

Naturalism – moscow arts center – the seagle assignment

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In this essay I shall be looking at: ??? The rise of Naturalism as an art form in the theatre ??? Anton Chekhov and the first production of *The Seagull*. ???

The origins of the Moscow Arts Theatre The research methods I used were primarily web based with references taken from various books as well. The rise of Naturalism [1] There are three relevant senses of 'naturalism,' and of the associated 'naturalist' and 'naturalistic.' The first, and most popular, indicates a method of 'accurate' or 'lifelike' reproduction. The second, and historically earliest, indicates a philosophical position allied to science, natural history and materialism.

The third, and most significant in the history of drama, indicates a movement in which the method of accurate production and the specific philosophical position are organically and usually consciously fused. Raymond Williams Naturalism started in France in the 1870's. Naturalism is a style in theatre that tries to bring a sense of reality to the stage through various methods, detailed sets, an unpoetic literary style that reflects the way real people speak, and a style of acting that tries to recreate reality often by trying to get the actor to have a complete identification with the role they are playing.

Later Konstantin Sergeevich Alekseyev (who took the stage name Stanislavsky) came up with a system of actor training which went hand in hand with Naturalism. The main spokesman for naturalism when it first emerged was Emile Zola, he wrote mostly novels and wanted to reform the way they were written he also wanted to reform the play. Zola's first major statement about naturalism was in his novel, *Therese Raquin*, which was first brought to the stage in 1873. The preface of *Therese Raquin* stated his views about naturalism in the theatre and in the novel.

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He felt that the theatre was years behind the novel and suffered from old and outdated conventions. Zola didn't like the distortion of psychology to create sympathy for a character or unrealistic writing with complicated plots that usually ended with a satisfying resolution. In its place, Zola wanted plays which would avoid the complications and unbelievable plots and characters typical of the 19th Century and substitute the depiction of human beings caught in the coils of fate. 'Therese Raquin would seem today far from naturalistic.

It would appear to be more of a melodramatic story about love and murder and betrayal, and suicide brought on by conscience. A pair of lovers commits murder in order to be together. The focus is seemingly on the nature of the consciences of Laurent and Therese. In the third act we see the mounting remorse of the two conspirators. But the final scene is pure melodrama: Mme. Raquin enters, overhears their confession of Camille's murder and is stricken with paralysis. The last act returns to exploration of their consciences and it is conscience and exposure that drive them to their suicides.

The play ran only nine performances. ' [2] Even though Therese Raquin wouldn't be considered completely naturalistic it was the first real venture into naturalism and it is hard to have a play that is completely naturalistic even today. Therese Raquin was on for nine performances after that Zola ended up with a lot of followers who were passionate about his new style of theatre. When naturalism first came about there was a lack of good naturalistic plays which could were able to incompise all of its principles.

Henri Becque captured the essence of naturalism in two of his plays, *The Vultures* (1882) and *La Parisienne* (1885).

But Becque refused to comply with suggested changes when the shows were first produced in a conservative theatre, so naturalism was still not really accepted. The Independent Theatre Movement or the Theatre Libre was started in 1858 Andre Antoine. It was a means to make Naturalism more acceptable by the public. Antoine became known as the father of naturalistic staging. He had very little acting or theatre experience. When he wanted to produce a dramatization of a Zola novel, the amateur groups refused so he founded the Theatre Libre. His initial shows were a success and by the end of 1887 he was famous.

The Theatre Libre used a subscription basis for its patrons and the productions were open only to members so the theatre was exempt from censorship. This meant they were able to put on a lot of plays that had been refused licenses in other theatres. He continued to work in the theatre until 1914. As well as pushing the naturalistic styles the Theatre Libre also began producing foreign work usually two or three a year, which opened up a world theatre to France. Zola's successor as theoretical spokesperson for naturalism was the less well known Jean Jullien (1854-1919).

His play *The Serenade* was introduced by the Theatre Libre in 1887.

Antoine's production techniques were considered very innovative. The theatre was not without its problems, as actors became well-known, they left the company. Antoine's high standards left him always in debt and his theatre did only three performances of any production. By 1894, Antoine left

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the Theatre Libre and opened the Theatre Antoine in Paris in 1897. His influence to the acceptance of naturalism and realism was huge and he also helped in the development of the independent theatre movement.

The preface Therese Raquin notes on naturalism:[3] ??? Either the theatre will die or it will become modern and naturalistic. ??? Tragedy must disappear. ??? [the] moral impersonality of a work is all-important, for it raises the question of morality. ??? ‘ I am simply an observer, who states the facts... ??? In history, in criticism, the study of facts and surroundings replaces the old scholastic rules. In the purely literary works, nature intervenes and reigns with Rousseau... man is no longer an intellectual abstractor; nature determines and completes him... The century belongs to the naturalists, to the direct sons of Diderot... ??? I am waiting for someone to put a man of flesh on the stage, taken from reality, scientifically analyzed, and described without one lie. I am waiting for someone to rid us of fictitious characters, of these symbols of virtue and vice which have no worth as human data. I am waiting for environment to determine the characters and the characters to act according to the logic of facts combined with logic of their own disposition. Naturalism usually looked at some of the more degraded aspects of lower class life.

Zola was greatly influenced by Claude Bernard’s Introduction to Experimental Medicine. It was study of the effects of environment on bodily organs and changes in body chemistry on behavior. In Zola’s The Experimental Novel he tried to apply Bernard’s methods to literature. He compared the writer to the doctor, who seeks the causes of disease so that

he can cure it-not hiding infection, but bringing it into the open where it can be examined. In like manner, the dramatist should seek out social ills and reveal them so they can be corrected. There should no longer be any school, no more formulas, no standards of any sort; there is only life itself, an immense field Where each may study and create as he likes... ” [4] He believed that a dramatist should never allow his own prejudices to intrude, but only observe, record and experiment and that way a playwright would be able to look at any subject and get to the truth of it. And there are a number playwrights, some often overlooked, who contributed greatly to the movement, some consciously, some unconsciously, among whom are Ibsen and Strindberg.

Anton Chekhov and the first production of *The Seagull* Anton Chekhov was the son of a grocer and the grandson of a serf. He was born on January seventeenth 1860 in Taganrog, a provincial town on the Sea of Azov in southern Russia. To be a serf in Russian was the same as being a slave you would be considered the lowest of the low. Chekhov was the third son of Pavel Egorovich Chekhov and Evgeniya Yakovlevna. When Chekhov was sixteen, his father fled to Moscow to escape debtors he owed for his failed grocery business.

His mother followed her husband to Moscow in July of that year with her younger children, leaving Chekhov behind in Taganrog to finish school and to tutor the nephew of the man who bought their estate for an unfairly cheap price (which is a theme which would later appear in his play's). Chekhov used to write stories for a magazine that he created with his brother. In 1879

Chekhov moved to Moscow to attend medical school and published his first short story, *The Letter from the Don* Landowner Stephen Vladimirovich N. to his Learned Neighbor Dr. Friederick. He continued to publish stories until he graduated medical school in 1884.

He wrote *The Seagull* in 1895. It was first performed in 1896 in Petersburg at the Alexandrinsky Theatre. The first performance was viewed as a failure since it generated the disappointment of the audience who had come to see the play as it was falsely advertised, as a benefit performance for a well-known actress who was only in a sketch after the play. The audience booed and shouted during the performance. Vera Komissarzhevskaya, who some considered the best actor in Russia, and who, according to Chekhov, had moved people to tears as Nina in rehearsal, was intimidated by the hostile audience and lost her voice. 5] The next day, Chekhov, who had taken refuge backstage for the last two acts the night before, announced that he was finished with writing plays. Supporters assured him that later performances would be more successful. *The Seagull* impressed the playwright Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, however, who said Chekhov should have won the Griboyedev prize that year instead of himself. And it was Nemirovich-Danchenko who convinced Konstantin Stanislavski to direct the play for the new Moscow Arts Theatre. [6] Moscow Art Theatre We cannot look at the origins of the Moscow arts theatre without first looking at Stanislavski.

Stanislavski is the most significant and one of the most important figures in the history of actor training. He was born Konstantin Sergeyevich Alekseyev

in Moscow to a rich family who were textile manufacturares. He took the stage name Stanislavski early in his career. Stanislavski's mother was the daughter of a famous french actress and the familly were passionate about theatre. In 1877 Stanislavski's father convertid a barn in there estate in Moscow into a small theatre. It was here that Stanislavski first performed to an audience. Later one of the large rooms of there Alekseev town house was converted too.

Stanislavski's brother and sisters created the Alekseev Circle, and they staged the Russian premiere of Gilbert and Sullivans Mikado which got good critical press. At fourteen Stanislavski started to keep a notebook to analyse his problems with acting (Which he kept and updated untill his death in 1938). He tried to improve his techneque as an actor all the time, he enrolled at a drama school when he was twenty one but only stayed for two weeks because he fealt he was only being taught how to imitate other actors. In 1887 Stanislavski founded the Sociaty of Art and Litrature at the Maly Theatre.

This is where he started to get his skills as a director, stagecraft and at the same time develop what would soon become the Stanislavski System. The Stanislavsky's System focused on the development of realistic characters and stage. In 1897 he decided to create a professional company, he was by now one of the leading actors and directors around. He wanted to create a new style of theatre and at the same time two new styles were emerging which fit into the reforms he wanted to bring about for the actor, Raelism

and Naturalism. He was contacted by Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko who was a leading dramatist and critic who shared his ideals.

Together they created the Moscow Art Theatre. Its purpose was to establish a theatre of new art forms, with a fresh approach to theatre. Stanislavski was to have control over stage direction while Nemirovich-Danchenko was assigned the literary and administrative duties. The original ensemble was made up of amateur actors from the Society of Art and Literature and from the dramatic classes of the Moscow Philharmonic Society, where Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko had taught, they were also influenced by the German Meiningen Company.

After around 70 rehearsals, the Moscow Art Theatre opened with Aleksey Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich* in October 1898. For its fifth production it staged Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*. With its revival of *The Seagull*, the Art Theatre not only achieved its first major success but also began a long artistic association with one of Russia's most celebrated playwrights, in Chekhov's artistic realism. The theatre discovered a writer suited to its aesthetic sensibilities. In *The Seagull*, as in all of Chekhov's plays, the Art Theatre emphasized the subtext, the underlying meaning of the playwright's thought.

Artistically, the Art Theatre tried all that was new. Its repertoire included works of Maksim Gorky, L. N. Andreyev, Leo Tolstoy, Maurice Maeterlinck, and Gerhart Hauptmann, and it staged works of political and social significance as well as satires, fantasies, and comedies. The first six years were the most creative. Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavski

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started to argue over the future policy of the theatre and Stanislavski was going through a personal crises as well as he felt he had stopped being creative as an actor.

He felt that he had become very mechanical and that he had nothing really to communicate to the actor. It was out of this personal crises that the 'system' was born. Stanislavski felt that he had mastered the outer actions of his performances such as external moves and spacial awairness and relationships but what he wanted was to be able to controle his inner actions. The problem he faced was how could he envoke and controle emotons. Surviving the Russian Revolution of 1905 he begun his work on the system in 1906 using the notebook materiel he had amassed over the years.

His ideas didn't get accepted straight away in the Moscow Arts Theatre or in general. By 1911 the system was declared the official acting method of the Moscow Arts Centre. At this stage the relationship between Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavski was worse than ever before.

Stanislavski's search for new creative ideas all the time was at odds with his colleagues who wanted stability with what they thought was a working formula that had brought them success. The next Russian Revolution of 1917 was another close call and aparintly Lenin and and A. V.

Lunacharsky, intervned to protect them from any harm. In 1922 the Art Theatre toured Europe and the United States, garnering critical acclaim wherever it performed. Returning to Moscow in 1924, the theatre continued to produce new Soviet plays and Russian classics until its evacuation in 1941. In 1922-24 the theatre went on tour to Paris and to the United States

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where it caused a huge impact especially to American acting. It presented plays by Tolstoy, Gorky, Tchekhoff and other Russian dramatists in their own language, and they appeared in a large group, more than fifty in all.

The American Defense Society protested against their entrance on the theory that they were Communist propagandists, to which Stanislavski answered: ' It is not so. We have no connection with the Soviet Government. We are interested only in art. It is our art that we have come to bring you, not politics. '[7] After two successful tours of London in the late 1950s and early '60s the theatre reestablished its preeminence in world theatre. The Art Theatre had a very big influence on theatres all over the world.

After the huge impact of the tour one of Boleslawski's students, Lee Strasberg, went on to co-found The Group Theater in 1931 with Harold Clurman and Cheryl Crawford. It was the first American acting company to put Stanislavski's first discoveries into theatrical practice. Boleslawski had been in Stanislavsky's class when he was experimenting with ' Affective Memory' (Stanislavski proposed that actors study and experience emotions and feelings and to manifest them to audiences by physical and vocal means). Stanislavski's theory later evolved to rely on Physical Action inducing feelings and emotions.

Affective Memory is applied in Stanislavsky's System but not as much so as in Lee Strasberg's Method. The Moscow Art Theater School opened in?? 1943?? as?? an?? affiliation of?? the Moscow Art Theater. Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko was the main creator of the school. On?? March 21, 1943 the leaders of?? the Moscow Art Theater gathered together at??

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Nemirovich-Danchenko's apartment. On April 25, 1943, not long after that meeting took place, Nemirovich-Danchenko passed away, and in his legacy as a teacher and director, he left behind his great ideas for the school.

On April 26, 1943 the Soviet Ministry of Culture immortalized the name of the great master in establishing the theater at The Moscow Art Theater School, named after Nemirovich-Danchenko. [8] The core of the acting method taught at the school was originally the same as was being thought at the Moscow Art Theater, Stanislavski's system. They wanted the same sense of truth and real life on the stage, the truth of organic acting. In 1956, emerging from the heart of the Moscow Art Theater, the Sovremennik (Contemporary) Theater was born.

It was created by former students who were inspired by their teachers' idea of bringing a genuinely human audience to the theater. The first productions of this theater were rehearsed in the Moscow Art Theater School. Bibliography ??? Wikipedia. com ??? Stanislavski, Benedetto. J, Methuen 1998 GB ??? TheNewYorkTimesOnTheWeb. com ??? Therese Raquin notes on naturalism ??? Naturalism in the theatre. co. uk ??? Moscow arts theatreArt Theatre School History. htm ??? Benedetto, Stanislavski: An Introduction, p 16-25 ??? Letter to A. F. Koni, 11 November 1896. Letters of Anton Chekhov.

Research ??? The rise of Naturalism ??? The Moscow Arts Theatre ??? Anton Chekhov and the first production of The Seagull. By Aslan Wheeler

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