify where and how one can help the other. Shomit Mitter in *Systems of Rehearsal* states that, "Stanislavsky and Brecht move apart on adjacent rails from unlike premises to appropriately incongruent forms of

presentation” (Mitter 45). As a quick reference to be used by my designers, actors, and myself, I created a table of the major differences between the two practitioners (Appendix B). It includes shorthand descriptions of the differences in design categories, acting techniques, production goals, etc. It was useful during the rehearsal process to have at hand when making choices about the production. At all times we needed to ensure that we were faithfully reproducing the respective techniques. To demonstrate these differences specifically within the framework of the play intended for production, consider two different summaries of *The Exception and the Rule*. The first summary represents how this play could be viewed from Stanislavsky’s perspective only; the second represents only Brecht’s perspective.

**Realism:**

*The Exception and the Rule* by Bertolt Brecht relays the story of a Merchant and his employees in the Jahi desert in the early 1900’s, who are attempting to reach a newly discovered oil hole before their competitors. Along the way, the Merchant, driven by the promise of financial gain, is forced to physically and emotionally abuse his employees in order to push them to their maximum productivity. The Merchant’s vituperative attitude results in the firing of his Guide, and the subsequent deterioration of his relationship with his remaining employee (a Coolie). Paranoia grows between the two as they attempt to navigate the desert without the Guide which results in further physical abuse from the Merchant to the Coolie. The more the Merchant abuses, the more paranoid he gets, and the further they get lost. The downward spiral between the two culminates in the Coolie attempting to offer water to his parched master, which the Merchant, mistaking the Coolie’s offer of help for an attack with a stone, shoots the Coolie dead. The events of the narrative above are reviewed in a tribunal in which the Widow of the deceased Coolie demands punishment of the Merchant and damages for the loss of her breadwinner. Despite proving conclusively that the Coolie was not attacking the Merchant with a stone, but instead was offering a flask of water, the Widow’s case is dismissed because it is decided that the Merchant was acting in justifiable self-defense. The Judge declares the Merchant could not assume that someone he abused would want anything other than misfortune for him. The Merchant shot the Coolie because it

would be foolish to assume that the Coolie was acting exceptionally towards him through an act of apparent kindness.

**Brechtian:**

Here is another way to summarize the same story:

*The Exception and the Rule* by Bertolt Brecht demonstrates the exploitation of the lower class by the upper class as a result of the cruel inhumane demands of capitalism. A Merchant who represents the upper class, a Guide who represents the middle class, and a Coolie who represents the lower class are attempting to cross a desert in order to collect a bribe of silence from the discoverers of an oil hole before their competitors. The Merchant mercilessly pushes his employees to travel faster in order to reach this promise of financial gain. The Coolie, who is overburdened with the Merchant's baggage, is struggling to keep up with the Merchant's pace. He is consequently beaten by the reluctant Guide in order to motivate him further. The Merchant senses the Guide's reluctance and attempts to turn his employees against each other. When he is unsuccessful at manipulating the Guide, he fires the Guide, so that he may continue on his journey without fear of mutiny. However, this fear is not quelled as the Merchant must continue to push his increasingly exhausted yet still faithful Coolie beyond his limits. In the uninhabited desert, without the support of the corrupt capitalist legal system and its enforcers to enable his abuses, the Merchant fears that the Coolie has sufficient reason to revenge himself upon his cruel master. All the guilt of the man at the top is only made real to him when he is left alone with the human object of his ruthlessness. Not surprisingly, the Coolie, whose original job was not to Guide, gets their expedition lost in the desert. Now lost and running out of water, the Merchant prepares his revolver in case he must defend himself against the wrathful Coolie. The Coolie meanwhile, who has a secret water flask which was given to him by the Guide, recognizes the Merchant's unstable condition. He realizes that if he is found with a full water flask while his master is left collapsed from dehydration, he will probably be punished, prosecuted, and left without money to support his family. The Coolie decides to get up and offer his water flask to the Merchant who, in his paranoia-induced delirium, shoots the Coolie dead, believing he was attacking him with a stone. These incidents are reviewed by a corrupt judge who conspicuously assists the Merchant in coming up with a strong defense. The merchant ends up deciding that the Coolie's Widow should not receive financial compensation, and that the Merchant should not be punished because the Merchant acted in "justifiable" self-defense. It was perfectly acceptable for the Merchant to shoot someone who presumably hated him. None of the Merchant's other behaviors are questioned. His abusive behavior is considered normal.

The first focuses on the motivations of the individuals involved, while the second focuses on the political implications of the individuals' actions. It should be clear that even with the political perspective in the second narrative, expressed by some non-realistic behavior, Brechtian actors are still performing in real time, are reacting actively to whatever is occurring on the stage, are communicating with their fellow actors, and will still have emotional responses to the actions they are pursuing. With my production of *The Exception and the Rule*, I intend to practically disprove misconceptions about Brechtian acting needing to be "cool and unemotional," and in general find which parts of the first narrative (Stanislavsky) I can use to improve the second (Brecht). I believe it is possible to tell a compelling story about the excesses of capitalism by making the audience think intellectually about the issues presented as Brecht wishes, and also by including the emotional drama between the characters, as Stanislavsky wishes.

## ***Method***

### **Play Selection and Analysis**

In order to successfully test my hypothesis, I selected a Brecht play which was manageable in length, had a small cast, and had simple technical requirements. The play also needed to have characters with relationships which could be expanded upon, a clear political message for change, and political relevance for our audience. The *Exception and the Rule*, written in 1929/30, fit all of these requirements. It has a thirty minute run time, requires only seven actors, has a clear message, and leaves room for character development and interpretation. Brevity and clarity are appropriate characteristics of a play intended for a senior theatre project, for a first attempt at

directing Brecht, and especially for a play intended to be performed in two different styles. Also, approaching this prolific and extensively analyzed playwright through his work in its simplest form is conducive to experimenting with the acting style. *The Exception and the Rule* is classified as a *Lehrstücke* (Learning Play) which is a particular genre of play in Brecht's career from 1926 to 1938. These short plays were intended to erode all division between the audience and the actors so that together they could be instructed on the principles of Marxist philosophy (Wirth 2000). It was an opportunity for Brecht to experiment with his theatrical ideas in service of educating the audience about politics in a concise format. Regarding the *Lehrstücke* he wrote: "The form in question can however only be achieved by a complete change of the theatre's purpose. Only a new purpose can lead to a new art. The new purpose is called paedagogics" (*Brecht On Theatre* 30) The concise format and bare bones style of a *Lehrstücke* play lent itself to being filled out and made more three dimensional by Stanislavsky's methods. For example, the characters of *The Exception and the Rule* are only referred to by their professions, and little information is overtly given to distinguish them from other members of their profession. Applying Stanislavsky's ideas here could help establish these characters as distinct individuals while also not removing their association with the larger groups their characters are intended to represent.

In order to properly test whether or not more emotional engagement from an audience would increase the impact of a Brecht play, it was necessary to ensure the topic would be compelling regardless of the performance style. Therefore, it was part of my responsibility as a director to communicate my intentions about what defined or

united the play as a whole and how each of the theatrical elements will combine to serve the message of the play. For this show specifically, I had to make some choices which would apply to the show as a whole, and make others which would help to differentiate the two styles. My process for making choices for the show as a whole included identifying questions the play asks of its audiences, deciding which character's story the play is about, and clarifying any associations the play might inspire with a contemporary audience.

One of the first questions I focused on was, "Could the Merchant have gotten away with his actions on the basis of self defense in our current society?" Personal self-defense has been a contentious political issue in the United States since the occurrence of high-profile incidents like the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin in 2012. It was important to ask this question in relation to our current society, in order to find ways of making the play more relevant and therefore more engaging for contemporary audiences. In the United States, self-defense can be justified even if the perceived aggressor didn't actually mean the perceived victim any harm. What matters in these situations is whether a "reasonable man" in the same situation would have perceived an immediate threat of physical harm. The concept of the "reasonable man" is a legal conceit that is subject to differing interpretation in practice, but it is the legal system's best tool to determine whether a person's perception of imminent danger justified the use of protective force (Hill 2002). The question that follows this research for the play is whether or not the Merchant could be considered to be behaving as a reasonable man in this situation. Clearly, the Judge argues the Merchant behaved reasonably given that

the Coolie, as a member of the abused lower class, had every reason to wish harm upon the Merchant. The Merchant couldn't know that the Coolie was behaving exceptionally, so he behaved reasonably in that he assumed the worst from his "enemy." What strikes me about this conclusion is that the issue Brecht is trying to communicate is not that the Judge's reasoning is illogical, or that the Merchant's behavior is irrational, but the fact that their behavior is perfectly reasonable considering the society which surrounds them. This is supported by the opening speech of the play, spoken by all of the actors: "Observe the conduct of these people closely: find it estranging even if not very strange, hard to explain even if it is the custom, hard to understand even if it is the rule." The point of the show is to recognize that most of the characters are behaving according to the "custom" and that in the end it is the custom which should be criticized and altered rather than the actions of a few people within the custom. Brecht wished people to solve the root of the problem rather than merely addressing the symptoms. What makes the play powerful and outrageous is that the Merchant can be considered to be acting as any reasonable man would in his situation.

Another of the questions this play is therefore asking is not "is the Merchant a reasonable man", but instead, "why is it acceptable that he can be considered a reasonable man." I could raise this question in my performance by directing the actor playing the Merchant to have sympathy for the Merchant's situation. Rather than playing the Merchant as volatile and irrational, as he might appear through the text alone, the Merchant could be played as someone who did not intend to cause harm to others, but was forced to under his legitimate belief that the Coolie was threatening his life.

Based on my choices to focus on the above questions, I decided that the story of the play is the Merchant's story. It is about his motivations to abuse, his own paranoia from committing the abuse, and the Coolie's consequent death. It is about whether this is right or wrong, if it was justified or not, and what can be done in the future to prevent this kind of event from happening. The Merchant is the character whose decisions should have been different. It is the negative consequences of his actions that a change in society would affect. Deciding that this play is the Merchant's story does not mean detracting something from the other characters, but instead means ensuring that their behavior or other elements of the production do not distract from his journey unnecessarily. The audience needs to pay attention to his thought processes and choices in order to have an understanding of the play as Brecht desired.

After completing this part of the analysis, I had to figure out how I should acknowledge the relationship between contemporary issues and the issues of this play. After all, I found many parallels between the conditions when this play was written in 1930's Germany, and 2016 in the United States. Class inequality, racism as a scapegoat for class inequality, exploitation of the lower classes, and "justified" self-defense resulting in the death of innocents are unfortunately issues which still resonate profoundly today.

In order to implement the ideas established from this analysis, I relayed all of this information to my actors at the beginning of the rehearsal process and continually brought it up as we worked. We consistently made sure that the choices made by the actors, designers, and myself served not only this experiment in style, but also the

questions and themes I identified above. There would inevitably be some differences between how these aspects of my analysis were implemented in the Stanislavsky night and how they were implemented in the Brecht night. In the Stanislavsky night, references to the outside world had to be implied than directly stated, unlike in the Brecht night. We had to trust that many of the real world associations would be made by the audience themselves, rather than having the connections referenced directly. It wasn't imprudent to assume that this could happen. With lines from the Merchant like, "All power to the strong, no power to the weak", "a malicious lot these Coolies", and "who has good luck is good and who has bad luck is bad", his harsh survival of the fittest perspective on the world is communicated. It is obvious that if the Merchant were a real person in today's culture, he would be advocating for policies supported by Social Darwinism that would result in racism. Some of the lines from the Judge are even more eerily relevant including, "the Merchant did not belong to the same class as his carrier. He had therefore to expect the worst from him." And "This happens also with the police at times. They shoot into a crowd of demonstrators- quite peaceful folk- because they can't see why these folk don't simply drag them off their horses and lynch them. Actually, the police in such cases fire out of pure fear. And that they are afraid is proof of their good sense." The line from the Judge about the police can be directly connected to the controversial deaths of unarmed African-American men at the hands of the police during the past four years. The racial stereotyping and paranoia involved in these current events are exactly what the Judge is excusing in his analogy to the events of the play. For the Stanislavsky night, I decided it did not hurt the effect of realism for me to

instruct the actors playing the Merchant and the Judge to say these particular lines a little bit slower and louder than they normally would. I wanted to guarantee that all audience members would pay special attention to these lines, and be able to make connections to today's social climate on their own.

However, for the Brecht night, I knew we could implement my analyses more conspicuously. First, it was possible, to highlight the lines mentioned above even more obviously, by having the actors take care to speak those lines directly to the audience so that they could not be ignored. Other ways of expressing a contemporary connection included creating a 1% only sign (a reference to the Occupy Wall-Street Movement) which the Coolie placed on top of the shelter he constructed in Scene six for the merchant, the gun the Merchant used to shoot the Coolie- which shot out a sign which read "Self Defense" (quotes included to imply a negative view of self-defense in these circumstances), and the Merchant's rap (a music genre originating from African-Americans whose subjects are sometimes related to racial oppression). Also, perhaps less noticeable, but significant for the actors, I suggested that they should be thinking about the contemporary issues which mean the most to them when directly addressing the audience as a group. For instance, at the beginning and end of the play, when the actors all speak as themselves rather than their characters, they instruct the audience to critically evaluate and be outraged by the events presented in the play. In order to inspire passion in the actors' performances at these moments, I thought it would be useful for them to relate what they were saying to the issues mentioned above that have affected them or someone they know personally.

After choosing what would conceptually ground the play no matter the performance style, I had to establish what would stay constant between the two nights in the production itself. Brecht's script, the actors, the musicians, the use of cube units for the set, the reuse of some costume pieces, and many aspects of the trial scene would stay the same between both nights. Keeping these consistent would help to make sure that Brecht's basic narrative was maintained for comparison between the two nights.

Next, I had to make choices I would implement as a director, and choices I would develop in collaboration with the designers regarding the distinct differences between the two performance nights. Our fundamental issue was identifying how we could compromise between the differing goals of Stanislavsky and Brecht. Brecht asserts that the goal of his plays should be moral debate rather than attempted psychoanalysis of the individual characters (Hodge 107). In contrast, Stanislavsky's main goal was for the audience to have a deep understanding of the psychological motivations behind a character's behavior. The implied question for combining the two is how can a focus on the emotional inner lives of characters be beneficial when challenging societal standards in moral debate?

## **Production Differences**

### **Stanislavsky Night**

In general, I intended that the first night would be done with an emphasis on realism while still maintaining a few elements of Brecht. I wanted to provide the spectator with an experience where it was possible to empathize emotionally with the

characters on stage. The audience would be continually engaged in the narrative of the story until the trial scene, where they would be made self-conscious on a few occasions. The point of the narrative sequence is for the audience to follow the events of the play, gain an understanding of them, and develop an emotional connection to them. The trial scene is a reflection on and judgment of this narrative, and is therefore an opportunity for the audience to think critically about the events of the play for themselves. In experiencing the trial's outcome with both an intellectual and emotional perspective, the audience can reach the conclusion Brecht intended with a greater passion for solving the issues presented. Also, generally, I wished there to be as little disruption between scenes as possible. With the help of incidental and transitional instrumental music and efficient scene changes, I hoped the story would be continuous and mesmerizing all of the way through.

### **Stanislavsky Acting**

With regard to the acting, actors needed to have a psychological understanding of their character, the ability to behave truthfully on stage with their fellow actors, and the ability to express their characters specifically in nonverbal etudes. Unlike in Brechtian theatre, the invisible fourth wall between the actors and the audience would remain up. The actors were to pretend they are alone on stage with the goal of convincing the audience that they were actually their characters on stage. These characters were to be fully fleshed out individuals who had a specific psychological perspective on the action they were involved in. Actors must achieve this by relating to their character through an understanding of their given circumstances, their objectives

moment by moment as well as their super-objective, or the objective which ties all of their other objectives together. It was relatively easy for most of the actors to apply this process since they had been trained in Stanislavsky's methods in previous acting classes. I spent more one on one time analyzing in this way and practicing with those who did not have this experience.

Actors must also be looking to be consistently connected to their fellow actors on stage. This is accomplished by making sure that actors have their focus on each other and not on themselves. It is easy for an actor to be self-conscious on stage or to focus egotistically on their own acting, but these thoughts will be immediately obvious to an observant audience member, and will ruin the illusion of the play. To prevent this, actors, with their objectives, must look to change their fellow actor's behavior on stage. In dramatic moments in real life, people are focused on trying to get something from the other person and are therefore not self-conscious. To be compelling, actors must do the same. Actors must also always be looking to behave "truthfully" in the moment and to be in sync with the logic of the play. Nothing happens in the play without reason, so an actor must always understand why their character is on stage, and why they are doing or saying whatever it is they are doing or saying. In some cases, this means finding ways to justify Brecht's built in devices designed to interrupt the flow of the story. For example, there were many instances where the script requires the actors to break character and explain their character's perspective to the audience. My solution for this, for the night of realism, was to have the characters journaling to themselves or "thinking out loud" whenever they were supposed to be talking to the audience. During these

moments, characters would avoid eye contact with the audience and speak only to themselves like a Shakespearean soliloquy. This way, no alterations in the script would be required and the world of the play could remain unbroken.

Another device included to help with the communication of realism was the setting up of non-verbal etudes into and between scenes. Brecht intended that the flow of the story be interrupted with direct breaks in time or location with a narrator announcing scene changes, and quick immediate shifts in location. I decided to find a way to connect all of the scenes together in order to maintain a stronger sense of a unity of time and space. Nonverbal etudes fulfill this function by showing the actions on stage that might occur between scenes or even between lines. A greater unity of time and space gives the audience more time to see the characters existing truthfully in real time, doing things that might not be deemed necessary to show on stage by Brecht in order to give a heightened sense of realism and possibly a deeper glance into their character. In most people's every day lives, conversation with others only makes up a part of the things we do during the day. Most people's lives are also made up of time spent traveling, working on things by oneself, doing chores in silence, or even interacting with people non-verbally in between conversation. Stanislavsky thought that paying attention to all of the little details of our lives with and without other people would layer theatre with more convincing dimensions of realism. In the context of my production, we decided that rather than ignoring all of the realities of crossing a desert, we would try to sprinkle in the sort of daily activity required for such a journey. I was also able to use these moments of transition to explore some of the psychological

relationships between characters in more depth. For instance, after the scene where the Coolie sets up the tent in the desert and the Merchant decides that he should sleep outside so that the Coolie can't hurt him, I staged a passing of time using lights and music until the characters woke up the next morning. I then showed the Coolie waking up, packing the tent up, and then proceeding to wake the Merchant up carefully. The Merchant is startled awake and is prepared to defend himself for a moment until he realizes the Coolie is harmless. I hoped this would foreshadow the events of the end of their journey, reveal the psychological condition of the Merchant, make it seem more plausible that the Merchant would shoot the Coolie, as well as passing from scene six to scene seven without much of an interruption.

### **Brecht Acting**

The second night was intended to be purely Brechtian. Acting this was to be achieved primarily through constant breaks in character, exaggerated physicality, frequent addresses to the audience, and etudes which incorporated other mediums of art. On a small scale, breaks in character could occur during actor entrances and exits. Simply by coming on stage and leaving the stage as themselves, actors could make the transformation to their character's physicality more interesting because of the distinct contrast between themselves and their characters. In order that the audience could understand the distinction between the actor and the character, the physicality of the character had to be obviously heightened and unnatural. Exaggerated physicality or "gestus" would be developed by finding positions and habits of movement which incorporated stereotypes of a character's social class or ones which symbolized the

emotions that character was experiencing in the moment. These physical alterations would have to be immediately comprehensible and make clear the relationships between each of the characters and the larger groups of people they represented. The Coolie, for example, hunched her back, moved with tiny rapid steps, and kept her hands clutched close to her body. Conversely, the Merchant puffed out his chest, took firm and bold steps, kept his fists clenched, and rotated his elbows out. The two positions obviously contrast each other and give a clear indication of how the two are to be viewed in relationship to each other. Another example of gestus was the inclusion of a silent scream from the Widow as inspired by Helen Weigel in the original production of *Mother Courage*. It is obvious that the Widow is in pain given the contortions of her body in the scream, but it is made strange due to the lack of sound coming from her when her body and facial expression would suggest otherwise.

Another Brechtian acting technique implemented was the actors' breaking of the fourth wall by expressing their opinions about the play directly to the audience. The Judge was able to make particularly good use of this technique because of his actually being positioned physically in the audience, and the number of times his lines involve apparently conferring with the audience.

The addition of etudes which incorporated other mediums of art served as replacements for the instances where singing is indicated in the original script. The purpose of these singing moments is to make things strange, and to distance the audience from the moment. I took this idea, and applied it in different ways. For instance, instead of singing one of his monologues, the Merchant rapped it to a rhythm

supplied by the actors and the audience members. Rapping allowed the Merchant more room for aggression than singing would, and distanced the audience more because of rap's greater relevance as a contemporary medium. Another example of an etude was when the Judge sang at predetermined times throughout his long monologues to contrast significant points in his speeches. At one moment, he would be speaking normally, the next, as he was revealing his verdict for instance, he would be nearly singing a jazz ballad. It was akin to opera's recitative: half singing and half speaking. The laid back style of the Judge's melodies contrasted with his harsh assertions and verdicts. Hearing that the Merchant is acquitted for his act of violence is disconcerting when it is presented as a casual and beautiful jazz melody. The clash of feelings created by this forced the audience to pause to think about the significance of what they were hearing. Also, for the Coolie's monologue rather than just describing a third person's perspective on the Coolie's dilemma of whether or not to cross the river, this situation was reenacted physically while the Coolie described and watched from the audience. All of these were previously marked in the script by Brecht to be sung and were intended to take the audience out of what was happening and give them the opportunity to think critically about what was occurring on stage.

### **Rehearsal Process**

Our rehearsal time was spent doing four different types of activities: actor development, character development, scene study, and abstracted scene work. Actor development consisted of playing games intended to bond the actors, make them more comfortable being vulnerable around each other, and also to understand the basics of

Stanislavsky and Brecht in practice. It is important that the relationships between actors would enhance the performances rather than inhibit them. Especially for Stanislavsky's method, it is essential that actors can communicate truthfully with another. This is only possible when the actors trust and understand each other well. As such, exercises from my time spent in Russia were utilized for that purpose to great effect. Other exercises designed to teach style were borrowed directly from Brecht's writings in addition to books which expanded upon his original ideas. One particularly successful exercise was one modified from *Acting with Style*. Actors were asked to come up with a story in which minimal dialogue was required, which had a clear beginning, middle, and end, and where each character was distinct from one another. They chose to recreate a drug deal where a child, his grandmother, and an agent in disguise were all witness. After they stumbled through an improvisation using these characters and this scenario, I asked one of the actors to retell the same story from her character's extremely biased perspective. While the story was being recounted, the other actors were to then silently act out the events and their characters as they were portrayed in this new version of the story. After this, they were asked to recreate the story as they did it the first time, but incorporating all of the biases expressed by the one character's narrative to an extreme. For this time, the grandmother recounted the story and successfully reduced every character to exaggerated stereotypes with the drug dealer being slimy and creepy, the drug buyer being jittery, paranoid, and stupid, the child being innocent and angelic, and the undercover cop being aggressive and tough. All of the actors found a physical position and series of physical habits which encapsulated the descriptions above, and

were required to maintain those throughout the scene. The positions and physicality expressed by the actors in the third performance of their scene was a perfect example of gestus where an actor must visually express his character's position in the world. The differences between the first and third performances clearly captured what I intended to be the differences between the Stanislavsky style and the Brecht style in the production.

Character development consisted of analyzing each character in terms of Stanislavsky and then encapsulating parts of this analysis into gestus poses. Actors established their characters' objectives as made specific by their given circumstances and practiced applying them in scenes from the show. We did a series of exercises where actors could experiment with poses and styles of movement that they felt fit their characters, and could then narrow them down to the ones which I believed were the most appropriate. We then worked on understanding how the scenes themselves needed to function. We established a repeatable set of blocking which would support the characters' objectives for the scene. Gestus poses were incorporated into these scenes as well for the Brecht night. Lastly, for the parts of the play which were marked to be sung by the actors or to be spoken as a group, etudes described earlier were created. Sometimes the gestuses were used to inspire how these group etudes would look, and some were newly created.

The changes mentioned above reflect some of the concrete alterations in style that the actors could reliably execute. In addition, I altered some design aspects to assist the audience and actors understand each style. For realism, the design would draw the audience in and augment the believability of the actor's performances. For

Brecht, the design would distance the audience from the events on stage and make the actor's performances more alienating. Some design elements could even assist in producing better performances from the actors. Music and lighting can help an actor gauge the mood intended for a scene and help them in turn figure out how their performance should fit into or not fit into that mood.

### **Stanislavsky Set**

For both nights, we used a thrust stage with audience members on three sides. A thrust set up in addition to the already small space created a more intimate space where actors are closer to the audience. This is conducive to audience members seeing every detail of an actor's performance for Stanislavsky, and for audience members not being able to feel "protected" by a fourth wall for Brecht. The set was composed of a series of cubes which could be stacked and arranged in different ways to represent different environments and moods. Ideally in realism, it would have made sense to try to reconstruct each of the scenes using detailed and realistic representations. Instead, with only stage cubes to work with, we aimed for arrangements which would communicate mood and would occasionally imitate realistic objects like mountains, river banks, the entrance to the inn. Some of the cubes had opaque plexi-glass sides which we took advantage of by attaching small red LED lights inside of them. For instance, for scene four, where the Merchant and Coolie are traversing through "dangerous territory", all of the red lights inside of the plexiglass boxes are turned on, and are scattered throughout the stage irregularly. In combination with the lights, the set looks intimidating and chaotic in contrast with their symmetrical organization during the scene before. The

set designer and I hoped this would provide an emotional stimulus for the actors to initiate the Merchant's descent into mistrust and the Coolie's into fear. The less an actor has to imagine what they are responding to, the easier it will be for them to produce believable performances which match the circumstances of the play. In this case, if the set looks more intimidating, then it will be easier for the actors to respond to their surroundings as if they were intimidating.

### **Brecht Set**

The utilization of the cubes for the Brecht night did not have to be altered too significantly from the realism night because of their already minimalistic form. In general Brecht design is supposed to make the audience aware that they are in a theater. The stage and auditorium must be purged of anything magical so the audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event (Willet 230-232). The primary adjustments with the cubes were to reduce any mood enhancement by turning off the lights in the cubes and to make their arrangements in structures less clean. All of the boxes were rotated so they did not align precisely with the boxes near them, making their appearance messier and their purpose less obvious. I wanted to make the audience more aware that these were individual cubes rather than only as a larger structure.

Brecht was known for incorporating placards and scene titles as another way of distancing the audience from the onstage action (*Brecht On Theatre* 43). Therefore, the most significant alteration for the Brecht night was the addition of painted signs with the titles of the scenes written on them as well as the addition of labels onto different props.

In between every scene, the actor who played the Judge would come out onto the stage during the scene change, switch out the posters and read aloud the name of the next scene. Each of the signs was painted in an abstract way which somehow represented the events of the next scene. For example, the fourth sign says "Scene 4: The Rushing River" in bold black text which is set against a blue, silver and black background. The background looks like rolling waves with speckled silver throughout, and therefore obviously symbolizes the river the Coolie and the Merchant encounter. The last sign is for scene eight, had no text on it, and was all sharp black and white shapes to symbolize the court's role in dividing up everything into good and bad, and into the exceptions and the rules.

At times, other signs (not scene titles) were worn by the actors or adorned props on stage. For example, the Coolie comes back on stage during the song of the tribunals right before the trial scene. At first all of the actors speak chant the text of the song until the Coolie says the last lines alone, "Here (the court) the thief hides what he has stolen, and wraps it in a piece of paper upon which a law is written." She then switches around a cardboard sign on her back which says "and that's how it should be," referencing the "chorus" of the Merchant's rap earlier. The point was that the sign and the Coolie's text obviously contradicted the Coolie's best interest, giving the audience a moment to think twice about what they were seeing/ hearing. Finally, the water flask the Coolie used to give water to the Merchant and the gun the Merchant used to shoot the Coolie both included text. The flask had the words "stone?" painted on them to ironically comment on the Merchant's mistaking it for a stone. The gun actually turns out to be a gun which

shoots out a small flag which had “Self-Defense” written on it, foreshadowing the grounds on which the Merchant would be allowed to get away with this murder. These details all served as tools for separating the audience from the action on stage and making them think twice about what they were seeing.

### **Stanislavsky Lights**

As with the set, lights could provide emotional accompaniment for the Stanislavsky night, but unlike the set, they could also more clearly differentiate aspects of the natural environment all through changes in the distribution, color, and intensity of the light. In general, we wanted to establish the natural settings of the play, so side lighting provided a sandy straw and a light orange color for the desert, a winding blue path throughout the stage represented the river, and a mix of blues and purples for the desert at night. We were able to exaggerate the foundations of each of the natural lighting environments whenever it was necessary to emphasize mood. For instance, during the tent scene when the Coolie and Merchant go to sleep and wake up the next morning, the lighting changed from the blue and purple night to the sunrise the next morning. From this point forward, their relationship deteriorates as they get more and more lost, so the desert side lighting became more and more intense until the stage was primarily lit from both sides. I believe this exaggerated the tension between the two as their shadows grew longer and their faces became more obscure generalizing the focus to their bodies and their relationship to each other rather than to their faces as an identifier of their individuality. All culminated in a tableau where the Merchant is lying on the ground shooting the Coolie who his reaching out to give him the water flask. I

intended that this stage picture and Brechtian gestus, which captured the essence of the show's message, would be engrained in the audience's mind as something absorbing, emotional, and simple to remember the show by.

### **Brecht Lights**

Lighting for the Brecht night was entirely white. We wanted the stage to feel neutral and clear for the audience to see. It would be harder for the audience to be absorbed into the action of the stage given that the lighting did not attempt to influence their mood. We did retain the lighting from the Coolie's shooting scene from the night before given its function as a gestus. The contrast between the white lighting of the rest of this show and this one moment of all sand colored side lighting would hopefully make this scene and the gestus contained in it stand out even more.

### **Stanislavsky Costumes**

Costumes were able to communicate in detail the "real world" of the play the most of the design elements. Each character's personality and profession could express specifically through the costumes. The Coolie had several fully packed bags, sandals, a jacket tied around her waist, distressed khaki pants, and a small dark green vest. The Coolie's poor economic status and role in this journey are contrasted with the Merchant's high economic status and position in the journey with his leather jacket, fedora, and binoculars. Aside from their socioeconomic status, the costumes also contained inherent emotional qualities which assisted the audience in understanding the characters. The Merchant's leather jacket, combat boots, and fedora make the

Merchant feel larger and stronger in contrast to the Coolie's small sandals and vest which make the Coolie feel kinder and weaker.

### **Brecht Costumes**

Costumes were reduced to their essential elements for the 2nd night. Actors only wore the pieces of their clothing which represented their character the most and wore their normal street clothes for everywhere else. For example, the Coolie only wore her vest and the jacket around her waist, the Merchant only wore his leather jacket and boots, and the Guide only wore her billowy shirt, serving as a reminder to the audience that the people in front of them are actors and therefore only represent their characters.

### **Stanislavsky Music**

My overall goals for the music on the Stanislavsky night were for it to confirm and heighten the emotions present in each scene, to carry momentum through scene transitions, and to tell the audience how they should feel about each of the moments on stage. An undergraduate composer created music for the string quartet which she would conduct during the performances. The most affective section musically started from the Coolie sleeping in the tent near the end of the play during scene seven. When the Coolie falls asleep, the music plays consistently until her death; providing an intense, atmospheric, and somber background for the events until the Coolie's doom. This was expressed musically through long, slow cluster chords which would resolve unsatisfyingly one note at a time to 7<sup>th</sup> chords or other cluster chords. By creating this continuous and dissonant drone, which never resolves pleasurably, a thick atmosphere filled with tension is built. It feels hypnotic and meditative, and allows the audience to

give in to the deep sadness of the scene they are watching. This was assisted by the actors' frequent crossings of the stage and quick entrances and exits which never allowed for any sort of emotional break. I hoped this would fully immerse the audience emotionally in the Coolie's plight.

### **Brecht Music**

The music for the second night was composed differently from the first. Generally, the music was significantly shorter and didn't necessarily match the on stage action. Rather than heightening the emotions of the scene it tried to contradict them by playing excerpts from the slow atmospheric scene seven music described above. For example, after the Merchant's rap, I expected the audience to be laughing. In order to contradict this, the slow painful drone, which is the opposite of the intense upbeat rap, would come back in to remind the audience of the gravity of the situation. Lines from the rap like "the weak lag behind but the strong arrive" and "sick men die but strong men fight" seem silly in context of this absurd rap, but given time to think about them during the subsequent music, one realizes how terrible the Merchant's words really were. The rap entertains the audience with these words, but the string quartet shames them for being entertained by these words.

For the music involving the actors, including the rap and the Judge's jazz ballads, more contemporary styles were selected in order to further estrange the audience from the action on stage. When the audience heard a melody or style they recognized from pop culture, any illusion that they were watching something from a different time period or that the actors were actually their characters would be dispelled. Brecht did this

himself in his musical collaborations with composers Kurt Weill and Hanns Eisler. His *Three-Penny Opera* was full of references to pop culture which made it popular, but ironically not for the reasons Brecht intended (*Brecht On Theatre* 85-86).

## ***Results and Conclusions***

### **Audience response**

At the end of each performance, audiences were asked to take a voluntary survey to assess emotional engagement and intellectual comprehension. The survey asked how much they sympathized with the Coolie, Guide, and Merchant, what “the exception and the rule” actually referred to, who was responsible for the Coolie’s death, and whether the events of this story could be considered unique or not in the world of the play. Generally, audiences on both nights agreed on answers for many of the questions. They did not sympathize with the Merchant, did sympathize with the Coolie, and had more sympathy for the Guide than not. They believed the exception was represented by the Coolie, and the rule was represented by the Merchant. They believed that the survival of the fittest was the rule and that an act of humanity was the exception in the play. They also said that the Merchant’s behavior is common rather than uncommon in the world of the play. Interestingly, there was an almost equal division both nights between those who blamed the Merchant and those who blamed society for the death of the Coolie. As these were the answers I expected to get from the audiences, the uniformity of these responses implies both that audiences understood Brecht’s criticism of capitalism, and that style did not impact the outcome of these questions.

Upon further analysis, there are some distinctions between the sets of answers. The most obvious distinction between sets of answers for both nights was the fact that answers for the Brecht night were less uniform than answers for the Stanislavsky night. I would attribute this to Brecht's alienation effect, and the contradictions it highlights in performances. This certainly lines up with Brecht's intention to make his audiences critically reflect on the events he was presenting. It seems as though on the Stanislavsky night, audiences knew what the "answers" were supposed to be, whereas on Brecht, they had to come to their own conclusions.

After doing a standard statistical analysis of the survey results (see appendix), here is the only useful and statistically significant ( $r=-.989$ ,  $p<.01$ ) conclusion:

- 1) Stanislavsky night audience members who sympathized with the Merchant did not sympathize with the Guide. Brecht Night audience members had no apparent relationship between their sympathy or lack thereof for the Merchant and Guide

What these answers mean is that people were less certain of who was the exception for both nights; those who sympathized with the Merchant more, sympathized with the Guide less on Stanislavsky night, and no such relationship exists with the Merchant and Guide on Brecht night. It is possible that the lack of an antithetical relationship between the Merchant and Guide on Brecht night is another testament to audiences being more certain of what they were "supposed" to think on Stanislavsky night: no sympathy for the Merchant and some sympathy for the Guide. Although the survey results provide some insight into the relationship between style and its impact on

an audience, for me personally, the most significant information was gained from witnessing the performances and audience responses myself.

### **Analysis of results- Personal Response**

One of my first observations about the first night was that it completely clarified why Brecht's style of performance might be necessary for a Brecht script, because there were many moments in this night of realism which didn't quite work. A large percentage of the dialogue in the script consists of the Merchant's asides to the audiences where he relays his opinions in long monologues on the past action as well as his intentions for the future. In the Brecht version, we were able to take creative liberties with these sections as well as other character's monologues by turning them into theatrical moments like raps or movement pieces or songs. These sections gained variety by using other mediums of art to communicate in different ways. For the realism night, all of these long monologues blended together and communicated essentially the same message repeatedly. Some variety inherently existed in the words themselves, some was able to be added through the actors' performance, but unfortunately I felt like these took me out of the scene due to their repetitiveness. It might have been possible with more rehearsal time to differentiate these moments more clearly from one another, but overall they became laborious for me to watch. Other moments where the Brecht style revealed itself as more appropriate to use included many of the quick dialogue exchanges between characters. When some of these moments which were intended to be presentational for the audience were played seriously and with commitment, they became shallow and even tacky. In quality realism, particularly for Stanislavsky and his

main playwright, Anton Chekhov, subtext was significant. Characters rarely meant what they said and therefore it was up to details in the acting to do the primary making of meaning. Whereas in Brecht and in particular the Lehrstücke, the dialogue serves as a way to only give the essential information the audience needs to know. The dialogue wasn't designed to give a three dimensional look into the complex relationships between characters and this showed when it was attempted to play as such. Therefore, for me, the best moments in the realism style were the nonverbal etudes where the actors could behave naturalistically and could subtly reveal aspects of their personality or feelings towards each other. This worked especially well from the tent scene to the Coolie's death where music controlled the mood and a gesture or a facial expression was all that was needed to express something powerful.

The trial scene at the end of the night of realism also worked fairly well. First, the dialogue itself was more conducive to being performed realistically as it flowed more naturally and contained a greater degree of specificity. I think Brecht did this intentionally because it was important to him that the arguments contained in the moral debate he presented were as filled out as possible. Audience members needed to understand in detail how someone in the society Brecht was railing against could get away with murder. Therefore, I believed it worked to perform this section realistically. It also made the times where I kept some Brecht style in this last scene more impactful. For instance, there are two moments where the Guide and the Coolie speak directly to the audience and the actors around them demonstrate what they are saying physically. These are the only times during the first style where the world of the play is broken. For

me, the world of the play was consistently engrossing from the tent scene forward and it was therefore more strange at the end when the actors all of a sudden started speaking to the audience than if they had been breaking character all along.

Overall, I felt like I took the Coolie's death more seriously and felt more emotionally connected to the character during the Realism night than in the Brechtian. I don't think this necessarily made me care more about the issues presented, but it certainly was different and made me feel differently. I was also definitely given more clues about what a truly great Stanislavsky-Brecht hybrid might look like. With a script that was more conducive to naturalistic behavior, with more time to develop more precise characters, and with a more discriminative and reserved use of Stanislavsky would this hybrid be effective. From my own observations, I would say that the inclusion of Stanislavsky technique during highly emotional moments makes those moments more powerful and makes the times when they are broken more estranging. I would also say generally that the nonverbal moments of character insight aren't particularly useful for Brecht's purposes unless they occur during an emotionally climactic moment.

In the end, I felt like the Brecht night was the more effective night. It was more effective in that it conveyed what Brecht intended more faithfully and convincingly, and it was also more consistently engaging. What worked best was how the various Brechtian elements combined together to create Brecht's alienation effect. It was not until this performance that I, and I believe my performers/ designers, truly understood what this effect was. There is only so much you can understand from written description, so it was rewarding to finally see it in practice. I believed the alienation effect to be strongest and

most powerful when something comedic or “entertaining” happened on stage which was concurrently or then immediately contradicted by something else. The Merchant’s rap, the Judge’s jazz singing, the Coolie breaking her arm in the river, and many other instances produced this effect. The Merchant’s rap and the Judge’s jazz recitative were entertaining in the moment, but some sense of cognitive dissonance occurs when reflecting on the words and ideas these characters are actually communicating. The same thing happens with the Coolie is breaking her arm in the river: the way she acts struggling to survive in the river is humorous, but is contradicted immediately by the Merchant’s aggressive response. At each of these moments, it was possible to tell that audiences were not quite sure whether or not to laugh. I believe this moment of self-doubt and self-consciousness provides an opportunity for critical thinking which is what Brecht intended (*Brecht On Theatre* 37). I think it is important for me to note that the work we did on Stanislavsky was not absent from the Brecht performance just as the Brecht work was not absent from the Stanislavsky performance. In my table of differences between Stanislavsky and Brecht (Appendix B) I think the common misunderstandings of Brecht were addressed as a result of the inclusion of Stanislavsky’s methods. The acting was not “cool or unemotional”, “bored or mechanical”, or making a choice between “playing and experiencing.” “It is only the opponents of the new drama, the champions of the ‘eternal laws of the theatre’, who suppose that in renouncing the empathy process the modern theatre is renouncing the emotions. All the modern theatre is doing is to discard an outworn, decrepit, subjective sphere of the emotions and pave the way for the new, manifold, socially productive

emotions of a new age.” (*Brecht On Theatre* 161). There were multiple occasions where emotional intensity and communion on stage were present in the actor’s performances as developed through Stanislavsky exercises. These moments were often useful in bringing the audience back to the gravity of the situations being portrayed on stage. The few instances where the Coolie or Guide stood up for themselves and tried to change the opinions of the Merchant or judge and the audience, were rooted in the development of character objectives from Stanislavsky. It gave their anger and passion specificity, direction, and true meaning. Without this, the Brechtian night could have been merely comedic or entertaining rather than persuasive and memorable.

### **Improvements**

For the Stanislavsky night, I think what would have helped the most is if we had a lot more time to work on the acting for just that style. During my time at the Moscow Art Theatre, I learned that students and professional actors would sometimes spend months and months developing a character and then might end up playing that same character over many years. Of course this results in more nuanced and therefore interesting performances than without. However, with my Stanislavsky night, we barely had time to put in any of these details. We had a few nonverbal moments which were useful and were able to flesh out some of the character’s objectives, super objectives, and given circumstances in performance, but we lacked the detail in the acting necessary to overcome the original, highly two dimensional script.

For the Brechtian night, I think that more effort could have been put into developing what Brecht calls the “Not...but.” The sense that there were alternatives

choices for each of the actors to make was absent from this performance. It seems to me that this concept is subtle and would take a bit of time to develop, but once implemented could have a large impact. I think our specific performance showed the world as it should not be, but it did not sufficiently imply that an alternative was possible. The “not...but” technique, in showing through the acting that the characters could have made other choices, would have fixed this.

### **Conclusions**

My production of Bertolt Brecht’s *The Exception and the Rule* in two different styles proves that Stanislavsky’s methods can be utilized in the Brecht theatre with good results, but only when used in the right places. An entire production of Brecht using only Stanislavsky’s methods to the exclusion of Brecht’s would not stay true to Brecht’s intentions, and would also not likely be an interesting work of theatre. Stanislavsky can be used in Brecht to help the actor to find moments where the actor needs to play his character’s objective to other characters on stage and also when the emotional intensity of a scene needs to be amplified. Although I did not intend this, I also learned that Brecht can also be useful when applied to realism. Employing a specific, exaggerated physicality in the creation of a character can bring a sort of psycho-physical understanding of the character which would be absent if only Stanislavsky’s psychological character analysis were integrated. Also, looking at a character from the perspective of society, other characters, and from the actor himself can reveal elements of a character which would not have otherwise been unearthed. Implementing traits

discovered from looking at a character from other perspectives can bring about a more complex, nuanced, and therefore more realistic performance from an actor.

### **Significance**

The results of my thesis have implications for me personally as an actor and director, and also for those wishing to perform a work of Brecht's or a work of realism. Both methods will benefit from selective inclusion of the other. Also, my thesis highlights which elements of both methods can help improve the other including integrating Stanislavsky in emotionally intense moments in Brecht and integrating Brecht in Stanislavsky to gain a deeper understanding of a character from a physical and sociological perspective. I hope my results can help dispel some of the myths surrounding Brecht's style so that his pieces may be performed more accurately and with a better audience response in the future.

## *Appendices*

### **Appendix A: Survey**

<b>The Exception and the Rule Survey</b> <b>Read:</b> This survey is intended to evaluate the efficacy of the different style of acting presented each performance night. Results of the survey will be analyzed by the director in order to support or refute the hypothesis of his honors thesis. Your participation in this research study is <b>voluntary</b> . You may choose not to participate. The survey will take approximately 3 minutes. Your responses will be <b>confidential</b> and we do not collect any identifying information. If you have questions please contact Taylor Galloway at <a href="mailto:tgallowa@butler.edu">tgallowa@butler.edu</a> . Feel free to write in a short alternative response under "other."					
<b>Who represents the Exception and who represents the Rule?</b>	Coolie	Merchant	Guide		
<b>What is the rule and what is the exception in the play</b>	Act of Humanity	Survival of the fittest	Other		
<b>What is the rule and the exception in our society</b>	Act of Humanity	Survival of the fittest	Other		
<b>What should be the rule and the exception</b>	Act of Humanity	Survival of the fittest	Other		
<b>Who/ what is to blame for the death of the coolie?</b>	Merchant	Society	Guide		
<b>In the world of the play, is the merchant operating as a unique individual or do you imagine this is a common pattern?</b>	He is an outlier	This is common	Other		
<b>On a scale of 1 to 5 how much sympathize with the Merchant. 1 being the least</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>On a scale of 1 to 5 how much did you sympathize with the Coolie</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>On a scale of 1 to 5 how much did you sympathize the Guide</b>	1	2	3	4	5

## Appendix B: Brecht/ Stanislavsky Differences Quick Sheet

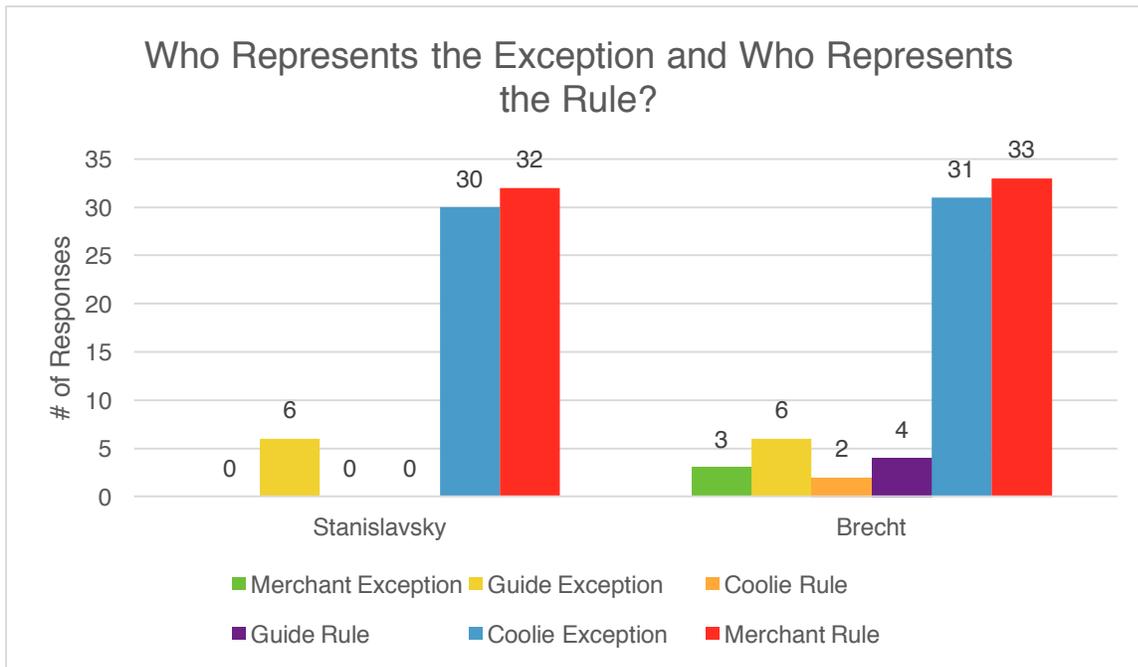
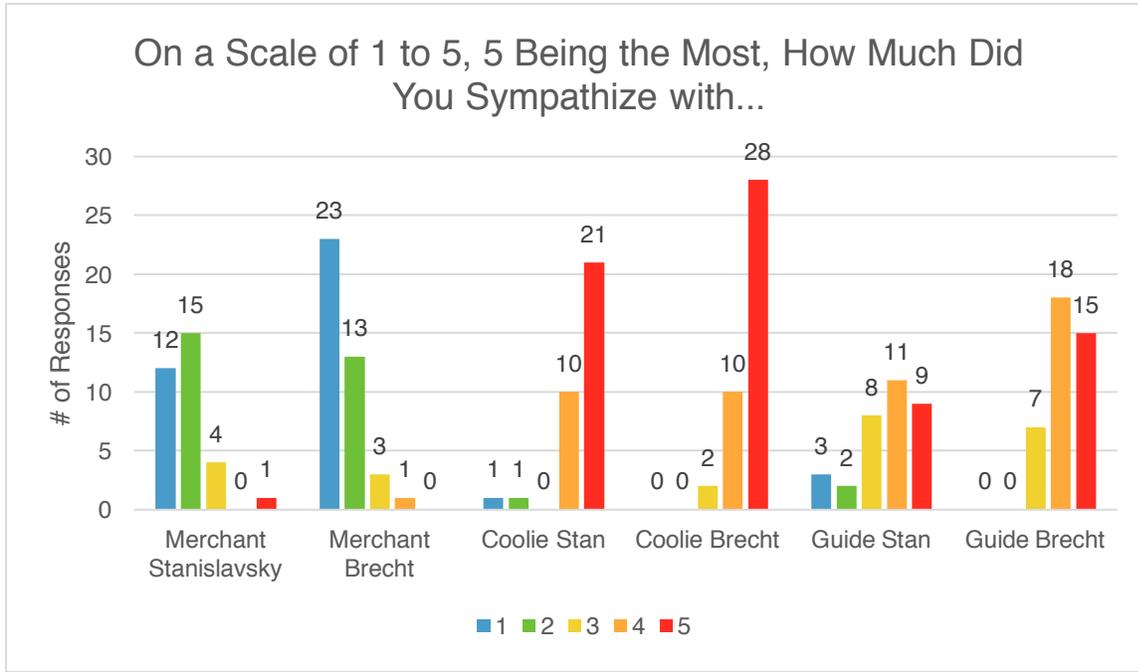
Category	Realism/ Stanislavsky	Brecht and Epic Theatre
Theories	Theories	Theories
Perspective on life/ theatre	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The human being is taken for granted</li> <li>2) He is unalterable</li> <li>3) Man as a fixed point</li> <li>4) Thought determines being</li> <li>5) Feeling</li> <li>6) Life on stage cannot be changed by life outside the stage or people in the audience. (Zarrilli pg. 263)</li> <li>7) Presents its content as the truth, common sense or obvious. Purports to be free of any specific ideology, therefore masking its ideology ("An epic system from acting reconsidered")</li> <li>8) For art to be apolitical means to present the world as is.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The human being is the object of inquiry</li> <li>2) He is alterable and able to alter</li> <li>3) Man as a process</li> <li>4) Social being determines thought</li> <li>5) Reason</li> <li>6) Change and Manipulation of Man and his environment are possible despite deep historical nature of human misfortune</li> <li>7) When something seems the most obvious thing in the world, it means any attempt to understand the world has been given up</li> <li>8) For art to be apolitical means only to ally itself with the ruling group.</li> <li>9) The contrast between learning and amusing oneself is not laid down by divine rule; it is not one that has been and must continue to be.</li> <li>10) Marxism as a solution to the abuses of Capitalism</li> </ol>
Impact on the Spectator	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Plot (pg.37 Brecht on Theatre)</li> <li>2) Implicates the spectator in a stage situation, but...</li> <li>3) Wears down his capacity for action</li> <li>4) Provides him with sensations</li> <li>5) Experience</li> <li>6) The spectator is involved in something</li> <li>7) Suggestion</li> <li>8) Instinctive feelings are preserved</li> <li>9) The spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience</li> <li>10) Passive and Empathetic Spectator</li> <li>11) Audience should empathize and identify with the characters entirely</li> <li>12) Eyes on the finish</li> <li>13) Spectator as consumer</li> <li>14) Outcome for the audience is psychoanalysis</li> <li>15) Clear hierarchical structure- The director/ playwright is the authority on the subject of their play.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Narrative</li> <li>2) Turns the spectator into an observer, and...</li> <li>3) Arouses his capacity for action</li> <li>4) Forces him to take decisions</li> <li>5) Picture of the world</li> <li>6) He is made to face something</li> <li>7) Argument</li> <li>8) Brought to the point of recognition</li> <li>9) The spectator stands outside, studies</li> <li>10) Critical observer who must make decisions and take action.</li> <li>11) Prevent the audience from emotionally identifying with the play in anyway- especially the characters.</li> <li>12) Eyes on the course</li> <li>13) Spectator as critical thinker</li> <li>14) Outcome for the audience is moral debate.</li> <li>15) Spectator is constantly reminded</li> </ol>

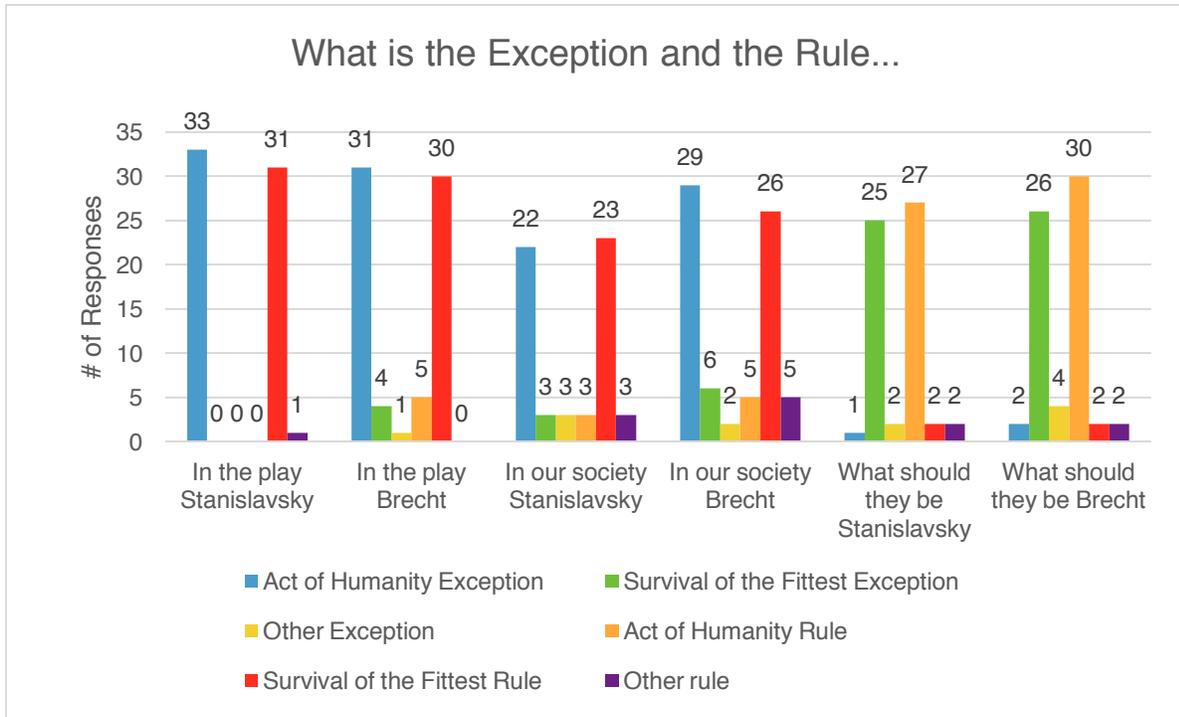
	<p>a. Hierarchy of discourses- the relation of the plot by means of an authorial, authoritative voice, which destroys any illusion of discourse.</p> <p>16) Consistent recognition and familiarization with events on stage. Worldview is often validated.</p>	<p>that no one side signifies authority, knowledge or the law.</p> <p>a. The relation of plot which encourages discourse.</p> <p>16) Verfremdungseffekt- A defamiliarized illustration is one that, while allowing the object to be recognized, at the same time makes it appear unfamiliar.</p>
Impetus for creation of methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stanislavsky's first ideas were a reaction to actors who were obsessed by their audience. (This was an overreaction and resulted in focusing only on inner life of the character.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brecht's ideas were a reaction to the mindless state he saw in audiences during a performance. They were hypnotized. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the world was going to change, art had to turn people's capacity for critical thinking on and not off.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Technique	Technique	Technique
Location	Specified location/ time	Unspecified location/ time- prevents audience from identifying
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design intended to absorb the audience- making it so they can believe what is happening on stage is "real"</li> <li>Spectator is given illusion that she or he is involved in the creation of shared meanings by the observation of "reality"</li> <li>Costumes/props- can also be representational, but intend to present the things as they are rather than ascribing meaning to them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimalistic Design- making audience aware they are in a theatre ex. exposing lighting grid or other technical elements</li> <li>Stage and auditorium must be purged of anything magical so that the audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event</li> <li>Costumes/props-are representational, but often are symbolic or exaggerated.</li> </ul>
Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To emotionally arouse</li> <li>To hypnotize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To disrupt</li> <li>To make strange</li> </ul>
Plot Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One scene makes another</li> <li>Growth</li> <li>Linear development</li> <li>Continuous action in the plot. If something like singing/ dancing does occur, it is integrated smoothly into the process so that audience members accept the reality of actors singing as "normal."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each scene for itself</li> <li>Montage</li> <li>In curves</li> <li>Jumps</li> <li>Ways of interrupting the flow of the play: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asides to the audience</li> <li>Actors singing</li> <li>Music which does not match what is occurring on stage. Incorporates popular culture ironically</li> <li>Projections/ Placards (Cambridge Guide to brecht)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Play's relationship to play's time setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking different social structures of past periods then stripping them of everything that makes them different from now. Thereby implying a pure and simple permanence. Determined to validate dominant culture. That human behavior is consistent across differences of time, culture, race, and gender</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historicization- Events on stage are unique transitory incidents, the conduct of the persons involved is not fixed and universally human. The spectator is given the chance to criticize human behavior from a social point of view. Challenges the presumed ideological neutrality of any historical reflection.</li> </ul>
Play Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classic realism in closure ensures familiarity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gave no closure- wanted contradictions to be dealt with there.</li> </ul>
Relationship to Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fourth wall; actors pretend they are alone</li> <li>• The artist's objective is to appear relatable and familiar.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narration/ asides to the audience</li> <li>• The artists objective is to appear strange and surprising</li> </ul>
Characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characters are fully fleshed out individuals.</li> <li>• Psychological Perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characters are intended to represent an entire group of people usually social class.</li> <li>• Sociological Perspective</li> </ul>
Actor's Relationship to Characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actors "become" their characters. The way their character behaves is set out by the text and is not open to change.</li> <li>• Actor and character are one</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actors should imply alternative viewpoints of their character in their acting. "not...but"</li> <li>• Gestus includes physical attitude, tone of voice and facial expression in order to show the attitudes which people adopt toward on another. The actor is consciously commenting on the character's social relations with others.</li> </ul>
Actor Physicality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physicality should be natural and specific to each character as if they were a person in real life. Sometimes necessary to exaggerate if playing in a larger space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gestus- The mimetic and gestural expression of the social relationship in which the people of a particular epoch stand to each other.</li> <li>• Example- could be a bow to another person lower than necessary and done many times. Best example is mother courage's silent scream- recognize it but it takes you out of it</li> <li>• The blocking and the gestus of the actors tell the fable in such a way that one could discover what is happening even if one couldn't hear anything. Transformations in the dialectic are marked on stage through transformations in the blocking.</li> </ul>

<p>System of Rehearsal/ character Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of character’s function with the play.</li> <li>• Identification with character. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Character’s Given Circumstances</li> <li>○ Character’s objectives moment by moment as well as their super-objective- what ties all of their other objectives together.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First part of rehearsal- You look assiduously for contradictions, for deviations from type, for the ugly in the beautiful and the beautiful in the ugly...The study of the role is at the same time a study of the fable.</li> <li>• Second phase is that of identification with the character, the search for the character’s truth in a subjective sense; you let it do what it wants to do, to hell with criticism as long as society provides what you need.</li> <li>• Only when the work of this naturalistic phase has been completed can the third brechtian phase begin. During this phase the actor having understood the character from the inside once again examines it from the point of view of society. Question characters Given Circumstances</li> </ul>
<p>Misconceptions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brecht” the false impressions of Stanislavsky arose because he lighted on an art which after great high-points had sunk to stereotype. “</li> <li>• Stanislavsky,” I recalled the fact that while I was playing the part of the critic I still did not lose the sense of being myself...One part of me continued as an actor, the other was an observer</li> <li>• “Method acting”- requires sense memory or exploitation of the emotions in memories found within an actor’s personal experiences to be abused for the stage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common misunderstanding of Brecht- Epic acting does not allow for the portrayal of real people on stage but only characters</li> <li>• “Ignorant heads interpret the contradiction between playing and experiencing as if only the one or the other appeared in the actor’s work. In reality it is of course a matter of two competing processes that unite in the work of the actor</li> <li>• Brecht actress,” one must make a determined effort to avoid working mechanically or in a bored way.”</li> <li>• Brecht acting is cool and unemotional.</li> </ul>

### Appendix C: Combined Stanislavsky/ Brecht Night Survey Results





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