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Meyerhold and Plato: Brothers in spirit

Feuer, Marie, M.A.
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MEYERHOLD AND PLATO:

BROTHERS IN SPIRIT

by

Marie Feuer

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

Rosemary Gipson
Associate Professor of Drama

[Signature]  
April 5, 1989  
Date
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Abstract

This thesis puts forth the premise that the ideas of the Russian director Meyerhold correlate to the ideas of the Greek philosopher Plato. The writer shows that Meyerhold was a theatrical innovator in the sense that he gave Platonic thought a fresh reflection, expressing as he did his philosophic beliefs by means of the medium of the plastic arts and the stage; dialogue, scenic design, lighting techniques, etc., as opposed to the pure philosophic dialogues Plato used. Meyerhold's theatrical contributions arose from an attempt to resolve opposites, often by the creation of paradox, in order to provide the audience with at least a glimpse of a new world view.

The writer uses the writings of Plato, and the writings and examples of the staged productions of Meyerhold to prove the aforementioned premise. Using Meyerhold's theory of uslovnyi theatre and Plato's Theory of Ideas, the writer shows that Meyerhold's work, his theatrical innovations, gave dramatic life to Platonic epistemology.
Introduction

This thesis concerns the work of two great men who never had the pleasure of meeting: the Greek philosopher Plato, c. 428 B.C.-348 B.C., and the Soviet Director Vsevolod Meyerhold, b. 1874--d. 1940? Both of these men have left their marks on the world, marks that have far outlived their own lifetimes. They have ideas that are of great interest and relevance to us even today, and these ideas deserve some exploration.

This thesis offers the original premise that Meyerhold's ideas as a director correlate to Plato's ideas as a philosopher. It is their commonalty that is of interest to this writer as it is a standard against which greatness, no matter in what field of endeavor, can be measured. Neither man believed that the material physical world is in truth "Reality." Therefore, the work of both Plato and Meyerhold was dedicated to exposing and calling into question the supposed truths of the mundane world with the desired effect of awakening their fellow compatriots to a larger, universal, unchanging truth. Plato did this through dialectical discussion. Meyerhold also working dialectically, achieved the same by using all the elements of theatre craft available to him and by discarding the idea that the artist must realistically represent the material world. "A resemblance to reality is still supposed to be the chief precondition and basis of the dramatic art. But what if it could be proved that the very essence of dramatic art is such as to preclude any such resemblance" (Hoover 1974: n.p.)?

The first chapter of this thesis covers Plato's Theory of Ideas of which the ruling Idea is the Idea of the Good. Plato's belief is that there is an eternal unchanging world of ideals that mankind is ever striving towards, and that it is the duty of the artist and philosopher to provoke mankind to see this bigger realm.

The second chapter of this thesis, using Meyerhold's own words as much as possible, illustrates that Meyerhold carried out Platonic epistemology in his work as a director in the Soviet theatre. In all of his productions, Meyerhold was always striving to reveal to
his audience a larger picture of the world. Meyerhold’s theatre was committed to showing the audience that there is always more that meets the eye, the world is not just about the mundane; it is about this bigger world, which in fact corresponds to Plato’s world of Ideas.

The third chapter will offer examples of the work of Meyerhold which, according to the writer, best exemplifies that Meyerhold’s work, throughout his career, embodied Platonic epistemology. Without making direct reference to Plato, without quoting Plato or making use of him as a reference, and not even being a great theoretician himself, Meyerhold’s work nevertheless gave life to Plato’s philosophy. The second part of Chapter Three will use comments from other people, both reactions to Meyerhold’s work as well as some descriptions of his work, to further show through third party opinions that Meyerhold’s work does resemble the theories of Plato. These third party opinions, though not making reference to Plato or his works, reiterate Platonic epistemology in their reactions to the work of Meyerhold and thereby provide agreement to the premise of this thesis.

Chapter four, the conclusion, will use material presented in the summaries of the first three chapters. Chapter four will draw the necessary comparisons between Plato and Meyerhold that have been made apparent through the selected writings of Plato and the selected examples of productions and the writings of Meyerhold, to show the correspondence between Plato’s Theory of Ideas and the work of Meyerhold.
Chapter 1:

Plato's Theory of Ideas

The correlation between the ideas of Plato and the art of Meyerhold is the subject of this thesis. This first chapter will explore and define Plato's Theory of Ideas and those areas relevant to the work of Meyerhold. The writer will begin with an examination of Plato's Theory of Ideas, and the Idea of the Good, and then look at the various relationships of things of sense to the world of Ideas in general. The point here is not to dispute Plato's writings, but to build the premise that Plato's theories are reflected in the work of Meyerhold.

It has seldom been supposed that reality exhausts the objects of our thought or knowledge. We can conceive of possibilities not realized in this world. We can imagine things which do not exist in nature. This theory of a world of ideals Plato named "Ideas." These Ideas exist outside of our standard reference points known as space and time. It is useful to follow the convention of translators who capitalize the initial letter when referring to Plato's "Ideas" which are separate from the characteristics of material things and from the ideas in our mind. Therefore, the words "Good" and "Idea" for example are interchangeable, but the words "Idea" and idea are not.

Plato's world of Ideas is a practical, aesthetic theory and has a very specific relationship to objects of knowledge. Objects of knowledge are things of the physical senses that we can define and illustrate; e.g., a beautiful horse, an outstanding play, a great meal. Most people tend to think that we have to know objects of sense before we can grasp the Idea of the object of sense. Plato says the opposite, that it is the existence of the Idea that allows us to comprehend objects of knowledge (Plato 1952: 229). However, he does not deny that there is a purpose to objects perceived by the senses because they revive in us the remembrance of the Idea (Plato 1952: 126,456). At some point, objects of knowledge have to be discarded because they are merely the reminders of the Idea. They are participating
in and giving form to an Idea by striving to be the Idea, but the forms fall short of the Idea (Plato 1952:228-229). If we accept Plato’s theory, it is the realm of Ideas that is unchanging, everlasting, eternal, and therefore real. All else is merely an attempt to represent these Ideas through their participation in form. This gives added dimension to the saying that all in life is imitation. The Idea is an unchanging truth, and the forms and the appearances of the Idea are forever changing and therefore can be deceptive (Plato 1952: 428).

In daily conversations, we often find ourselves agreeing, or not, that something is good or beautiful. However, let us first take a completely different kind of example of agreement, something concrete, the flu for example. We all know certain symptoms tell us we have the flu. It is referred to as an absolute object, a thing, that exists in its own right. Even if the point were put directly to them, a great many people would deny that they were referring to an ideal "it." Yet in our experience there are not diseases, only sick people, no two of which have exactly the same symptoms. The general term does not stand for a real object or thing, which exists over and above the individual cases. No one can say exactly, precisely, what the flu is. We just have it.

To give another example, we say that we have an "idea" of goodness which enables us to mean the same thing when we talk of good wine or a good performance although there may seem to be little shared in common between wine and a performance. In science we have reference to "pure" water yet where do we ever find chemically pure water of a certain "normal" temperature and of a given "normal" volume? In mathematics, where is the perfect triangle? Neither can be proved to exist in its perfect, its ideal purity. Yet the concept which we have formed of it is not mere fantasy. If there is not some common ground of meaning when the same epithet is applied to different objects, then communication must be given up as impossible.
Plato's predominant Idea, as outlined in his *Republic*, is the Idea of the Good. For Plato, the Idea of the Good is the measure of perfection in all things:

The Idea of Good is the highest knowledge, and that all other things become useful and advantageous only by their use of this. You can hardly be ignorant of this I was about to speak, concerning which, as you have often heard me say, we know so little; and, without which, any other knowledge or possession of any kind will profit us nothing. Do you think that the possession of all other things is of any value if we do not possess the Good? or the knowledge of all other things if we have no knowledge of Beauty and Goodness (Plato 1952: 384)?

This Idea is selected from all the others, and is, in a certain sense, placed at the head of the whole realm of the invisible world of Ideas (Plato 1952: 386). Plato charged an all-transcending meaning to the Idea of the Good, stating that it sheds light on, and gives clarity to, every form of knowledge, and not merely practical concepts. We are not talking here in terms of human behavior and ethics. The Good is not a matter of opinion, but an unchanging absolute ideal (Plato 1952: 447). Opinions do not lead to knowledge. The recognition of the Idea leads to knowledge (Plato 1952: 371). The Idea of the Good remains true throughout time: we always refer to things, be it a performance or simply a wine, as "good."

"Now that which imparts truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower is what I would have you term the Idea of the Good" (Plato 1952: 386).

Most people would fight hard for their right to continue using the word "good," and would claim that it has a meaning of its own. Although some of us might be hard put to say what there was in common between the flavor of a wine and the bodily skill to perform a ballet. Plato would maintain that they had something in common, and that this could only be accounted for by the assumption that both alike partake in the Idea of the Good. The Idea of the Good has and will always exist as the epitome. The point is this: it is not necessary to have total agreement over particular manifestations because, according to Plato, nothing that we see and know can really be good or beautiful. It can, at best, only remind us of the
The fact that we refer to "ideas" in general conversation, as well as in math and science, further endorses the living existence of the realm of Ideas as put forth by Plato. In science, a given set of "natural laws," unprovable but always referred to as the standard, is absolutely essential to scientific methodology. This is also true in mathematics where hypothesis are carried to their logical summations based on "true" triangles, "perfect circles," etc. In the fields of mathematics and science, as with Plato, these given laws are held up as "true laws," as "ideal laws," in order to work within the given postulates, to make certain deductions, to explore new implications, and to project new, potentially unknown, or undiscovered theories.

One could say that as long as pure forms exist, they are everywhere. And if we inquire about the "when" of their existence, we may say that they exist always. On the other hand, since pure forms are not subject to spatial limitations, the possibility of limiting them spatially no longer exists, and one would therefore also like to say that they are nowhere. If the Idea is in the individual objects, it must not for this reason be thought of as being in space. Socrates’ example of daylight, which is simultaneously present in many places, yet remains one, is a perfect analogy of the relationship of Ideas to forms (Plato 1952: 488).

It is Plato’s working assumption that man is basically good. However, we are seduced and fooled by the world of form. Objects themselves are not, and can never be perfect. If we have gotten a definable idea in our minds, we cannot have gotten it merely from an examination and comparison of objects of the physical world. This is why we have artists and philosophers; they remind us of a larger perspective. Those who consistently pursue appearance are plagued by the dominance of their opinions, whereas seekers of the Good can make distinctions based on essentials. These people consider the Idea when making
"imitations." Just as it is the craftsman's chosen task to build a chair, so it is the philosopher's job to re-awaken people to the simple fact that the things of sense, the objects of knowledge, the forms that they have gotten involved with, are merely that, and not to be taken as the end all. We must always be reminded that things of sense are transitory and are merely reflecting a minute portion of a greater Good, a Good that compels us to constantly expand our current boundaries (Plato 1952: 428).

The essence of art is imitation. Ideas, as has been established, are the prototypes of sensible objects. Art therefore, must be patterned after an eternal prototype. True artists always produce in accordance with an Idea, which is the source of the inspiration that he/she beholds in the creative mind's eye. It remains true that the best instruments cannot make perceptible what is imperceptible in its nature. However, every Idea which, on a material basis, has been given expression by the good imitation of the artist, not merely transfigures the form, but leads to the seeking of the knowledge of the eternal prototype which has been revealed by the particular work of art (Plato 1952: 560, 660-661). The works of many artists reintroduces people to a larger Idea; however not all artists are philosophers.

There are artists, and there are philosopher-artists, and Meyerhold is a prime example of the latter.

Plato loved the pursuit of wisdom and was committed to the process of the attainment of wisdom more so than the end product itself. Plato was interested in the cultivation and care of the soul. He believed "that if you discard knowledge, you will hardly find the crown of happiness in anything else... that he who lives according to knowledge is happy" (Plato 1952: 12). Accordingly, he confined the thrust of his explorations to issues directly affecting the development and improvement of the soul of men.

The most famous analogy of Plato's concerning the pursuit of wisdom of the soul is the story of the Cave in the Republic. There is a group of people, representative of mankind,
who live in a world of shadows. Outside, the light is blindingly bright. Inside, it is cool and comfortable. The people know only their world of the cave. One day a member of this group leaves the cave. When he first steps out, he is blinded by the light. Perhaps this is a punishment of the Gods? But slowly his eyes adjust to the light and he sees what he has been missing all of his life, how sharp and clear the world really is. He goes back to the cave to joyfully share his revelations with his companions, to inform them that they are living in a world of shadows, a dim silhouette of what really exists. However, again he is blinded, this time by the darkness, and so he appears dull-witted and slow and his companions think he has gone truly crazy (Plato 1952: 388-389). This, says Plato, is ever the dilemma of the philosopher who has seen this blinding truth and is compelled to bring his discoveries to those who have not yet experienced them. Plato states that it is the duty and role of the philosopher to reawaken the public to the search for essence, the world of Ideas.

In nature, animals must utilize all aspects of their being in order to survive. We, as humans, have the singular ability to reflect. Philosophy is unique to human beings in that it is our ability to describe ourselves and our experiences. We have the ability to be both in the world and at the same time, describe our being in the world. This is our special given ability or talent, an aspect that must be fulfilled. We do this as part of our being, our nature; it is the development of humanity.

Plato states that he is only describing what is already existing phenomena, the modus operandi of the physical world, though not generally recognized as such, and that it is the duty of the philosopher, the true artist, to examine life in order that we may become self-conscious of it and therefore own the process. Very often it is only by naming a thing that we can claim it (Plato 1952: 333). One of the things that art can do is provide materials from which philosophic insights can be gained. The difference between the general population and artists is that true artists do what philosophers do; they have to tap into a larger realm
of Ideas; they have to be able to explain and translate something unknowable and give it form. This is what philosophers do through language. It is what artists do through their various formats.

Plato worked from the premise that the unexamined life, life without knowledge, was not worth living. He pursued this end through the means of thought. Meyerhold worked through the medium of theatre, examined life and compelled others to examine life, with the goal of discovering the huge world outside of the cave.

Knowledge, according to Plato, consists in the imitation of Ideas. For Plato, knowledge means knowledge of the truth and that there is a difference between possessing the truth about something and having the right opinion about it. He said that truth is not an opinion. Opinions come and go, but truth does not. In the world of Ideas, opinions lack stability and are transitory, whereas the Idea is always out there. Time does not wear down its edges. There is no reasoning it away. There is no hesitancy about it even if the majority of the world is against you at the time.

Plato's Symposium suggests that the knower and the lover seek to become one with their object in their search for true knowledge (Plato 1952: 164-165). Again, Plato uses an analogy to help distinguish between knowing opinion and knowing truth. The knower, like the lover, must attempt to merge with, to become one with the essence of the thing it wishes to know. The philosopher and the philosopher/artist, aims at having his/her audience become one with the larger truth which awakens in them a larger consciousness.

In almost every field of endeavor there are "masters" whose work has transcended the current space/time realities of the phenomenal world of their time, to make discoveries of "truths" that have lasted "eternally." How is it these "masters" discover these truths? According to Plato, there is an eternal world of Ideas, called the noumonal world, of which
Knowledge is but one aspect. Seekers of Truth can connect with the noumonal world and when they do eternal "realities" are revealed.

Plato called the world a divine work of art (Plato 1952: 447,450). As such it is an "image" of something else (Plato 1952: 447), an imitation of a superior model (Plato 1952: 456), and a man of knowledge "must have intelligence of universals and be able to proceed from the many particulars of sense to one conception of reason" (Plato 1952: 126). The final point of knowing is achieved by the complex interplay of deductions, logic, reasoning and some ultimate assimilation and cognition. The final synthesis is the spark that one cannot explain. The philosopher returning to the cave tries to impart his/her newly discovered Knowledge, to pass on the spark, to kindle the small flame of light, be it through dialogue as was Socrates' way, or writing as was Plato's way.

"Sensible," material, changing things, have the experience of form, which means a space/time continuity and reality. As ordinarily used, "form" connotes figure or shape. That connotation expresses one aspect of the technical significance of "form." A great variety of things, differing materially and in other respects, can have the same figure or shape, such as a sonnet or a house. The same form can be embodied in an indefinite number of otherwise different individuals or objects. To identify form with figure or shape would put an improper limitation on the meaning of form. This is popularly recognized in the consideration of the form of a work of art, the structure of an epic poem or a symphony, which seems to be more a matter of understanding than of direct sense perception. What might be called the subject matter or content, may be completely different, but have the same form.

Apart from the perishable things of the sensible world, and apart from the ideas which are involved in our process of learning and thinking, there exist the Forms or the Ideas themselves, the immutable objects of our highest knowledge. According to Plato, by imitating Forms, sensible things have the characteristics we apprehend in them (Plato 1952: 535).
The ideas we have when we apprehend the resemblance between sensible things and the
Forms which sensible things exhibit, would seem to be indirect apprehensions of the Forms
themselves. From this it appears that just as we should regard the form of the thing as an
imitation of, or participation in, the ideal Form, so should we regard the idea we have, that
is our understanding of the thing, as an approximation of the Idea. The Ideas are outside
the human mind even as the Forms are separate from their sensible, material imitations.
When we apprehend them by our senses we know them as imitation or as images of the
Ideas.

Plato extends this relationship of Idea to form further, stating that the way that we
know something is a chair, for example, is because there is this Idea of a "chair" that we
"know about." The Idea is the standard that gives us the Knowledge to say, "This is a chair,
and a beautiful chair." How else can we come to name a thing a "chair," and then recognize
it as such? Plato says that in order to give something form, one must first tap into the Idea
of the form (Plato 1952: 535-536).

Platonic theory gives an expanded meaning to word and concept of "imitation." We
ordinarily think of imitation as involving a relation of resemblance between two sensible
things, both of which we are able to perceive. For example, we say that a child imitates his
father’s manner or that a portrait resembles the person who posed for it. As earlier pointed
out, the painter, according to Plato’s Republic, is not the only creator of appearance. He
compares the painter who pictures a bed with the carpenter who makes one. Like the bed
in the painting, the bed made by the carpenter is not the real bed. It is not the Idea, which
according to Plato’s view, is the essence of the bed. The carpenter cannot make true exist-
ence, but only some semblance of existence. As the bed in the picture is an imitation of the
particular bed made by the carpenter, so the latter is an imitation of the Idea, the essential
bed-ness which is the model, the One, or archetype of all of the many beds (Plato 1952: 369,428-429).

Shifting to another example, we can say that a statue, which resembles an individual man, is an imitation of an imitation, for the primary imitation lies in the resemblance between the individual man portrayed and the Form or Idea, Man. Just as the statue derives its distinctive character from the individual man it imitates, so that individual man, or any other, derives his manhood, or humanity from Man. Just as the individual man imitates Man, so our idea of Man is also an imitation of that Idea.

For Plato, another name for imitation is "participation." To participate in is to partake of. In Parmenides, the dialogue in which Plato has the young Socrates inquiring into the relation between sensible particulars and the Ideas or Forms, Parmenides tells him that,

there are certain Ideas of which all other things partake, and from which they derive their names; that similars, for example, become similar, because they partake of similarity; and great things become great, because they partake of greatness; and that just and beautiful things become just and beautiful, because they partake of justice and beauty (Plato 1952: 488). The forms of Ideas are, Parmenides suggests, "patterns fixed in nature, and other things are like them, and resemblances of them, what is meant by the participation of other things in the ideas is really assimilation to them" (Plato 1952: 489). Sensible, material things have whatever being they have by imitation of Ideas which are true beings.

We can witness the origin of the problem of the One and the Many as it occurs in Plato's the Meno. In the Meno, Socrates and Meno get into a discussion of how virtue is acquired. Socrates thinks it is necessary to inquire first what virtue is (Plato 1952: 174). Meno responds by enumerating different virtues, but Socrates is not satisfied. He wants a definition which will cover all the virtues. Even if Meno could say what justice or temperance is, that would not do, for each of these is, as Socrates says, a virtue, not virtue, a particular virtue or a part of virtue, not the whole of it (Plato 1952: 175).
"In searching after one virtue," Socrates tells Meno, "we have found the many . . . but we have been unable to find the common virtue which runs through them all." To help Meno, who claims he is not able to follow Socrates in his "attempt to get at one common notion of virtue," Socrates shifts the discussion to colors and figures. He warns Meno that color cannot be defined by naming colors, and that, even if he could define a square, a circle, and all other figures, he would not be saying what figure is (Plato 1952: 176).

"Tell me then," Socrates says, "since you call them by a common name, and say that they are all figures, even when opposed to one another, what is that common nature which you designate as figure?" If Meno were to reply, "I do not know what you want," not much further explanation could be given. To someone who remains perplexed at this point Socrates suggests, "Do you not understand that we are looking for the same in the many?" Or, put in another form, he says, "What is that one in many which you call figure, and which includes not only the round and straight figures, but all" (Plato 1952: 176)?

This passage is quoted to demonstrate how the One exists in Plato's realm of Ideas. The noumonal world, the intelligible world, may also be described as the world of being. The world of being is unchangeable. The sensible world, the world of becoming, of existence, is fleeting. According to Plato, things of sense participate in the immutable forms. In the Timaeus, according to the story of creation which Timaeus tells, the artificer of the world made its sensible particulars copy an eternal pattern (Plato 1952: 447). When things seem to be of one nature or to share the same quality, they are so by virtue of imitating the eternal forms, which are not only absolute essences in themselves, but are also the models for created or generated things.

In order to appreciate the way both Plato and Meyerhold arrived at the truth, we need to define dialectic which comes from the Greek, meaning discourse, or debate. Although Plato did not "invent" dialectic, the art of disputation by question and answer, he developed
it metaphysically in connection with his doctrine of "Ideas" as the art of analyzing ideas in
themselves and in relation to the ultimate Idea of the Good (Plato 1952: 388-401). It in-
volves a technique of cross examination whereupon false beliefs are exposed and the truth
is elicited. Plato believed the dialectic was the sole method by which the truth was arrived
at, the only one (Plato 1952: 397-398).

Plato considered truth and knowledge as that which is independent of what anyone
thinks about it. And as far as we apprehend the unchanging within the change, and make it
the basis for a true conception, it appears as an Idea. The Idea is what is rightly apprehended
in an object whether or not that object be material or immaterial. It is the perceivable and
conceivable object in its essential being, freed from the false assumptions and trappings of
its form. Ideas are not a duplication of things of sense, so through the use of dialectical in-
vestigation which is introduced in the Sophist (Plato 1952: 551-579), the Statesman (Plato
1952: 580-608), and the Philebus (Plato 1952: 609-639), Plato discovers the means for
separating the Idea from its deceptive cloak. The more logical the investigation proceeds,
in cooperation with the epistemological investigations, the more definite becomes the mean-
ing of the Idea.

To summarize, Plato espouses that there is a world of ideals headed up by the Idea
of the Good, that is unchanging, for which we are ever striving. The desire to comprehend
Ideas is both a quality and an ability unique to human beings. Plato holds that this pursuit
is a vital aspect of human life. The forms of our daily lives are our attempts to express the
world of Ideas. Be this a conscious or an unconscious desire, this search is the fuel that
drives human soul.

According to Plato the world of Ideas gives us knowledge about our daily world.
Given this perspective, the forms we create are mere imitations of the world of Ideas.
However they too are important because they are our means for not only integrating the
realm of Ideas into our daily lives, but can actually inspire us to remember that this world of ours is not all that there is. Forms are the gateway to higher perception. They are meant to inspire their audiences to seek out the realm of Ideas.

Plato believes that the dialectic process is the best means to arrive at truth. Through the presentation of opposites, contradiction is pitted against contradiction until nothing is left but the core, undeniable Truth, independent of opinion. Truth becomes perceivable, and conceivable. In doing so, he used fictitious dialogues and certainly did not always confine himself to "realism." He created dialogues to suit his purposes, to make his point. He also used repetition and exaggeration, as well as paradox and metaphor in order to make sure his point was received by his audience.

Plato believed the seeking of knowledge, the search for truth, is the highest and most profound activity of human beings. Human beings are the only creatures capable of self reflection. Reflection is the process of becoming self conscious and self aware. Through this process, we realize that we are not only what we appear to be but that we are also something much greater. Reflection leads to wonder. Wonder leads to questioning the surface reality of the world. We begin to sense the eternal and search for answers beyond the mundane. The success of the artist and the philosopher lies in their talent to awaken in people this ability to reflect not only on themselves, but on the world in which they live. The artist and philosopher stir to life man's innate inclination towards philosophical reflection and to begin his own personal search.

When we refer to "masters," in any field, it is clear that they are the ones who are capable, through their chosen means of expression, of reminding us of eternal prototypes. This is the ingredient that gives their work a timeless quality and a relevancy that far out-lives the fashion trends of their particular era. According to Plato, this is what the
philosopher and artist are capable of doing, and indeed, what they should be striving for in their work.

Plato pays homage to the role of the artist in reminding us of the Good. In the Ion Plato says it is through poets that the voice of the divine can be heard. Poets who are willing, become channels for the messages of higher truth and speak in such a way that all who listen know them to be speaking Ideas from a higher source. Plato does not mean to say that the poet does not know what he is saying. He calls the poet the interpreter of the Muse who is a representative of the world of Ideas (Plato 1952: 144).

The artist, representing the realm of Ideas, is often called upon apparently to contradict himself when in fact he is remaining true to a larger Truth. In reaching for the Truth, the artist must speak to human beings who are all lodged in their own point of view, their own level of knowingness. The artist, in allowing him or herself to be a free flowing channel of higher communication, must pursue all apparent inroads of communication. Starting where the audience is, only than can the artist begin to expand the audiences' perception of Truth. An artist must have the willingness to appear as though he or she is contradicting him or herself when in fact what is happening is simply establishing the basis for communication with the audience before leading them to view the realm of Ideas (Plato 1952: 144).

Art, according to Plato, is humbled by the limitations of material reality. Forms of the real Ideas cannot manifest themselves in visual bodies. Beauty can only be imitated (Plato 1952: 167). Therefore, true art does not lapse into flat realism, but strives to transcend the material world. In its poor images it tries to evoke something of that higher realm of being which also glimmers through the phenomenal reality. In true art likeness does not refer to commonplace reality, but to ideal Beauty (Plato 1952: 660).
Chapter 2:

The Theories of Meyerhold

Vsevlod E. Meyerhold was born in the Soviet Union in 1874 and was executed February 2, 1940 (Braun 1979:269). He began his work as an actor and moved into directing after first following the principles of Stanislavsky, then moving into his own distinct search that made his directing career unique. This chapter will deal only with the philosophic basis of Meyerhold’s directorial career as relates to the doctrines of Plato.

Meyerhold’s primary commitment was to the art of the theatre rather than to portraying realism. He felt art should serve both the artist and the public by presenting paradox and raising questions to stimulate a thinking and questioning process that would lead to the perception of new thoughts, ideas, and a larger comprehension of life. For Meyerhold, the theatre was a gateway to truth. Meyerhold held that there was a greater truth, a higher good than that of every day appearances, and that it was the duty and responsibility of the theatre to affect the audience in such a way that they experience a larger more powerful "reality" than that which we perceive every day.

Meyerhold’s productions, though "serious" in their intent, were also entertaining and full of comedy and fun. Meyerhold had philosophic priorities which stated that "the theatre is not amusement and relaxation; the theatre is not an imitation of man’s impoverishment. The theatre is an act of worship, a mass whose mysteries conceal perhaps redemption" (Braun 1979: 32). Some of the great religions have been full of celebrations, joy and laughter and that added to, not diminished, their power to reveal the great mysteries to the various civilizations. Laughter has been know to bring redemption. Comedy has always been a powerful tool for shifting perceptions and awakening sluggish minds. In fact, Meyerhold felt that comedy was often more successful in impacting an audience than a morose or tragic approach.
According to Meyerhold, theatre is art, not life, and does not have to follow the rules of naturalism, namely, does not have to present "reality." "It is time for the theatre to stop imitating reality. A cloud in a painting is flat, stays motionless, does not change its shape of color, yet it contains something which excites in us the same sensation as a real cloud in the sky" (Meyerhold 1969: 38). He held that theatre was a form unto itself with theatrical conventions. Meyerhold pointed out that simply entering a theatre was already an agreement that one is not in "reality" anymore, and that agreement did not lessen the impact of the work. In fact, in Meyerhold's opinion, it heightened the impact of the work:

The spectator should not forget for a moment that the actor is performing before him, and the actor should never forget that he is performing before an audience, with stage beneath his feet and a set around him. When one looks at a painting, one is always aware that it is composed of paint, canvas and brush strokes, but none the less it creates a heightened and clarified impression of life. Frequently, the more obvious the artifice, the more powerful the impression of life (Meyerhold 1969: 63).

Valery Bryusov published a crucial article in 1902 that Meyerhold acknowledged as the theoretical basis for his work (Braun 1979: 38), in which he states "It is not possible to reproduce life faithfully on the stage. The stage is essentially based on conventions. All one can do is replace one convention with another." He goes on to stress that trying to represent "reality" on the stage is not only undesirable, it actually obstructs the impact of the work.

On being confronted with an exact representation of reality, our first reaction is to discover how it is achieved, our second is to discover the discrepancies with reality. Only then do we begin to respond to it as a work of art, and when we do it's because we have accepted the convention. The more exact the representation, the less scrutable will be the convention and the more delayed our response to it as a work of art (Meyerhold 1969: 38-39).

Such conventions, says Bryusov, are dictated by necessity, and we must reject them in favor of the "deliberate convention," which "furnished the spectator with as much as he requires
Meyerhold sought to simplify theatre by releasing it from the responsibility of having to represent reality. By 1905, Meyerhold had adopted the theory of uslovnyi theatre, uslovnyi meaning literally "conditional of conventional," and is predicated on the "willing suspension of disbelief" (Hoover 1974: 46). Uslovnyi is based on the principle of stylization. Meyerhold defines his conception of the term "stylization":

With the word "stylization" I do not imply the exact reproduction of the style of a certain period or a certain phenomenon, such as a photographer might achieve... In my opinion the concept of "stylization" is indivisibly tied up with the idea of convention, generalization, and symbol. To "stylize" a given period or phenomenon means to employ every possible means of expression in order to reveal the inner synthesis of that period or phenomenon (Braun 1979: 42).

Meyerhold's uslovnyi presupposes the art, not the reality of the stage, which can give an even stronger feeling of life than reality. Art, by not adhering to realistic convention, frees the audience from the hypnosis of the theatre.

According to Meyerhold, in order for an audience to be moved to new depths, they had to be participants in a production, not passive spectators. They had to be a smart audience, they had to be involved, thinking and questioning. If an audience left a performance with their heads buzzing with questions, this was, for Meyerhold, a sign of success. This indicated to him that at the very least the audience had been awakened and was engaged in searching for new comprehensions. In 1906, Meyerhold first read George Fuch's The Stage of the Future, a work which, as he himself admitted, made the deepest impression on him. Fuchs called for the restoration of the theatre as a festive ritual, involving performers and spectators alike in a common experience which would reveal the universal significance of their personal existence (Braun 1979: 54-55). Meyerhold was committed to the audience...
being participants in each production. "We intend the audience not merely to observe, but to participate in a corporate creative act" (Meyerhold 1969: 60).

Naturalistic theatre, in its attempt to portray realism, spoon fed its audience, sparing no detail or explanation and left its audience no other alternative than the role of passive spectator. "The naturalistic theatre teaches the actor to express everything without fail with definite clarity and outlines; it never allows allusive acting, intentional understatement. This explains why the action in the naturalistic theatre is so frequently overdone" (Hoover 1974: 46). Meyerhold's uslownyi engaged the audience. Through understatement and visual suggestion, Meyerhold painted pictures on the stage which his audience was then required to decipher, understand, and complete in their own terms, providing the details of the work through the use of their own imagination.

In the theatre the spectator's imagination is able to supply that which is left unsaid. It is this mystery and the desire to solve it which draw so many people to the theatre. . . . Ultimately, the stylistic method presupposes the existence of a fourth creator in addition to the author, the director, and the actor --- namely, the spectator. The stylized theatre produces a play in such a way that the spectator is compelled to employ his imagination creatively in order to fill in the details intimated by the action on the stage (Braun 1979: 78).

This principle manifested itself in Meyerhold's stylization of stage sets and in his innovative acting techniques. Neither stage sets nor characterization should be overburdened with detail.

Meyerhold wanted audiences to notice and to look anew at what had always been there. Say, for example, you suddenly saw your own hand under a magnifying glass, you would then be forced, or even compelled, to examine it. With the surprise of seeing your own hand under such different circumstances, you might not even recognize it as your hand even though it was your hand that you have been looking at and living with all of your life. This is what Meyerhold always attempted to do in theatre; to put things under a magnifying glass. He did this through distortion. He heightened elements of each production and
gave them special emphasis, and juxtaposed them in an unfamiliar way so that a point that perhaps had never been perceived before would be brought forth. He called this "theatre of the grotesque."

In 1912, in his article "Balagan," Meyerhold defined his conception of the grotesque: "The grotesque mixes opposites, consciously creating harsh incongruity, playing entirely on its own originality. . . . The grotesque deepens life's outward appearance to the point where it ceases to appear merely natural" (Braun 1979: 74). The grotesque, however, was not a stylistic device for Meyerhold. The grotesque is the means of transforming ordinary realism into an unusually sharp and strongly influential and memorable affair. Meyerhold, in his essay "The Fairground Booth" written in 1912, spoke of "the grotesque, advancing beyond stylization, it is a method of synthesizing rather than analyzing. In turning away details, the grotesque recreates a fullness of life" (Symons 1971: 65). And further:

In reducing the richness of the empirical world to a typical unity, stylization impoverishes life whereas the grotesque refuses to recognize only one aspect---only the vulgar, or only the elevated. It mixes the opposites and by design accent the contradictions. . . . The art of the grotesque is founded on the opposition of substance and form (Symons 1971: 65-66).

This concept was one of Meyerhold's main tools for altering audience perception and for moving them from their current reality to a glimpse of the unknown. "The basis of the grotesque is the artist's constant desire to switch the spectator from the plane he has just reached, to another which is totally unforeseen" (Braun 1979: 74).

Meyerhold felt that it was the duty of the director to present the essence of each play, not simply to paint the picture that was written in words. The director was responsible for infecting the audience with the same underlying driving force that made the writer write the piece in the first place. "The director erects a bridge between actor and spectator. . . by means of movement and poses he must present a picture which enables the spectator not only to hear the spoken dialogue, but to penetrate through to the inner dialogue" (Meyer-
hold 1969: 56). In order to do that, the director had to be true to the essence of the piece, not to realistic conventions, or acting styles, nor even to remain true to the text. For Meyerhold, being true to the essence meant he could justify changing the text. In his later years he would divide plays into episodes, eliminate acts, and arrange the episodes in such a fashion that it would impact the audience with the essence of the play.

Meyerhold’s concern with revealing the inner life of the play carried over to acting techniques and styles. "Meyerhold’s theory of uslovnyi refused to accept that the art of the actor was to 'be' the character. The subject of art is the soul of the artist, his feelings and his ideas; it is this which is the content of the work of art; the plot, the theme, are the form; the images, colours, sounds, are the materials" (Meyerhold 1969: 39). He believed the art of the actor was to portray the essence or the soul of the character. "The actor on stage is just like the sculptor before a piece of clay. He has to embody in a recognizable form exactly the same subject matter: the impulses and sensations of his soul" (Meyerhold 1969: 37-38). Meyerhold’s actors were required to search their souls in order to develop their characters. They were not to offer forth "realistic" portrayals of their characters. They had to move beyond the superficial aspects of characterization and discover the inner core of their role. "We are striving to penetrate behind the mask, beyond the action into the character as perceived by the mind; we want to penetrate to the inner mask" (Meyerhold 1969: 60). Having gone to the core, Meyerhold’s actors had a responsibility to communicate their truth to the audience and the production was to support the actor in this task. "The task of the theatre is to create conditions under which the actor’s creativity can be manifested most freely and can be most fully comprehended by the audience. The theatre’s sole obligation is to assist the actor to reveal his soul to the audience" (Meyerhold 1969: 38). This compelled him to invent new non-realistic acting techniques, ranging from "pre-acting" to "biomechanics," that could fulfill his wishes. These acting devices did not arise from trick-
ery or cleverness but from Meyerhold’s commitment to affect his audience. To achieve this, Meyerhold used repetition of movements, exaggerations, slow motion, freezing the action or scene, and other specific staging techniques in order to prevent the audience from being hypnotized by the actor as his character. Non-realism diverted the attention of the audience by alienating the experience being viewed on stage. The audience was forced to step back and truly observe and see who the character was and what they were doing, rather than simply emotionally empathizing with what the character was going through and riding along passively on the roller coaster ride of the character’s emotional life without having to think at all. Meyerhold pulled the actor out of character, so to speak, and gave him things to do that revealed the soul of the character to the audience as demonstrated in examples given in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Meyerhold viewed all elements of theatre, set design, lighting, acting techniques, blocking, as parts of an orchestra, in this case a visual symphony, with each element as important as each instrument in an orchestra. The director was responsible for providing the visual imagery that would move the audience to another deeper level of perception in order to comprehend a more profound truth that lay beneath the surface of the play. When one listens to an orchestra, you do not concentrate on the sounds of the individual instruments. Instead, you are moved by the impact of all of the instruments playing together, and in relationship to one another, be it harmonious or discordant. It is the overall effect that moves one.

This is what Meyerhold strove for in his productions. Meyerhold overwhelmed his audience with the symphony of his production so that one’s senses were bombarded and one would be drawn into the spectacle of the event. He utilized every element of the theatre to involve and immerse the spectator in an event in which they would be led to perceive their own souls in each production. With the senses being bombarded, there was no room
for the audience to make their usual judgments and rejections. The audience had to absorb the production almost through osmosis and then, later, sort through their experience. Meyerhold's productions could be seen over and over because there was always more to get out of each viewing.

Throughout Meyerhold's career, his commitment was to giving life to the essence of each play. Meyerhold believed form should serve content, should serve the purpose of getting the essence of the content across. Accordingly, to Meyerhold, "Any re-creation of a work justifies its existence if it springs from an inner necessity" (Symons 1971:119). He felt that one should not be faithful to a form if it was not serving the essence of the piece.

Meyerhold never stuck to one form for very long. He used one experiment to build upon another. He changed his forms, mixed up the various elements of each production, always striving to better accomplish his goal of getting the essence of the piece across to an audience. This makes his work look very eclectic. The range and variety of Meyerhold's productions would seem to suggest the absence of a consistent idea of theatre. This is not so. Meyerhold states:

I have often been reproached to the effect that I do not develop my finds and discoveries, I always hurry on to new labors: after one play, I do another, completely different as to style. But in the first place, human life is short, and in repeating yourself there are many things you won't have time to do; in the second place, where a superficial glance sees a chaos of different manners and styles, my colleagues and I see the application of the same general principles to different material, a variant treatment of it in relation to the style of the author and the problems of the present day (Symons 1971: 126).

Throughout his career, Meyerhold held to his core belief, which was that theatre should stir up an audience, disturb their normal perceptions and preconceptions, and move them towards seeing a bigger idea of life than meets the eye; a bigger meaning than perhaps they had ever been able to see before, or to acknowledge. It was his self-assigned duty as an artist and as a director to expose the essence, Truth, of each piece so that the audience
would be moved to greater insight. "If I were asked what is the artistic challenge of the regisseur, I would say, 'He has to comprehend the uncomprehended'" (Symons 1971: 160).

There is nothing in his future work which fundamentally contradicts this attitude. On the contrary, it is this idea which constitutes the conceptual consistency in nearly all of Meyerhold's work (Symons 1971: 66). Symons sums it up beautifully:

For Meyerhold, the [theatre of the] grotesque was the most dynamic means at the disposal of theatre artists for giving expression to the joie de vivre which is all too often missing from man's daily life. For Meyerhold, the joy of living was to be found not so much in the simple pleasures and quiet contentedness as in the fireworks of life's contrasts, conflicts and dissonances. Furthermore, the grotesque was not to be construed simply as a manifestation of skepticism or ironic detachment; rather, it was for him the artist's involvement in a search for meanings. [quoting Meyerhold] "Beyond that which we see, existence is composed of an immense domain of mystery. The grotesque seeks the supernatural, synthesizes the quintessence of contraries, and creates the image of the phenomenal. Thus it urges the spectator to attempt to penetrate the enigma of the inconceivable" (Symons 1971: 66).

Summarizing Meyerhold's philosophic basis, the first point is that for Meyerhold, the theatre was not to be an event which realistically portrayed to us our own daily mundane lives, nor was it a place to depict life as viewed through glasses romantic, sentimental, comic, or tragic. It was, instead, to be a mirror of profound self-reflection. The theatre was a place for confronting an audience, through conventional means peculiar to the theatre, with a synthesized distillation of life's extremities in conflict with one another.

Meyerhold knew there was something bigger than "life" out there, more than just "appearance," and it is the bigger idea that we yearn to touch, to know. He was always striving to have his audience get a glimpse of the fact that there was a larger realm of Ideas. Meyerhold did not name it as such, yet he referred to this concept constantly.

With this priority in operation, Meyerhold freed himself from the constraint of having to portray surface reality on the stage of the theatre or to follow the staging fashions of his time. Meyerhold did not want his audiences to place their attention on trying to analyze
how accurately his productions represented physical reality. It was, in fact, crucial to Meyerhold that his audiences not try to find the familiarity in his productions, but instead to be so confronted with the unfamiliar that they would be forced to search for a greater truth. Truth for Meyerhold, was not to be found in comfortable conventions, but rather through contradiction. Meyerhold wanted his theatre to represent the inner synthesis of a play, not the surface reality. He aimed to create conventions that would give an even stronger feeling of life to a play than the convention of attempting to portray the superficial aspects of realism.

Meyerhold’s work called for the active participation of his audience in his productions. His audience, faced with a series of paradoxes in a production, was forced to ignore the superficial realism and look deeper. The audience was called upon to put together associations that Meyerhold presented to them often in the form of paradox not only in the verbal content of the play, but often through the very texture of the whole production and the way the elements of stagecraft were strung together in relationship to each other. Often the very elements of stagecraft were in contradiction to each other. The audience had to draw their own conclusions. Meyerhold’s works were not ready-wrapped, easily digestible little packets simply to be swallowed by an audience half asleep.

Meyerhold geared not only the elements of his stagecraft towards the noumonal world, but the art of the actor as well. His actors had to embody the essence of the soul of the character. Meyerhold’s actors had the responsibility to reveal what lay behind the mask of the character, providing the audience with a glimpse into the inner stronghold of the workings of the character. He believed the other elements of stagecraft needed to assist the actor in this responsibility.

Meyerhold did not want his audiences hypnotized by the illusion of realism on the stage. Meyerhold actively sought to shatter any hypnotic unconsciousness in his audience.
He wanted his spectators fully awake, thinking, and involved in a profound, moving, experience.

Based on these same principles, Meyerhold often painted pictures that were incomplete. The audience had to fill in the blanks, to provide the missing logic, to question why something was happening or why the character was reacting in the manner they were. He did this deliberately. He wanted the audience to seek out and discover the core.

Meyerhold used all elements of stagecraft to do this. He used distortion, exaggeration, repetition, and created paradox in his acting stylization. He treated productions as symphonies. He submerged his audiences in an experience where logic could no longer be used simply to view the world in the same old way. The audience had to question their logic. Static ways of thinking were dislodged and new viewpoints were offered. The audience experienced sensory overload and viewed contradictions that were not resolvable through everyday answers. They were moved from static acceptance to confusion. Confusion forced people to search for new explanations, preconceptions no longer made sense.

Meyerhold gave little value to the permanence of forms. Form serves content, the content being the essence, the Truth. He was willing to do anything to reach, or reveal the essence, including standing up to the Soviet government's policy on art. Meyerhold was willing to face enormous criticism. He devised extraordinary new methods of actor training so that he could produce actors who were capable of fulfilling his artistic visions. He was willing to re-write material, and restructure it, including the classics. Meyerhold gave himself permission to be innovative in all areas of staging.

Meyerhold invented new staging techniques, lighting, and scenic designs that we still use today. He brought the audience closer to the stage, stripped down stage walls leaving the usually hidden workings of the theatre exposed to the full view of the audience. He removed footlights and expanded the playing area, sometimes taking the action directly into
the audience. He used movement and rhythm to counterpoint the language of the play and to give life to the subtext of the play. He gave the director the right to freely interpret text. His innovations grew out of his need to fulfill his artistic goals which were to upset the normal picture of the stage, and to upset the normal limited viewpoint of an audience. Nothing was sacred to Meyerhold in striving for the Good.

These principles readily smooth away the apparent contradictions that seem to run through Meyerhold's career as a director. Meyerhold's contradictions are not contradictions at all; they are merely evidence of the challenge he faced as an artist to create visually what is inherently impossible to create materially, the world of Ideas. The true artist does not content himself with a superficial glance at his object, but tries to penetrate to its inner structure. As the third chapter will illustrate, Meyerhold clearly showed that his work was meant to be a gateway to Truth, to the Idea of the Good.
Chapter Three

Meyerhold’s Theatrical Practice

By 1905 Meyerhold had adapted uslovnyi as his working methodology and in the summer of 1905 presented Maeterlinck’s The Death of Tintagiles at the Theater Studio in Moscow. Meyerhold found the key to interpreting this play in Maeterlinck’s "Everyday Tragedy." It is apparent that from the beginning of his career as a director Meyerhold’s search for form was dictated by his commitment to portraying essence, i.e., idea.

I have come to believe that the old man seated in an armchair, simply waiting in the lamplight and listening unconsciously to all the eternal laws which preside about his house, interpreting without realizing it all that which is contained in the silence of the doors and windows, and in the small voice of the lamplight, enduring the presence of his soul and its destiny, bowing his head a little, never suspecting that all the powers of this world watch and wait in the room like attentive servants, unaware that the little table on which he leans is held in suspense over the abyss by the sun itself, unaware that there is not a star in the sky, not a part of the soul, which remains indifferent to the lowering of an eyelid or the waking of a thought—I have come to believe that in reality this motionless old man leads a life which is more profound, more human and more significant than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who is victorious in battle, or the husband who avenges his honor (Braun 1979: 25).

For Maeterlinck the "internal dialogue determined the tragic moments of human existence when the spoken word concealed the truth" (Braun 1979: 45). Prompted by Maeterlinck’s essay, Meyerhold saw The Death of Tintagiles as "above all a manifestation and purification of souls...a chorus of souls singing softly of suffering, love, beauty, and death" (Meyerhold 1969: 54).

With The Death of Tintagiles Meyerhold created a mystic theatre aimed at revealing the inner life of the play. He boldly experimented with new staging techniques and with new forms of acting, both visually and orally. The actors were used to form group tableaux, giving living, dimensional imagery to the inner life of the play. A style of diction was developed that removed all external, emotional intonation, forcing the totality of the produc-
tion to carry the weight of the message of the play (Meyerhold 1969: 54). The inner dialogue of the play was conveyed with the help of actual music (Braun 1979: 48). Meyerhold’s belief that "Words alone cannot say everything" had him replace conventional gestures by a pattern of poses, glances and silences meant "to transform the spectator into a vigilant observer" (Meyerhold 1969: 56). Evidently, even from this early date, Meyerhold was concerned not only with giving life to the Truth of the play, but also with redefining and reshaping the role of the spectator, moving them from passive to active.

On November 10, 1906 Meyerhold staged Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* which opened at the Theatre of Vera Komissarzhevskaja in St. Petersburg. This was not the familiar production of Ibsen’s play. Peter Yartsev, the Dramatic Theatre’s newly appointed literary manager makes these comments in describing the production: "Life is not like this, and it is not what Ibsen wrote. *Hedda Gabler* on the stage of the dramatic theatre is stylized. It’s aim is to reveal Ibsen’s play to the spectator by employing unfamiliar new means of scenic presentation" (Braun 1979: 60).

Once again Meyerhold used all elements of stage craft to delve into the Truth of the play, and to draw the audience in as active investigators of this Truth. The costumes were designed to present the "externally simplified representation of the character’s inner nature" (Braun 1979: 59). Authenticity and "lifelikeness" were rejected in favor of minimalist gesture and mime. Emotions were once again internalized, all with the intention of engaging the spectators’ imagination to fill in the missing gaps (Braun 1979: 61). Thus the production was a precisely personal experience and each audience member had to interpret the production for his or her self.

With uslovnyi, i.e., stylization, the actual words of the production may not be remembered but the overall impression of the production made an indelible impression (Braun 1979: 62).
The listener hears in this a dialogue meant for the audience. The whole time the audience sees before it the faces of Hedda and Lovborg, and reads in them the two characters’ most subtle feelings. In the rhythm of the monotonously falling words and behind the actual dialogue, an inner hidden dialogue comes out, the presentations and emotions which are not expressed (Hoover 1974: 34).

It is clear from these, and other comments, that Meyerhold used every visual element of the theatre to support his vision of the inner life of Hedda. The rules of naturalism were not permitted to intrude upon Meyerhold’s portrayal of the essence of the play.

Meyerhold was certainly in not alone in his efforts to break out of the confines of naturalism. Konstantin Rudnitsky makes the point of Meyerhold being at one with the "symbolist" writers of that time in their aim against naturalism and makes this point when he quotes the philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev: "Symbolism justifies itself with an aesthetic which totally rejects the possibility of art as the reflection of reality. An idealistic world-view must recognize the independent meaning of beauty and of artistic creativity in the life of mankind. Beauty is the ideal goal of existence; it elevates and ennobles man" (Rudnitsky 1981: 78).

Meyerhold continued to use the theatre as an opportunity to reveal a larger truth to an audience. On November 22, 1906 Meyerhold presented Maeterlinck’s Sister Beatrice. This time the play itself was a symbolist work, not a classic that Meyerhold had to adapt. Meyerhold continued to apply is principles of uslownyi. Meyerhold intended "to soothe the audience with a vision of harmony and to induce participation in a corporate mystical experience akin to the medieval miracle play... Meyerhold applied the principle of stylization, seeking to imbue the legend with universality" (Braun 1979: 64).

Meyerhold’s production Life of Man by Leonid Andreev opened February 22, 1907. This production demonstrated most clearly Meyerhold’s continued work on the role of the spectator. Meyerhold’s stylisation once again understated the play in such a way that the audience automatically employed their imagination to fill in the details of the event enacted before them. By using their imagination, by entering into a relationship with the produc-
tion, Life of Man assumed a significance and a profundity precisely because the spectator's participation personalized the experience making it a relevant and individualistic experience for each audience member. Meyerhold sought to provide "only the symbol of the objects, its mystical essence" (Braun 1979: 88). Life of Man was mediocre literature. Meyerhold's priority to use theatre as an experience for transformation gave him license to use his tremendous abilities to turn mediocre literature into an impactful and forceful theatrical event.

Meyerhold directed Wagner's opera Tristan and Isolde which opened October 30, 1909. Opera suited Meyerhold's stylistic theatre very well as opera is already unrealistic in its basic convention in that people sing rather than talk. Meyerhold found the key to staging opera was to base the acting not on the obvious text of the libretto, but on the underlying musical score (Hoover 1974: 57). The score, according to Meyerhold, "does not merely provide and accompaniment to the libretto but reveals the world of the soul, gives voice to the inner dialogue of the characters' emotions." Meyerhold used the orchestral score as the text and gave life to it in visible plastic terms. The actor was "not to duplicate the expressive power of the music, but rather to supply what it fails to say or leaves half said" (Braun 1979: 93).

Meyerhold dealt with music as he did all other elements of stagecraft, namely he looked at it as yet another integral part of his methodology to reveal a higher Truth. "A simple indication suffices to place the action in the external world, and once this is done, the setting has only to express what there is in the place chosen by the dramatist that corresponds to the inner essence revealed to us by the music--in other words, the eternal aspect with which all transitory forms are endowed" (Braun 1979: 96). His dramatic use of music came out of his need to expose the core of the opera. Musicality became a guiding principle for Meyerhold who, "having isolated the text's 'inner dialogue,' he would 'orchestrate' it" (Braun 1979: 95).
Don Juan by Moliere, opened November 9, 1910. In this production Meyerhold, along with his designer Golovin, created a whole, unified atmosphere in the auditorium abolishing the separation between audience and stage. Meyerhold’s aim was "to fill the stage and the auditorium with such a compelling atmosphere that the audience is bound to view the action through the prism of that atmosphere" (Braun 1979: 109).

With Don Juan Meyerhold introduced the use of "the mask," which for him, was not an actual physical mask but rather

The style of acting which the mask signifies: the emotional detachment and physical dexterity that enable the actor to assume the various aspects of his part ("to manipulate his masks") and at the same time to comment—both implicitly and explicitly—on the actions of himself and his fellow characters, thereby affording the spectator a montage of images, a multi-faceted portrait of every role. It was in such a manner that Meyerhold conceived the figure of Dom Juan (Braun 1979: 113-114).

Meyerhold’s theatricality arose out of the need to expose the universality not only of the play, but of the characters in the play. "The mask enables the spectator to see not only the actual Arlecchino before him but all the Arlecchinos who live in his memory. Through the mask the spectator sees every person who bears the merest resemblance to the character" (Braun 1979: 113). Once again we see that Meyerhold’s discussions of techniques are never aimed at finding cleverness or trickery, but emerge out of his priority to provide visual and emotional imagery to the universal essence of the piece.

Lermontov’s Masquerade opened February 25, 1917. This production was an excellent example of Meyerhold exercising his self proclaimed right that as director he was also author of the production and had the right to revise classics or to interpret dramatic material freely. Having been censored for over a decade, Masquerade had been reduced to being staged as a romantic melodrama. Meyerhold set out to restore the original satirical emphasis of the production (Braun 1979: 136).
Meyerhold broke the play into episodes and reorganized the stage space into a continuation of the theatre. He used curtains and screens which allowed him to deal freely with stage space. "This changeability of stage space supplemented the overall impression of shifting mystery and ghostliness" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 45-46). "The intent on Meyerhold's... part was... to underline the essence, or gestus, of Lermontov's play" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 45). Music was used for the purpose of providing commentary and emphasizing subtext in contrast to the staging. Stage props, "everything that had a significant value was made slightly oversized to intensify the effect on the spectator" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 46). All effects were geared at increasing the impact on the audience that what they were seeing was all illusion.

The disbanding of the separation between audience and stage in his productions served Meyerhold's intention of creating the spectator as the coequal in the process of theatrical productions. "Even in his early productions, and certainly in his production of Masquerade that Meyerhold's attempts were always focused on bringing the audience into a mental dialogue between the action occurring on the stage and their own values and beliefs" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 45-48).

The Mystery Bouffe opened November 7, 1918. The playwright Mayakovsky was intent like Meyerhold, "on creating a revolution in the theater" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 49). This author and Meyerhold were in agreement: both felt theater should be relevant, nonillusionistic and that the text was not sacred. Mayakovsky ordered that all further productions of his play should have the contents altered in order to keep the play current. In The Mystery Bouffe even the artist who designed the stage space, Kasimir Malevich, was in line with Meyerhold's philosophy: "I saw my task not as the creation of associations with the reality existing beyond the limits of the stage, but as the creation of a new reality" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 50-51).
Meyerhold used anti-illusionistic staging devices and exaggerated theatricalism. These trademarks along with the biting satire, disregard for plot suspense, and asides to the audience "were characteristics that would remain associated with all future collaborations with Mayakovsky" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 51).

Meyerhold adaptation of Ostrovsky's *The Forest* which opened January 19, 1924 portrayed one of Meyerhold's most fundamental ideas of life and the theatre, which is that the appearances of life are a masquerade and are not to be taken seriously (Symons 1971: 116). *The Forest* was a most successful example of where conditional theatre freed the actor from the burden both of having to portray the character realistically, and having to be dependent upon a realistic set.

Thus, for instance, in *The Forest* Meyerhold can have the girl ironing, hanging clothes, chasing pigeons, people on a road, fishing, love scene on the road--marvelous in its effect of throb and pulse--the swings, the seesaw, where in a realistic set he would be tremendously limited. . . . This kind of set, used in very different styles, opens the way for theatric imaginations, inventiveness, actors' mastery...interpretation of the play--deepening of the play, and creating of the life inherent in the play but not expressed in mere dialogue. It is not a striving towards theatricality-it is a desire to mirror and explore life more fully (Strasberg 1973: 120).

Meyerhold created theatrical effects by exaggerating stage properties, and in his characterizations of the actors who were "introduced by means of leitmotifs as puppets or marionettes come to life" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 67-68). Every major character was costumed in an exaggerated manner that revealed his essential nature to the audience and each was assigned typical gestures and actions that further revealed the nature of the character. A single phrase in Ostrovsky's text saying that Neschaslivtsev had performed tricks was turned by Meyerhold into a demonstration of these tricks on stage: "when the merchant declares 'I shall give up everything,' a flood of furs, shoes, and hats drops upon him from above" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 67-68).
Meyerhold used montage-like staging, which by now had become a trademark of his, having developed naturally from dividing plays into episodes and having granted himself the freedom to act as co-author while directing. The montage freed Meyerhold from the linear and sequential cause-effect progression of naturalistic drama (Kiebuzinska 1988: 68).

This concept of montage rather than linear cause-effect composition...sought to communicate the idea of the play through the effect of scenic and episodic contrasts rather than through consistent cause-effect progression of events. Consequently, it could be said that Meyerhold sought to communicate a conclusion through an inductive rather than a deductive process (Symons 1971: 116).

In *The Forest*, everything was sacrificed purely for the effect of plot significance. It was an attempt to stage an old problem in a new way (Rudinitsky 1981: 351).

*The Forest* is one of the clearest examples of such a destruction of the necessary bonds between an individual personage and the environment around him. Therefore it would be more correct to say that the bonds between the characters in the play were not only 'shook apart,' but that new forms of dependence were established and that the entire system of images in *The Forest* was reoriented in accordance with the intentions of the director (Rudnitsky 1981: 342).

*Bubus the Teacher* by Faiko, opened January 29, 1925. Here Meyerhold introduced the technique of "pre-acting." The theory of pre-acting was based on Meyerhold's commitment to using paradox and the juxtapositioning of contradictions in order to raise consciousness (Symons 1971: 126). Pre-acting was developed to prepare the spectator to fully perceive the scene about to be presented. Pre-acting demanded that the actor take a moment of pose, before the action, in order to exemplify the essence of the action to follow. "The actor-tribune acts not the situation itself, but what is concealed behind it and what it has to reveal. . . . When the actor-tribune lifts the mask of the character to reveal his true nature to the spectator he does not merely speak the lines furnished by the dramatist, he uncovers the roots from which the lines have sprung" (Braun 1979: 192). Pre-acting was not a success. It was however, another fearless step on the part of Meyerhold to find new forms to accommodate his demands.
The Mandate by Erdman, which opened April 20, 1925 at the Meyerhold Theatre

was prime example of Meyerhold's use of the grotesque.

If for the effective demonstration of a given social trait it becomes necessary to represent it as totally unlike its real manifestation, but in such a way that the distorted and caricatured image reveals what is concealed, shall we say, behind its superficially fine appearance and indifference, then this technique is, of course, very realistic (Rudnitsky 1981: 378).

The play depicted daily life and stemmed from observations of real everyday gestures, however all situations were intensified, and exaggerated and the whole production was arbitrarily structured into a staccato rhythm. Apparently this technique was quite successful.

Small details of life were presented as major geologic shifts. In this show, the daily life and psychology of small people obtained a grotesque and exaggerated significance. The fearful power of inertia contained in this lifestyle and psychology was also revealed in this way. The plot dictated the need for the actor to give foundation for the strange actions, the fantastic logic of behaviour, the amusing accidents and the examination of an evident alogism of life knocked out of its rut. A living anachronism became the object of art. Art looked with alarm at walking paradox (Rudnitsky 1981: 378).

True to form, Meyerhold's techniques fulfilled their assigned purpose as evidenced by the following comments made by different sources, regarding the impact of The Mandate: "The development of clowning led to a most intensive enrichment of the actor's means of expression and the revelation of life's contradictions, and in this way laid the way to renewed forms of stage realism" (Rudnitsky 1981: 379). Reviewers comment:

"Eccentricity in the rendition of psychological failure is the best expression of realism, and the staging of The Mandate confirms," this one of the reviews said unexpectedly of Meyerhold's intentions.

The Mandate) ... collects sharp observations about an empty and frightful, powerful and passionate life, in order to condense them into the form of new, concentrated realism (Rudnitsky 1981: 381, 388).
"The production makes you think. It questions premises and proceeds by deduction" wrote Pavel Markov, the principal dramaturg of the Moscow Art Theatre (Braun 1979: 206).

The Government Inspector opened December 9, 1926. Originally written by Nikolai Gogol, it was adapted by Meyerhold and M. Korenev, for this production. Meyerhold as usual, enlarged the meaning of this production, not targeting some small little town in the middle of nowhere, but to hold injustice up to ridicule. He did this of course using all the means the theatre had to offer. Thus Pavel Markov commented:

Meyerhold looks at men and actors with the eye of a painter, a draughtsman, or a theatre cameraman. He almost willingly sacrifices the effect of gradually uncovering the inner kernel of a personality. In a fleeting glance, a single movement, the drop of a hand, he reveals more than a normal observer would notice; he shows (or seeks to show) the fate a man unfolding, and at the same time achieves a dazzling theatrical effect (Braun 1979: 211).

Rudnitsky adds: "With a glance, a step, a lowered hand, he shows more than the ordinary observer sees; shows (or wishes to show) the revelation of man's fate and, at the same time, a brilliant rhythmical theatrical effect" (Rudnitsky 1981: 392). And further: "Meyerhold refused to equate realism with psychology and, accordingly did not consider it possible to examine a character as a sum of the specific human qualities, as some psychological unity" (Rudnitsky 1981: 392).

This was most clearly illustrated in the character of "the Visiting Officer." This figure Mikhail Chekhov comments, wanders silently, and aimlessly about the stage, unnoticed by the other characters. "'What is this little officer?' asked Mikhail Chekhov. An empty space in the production? Yes, of course, though not in the production but in man himself. The idea of the emptiness and pointlessness of life, is conceived and manifested by Meyerhold to a degree of nightmarish reality" (Rudnitsky 1981: 357).
Woe to Wit opened March 12, 1928. Originally written by Griboedov, the production Meyerhold staged was a compilation of versions reworked by Meyerhold and M. Korenev. The play was once again divided into a series of episodes and

was made up of short quickly changing pictures: fragments of plot, pantomime, and such seemingly gratuitous activities as billiards and dancing lessons, all revealing different aspects of life in the Famusov household. Such a chain of impressions was aimed at capturing the essence of the play not through the development of character or plot in the traditional sense, but rather by the projection of personalities and the repeated reinforcement of the general theme (Law 1974: 93).

Meyerhold was asked which he considered the most important, the playwright or the producer, to which he replied: "Neither--it is the thought contained in the play which must hold first place in our play while working on a play. This thought has determined the play. Dialectically, the thought appears first and from this develops the play" (Van Gysegham 1943: 23).

Meyerhold’s ability to bring forth the "thought" of a play was apparent not only to audiences, but playwrights as well, as Yury Olesha noted when Meyerhold directed his play, List of Assets, that Meyerhold "saw in my play what kept eluding me--he saw what I intended to put into it but failed" (Schmidt 1980: 71).

Others viewing Meyerhold’s work understood that Meyerhold saw the theatre as a ritual which when experienced, would have profound effect on its participants. In that context, Meyerhold saw his work as director as something far greater than a technician whose job consisted of translating a text into a staged production.

He sought to unlock what might be termed the universal mystery of dramatic communication. To him, as to the ancient Greeks, the theatre has appeared a temple, with the stage as the Holy of Holies and the Actor as the High Priest serving as a medium of religious initiation into the truth of dramatically communicated mysteries (Chapman 1924: 67).

Meyerhold was committed to revealing "Truth" through his productions and was quite successful in his endeavors. Huntley Carter Chapman, a critic of Soviet Theatre and
Cinema was convinced that Meyerhold had a special ability to bring forth essential truths in his productions. Chapman believed that Meyerhold's uslovnyi, i.e. "conditional," theatre was a powerful means to bring forth the essence of the Truths of life through the vehicle of theatre. "The aim of actualism ["naturalistic" theatre] to express "real" life, that is, life as it is actually lived, simply conceals the inner spirit of life. Metaphysically it holds up the thing to view but conceals the activity behind the thing. Conditionalism is the activity of spirit attributed to the thing" (Chapman 1924: 54). Cause and effect were suspended and situations were held up to the spectator for comment and observation. "Meyerhold offers us a theatre of world, one that forces us to look at the world and our existence in it" (Schmidt 1980: xiv).

Meyerhold is the creator of forms, a poet of the stage. He has his own theatrical language of gestures and rhythms that he invents for the expression of his intention, and which says as much to the eye as the text does to the ear. He creates his means for expression on the basis of the inner meaning of the work; he removes the skin from the fruit, eliminates everything that is extra, goes straight to the core (Rudnitsky 1981: 542).

In his search for the means to manifest the greater Truths, form was Meyerhold's main tool of altering and shaping the perceptions of the audience. "Above all, Meyerhold sought to use the theater as a means of inducing a new perception of reality by revolutionizing the forms through which it is customarily perceived" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 74). "Meierhold conceives of the theatre not as an expression of initiation, reasoned or other, into, or the mere re-shaping of the actualities of life. To him it is an expression of an evolutionary creative power which urges the possessor to reject old forms in order that he may attain the essential one" (Chapman 1924: 52). Meyerhold clearly stated that "all devices which are at the disposal of the other arts must be used as an organic fusion to affect the audience" (Meyerhold 1969: 256).
Meyerhold's theatre was complex rather than simple, multi-layered, polyphonic, ambiguous rather than clear, polysemic. Meyerhold broke his plays into episodes, devised acting techniques to slow down or abstract the action on stage, used tableaux to paint pictures in the mind of the spectator. He never repeated himself. Each production of Meyerhold's had its own language of movement, sounds, shapes and colors. Meyerhold's manipulation of these theatrical elements activated in the spectator, a new awareness about the world (Kiebuzinska 1988: 39,44). He "toppled the taboos of the ruling aesthetics and offered spectators new possibilities for viewing the world" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 144).

Meyerhold used theatrical devices to arouse emotional reactions by their associative power. He used dynamic movement, abstract rhythms, to appeal to the senses and stimulate rational reflection. His theatrical devices such as bio-mechanics and pre-acting were important, not because of their theatrical significance, but because of their results on the stage (Kiebuzinska 1988: 59). "The selection of materials for use in the theatre is meaningful because of their particular stimuli. Much attention was given by Meyerhold to their intrinsic value: 'In art it is always a question of arrangement of material he declared'" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 45). Meyerhold never intended pure biomechanics or scenic constructivism as an aesthetic in and of itself. Meyerhold himself referred to them as "stylistic extremes" (Meyerhold 1969: 204). Both were tools to produce both in actors and audience a detachment from the characters and their environments. "For Meyerhold's actor, the slightest movement on the stage very often is as important as a lengthy monologue for an actor of the emotional school. Using motion, Meyerhold's actor transmits the external form of an image, its internal essence" (Rudnitsky 1981: 542). Meyerhold's characters and theatrical devices were also symbols for "all the qualities which the observer can associate with those objects and their users" (Houghton 1936: 95). "Fundamental... was the aim of
'shaking up' the spectator's perception, to make him 'see' things and not simply 'recognize' them" (Kiebuzinska 1988: 143).

Meyerhold's uslovnyi reshaped the idea of "audience." His theatrical inventions impacted his audiences in terms of content. In structure, Meyerhold's theatrical conventions actively altered the role of the audience.

In Meyerhold's theatre, darkness is destroyed by light, the hidden chair of the analyst-observer-audience is discovered, made present; a passive, purely aural process is replaced by an active, physical transaction between two equal entities who occupy the same space. The idea of audience, those who hear, is replaced by the idea of spectators who see. The primacy of the actor as a speaker of words is denied for the sake of a text written in more than words. And the creation of this text is the task of the director (Schmidt 1980: xiv).

In order to evoke knowledge of the Truth, Meyerhold's productions not only worked upon already known associations, but created new powers of understanding. They awoke and renewed the powers of association in the audience. "Meyerhold contends that the reality must exist not on stage but in minds of the audience. The stage is a reflector—a convention—with the aid of which they see the reality. But it is not in itself reality" (Van Gysegham 1943: 23). Meyerhold's task as a director was to handle the delicate task of tearing off the bandage from the eyes of his audience and ask them, push them, to go beyond the apparent transparencies of the play they were viewing and view instead the essence, the Idea (Van Gysegham 1943: 23).

From as early as The Fairground Booth in 1906, Meyerhold structured his productions to stimulate and exploit audience reaction, confounding its expectations as often as it confirmed them. The audience was forced to take issue with its preconceptions, to question the values that endorsed the existing order. "No director has ever shaken his public's composure more thoroughly and more consistently than Meyerhold" (Braun 1979: 267,269).

Meyerhold's art turned simultaneously to the emotions and the intellect of the spectator, caused him to investigate and assimilate the too well known and habitual
world. It judged a man according to the highest laws of beauty...and strove to draw the audience out of its state of inertia (Rudnitsky 1981: 542).

Meyerhold addressed his audience as capable and intelligent adults. He approached them on an intellectual level, and, he aimed for the heart. He made emotional contact with his audience.

His appeal to the audience was at once direct and indirect. He addressed it frankly as spectators, as really more than spectators—as a living force in the drama which it took the whole of his playhouse, stage and auditorium, to create. But at the same time he appealed to his audience not by the direct words of literal translation of life, but through the indirect medium of suggestion, of emotion conjured up through symbol, of intelligence provoked by abstractions (Houghton 1936: 90).

Meyerhold’s uslovni invented conventions which pushed the role of the spectator beyond that of a conscious witness. Meyerhold’s spectators were drawn into a closer examination of themselves and world around them. They were asked to consider the issues on stage as closely as moments in their own lives. The combination of intellectual appeal and emotional involvement joined the life of the stage with the life of the spectator. The results produced sparks in the consciousness of the audience. "Meierhold took the drama of the hour men were living in and, heated through by the fire of his genius, turned back to the people their own experiences etched in sharper and more vivid strokes. At such moments life and the theatre were one; the spectator was the actor—it was his own drama" (Houghton 1936: 89).

Meyerhold was a visionary. Always before him was the Idea, and from there his work was to translate Idea into form on the physical plane. "From the first rehearsal Meierhold has had a vision in his mind of the completed production, the vision of what the audience will see, and this he holds always before him" (Houghton 1936: 113). Meyerhold’s whole career was an ongoing search for forms that would completely satisfy him. He never found the perfect form. Every production of Meyerhold’s created new stylistic devices so that it is hard to trace his path without stopping to consider his accomplishment with each play
which he undertook. "Meyerhold never followed a straight path; he kept climbing mountains, he moved in detours" (Schmidt 1980: 61).

To summarize briefly, Meyerhold’s creative genius was not concerned with consistency. He was a seeker and was not fearful of contradicting himself in pursuit of the Idea. His struggle was to translate the noumonal into the phenomenal. His search was for a deeper understanding of universal truths. His work was to strip away the concealments of everyday life to reveal greater visions to his audiences and in the process, enroll audience members to pursue their own search.

Meyerhold created a new theatrical language. Part of that language was the creation of a new relationship of the audience to the theatrical experience. His commitment to the honesty of theatre as a theatrical happening and not "real life" immediately made the audience responsible for their participation in the event. In Meyerhold’s theatre the event was no longer something the audience could unwittingly wander into, innocently unawares, unknowing, or irresponsible.

Meyerhold’s uslovni theatre required the active participation of his audience to interpret and complete the events presented on the stage. By creating an active audience, Meyerhold created dialogue. The age of theatre as soliloquy was over. Uslovni theatre’s non-reality created an "incomplete" theatre experience. The audience became co-creator and entered into a relationship with the production and a dialogue was established. Meyerhold’s uslovni insured that a dialectic was created in which the audience was driven to question the event they were attending and compelled to search for their own truth, their own answers.

Meyerhold did not aim for a simple truth. He did not aim for a quick answer. He aimed for a profound process of truth that was many layered, that lead from one implication to another. He guided his audience to the search for the "One" through the presentation of
the "many." He used the specifics of each play to lead to a comprehension of a "Truth" far beyond the scope of the play.

Part of Meyerhold's genius was that he never lost himself, or his goal in the specifics. He was always able to keep his eye on the true purpose of his varied theatrical devices, where he was leading his audience, and most importantly, what realization he wanted them to experience. He was truly a master craftsman and technician, as well as being a gifted visionary.

With all of this very meticulous planning and conscious manipulation of the elements of the theatre, Meyerhold's productions were never dry and pedantic. He never sacrificed or denied the humanity of the events on stage to make his points. True, he did not use emotional blackmail to win over his audiences. That, for Meyerhold, would have been denying the audience their humanity. He was a master at finding symbols that intellectually charmed his audience and emotionally engaged them both in the play itself and in the task of resolving the contradictions presented in the production. Meyerhold's audiences were impacted in terms of content, and he also impacted them emotionally. His audiences were moved into perceptual confusion, intellectual questioning, and emotional discomfort. These reactions could only be resolved by searching out new answers, new truths. Things that had been previously taken for granted by audience members were invalidated, and audience members had to create new systems of understanding for themselves.

The truth of Meyerhold's work has proven itself with the test of time. His ideas are not only relevant today, they are current. He is truly the father of modern contemporary theatre. Meyerhold's innovations in the areas of stagecraft: the use of bare stage space, suggestive props, the disregard for "realistic" space/time continuity, are now standard theatre practices. The same holds true regarding current trends in stylized acting, the use of stage
space including spilling out into the audience and even playing completely in the audience area, the disregard for "realistic" conventions, and the insistence, at least in the cutting edge of the theatre world, of an active audience participating in the production as co-creator.

In creating a new theatre language, Meyerhold created new symbology for the stage. He was able to do this having restructured his relationship with the audience. With a sleeping, passive audience, there is not much one can do with them other than spoon feed them. Having created an active relationship with his audience, whereupon they were as hardily engaged in the production as the actors themselves, Meyerhold expanded the symbolic language of the theatre using the audience as co-creators. Together, Meyerhold and his audience stretched the limits of symbolic associations, a precedent that has been carried through today's theatre practice.
Chapter Four

Conclusion

Drawing from the summaries of the first three chapters, the writer will illustrate the similarities in the works and methodology of Plato and Meyerhold.

To begin, Plato talks about a realm of Ideas, headed up by the Idea of the Good, and for him this is the true Reality of the world. The forms of the mundane world are ever changing, and whereas they are important, they are to be recognized as manifestations of the world of Ideas. Forms are tools to be used to awaken people to the larger, more real Idea, and ultimately, they are disposable.

Meyerhold, putting this theory to use, albeit unconsciously, stated that for him theatre was not Reality and that theatre had no obligation to portray the realism of the mundane world but rather had an obligation to lead the audience into speculation of the world of Ideas, or the "essence," as Meyerhold named it. Meyerhold referred to theatre as the gateway to truth. Whereas Plato used dialogue and discussion to arrive at Truth, Meyerhold used theatre.

This belief shows up in the theatre practice as well as the philosophy of Meyerhold, as can be observed in the range and variety of staging, lighting, and acting techniques that spanned his career. Meyerhold never became the advocate of any one particular form for any length of time. Form serves content, said Meyerhold, and each production had its own set of conventions determined not by the demands of the tangible world of the production, but by the demands of the essence of the piece, of Truth.

Art participates in Idea, and behind each form of art there is the Idea. According to Plato, forms are always patterned after an eternal prototype. Meyerhold structured each of his productions based on his vision, on his understanding of the eternal prototype represented by the play. Meyerhold named this the essence of the play. In this way Meyerhold
gave life to Plato’s philosophy that forms are derived from Ideas, and every form participates in an Idea. As Plato fulfilled his duty as philosopher in using his dialogues as the form to lead to the Idea, so Meyerhold used his theatre as the form to reveal the essence, the Idea, to his audiences.

Meyerhold’s first action when working on a new piece was to discover the essence of that piece, its Truth. When something is too familiar, one is tempted to interpret events through an old and comfortable set of assumptions. Plato and Meyerhold were conscious of this tendency in their audiences and both were geniuses in their ability to avoid this pitfall. The brilliance of both these men lay in their talent in being able to engage their audiences in the pursuit of Truth. Through their respective forms, using their gifts of wit and charm, both of these men were able to capture the interest of their audiences. This in itself is no mean feat and is a challenge faced by every would be philosopher and artist. They were then able to go further. They inspired the audiences to become seekers, and thinkers.

Meyerhold looked to create the best means to reveal to his audience the Truth of each of the plays he choose to direct. In all of his productions he was not content to present the truth as offered by the individual production, he aimed to illustrate a greater Truth, Plato’s Idea of the Good. According to critics of Soviet theatre, he was quite successful in his efforts. Meyerhold’s play interpretations were never banal. He used the circumstances of the individual play to reach for a broader vision. His vision remained consistent throughout his career. His vision was the fuel of invention which pushed him to violate every rule of form so far known to the world of theatre. In their respective searches for Truth, Meyerhold and Plato were committed to the principles of the search. Their efforts were directed at finding the most dramatic and exemplary form for the given concept they wished to expound upon at the time.
Meyerhold and Plato both believed there was a method to arriving at Truth and for them this method was dialectical presentation. Examining contradictions, using the juxtapositioning of opposites, Plato through discourse, Meyerhold using all available elements of the theatre contrapuntally, stripped off the layers of falsehood to finally arrive at the Truth, the essence. Both men realized that the every day mundane matters of life can act as a cloak of deception, and that deception must be challenged and the protective veil lifted in order to reveal the Truth. This technique was the hallmark of Plato, and held true for Meyerhold’s work as well.

Using the dialectical mode made the audience active rather than passive. By presenting the audience with a series of "incomplete" contradictions in the search for Truth, the audience is induced to draw his/her own connections as the presentation proceeds. This method, although it can be confrontational, gives the audience the liberty to absorb only as much information as they are able to at the time. Since dialectical methodology offers layers and layers of understanding, Meyerhold’s productions could, and often demanded, to be seen again and again as each time a new depth of insight could be had by the ever enlightened spectator. This is, of course, true of Plato as well, making his writings pieces to be read over and over, each reading taking the reader to more profound levels of understanding and bringing them closer to the Truth. In either case, the audience must keep working in order to go deeper into the works of these men.

Plato was an artist, his art being the art of discourse through which he espoused his philosophical doctrines. Meyerhold was a philosopher and used theatre rather than discourse to lead his audiences to higher realms of greater insight. Meyerhold and Plato were both philosopher/artists, coming to the same places from different avenues using different means.

In Plato’s dialogues there is no system of doctrine, however there is a tremendous incentive to system building. This is true of Meyerhold as well, both in his limited writings
and in his production work. Both Plato and Meyerhold have no passion for literal truth. They do, however, have a passion for Truth, for what really is, for what ought to be. And both have a passion for the Good, the Beautiful, and find ways of using the literal truths of the physical world to enlighten their respective audiences to a greater Reality. The key here is also that these were men of passion, not of cold logic. Their work, for them, was an intense human experience. Plato’s dialogues are both dramatic and funny, as are Meyerhold’s productions.

Plato and Meyerhold, starting from their own life experiences and observations, developed the philosophic implications of their outlook, an artist’s outlook, on life and both employed an artist’s method and technique to do this. They had the aim of the artist in vision and in creation.

Take the two great objects of Plato’s interest, the Good...and Knowledge, which ultimately merge into one. In the dialogues they are seen through the eyes of the artist and treated by the hand of the artist. The Good...is treated as what the artist can discern of human possibilities, what he can create from the given human materials—an affair of imaginative vision, and of blending, reworking, remolding in the continued light of that vision. Knowledge is taken to be what the artist’s imagination perceives, the possibilities resident in his materials. Conceived as a human experience, the experience of knowing is the emotional experience the artist feels in the presence of the objects discerned by his imagination (Randall 1970: 137).

Plato had an artist’s interest in knowing what is worth knowing, from a philosophic viewpoint, i.e., "the possibilities of things, their uses, their opportunities—what you can do with them, what you can make out of them, if you possess the artist’s imaginative and constructive power (Randall 1970: 138-139)." This too is Meyerhold’s concern. Both men were profoundly moved by the act of knowing, which they saw not as a glimpse into some impossible heaven, but an inspirational light cast upon actual human life illustrating the totality of possibilities, Plato’s Idea of the Good. As artists they were committed to feeling the creative experience where one is led on and on, ever conscious of the vision that lay
beyond. "For Plato, the basic distinction between what is and what ought to be, between the actual and the ideal, is not a metaphysical dualism; it is not fixed and absolute. It is a fluid distinction made in experience, made by men dealing with their world" (Randall 1970: 141-142).

This is also the driving force in the work of Meyerhold. Plato and Meyerhold present the ideal, or essence as Meyerhold would have said, dramatically and as a process to be found operating in the imaginative experience of men and women. And it was their purpose to stimulate the imaginations of their respective audiences. The Good, the Truth is not a fixed body of doctrine, but rather a process and a quality of human vision that both of these great men embodied.
List of References


