



The Luminous Theories of Constantine Stanislavski and Bertolt Brecht: Parallels and Implications for the Contemporary Theatre Director

Teori Bercahaya Konstantinus Stanislavski dan Bertolt Brecht: Paralel dan Implikasi bagi Sutradara Teater Kontemporer

Affiong Effiom

Theatre, Film and Carnival Studies, University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

*Penulis Koresponden: affiongeffiom24@yahoo.com

ABSTRAK

Teater modern jelas merupakan bidang eksperimen; percobaan ini kurang lebih telah tangensial dan anak sungai. Tantangan dan perhatian penting sutradara setiap kali adalah menemukan diet teater yang tepat untuk memberi makan dan memperkuat hubungan aktor dengan penonton. Eksperimen dan eksplorasi ini diarahkan pada bentuk produksi serta individualitas sutradara. Efek yang dihasilkan dari imbroglia yang tampak ini adalah pandangan dan resep yang berbeda dari praktik teater. Namun, beberapa direktur pada periode ini seperti Constantine Stanislavski dan Bertolt Brecht telah meninggalkan warisan yang bertahan lama dan signifikan sementara yang lain gagal. Apa persamaan dan implikasi teori mereka terhadap sutradara teater kontemporer? Ini, antara lain, akan menjadi perhatian makalah ini.

Kata Kunci: Nigeria; semenanjung bakassi; kalabar; kamerun.

ABSTRACT

The modern theatre unequivocally is a field of experiment; these experiments more or less have been tangential and tributary. The challenge and essential concern of directors each time has been to find the proper theatrical diet to feed and strengthen the actor's relationship with the audience. These experiments and explorations are directed towards the form for the production as well as the director's individuality. The resultant effect of this seeming imbroglia has been divergent views and prescriptions of the practice of theatre. However, some directors of this period such as Constantine Stanislavski and Bertolt Brecht have left enduring and significant legacies while others fizzled out. What are the parallels and implications of their theories to the contemporary theatre director? This, amongst other issues, will be the preoccupation of this paper.

Keywords: Modern theatre; Constantine Stanislavski; Bertolt Brecht; theatricalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern period in theatre history holds sway an array of theories, visionaries, concepts, and avant-garde experimentalists (Effiom 2020; Effiom 2021), each one protesting and registering their discontent over the traditional, dramatic performances of the classical era (Undiyaundeye 2005; Undiyaundeye 2009; Offiong *et al.*, 2021). The inevitable consequences of these protests are the great and drastic changes that permeate the body polity of modern drama and theatre (Okpiliya & Eyang 2003; Eyang 2016). These changes are delineated in concepts and styles such as romantic realism, naturalism, expressionism, impressionism, symbolism, surrealism, dadism, epic theatre, absurdism, and existentialism amongst others. Throughout this period of theatrical movement, the animators of the modern theatre use these various production styles as primary means of immediate communication to convey a "truthful picture of the human predicament" (Solanki 2019, p. 280; See also Eyang & Okune 2004).

Notable amongst the practitioners/directors are; Constantine Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, Adolphe Appia, Max Reinhardt Vsevolod Meyerhold, Antoine Artaud August Strindberg, Lurgi Pirandello, Henrik, Ibsen amongst others. The modernists sought new and varied ways of presenting theatre which in Oscar Brockett's prescription should be "sensitive to the needs of the time and the man living at that time" (West 2017, p. 28). While some of them synthesized related concepts, others, due to the different backgrounds and training evolved into more complacent ones. Part of the reasons for the complacency observed at this period can also be attributed to the audience of the time who "demanded radical innovations, "...this radical innovations were to be found in the application of scientific, objectivity in the writing of plays" (Brockett, 1999, p. 2). They demanded a drama and theatre that will reflect social conditions and problems, deemphasizing the metaphysical rationalization and resolution of conflicts.

It was, therefore, the dire need arguably to satisfy the longings of the audience that the various dramatists and directors made copious attempts to meet these needs and at the same time, stamp their

authority on the theatrical scene leaving behind one legacy or the other. It is worthy to observe, however, that, while one concept or theory grew out of the other with observable similarities, there was a "dove-tailing" of one into another while some were complete opposites and critical of one another. Amongst the retinue of practitioners of the modern period stand two notable giants whose theories/concepts, drama and practices stand at the opposite end of the continuum, one being critical of the other, each having large followership. Above all, they have left lasting legacies and indelible landmarks in their practice of theatre today. These two luminaries are; Constantine Stanislavski and Bertolt Brecht.

Against the background of finding a proper theatrical diet, these two directors have inundated the theatre with diverse artistic and histrionic manifestations foregrounding and presenting theatre as a veritable field of experiment. Hatlen submits that "the new theatre is no longer a strident voice of protest, but it continues in many forms to be a theatre of experimentation" (1987, p. 222) as resplendent in Constantine Stanislavski's theatre praxis. Stanislavski typifies this submission by Hatlen through various experimentations. Intrigued by the perfection of external realism and the display of artistic truth by the Meiningen performers, Stanislavski co-founded the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898 with fellow theatre enthusiast Vladimir NemirovichDanchenko. This was intended to evolve a new theatrical form. As a disciple of Meiningen's technique of theatrical art, he became a facsimile realist of the George Duke IIs theatre, recapitulating the inner meaning of works and emotional authenticity where the actor "lived the part". In doing this, "he proposed proceeding from the conscious to the subconscious, bringing the conscious to exert influence on the sub-conscious (Pickering & Thompson 2018).

2. STANISLAVSKI METHOD AND PHILOSOPHY

Stanislavski is acclaimed to be the first person to work and transcribe a consistent acting methodology (though owing much to Wagner's notion of the integrated work of theatrical art and to

Meiningen's example of ensemble acting. His acting praxis began as a reaction to what he called the "moldy theatricality", inherited from the stages of Goethe and Hugo. In an attempt to solve the actor's problem, Stanislavski evolved the "system laboratory" where actors were trained to, not only represent reality in their acting but also create a subjective reality of his own by seeking the inner truth of feeling and experience. His theatre was characterized by a complete illusion of reality, willing suspension of disbelief, strong and inner psychological attachment to one's role. Schechner & Lucie (2020) enthused further, "the center of Stanislavski's concern was a complete autonomous theatrical activity where imaginary emotions and inner images are in satisfying aesthetic form, whereby the spectator not only sympathizes but also empathizes with the actor and the action" (p. 29).

Stanislavski theorizes that for the theatre to attain reasonable success, the director must create a proper atmosphere for the actor to realize his aim of making the spectator forget that he is in the theatre. To realize this feat, he developed the psycho-technique training method. This technique entails self-discipline, observation of life, total concentration, and spontaneous alertness. Dilating on Stanislavskian (1952) system method, Pickering & Thompson (2018) asserts that "Stanislavski claimed that the truth of the passions could be attained through authentic feelings that were not identical to, but similar to, and consistent with the feelings of the characters in the play" (p. 26). To achieve that authentic feeling similar to and with the feelings of the character(s) in the play, Stanislavski expounds through exercises: the circle of attention, the magic if, emotional memory and recall, and given circumstances.

In his form of communication between the stage and the audience, Stanislavski crystallized the physical and psychological life of the actor through widespread experimentations. He asserts:

"These experiments and explorations are directed towards the most complicated and interesting thing in our art, - finding the ideal form for the contemporary production, the best means of arousing fine feelings in

people and helping to affirm justice and noble, humanitarian ideas" (p. 20).

With his deep commitment to illusionism and representational form of staging, Stanislavski's dramatic theories search for the "super-objective" or essential idea of the play and subordinate the whole play to it

The superb skill and inventiveness on the part of Stanislavski as a director, an actor, a thinker, and a creator placed him on the pedestal of not only a super artist, but a scientist, Toporkov (2014) opines that "Stanislavski was not just a great thinker and actor, but a scientist who created the science of acting" (p. 34). Tovstonogov sums up the various apocalyptic theses of the "system laboratory" which Stanislavski refers to as the "Actor's ABC" as "universal laws of scenic creativity" (p. 34): He offered a method of educating the actor, the director, the designer, and the audience. This prescription gives credence to Young's (1972) assertion, that "a director is a man who must be "sensitive to the inner spirit of a work and project in its representation the various tone and mood born of that work" (p. 32).

On the other side of the theatrical divide, Bertold Brecht birthed what he referred to as "theatricalism" a catchall term that Ronald Hayman used in describing all types of non-realistic stylization, free from any effort to create the illusion of actuality (Puchner, 2002). Brecht was a thoroughbred theatre practitioner who rose to rebel against the illusionistic theatrical milk with which he was fed. In rebelling against the traditional theatre, he took up and challenged Aristotle, his principles, and all his theatrical perspective. Brecht's epic theatre is therefore generally conceived as anti-Aristotelean in structure, content and form". His theatre attempts to use an expressionist technique to violate expressionism, he also attempts to use the realist approach to ridicule Ibsenist realism.

As a Marxist theoretician and theatre practitioner, he also wrote anti-capitalist plays that were greatly enjoyed and acclaimed by the capitalist. Brecht is regarded as anti-Stanislavskian, the reasons for this are numerous; the Stanislavskian practice of the theatre takes its bearing from the Aristotelean conception of theatre which emphasizes the illusion

of reality presented on the stage to effect the willing suspension of disbelief. To distinguish between his theatre and Aristotelean format, he contrasted his form to that of Aristotle by calling the former EPIC THEATRE and that of Aristotle DRAMATIC THEATRE. He further distinguishes between his theatrical practice and that of Stanislavski. Characterizing his with the term "VERFREMDUNG EFFEK" ALIENATION EFFECTION. Distancing or detachment as opposed to Stanislavski's "EIFUNLUNG" (EMPATHY) – psychological attachment to the goings-on in the play or on stage.

In this regard, Brecht is also anti-psychologically oriented, that the actor should not be psychologically entangled with the action on stage, that performance can be effected without some degree of psychological involvement. A strand of the Brechtian style is the NARRATIVE technique, this takes its bearing from the expressionist mode of narrative, which he termed EPISODIC. This is achieved by interrupting series or narratives through cupious illustrations using the equivalent of slides and demonstration approach. To further flavor his dramaturgy, he introduced songs, parables, and other narrative ingredients into his works.

The other major strand portrayed by Brecht is the DIALECTICS OF MATERIALISM (Carney, 2020). To dialecticize, an issue means to focus on the contradictions in a script. Such issues may include themes, plot, language and form or genre; what is tragic to Aristotle is not what is tragic to Brecht. To Brecht, dialectically the hero is not necessarily the most highly placed individual; the Brechtian concept of heroism is derived from a collectivity angle rather than the individual.

3. PARALLELS AND IMPLICATIONS OF STANISLAVSKI THEORY AND BRECHTIAN THEORY FOR THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE DIRECTOR

Tovstonogov however expresses the fact that nothing stands still in life, "everything is in a constant state of flux" (Gross 2016, p. 105). It is therefore unquestionable that directors especially in the modern period were foreshadowed by the

aggressive search for "true" theatre. While some have left shallow-rooted controverted and insignificant legacies, some on the other side of the continuum have left contrived, enduring, notable, fascinating, remarkable and significant legacies on its trail. Their theories, though challenging but stimulating, were meant to activate the irreducible and inalienable relationship between the stage and the audience. It brought dynamism and viability to the theatre even up to this day. Iji's (2006) submits that "the Stanislavskian system ..,have become the main theatrical stylistic watershed alternatives available for creative directors to offer appropriate theatrical menus or at a carte to their audiences for sustainable theatre Business" (p. 39). Laying credence to the universality and validity of Stanislavskian theories Stanislavski & Benedetti (2018) points out that, "not all Stanislavski's work as a director belongs to history. A great deal is valid and necessary for us today, Stanislauski's teaching belongs entirely to the present and to the future" (p. 21). Since theories were widely held as the foundations for a science of theatrical art, Stanislavski had made a legion of followers in Moscow and around the world.

Interestingly, however, Brecht's theatre is seen to be at cross purposes with that of his master, who created his theories from the standpoint of the playwright as opposed to the Stanislavskian director's viewpoint. He does not reject the Stanislavskian laws of organic life on the stage, characters, and logic of the action. He made copious use of these laws to establish his didactic alienation approach to theatre communication. Despite the diverged expressions, there exist several salient and overt elements which have made these two directors outstanding theatrical figures. Some of the elements are entrenched in their theories, while some stem out of their practice, ideology, and beliefs. These elements are the essence of the theatre which the contemporary theatre director should not gloss over or consider superficial. Thomas (2013) explains that "the most important idea in Stanislavskian system and Brecht's alienation is that of finding the super-objective or the spine of the play, then build everything around it and in some cases deviate from following the playwright rigidly.

4. CONCLUSION
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Such has been the preoccupation of Constantine Stanislavski and Bertolt Brecht – two prominent and outstanding directors of modern theatre. Their numerous contributions in the field of theatre remain arguably, unrivaled. Instead of fading away with time, it has become a priceless legacy because “what Stanislavski discovered and taught belongs to the theatre of today (Ignatieva 2008, p. 33). Brecht on the other hand has been regarded as a significant force in contemporary theatre.

The Nigerian theatrical scene, without doubt, requires the vibrancy and pragmatism displayed by the two directors in view (Eyang 2004; Yta & Umukoro 2017; Iyorza 2014; Yta 2021). Despite the parallels between them, their directorial techniques can be imbibed and applied separately by contemporary theatre directors, to suit the demands of particular scripts and or interpretations of the script. Furthermore, the modern-day director can take advantage of models of experiments provided by the duo, use them as a springboard to make statements in their experimental exploits, and quest to find a proper theatrical diet (Yta 2016; Yta & Umukoro 2018).

REFERENCES

Brockett, O. (1999). *History of Theatre*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Carney, S. (2020). *Brecht and critical theory: Dialectics and contemporary aesthetics*. Routledge.

Effiom, A. (2021). Performing British Violence in The Nigerian Midwest: Abmed Yerima’s The Trials of Oba Ovonoramwen And the “Narratives” Of History. *Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Journal (SHE Journal)*, 2(3), 300-306.

Effiom, A. F. (2020). Semiotics and Contemporary Play Directing: The Example of Ogonna Agu’s Dawn in the Academy. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 16(3), 57-62.

Eyang, A. E. (2004). Language acquisition and language processing strategies of the child. *Currents in African Literature and the English Language CALEL*, 2(1), 279-286.

Eyang, A. E. (2016). Historical allusions as stylistic strategy in the poetry of Langston Hughes. *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary*

Research, 13(2), 48-59.

Eyang, A. E., & Okune, S. T. (2004). The value of the literary critic in literature. *Ndunode: Calabar Journal of the Humanities*, 5(1), 148-155.

Gross, L. W. (2016). *Anishinaabe ways of knowing and being*. Routledge.

Hatlen, T. W. (1987). *Orientation to the Theater*. Prentice Hall.

Ignatieva, M. (2008). *Stanislavsky and female actors: women in Stanislavsky’s life and art*. University Press of America.

Iji, E. M. (2006). The business of theatre and the theatre of business. *Global Journal Of Humanities*, 5(1), 35-42.

Iyorza, S. (2014). Quality Issues and the Ban on Selected Musical Video Broadcasting in Nigeria: A Defence for National Broadcasting Commission. *Nigerian Theatre Journal*, 13(2).

Offiong, E., Ellah, T. O., Effiong, E. N., & Inyang, E. B. (2021). Africa in the Era of Globalization: Issues and Prospects. *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*, 4(2), 199-211.

Okpiliya, J., & Eyang, A. (2003). The Civil Service in Fiction: The Ways of Bureaucracy in Gimba's Sunset for a Mandarin.

Pickering, K., & Thompson, J. (2018). *Naturalism in theatre: Its development and legacy*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

Pickering, K., & Thompson, J. (2018). *Naturalism in theatre: Its development and legacy*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

Puchner, M. (2002). *Stage fright: Modernism, anti-theatricality, and drama*. JHU Press.

Schechner, R., & Lucie, S. (2020). *Performance studies: An introduction*. Routledge.

Solanki, M. M. (2019). *Human Predicament: Critiquing Vikram Seths Novels*. Educreation Publishing.

Stanislavski, C. (1952). *My Life in the Arts*. New York: Theatre Arts Book.

Stanislavski, K., & Benedetti, J. (2018). *My life in art*. Routledge.

Thomas, J. (2013). *Script analysis for actors, directors, and designers*. Routledge.

Toporkov, V. O. (2014). *Stanislavski in rehearsal*. Routledge.

Undiyaundeye, U. A. (2005). Continuity and Change: Obudu under Colonial Rule, 1914-1918, The 1st Phase. *Ibom Journal of History*

and International Studies, 12, 113-125.

- Undiyaundeye, U. A. (2009). The Pre-Colonial Government of Obudu People. *Calabar Journal of Liberal Studies*, (CAJOLIS), 12(1), 36-57.
- West III, C. L. (2017). *Of Life and Time*. Dog Ear Publishing.
- Young, J. W. (1972). *Directing the Play: From Selection to Opening Night*. Associated Faculty Press Inc.
- Yta, E. M. (2016). Changing Meanings in Patterns of Efik Women Hair Styles. *A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies*, 1(2).
- Yta, E. M. (2021). Beyond Watt Market Roundabout Audiences: Redesigning Tourists Oriented Theatres in Calabar. *PINISI Discretion Review*, 4(1), 73-82.
- Yta, E. M., & Umukoro, G. M. (2017). Designs in carnival calabar. *_duñ_de: calabar journal of the humanities*, 413.
- Yta, E. M., & Umukoro, G. M. (2018). Adjudication and "Band of the Year Award": A Case Study of the Masta Blasta Carnival Calabar Band. *Journal of Theatre & Media Studies*, 3(1).