

Constantin Stanislavski
(1863 - 1938)

Stanislavski

was a Russian actor and theatre director. He was known as the 'father of modern theatre', whose system of acting became the backbone of twentieth century theatre craft.

System: based around an actor 'living the part' but always staying one step away from complete belief. Techniques involved a 'round the table' analysis – a process in which actors and their director would share their thoughts on the script and characters until a clear understanding was formed. Different 'objectives' would be found for each character, and themselves. An example would be, 'What if I was in the same position as my character?' Actors frequently employ his basic strategies without realising it – exploring character and action from both the 'inside out' and the 'outside in'. The main techniques of his 'system' include Units, Objectives, Given Circumstances, the Through Line and Emotional Memory. Whilst this originally focused on the creation of the embodiment of truthful emotions, his later focus was on the physical actions which evolve, inspiring truthful emotion. This also involved improvisation and discussion. The focus still remained on reaching the subconscious through the conscious.

Stanislavski said of his System, 'Create your own method. Don't depend slavishly on mine. Make up something that will work for you! But keep breaking traditions, I beg you.'

Stanislavski's aim was to have all actors performing as 'truthfully' as possible, relying on full commitment to objectives and physical actions, rather than artificial reproduction of emotion.

Bertolt Brecht
(1898 - 1956)

Brecht was a prolific playwright and the co - creator of an influential theory of theatre – the Epic Theatre. His theatrical reforms arguably make him one of the most influential figures in the world of theatre during the twentieth century.

His belief was that the theatre's main function was to educate rather than to entertain; 'It is the noblest function that we have found for theatre.'

He was involved in the creation of new theatre forms, such as 'Epic Theatre', wherein a play should not cause the audience to emotionally identify with the action observed, but provokes reflection and a critical view of the actions on the stage. He wanted audiences to fine tune their critical perspective so that social ills could be recognised through the medium of theatre and effect change on the wider 'stage' of the world.

Strategies: he required the actor to 'show' his character – not just identify with him.

He used techniques to remind an audience that the play is a representation of reality but not reality itself. This was an 'Alienation' or 'Distancing' effect. Brecht obtained this by including direct address to the audience, changing tenses of the text into third person or past tense, speaking stage directions out loud, the use of song, montage or series of still images, unnatural stage lighting effects and explanatory placards. He therefore highlighted the constructed nature of the whole play as a totally 'theatrical event'. He used a technique known as 'breaking down the fourth wall.' This meant that the audience was not simply a spectator, but mentally involved in the issues presented (Stephen Berkoff).

Jerzy Grotowski
(1933 -1999)

Jerzy Grotowski was a Polish theatre director and a leading figure of Avant Garde Theatre within the twentieth century.

He was born in Rzeszów in Poland.

He authored *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968), in which he declared that 'theatre should not, because it could not, compete against the overwhelming spectacle of film and should instead focus on the very root of the act of theatre: actors in front of spectators'.

Grotowski was a theatre revolutionary. He enabled us to rethink theatre's role within contemporary culture. One of his central ideas was that of the 'poor' theatre. When he created the term he was trying to understand a theatre in which the fundamental concern was the work of the actor

with the audience, rather than the sets, costumes, lighting or special effects. Grotowski believed these were just trappings that might enhance, but were not the fundamental aspect of the true meaning that theatre should generate.

'Poor', for Grotowski meant stripping away all that was unnecessary and leaving a 'stripped' and vulnerable actor. Grotowski realised his ideas by creating a creative laboratory where he could apply the principles he believed in. He rid the Company of costumes and staging and worked with black sets. His actors rehearsed in plain black and endured rigorous exercises designed to give them full control over their bodies. Grotowski believed that what he needed was not so much an actor who was a gymnast but rather a performer who had moved beyond the moment of the body to the spiritual 'self' beneath, the moment where the actor transcends physical tiredness and moves into the euphoria within.

Grotowski was interested in what the actor could do with his or her body and voice without excessive aids. The visceral and immediate experience between audience and performer was paramount. It was this approach that overturned the prevalence of the traditions of exotic costumes and elaborate staging that had driven European theatre from the 19th century. He did light the set for some public performances, but this was also secondary. Grotowski himself wrote that 'by gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make - up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects'.

Grotowski was an atheist, yet he added to the concept of 'poor theatre' the idea of the priesthood or sacredness of the actor. When the actor entered the sanctity of the performance space a special event occurred, much like Mass held in a Catholic Church. It was in this space that the 'holy' relationship between actor and audience occurred, the audience challenged to think and be transformed by theatre. Grotowski believed that the actor could bring the sacred ritual of theatre to themes of social transformation to an audience, the audience then taking on a pivotal role within the theatrical performance, and this then resulted in theatre becoming more than entertainment, rather it became a pathway to understanding.

Grotowski was a pioneer of political theatre and the majority of his work was heavily imbued with political or social themes.

Grotowski always maintained that theatre could never compete with cinema. Cinema offered a very different experience to theatre that, although not as immediate, was still capable of guiding its audience through realised imagery. However, he wanted to take a different approach; to bring to a theatre audience something that was more confronting, challenging and experiential. It was a theatre not based so much on image (as in cinema or television) but on the presence of the actor.

Grotowski wrote and published his work, becoming renowned and receiving numerous invitations to work in the most prominent drama schools, theatre companies and universities in Europe and America. Most of these he declined, preferring instead to stay with his actors in his small 'laboratory', in relative obscurity.

For Grotowski, it was the work and his journey that was most important