Abstract

MISCASTING THE SPECTATOR:
DRAMATURGS AND AUDIENCES IN TRANSCULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

By Ara Grabaskas Beal

Theaters not only cast their audience in roles, but also cast themselves within specific functions in the community. This notion of duel casting produces the give and take between the theater and the audience, similar to the give and take between a production and an audience during a specific performance. When choosing a hierarchy of performance signs, a production team must take into account what the audience expects. If they choose to disregard expectations, they must do so purposely, and not by oversight. This is a possible new role for an American dramaturg, assisting in the understanding of audience expectations. Based on this notion of dramaturgs helping to prepare audiences for their role, this thesis will use Yuri Lyubimov’s production of *Crime and Punishment* at the Arena Theater as a case study to explore what performance signs can differ.
MISCASTING THE SPECTATOR:
DRAMATURGS AND AUDIENCES IN TRANSCULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

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Introduction

In an age where the world seems to constantly be shrinking due to globalization, it is easy to become distracted by the similarities between cultures. As a result, we sometimes forget to examine what is different, which is just as important to understanding globalization, and each other, on a whole. We are especially guilty of this in theater, where the risks of narcissism are high. But, because globalization is the norm, we often forget to question the assumption of the universal. How do we as theater artists try to bridge the space between cultures in and with performance?

This question began to interest me when I was reading M.A. Bulgakov’s *Zoya’s Apartment*.\(^1\) The play is set in Communist Russia and tells the story of a woman who sets up a seamstress shop, which is really a brothel, to keep her apartment from being taken by the housing authority. Zoya, though not the most upstanding citizen, earns some sympathy because of her dire situation. However, it is quite possible that an American audience would not understand this situation, and therefore, not sympathize with Zoya as it should. I began to question how an audience could be helped to understand these circumstances.

Transcultural productions are theater from one (source) culture performed for another (target) culture. Usually, a lot of thought is given to adjusting content for the target audience. The performance might be translated into the target language or include subtitles (opera). Specific words or images might be changed to make the plot or more accessible to the audience. Dramaturgs, or others, might provide lobby displays or program notes that provide background information on the source culture supplying context. These solutions all address the *Zoya’s Apartment* dilemma. But this takes us to another problem.

Content is only one part of the communication with the audience. The other part is how things are communicated, what Marco De Marinis calls “hierarchy” (108). The hierarchy that De Marinis defines is the hierarchy of production elements: whether lights, or costumes, or dialogue is the primary means of focus. De Marinis’ concept of hierarchy is based on Umberto Eco’s notion of the ideal reader. De Marinis applies many of Eco’s theories to the audience member, since they are a kind of reader. De Marinis repositions the audience, placing them as a dramaturgical force that has influence on the creation of the performance text. Hierarchy is not what is presented to the audience, but how things are presented.

As productions are transplanted into another culture meaning shifts. Not just the meaning of the words of the text, but also the meaning of the performance text and its hierarchy. What meant one thing in a source culture could mean something quite different in the target culture. Rarely are attempts made to adjust the hierarchy of the performance for the target culture to clarify meaning. Rarely is the visiting troupe or director provided with a person who says: “Our audiences have been conditioned to read this symbol/production element/gesture this way. Is that what you want?”\(^2\)

This thesis will set out to argue that an individual who would inform visiting artists about the local audiences’ horizons of expectations could be invaluable. Part of

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\(^1\) Also sometimes translated *Madame Zoyka*.

\(^2\) It is important to note that a person needs only to point these things out to a visiting artist, not to forbid them from doing them. The purpose is to enhance the production, not inhibit it.
the argument will lie in a case study of a transcultural production. In 1987, shortly after being exiled from the Soviet Union, Yuri Lyubimov was invited to stage his world-renowned Crime and Punishment at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. This production, though well received by audiences, was not necessarily understood and absorbed by them. If Lyubimov would have had this person who would have informed him of the audience’s probable reaction, he could have altered his technique to clarify his message. Though he was more than willing to make sure the content and theme were accessible to his American audience; he did not think of the confusion that might arise in how the information was being conveyed.

But where would this person come from? I wish to argue that it is a natural role for the American dramaturg to fill. American dramaturgs have long been struggling to find their niche in the American theater. Unlike the strong hold dramaturgs have in the European theater community, they have not quite found their footing in the US since their popularization here in the 1980s. This role of liaison with transcultural directors (or even visiting directors in general) could prove to be the base they need to become essential in the American theater. Dramaturgs have, since their conception, been liaisons between the audience and the production, this new role simply moves their advocacy to a different point in the process.

However, because dramaturg is still a vague term in the United States and a position with varying duties depending on the theater and director involved, it is challenging to create an all encompassing definition of dramaturg or discuss the typical dramaturg. I will base my theory partly from my experience in regional theater and academia. But, I will provide support for my conclusions from other published materials written by dramaturgs and theorists.

Also, this thesis approaches a problem in which there is very little directly related theory. Though there are many sources on dramaturgy and on audience, there are fewer that combine the two, and even fewer that add transculturalism to the mix. Added to the fact that I am still at the beginning of researching this problem, this thesis perhaps does a better job of presenting the problem than suggesting a solution.

However, I will survey material about the dramaturg and the history of dramaturgy in both Europe and the United States as well as material on aspects of audience theory. After chronicling Lyubimov’s background and describing the hierarchy he was used to working with, this thesis will examine the case study production of Crime and Punishment. My decision to use a production with a Russian source culture are several fold. First, my own interest lies in Russian literature and theater, and I have some personal experience with Russian culture and language. Second, Russia provides an interesting comparison, since Russia is neither Western or non-Western.

Since it exists in this liminal space, we, as Americans, often underestimate the differences between

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3 Lyubimov told his translator that “I don’t want to cut anything that is going to have a resonance for an American audience” (Heim qtd. in Yurieff 127).

4 “The Russian Empire has been permanently situated between two or, arguable, three ecumenes. In its administrative structures it has been an Asian empire, building upon or adapting the practices of China and the ancient steppe empires. In its culture it has been European for at least three centuries, borrowing heavily from both Protestant and Catholic countries. In its religion it is Byzantine, derived from an East Roman or Greek Christian ecumene which no longer has a separate existence with its own heartland, but which has left enduring marks on the landscape of Europe” (Hosking 4-5).
Russian culture and our own. Because of this underestimation, we also underestimate the work we need to exert to appreciate that culture. Therefore, in Russian transcultural productions, few problems are anticipated or addressed, which provides more examples to explore in a case study. However, this second reason has a down side. Because of the assumed similarity between Russian and American culture, there are not as many sources about Russian/American transcultural productions. Therefore, there is a shortage of secondary corroboration when exploring this production. The majority of evidence comes from performance reviews and commentaries, without further support of theory or outside writing.

But because, and even in spite of, these reasons, I will attempt to use this case study to provide examples that a dramaturg in this new liaison role could have clarified the production and increased both the audiences’ and Lyubimov’s understanding of each other.
Chapter 1

The Dramaturg

Dramaturgy is most often used as a tool before a production opens. However, in a challenging production that did not grow to its fullest potential, dramaturgy can also serve as a post-mortem tool. What stood between the production and the audience? Between the director and the actors? Between the actors and the script? These are all relations that dramaturgs deal with on a regular basis, relations that become even more complicated in transcultural productions (such as the case study of this thesis.) As Paul Kosidowski points out in his article “Thinking Through the Audience,” “When a production fails, do we think of how we failed the audience, or how the audience failed us” (83)?

The Rise of Dramaturgy

Much like Western directing has Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Menningen, the man credited with being the first director as directors are known today, so dramaturgy has Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Lessing, primarily a playwright, became the Theatre Poet of the Hamburg National Theatre in 1767. The idea was he would write and publish reviews in Hamburg Dramaturgy, and he would write plays for the theater to stage. These works, plus his respected name, would draw audiences to the Hamburg National Theatre. However, the exact opposite occurred. Lessing was severe on the theater’s reliance on French Neo-Classicism and lack of Shakespeare. He even went as far as to criticize the audience for enjoying these, what he thought of as, lesser works. His criticism was so harsh that he was forbidden to write about certain actresses in the company. This prohibition led to Lessing’s cessation of covering acting or the actors in his publications altogether (Schechter 31). He also failed to produce any new plays during his short term of employment, a mere two years, until the theater’s bankruptcy.

“At least in theory, the managing director of the theatre, Löwen, also planned to educate German audiences, first by having Lessing publish information about plays and their authors, along with a running commentary on performances, in his journal” (Schechter 29). These writings were akin to what are now considered program notes, but were published ahead of time, as well as reviews (the running commentary) to be published during the run of the production.

All of Lessing’s roles dealt with relating to the audience. He, though perhaps incorrectly, told the audience what to expect. But more importantly, he told the theater what they owed the audience, more Shakespeare, etc. He began the tradition of a liaison between the theater and the audience. He was more than a critic, who is an educated audience member with the rights to publish his opinion; instead he served the theater by helping to prepare the audience, and served the audience by speaking on their behalf to the theater.

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5 “Dramaturgy is a term most frequently employed to describe the structure of drama. As such it tends to be regarded as a mortician’s tool, because most structural analysis is done on dead plays in the study or in classrooms [. . .] People [. . .] tend to forget that the purpose of dissecting a corpse is to learn what to do with the live body” (Hay 67).
Even though Lessing’s employment did not go as planned, both what he was hired to do, and what he ended up doing form part of the contemporary dramaturgical role. Dramaturgs now write program notes, occasionally serve as critics, and deal with new scripts and adaptations. Some dramaturgs even follow Lessing in encouraging their theaters to expand beyond the safe and well-known dramas into new trends. But, his heavy criticism of his theater is another important element that Lessing contributed to the role of dramaturg. This notion of oppositional dramaturgy, as Bert Cardullo calls it (6), is something that continued through to Brecht, and, in a lesser sense, to individuals such as Jan Kott and others.

Though many people may not consider Brecht a dramaturg, his work is significant because it took the role of dramaturgy to a new level. He kept the role of liaison, but changed how this liaison was involved in the production process. “He both magnified the role of the dramaturg and submerged it in the collective of the theatrical company” (R. Brown 61). He moved dramaturgy from a task done exclusively away from the stage to one that also took place in the rehearsal hall, making the dramaturg more integral, and harder to ignore. Brecht brought the dramaturg to the stage, making dramaturgs a primary part of the entire process, from choosing works, to writing and adapting them, to helping to stage them, all on behalf of the audience. Brecht was one of the first dramaturgs to challenge the audience directly. Unlike Lessing who attacked audience members, Brecht tried to re-educate them within the boundaries of the auditorium. Even though his tactics differed from Lessing’s, his goals were the same. He wanted to inform the audience about the productions intentions, and inform the theater about its responsibility to the audience.

Dramaturgy in Europe versus Dramaturgy in the US

--“It was long ago noted that no American dramaturg has ever had the impact on a production to match the impact of Kenneth Tynan or a Jan Kott” (Rosen 190).

There are at least two different types of dramaturgy, production dramaturgy and season, or company, dramaturgy. Perhaps, in simple terms, this is the best way to delineate the difference between American and European dramaturgs. As American theaters tend to be less mission driven, dramaturgs are often used to help with single productions—production dramaturgy. European theaters tend to have specific political or theoretical missions, and therefore utilize their dramaturgs more holistically, such as season planning and audience development. “The significant difference between the theatre in Europe, where dramaturgs have existed for two centuries, and the evolution of the English-language stage, where concepts of dramaturgy have generally failed to take root or adapt, is the gulf that separates a public institution from a private concern” (Hay 77). In other words, and as many agree, it is Europe’s national theaters, or public institutions as Hay calls them, that provide better support for dramaturgy than the American theater system of investors, or private concerns.

But even though there is an economic difference in the theater systems between the two continents, there are further reasons for the difference in the use of dramaturgs. Reinhardt Stumm speculates the following about the rise in the interest in dramaturgy during the 1970s in Europe; “With the absence of new plays, interest was again directed

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6 See, also Esslin “The Rise of the Dramaturg.”
toward the classics, which of course could no longer be played as the texts were written. So the dramaturg acts as a quasi-author, who develops the ideas and reworks the plays to make them approachable again, or even puts plays together himself” (Stumm 49). Though Stumm fails to explain why there was an absence of new plays and why classics could not simply be done as written, this model is given accreditation by a similar occurrence in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union reworked classic novels after the fall of Stalin, whose edict for Socialist Realism squelched the creating of meaningful new drama and art as every work had to venerate the cause of socialism. Then, in the post-Stalin era, directors had to go back to before the beginning of Socialist Realism to find fodder for staged works, returning to Gogol, Tolstoy, Gorky, and Dostoevsky. This is precisely the tradition that Lyubimov’s Crime and Punishment came from, the staging of classical works in lieu of new works, and a tradition that strengthened the need and use of dramaturgs in Soviet theater.

During this time when Europe, especially Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, were lacking new works, America was undergoing quite a different history. Directors and actors alike were reaping the benefits of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee and others. There was no need for a dramaturg to rework the classics when such producible works were being written within the borders of the United States. This might explain why dramaturgy gained such a stronghold in Europe long before it was popular in the United States. History provided a need for a dramaturgy in Europe, but failed to provide the same need in the United States.

For example, in an interview Jan Kott discusses this historical experience through his work in Poland. For the first ten or fifteen years after the war in Poland, the situation was special. There were very few movies, because of the scarcity of hard currency to import them. The theater was relatively cheap; a ticket cost less than a pack of cigarettes. Theater was an important part of our lives, more so than any time before or since, and it always presents special opportunities in times of political repression. Something in theater’s nature makes it relevant to the political arena, even in plays that aren’t political like Waiting for Godot. That was an especially significant play, perfectly suited to the circumstances, it was Waiting for Communism. Also, at that time in Warsaw there was an active political and artistic intelligentsia for whom the theater was a reflection of the times. It didn’t even really matter what was onstage; the audience found in it connection to their own lives (Bharucha 230).

Kott is able in a few sentences to describe the essential difference between American theater and Eastern European theater. Americans have experienced very little political repression, at least in comparison to other countries. Most American audiences do not work hard to relate with what is on stage. Instead, they want the connections between the play and their own lives to be obvious. Or, as bluntly put by British director Michael Kustow, American theater has customers, or consumers, not audiences (Hay 86). And, of course, a theater ticket in the United States rarely, if ever, costs less than a pack of cigarettes.

7 See Rzhevsky 14.
In “The Dramaturg in Yugoslavia,” Sanja Ivic also provides a first-hand, detailed account of working as a dramaturg in Eastern Europe. This article covers how the dramaturgy team at HNK (Hrvatsko Narodno Kazaliste) worked while she was a member of this team. The essay begins with outlining the general tasks at hand. The first task is reading submissions, the second, proposing a repertoire, etc. Ivic, for example, takes us through the process of their dramatization of M. A. Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*.

The dramatization was done by a visiting director, Horea Popescu, in collaboration with his Romanian dramaturg, Andrea Baleanu.

The dramatization had been written in Romanian; then it was translated into Serbo-Croatian.

The translated text was compared to the original and proof-read by our dramaturg and two assistant directors.

Communication with the Romanian director (who was also a set designer) was in French (237).

Ivic then describes literature read by director, actors, dramaturgs, and others in preparation for the project. These works were in French, English, and many other languages. For this particular production, it is easy to see how a dramaturg who did not know several languages would have been of little help. This is often cited as a weakness in American dramaturgs. Very few Americans are fluent enough in another language to work as a translator or interpreter.

As Martin Esslin explores “The Role of Dramaturg in European Theater,” he cites America’s “awakened interest in this function (of dramaturgy), which, in most countries of Europe with established companies, is regarded as being essential to the smooth running of their operation” (“The Role of the Dramaturg” 45). He continues by stating the function of the dramaturg “is organically linked to the existence of theaters with long-term artistic policies, permanent companies, and a planned repertoire.” A function whose absence “in the theater of the English-speaking world, was intimately connected with a commercial system which precluded the development of a long-term repertoire policy” (“The Role of the Dramaturg” 43).

As Peter Hay points out, American’s had “many opportunities, notably when Max Reinhardt and Stanislavsky came to be known and admired here, or when scores of Americans visited Moscow in the twenties and thirties, to observe how dramaturgs work and note their impact on productions. But the connection was not made, because English-language visitors never had anything to which to relate the dramaturgical function within the structure of the private theatre they knew” (Hay 82). The word dramaturg has no English equivalent, nor was the word even well known until recently in the United States. The lack of vocabulary only led to the lack of understanding.

Hay continues with other reasons that America failed to adopt dramaturgy as Europe had. “Some believe that the problem (with understanding and defining dramaturgy in the US) is not with directors but stems from trying to graft some foreign concept onto the English-language stage, which it does not need since it has evolved from a different historical tradition than the resident theatres of Central Europe” (68). It is

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8 Lyubimov also has an adaptation. In fact, it was this production that was scheduled to be his second American production at ART, before the production fell through (See Yurieff).

9 See for example Esslin “The Rise of the Dramaturg” 47
interesting that he cites the English-language stage and not American theater specifically. Grouping America with England in terms of theater is dangerous as England does have a national theater, something that America lacks, and something that usually is accompanied by a well-used dramaturg. However, the heart of his argument is astute. As American theater arose out of a different situation than that of Continental Europe (and Americans arose out of a different experience than Europeans), and continues to exist among different situations currently than Continental European theater, how necessary is this imported function?

Hay hypothesizes that “the reluctance to accept dramaturgy and dramaturg as English words reflects a deeper resistance to thinking about the theatrical process as a whole. As busy practitioners we pretend that we do not have time to question the philosophical basis of what we are doing” (74).

This goes a long way to explain why so few theatres have worked out a philosophy, or public policy, which might guide the selection of plays as well as their interpretation. The political process, which is what makes public theatre important and even essential, has been deliberately removed [. . .] Shakespeare, Shaw, and Ibsen are played for entertainment, not for what they have to say: that is why most productions of the classics are unintelligible [. . .] Much of the intellectual debate recently about theatre in the United States has been trying to reconcile the Hamburg Dramaturgy with what I would call the Hamburger Dramaturgy: the fast-food, mish-mash metaphor for the American quick-fix. If the rather fragile public theatre is to survive, however, American dramaturgy will evolve in the long term not on the European or any other model, but for the same reasons as elsewhere [. . .] It will be defined not by a list of tasks, [. . .] but rather by an agenda for making plays within a community that is consistent with the public agenda (86-87).

The proposed dramaturg/liaison between directors and the audience could be part of the agenda Hay mentions. As globalization becomes part of the American culture, and presenting transcultural plays become part of the agenda, it is only natural that an unspoken part of this would be to develop the understanding of these productions to their fullest.

Cardullo provides a contemporarily popular definition of an American dramaturg that provides a clear role within the theatrical agenda. “A dramaturg is also a guardian of the text [. . .] his job is to know as much as the playwright—about history, society, culture, and politics as well as drama” (10). He then closes his essay with this excellent analogy, “A dramaturg is to a play as a mechanic is to an automobile: he may not have built it, but he knows what makes it work, and this enables him to rebuild it as the theatrical occasion warrants” (11). He makes the very important point that a dramaturg has the ability to help the production suit the occasion, or current circumstance/atmosphere/political arena, etc. The dramaturg can, and should, serve as an advocate for the play, making sure it is not sacrificed to the director’s, playwright’s or artistic director’s ego10. But not only should the play be safe from subjugation by the production

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10 I do not wish to argue for an adversarial dramaturg. (Though as seen with Brecht and Lessing, this has its merits.) Instead, I wish to point out that as creators of text, whether written or performance, directors and playwrights are often too close to the work to take an objective perspective, and a dramaturg can serve
team, it should be safe from subjugation by the audience. And that is the dramaturg’s true job, a proponent of the play and the audience, the person who makes sure they, and everyone else involved, meet on common ground.

The Recent History of Dramaturgy

The 1980s and 1990s saw hard times for regional theaters, and as a result many practitioners became bitter about the future of their profession. For example, Carol Rosen takes a negative view about the necessity of dramaturgs in her essay “The Ghost Lights of Our Theaters: The Fate of Contemporary American Dramaturgs.” She writes “the dramaturg is probably the only member of the American university production team who considers the dramaturg to be an indispensable member of [that] team” (177). She argues the only place dramaturgs even have a future is in academia, where there are more funds for the pursuit of research and knowledge than in professional theaters. She calls dramaturgy a “fad that ran its course” (178). Like many who discuss the reason that dramaturgy is not successful in the United States to the same degree that it is in Europe, she raises the issue of the United States’ lack of a national theater. But, she remains trapped by the role of the European dramaturg in European national theaters, instead of seeing the possibility that Hay does of dramaturgs changing their role to truly become American dramaturgs.

For a long time, this had been the idea: an American national theatre, modeled after the Comédie Française, or the Berliner Ensemble, or the Moscow Art Theatre. Certainly, American theatre artists had been dreaming since Eugene O’Neill first made us aware that American plays could be called dramatic art. They had been dreaming of such a home base, at once a museum and a laboratory, a steady job and a series of new adventures, all housed under one roof filled with sympathetic companions (180).

Rosen then catalogues theaters in American history that could be considered national theatres— from the Provincetown Players, Depression-era Group Theatre, the Group Theatre, to the Actors’ Studio. “When a huge slum was demolished on Manhattan’s West Side and the Lincoln Center was constructed in its place, the Actors’ Studio was certain that the time had come to fulfill that long-held hope and promise of an American national theater” (181). But, the Actor’s Studio was wrong, and the United States has yet to have their own national theater.

Rosen’s other point about the failure of dramaturgy to take hold in American theaters has to do with dramaturgs themselves. As soon as they were hired, she claims, “preening occurred. No sooner had all the dramaturgs appeared on the scene, than they were all instantly busy making their presence felt and heard [. . .] All these dramaturgs were instantly congratulating themselves on how much they could contribute to the future of American theater” (182). Even though this description might be a little harsh, there is some accuracy to it. Because dramaturgs were not originally part of American theater, their integration was not an easy one. And perhaps they did not approach it in the best manner.

as this “outside eye.” The dramaturg is a person who, in a sense, can keep the play from becoming appropriated and abused, a vehicle for self-glorification.
Besides the creation of a national theater, the chance of that being slim, the future of dramaturgs lies in how dramaturgs themselves choose to work and present themselves; as Hay suggests, they must find their niche. They must avoid of the rigid opinions that Rosen implies they suffer from. By adopting a collaborative approach and being willing to convince the field that they are needed, by working with, instead of against, people, dramaturgs could have a future in the United States. Though there is no doubt that it will be quite different from the fate of European dramaturgs.

Cardullo observes that many dramaturgs work through a “transitional phase,” on their way to being playwrights or directors, or both. He cites Brecht, Ibsen, and Heiner Müller, as examples. He wonders if “the dramaturg’s work should be regarded not as an end in itself but as part of a collaborative creation, and a source of training for future play directors, artistic directors, playwrights, and critics” (8) This notion runs the risk of undermining the importance of dramaturgs for several reasons. First, are not the skills of a director/playwright/critic just as important to the role of dramaturgy as the skills of dramaturgy are to a director/playwright/critic? Second, if the role of dramaturgy is approached as a necessary ends to a means, will it not become something to be endured by those climbing the ladder within the theater system instead of embraced by those who enjoy it? Third, does our industry/art always want to be training replacements for dramaturgs who leave after they are offered their first directing position or have their first play produced? Cardullo does make the point that the skills used by dramaturgs, playwrights, directors, and critics do overlap; therefore, it is better that these positions be fluid, as Brecht made them. One could serve as a director on their way to being a dramaturg just as easily as the other way around. Perhaps the real problem that Cardullo is articulating is that the position of critic, playwright, and director are all more glorified in American theater than that of dramaturg, and thus, an individual usually does not hesitate to leave the theater where he or she serves as dramaturg for a chance to direct at another. This problem, however, could be solved, if there became a solid foundation for American dramaturgy, a foundation that could start with dramaturgs working on transcultural productions.

American regional and commercial theaters do provide different challenges than European national theaters, not just for dramaturgs, but for everyone involved. There seems to be some consensus that American audiences are treated, and present themselves as, consumers. The proposed role of dramaturg as liaison makes even more sense if this is true. Market driven companies have always studied their consumers and known them well, well enough to know that red makes them hungry, for example. This is simply what this liaison would do, provide the production team with information about how the audience is known to react to certain things. The argument is not to make the theater more commercial or complacent, but rather better serve our customers in a way that serves the theater.

Ever since Stanislavsky, it has been accepted wisdom that an actor needs motivation. But if an actor requires a reason for crossing the stage, audiences want to know even more why they should come into the theatre and watch the actor cross the stage [. . .] Dramaturgy, I believe, is a process of making sense both for the production and the audience. A good dramaturg helps articulate that sense (Hay 67).
De Marinis, in his article “Dramaturgy of the Spectator,” takes Hay’s notion of dramaturgy making sense for both the audience and the production one step further. He claims that the audience contributes to the dramaturgy of the performance text just as the performers and producers do. Because De Marinis approaches dramaturgy from a different standpoint, he uses a different definition.

Dramaturgy—This may be defined as: the set of techniques/theories governing the composition of the theatrical text.

Theatrical text—This is no longer meant to indicate the dramatic, literary text but rather the text of the theatrical performance, the performance text. This is conceived of as a complex network of different types of signs, expressive means, or actions, coming back to the etymology of the word “text” which implies the idea of texture, of something woven together (100).

In other words, the theatrical text is anything that conveys meaning to the audience. This, therefore, includes any preshow materials—lobby displays, programs, and press releases, as well as what happens on stage11. Part of a dramaturg’s role, whether or not it is ever articulated, is to be an advocate for the audience. This was the tradition started by Lessing and Brecht. The dramaturg’s first and foremost concern should be opening the connection between the audience and the performance to be as large as possible. By advocating for the play, the dramaturg prepares the play for the audience, and by advocating for the audience, the dramaturg prepares the audience for the play.

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11 The next chapter will further explore what conveys information to the audience and how.
Chapter 2

Audience/Performer Relationship

What is Art?, L. Tolstoy’s diatribe, is perhaps the first modern examination of the relationship between the spectator and art. In this exploration Tolstoy criticizes the work of what are considered to be many talented writers, such as Ibsen and Maeterlinck, for failing to be realistic and tangible to every audience member (172). He argues that what makes art is a connection between the art and a spectator, every spectator. “On one hand the best works of art of our time transmit religious feelings urging towards the union and brotherhood of man [. . .]; on the other hand they strive towards the transmission, not of feelings which are natural to people of the upper classes only, but of feelings that may unite every one without exception” (265). Though there are problems with some of the basis of Tolstoy’s arguments, the flavor of Social Darwinism for example, this early description of art argues for universality, for “feelings that may unite everyone one without exception.” Of course, Tolstoy is speaking mostly about universality across class lines, but one can argue that transcultural productions seek a similar kind of universality. However, Tolstoy also seems to argue for art that says the same thing to everyone, a notion that in this age of –isms, and –ists is no longer seen as realistic. But, he began an important exploration of how an audience is necessary to complete the occurrence of art; that it is the transmission of something to an audience that creates art.

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“The narcissistic aberration that conflates being and seeing is compounded by the fact that it is being watched. That is double so in theater, site of “the scopic drive” (a delirium of seeing) where the play within the play suggests—with the watchers watching the watchers watch—that the audience makes it worse” (Blau 7). Because of the natural give and take between the audience and the performer, it is possible to become exclusively focused on what you are receiving, either as an audience member, or a performer; therefore, it is necessary for both to remember that they are giving just as much as they receive, that the other part of this equation is dependant on them. And how much they each give is directly proportional to how much they receive back. It is that liminal space in theater where the gazes cross, the gaze of the audience passes the gaze of the actor, etc, that creates performance. However, this liminal space can be hypnotic, and it is easy for either party to become so mesmerized by this exchange they forget to look past it. Blau’s use of the word narcissistic above is exceedingly appropriate, for Narcissus became so involved and mesmerized by his own reflection, he was unable to look away from or past it. The same can happen to an audience which can become so engrossed with the similarities of themselves on stage, they fail to see the difference, and a performer can become so engrossed with the audience’s response, they seek to

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12 In moving from exploring dramaturgy to exploring audience and reception, it is important to note that though a specific audience at a specific performance is commonly seen as a unit there are many different kinds of audiences. There are audiences who frequent experimental theaters, and audiences who see only touring musicals. There are Western audiences, Eastern audiences, and audiences that are neither. While exploring what “makes an audience” it is important to remember that some generalization is a necessary evil.
see/cause only that and fail to notice the bigger picture. “Since my earliest days in the theater, I’ve winced when an actor said, ‘I had the audience in the palm of my hand.’ I always thought it a rather depressing idea, if not an altogether indecent one, and a claim of power verging on delusion. It is often spoken of, however, as if it were a form of love” (Blau 6). This liminality of gaze between performer and audience is both the pinnacle and the downfall of performance.

In his exploration of “Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance,” Marvin Carlson discusses this liminality as well, but from a different perspective. “Generic expectations and relationship to other works (intertextuality) are clearly as relevant to theatre reception as to reading, and the juxtaposition of fiction and reality perhaps even more relevant, given the particularly central role played by mimesis and iconicity in the theatre” (83, my emphasis). In a sense, the juxtaposition of fiction (the performer) and reality (the audience), creates the performance. However, there remains little doubt that the audience is aware of the performer as a performer. It is by embracing this awareness, and helping the audience understand the signs the performer uses to convey information that clarifies this liminality.

In order for this space to exist however, it is necessary to remember that two separate, though dependent, forces are at work. The gap can never be completely closed. There have been in the course of modernism all kinds of experiments in the theater to activate the spectator, achieve intimacy, or collapse the distance; yet whenever the spectator is restored to the environs of the stage, what opens up is another disjuncture, between the narcissistic figure and the audience in a collective sense. It makes us aware of the incremental and sometimes radical differences between such notions as community, public, audience, and spectator, all of which alter as the eye alters” (Blau 18)

And this is what causes the real problem, a lack of certainty as to what is on the other side of the footlights, either on stage or in the house. So, how can authenticity be found among the elements of conventions? And how do actors think as actors, not as an audience member, and vice versa—sticking to the assigned role? “What complicates this is the degree of self-consciousness bestowed upon the process. As we play out our roles and scenarios, we recognize them for the conventions that they are, as if we were sitting in the audience” (Blau 3). Many theater artists have a difficult time becoming audience members again, instead of remaining theater artists sitting in the audience aware of all the conventions. But the same problem exists for those theater artists on stage, how does one present openly and truly to the audience, without being aware of their own performativity and limiting their accessibility? Transcultural performances create even another awareness that is added to this equation—the awareness of discomfiture, on behalf of the performer, the audience, or both. Performers, because they are aware that the performance is strange to both the performer and the audience, might jeopardize the extent of how they embrace the performance to the extreme of a subtextual exchange between the performer and the audience regarding this lack of clarity.

**Boundaries and Horizons of Expectations**

Hierarchy is what provides a means of navigating this liminal space of performance for both the audience and the production. Since different theater traditions
have evolved in different situations, different cultures are accustomed to different hierarchies, and presenting a transcultural production with a hierarchy unfamiliar to the target audience can lead to confusion and lack of understanding. Part of the challenge, therefore, lies in pinpointing what hierarchy is expected within a particular culture. In Bennett’s work on theater audiences, she devotes an entire chapter to what intercultural audiences expect, “Spectatorship Across Culture.” Most of her examples stem from Western and Asian interactions, but they provide valid examples for other explorations as well. Before exploring how an audience reads a performance, it is important to establish how they know it is a performance.

It is worth remarking that while audiences in the West cannot understand non-Western theatre by the same processes as they would apply to a performance of, say, a Shakespeare play, it’s Western contextualizing (presentation in a building designated as a theatre space, the spatial boundaries of audience/stage, conventions of lighting, and so on) that renders a performance recognizable as theatre (Bennett 167-68). Partly because Western audiences attend non-Western performances in Western performance spaces, with a Western box office and Western ticket takers, they know they are seeing theater. Because they sit in the same season ticket seat to see a non-Western performance as they sat in to watch *King Lear* a month ago, they are familiar with what they are supposed to see, and more importantly, how they are supposed to watch. But, it is partly these expectations related to the theater space that hinders the production. Because the audience is sitting in the same seat, they expect their approach to watching to be the same. When something different is presented, the audience is often unprepared for changing their behavior, or, as De Marinis would say, for a different hierarchy of presentation.

“Whatever a performance’s intention, it cannot escape its effects, and in the example here of the Orient, it is hard to break that semiotic field away from the grip in which it has been held by Western theatrical practices, most especially when it is reproduced in the context (albeit an interrogated context) of the Western practices” (Bennett 198). To rephrase Bennett in the context of De Marinis and others—whatever a performance’s hierarchy, it cannot escape. . . the hierarchy which has been held by Western theatrical practices, most especially when it is reproduced in the context of Western practices. Western audiences, in fact any audience, will begin by reading a performance through the hierarchy they are most familiar with, unless they are instructed otherwise. And even, perhaps, when the audience is forewarned, they still are unable to adjust to a new hierarchy without some preconditioning and practice. Therefore, to successfully produce a multicultural performance, the audience’s expected hierarchy must be taken into consideration. Concessions might even need to made, if not in the performance itself, in the environment surrounding the performance—season planning, arrangement of the theater, press releases, etc.

Bennett admits “my own reaction to […] seeing something so totally outside my own cultural frame of reference [was] that I felt my strategies of viewing were not only disabled but irrelevant. I was not sure either how to watch or what to watch, far less feeling any kind of security or understanding about the content of the work” (Bennett 194). If even a theater theoretician can become confused by watching theater outside her frame of reference, the confusion must be even greater for an average audience member.
Therefore, without even necessarily meaning to, concessions are made for the target audience. The non-Western performance becomes slightly Westernized, if for no other reason than to allow the audience a means of access. But the audience, even if they are in no way forewarned, will very quickly pick up on the differences once the performance begins. So, even if they do not know exactly what to expect, they know to expect something different than the usual, this is what Bennett calls “heightened expectations.”

The audience is the material evidence of a target culture and the factor of their horizons of expectations become heightened in such conditions [. . .] Even the most rigorous and ‘best’ experiments with interculturalism unavoidably make concessions to prevailing horizons of expectations for the economically empowered audience and to the ambivalences that constitute the interculturalism (Bennett 171).

A common example of this concession is the use of a target culture language, instead of the source language of the performance—a concession that is made so the audience can simply understand the basics of the production. Other such concessions might be the anglicizing (etc.) of names or changing of settings to those more familiar to the audience. But even with these concessions, audience can still be lost, unable to absorb information.

Situating reception within the Community of Culture

In some ways, it is how audiences negotiate the liminality of performance, or their preferred hierarchy, that creates a community. Audience members have at least two distinct communities. First, their larger, geopolitical, religious, ethnic communities; communities that are shared with peers not necessarily in the same audience. The second and smaller community is created by everyone in a specific audience. These two communities are neither fully inclusive nor exclusive, but both serve to help situate reception among the audience, and both must be dealt with, but on different levels.

“In a regular reading situation, a frustrated reader may simply put the book aside and turn to something else. The theatre, as a social event, encourages more active resistance; not a few demonstrations and even riots have arisen from performances failing to play the game according to the roles many in the audience expected” (Carlson 86). This quote raises two very important points. The first is the readers/audience ability to close the book or quit watching. Though mass exodus is rare in theater, the audience is provided with ways of expressing their displeasure: booing, silence, coughing, even the rioting Carlson mentions. Of course, one of the large differences between books and performances is that a performance has the ability to edit itself before it is seen again; however, a book is unable to change what is printed, at least until the next edition or printing. This dialogue between the audience and the performance provides the audience with a power much different than a reading audience’s power over a written text.

In a further examination of dramaturgical approaches to the audience, De Marinis discusses the ‘casting of the audience’ in the environmental theater forms common in the 1960s and 1970s. Casting the audience is the notion of giving them a role within the performance itself to maximize their involvement (105). Though he limits his discussion of casting the audience to the very specific environmental theater of this period, this
notion can be extended to every audience for every production. Theaters not only cast their audience in roles, but also cast themselves within specific functions in the community—from simple entertainer to pure educator to some mix of the two; theaters have an idea as to what is expected of them. This is their unspoken contract with their audiences, and breaking this contract by the theater results in unhappy or absent audiences.

This notion of duel casting, the community casting the theater, and the production casting the audience, creates the give and take between the theater and the audience, similar to the give and take between a production and an audience during a specific performance. Obviously, the role the audience is cast in has direct effect on the dramaturg’s role. The more thought given to this casting of the audience, the more important the dramaturg becomes, helping to prepare not only the actors for their roles, but also the audience for theirs. This preparation comes in form of program notes, of course, but also any other dialogue with the community, such as press-releases, lobby displays, and previous productions. And, just as the richness of an actor’s performance is directly proportional to how thoroughly he has prepared, so the audience’s performance, or enjoyment, is directly proportional to how thoroughly it has been prepared. Of course, in the case of a transcultural performance, this preparation becomes even more important, since there is less previous knowledge for the audience to draw on.

These larger audience communities build the foundations of what the audience will accept and expect. However, as Carlson points out, Stanley Fish focuses “more particularly on the social dynamics by which varying interpretations are advanced and legitimized rather than on the mechanisms in the text which permit or seek to channel such interpretations” (Carlson 84). These social dynamics, while certainly existing in the larger, outer culture, also factor into the smaller, microcosm culture that works within an audience of a specific performance. These dynamics shape the way in which the performance is received. Therefore, “readings are thus ultimately authenticated empirically not by the text but by the institution of the community” (Carlson 85). The words on the page, or even the text on the stage, are authenticated by the community, both the larger one, in allowing the performance to take place, etc, and the smaller one, by how the audience responds to specifics of the performance.

This is part of the brilliance of performance, because audience members read the performance together, they not only respond to the text of the performance but also to other audience member’s readings of the performance. Not only are audiences exposed to other audience members’ laughter, tears, applause, and silence, but they are also certain to overhear at least some discussion among other audience members about the performance, adding to and reconsidering their own interpretation.

But also added to the way an audience reads the performance is the surrounding political and cultural atmosphere. For example, around the case study production of Crime and Punishment, the Arena in Washington D.C. received publicity for the production that was greater than any PR they could have planned. As Joe Brown put it; “Exiled Soviet director Yuri Lyubimov’s long-awaited American directorial debut was

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13 After all, when choosing a season, what is known about the potential audiences’ likes and dislikes is a major factor. How many theaters in conservative communities tell themselves that “we can’t do” a gay-play? And how many non-traditional theaters tell themselves that “we can’t do” a straight Rodgers and Hammerstein musical?
destined to be a closely watched international event” (“Crime’ Plays” 1) because of the surrounding international current events. On December 21, 1986, *The New York Times* ran a lengthy article by Margaret Croyden about Lyubimov’s history and aesthetic. Even at this early point Lyubimov “had been approached unofficially about returning home” (5). The article ends with Lyubimov’s assertion that the best place for him was back in the Soviet Union.

Despite the artistic freedom and applause that Lyubimov is enjoying in the West, and despite his outspoken criticism of the Soviet regime, he apparently feels that his greatest contribution can be made at home: ‘I am needed there, not here. We exiles are all needed there. Our souls are there. We are torn out and thrown out, and those that did that to us are leading the country to impoverishment of the culture. And this is evil. And we who were thrown out interfered with that evil and, of course, for that reason we are exiles’ (5).

However, Croyden does end her article with the statement that “at this point, Lyubimov has indicated that he prefers to live in the United States” (5).

A mere two days later, it was released that Lyubimov had begun an official dialogue with Gorbachev who had recently come to power and begun loosening the tight reins of Soviet censorship14. Many more articles followed, tracking Lyubimov’s dilemma between staying in the West and returning to his home country. All of these articles included a reference to the current production of *Crime and Punishment* at the Arena. This information was readily available to the public, and painted a picture of Lyubimov as a great artist suppressed by his government. Added to the notion of Lyubimov as an oppressed artist, almost all articles mentioned Lyubimov’s Christian faith, and the fact that he had to wear his gold cross under shirt while he was a member of the Communist party.15 This story of religious oppression also added to American sympathy for Lyubimov.

“[Lyubimov] expressed optimism over steps that Gorbachev has taken to ease curbs on the artist expression in the Soviet Union, praising his policy of ‘glastnost’ or openness. Gorbachev has allowed the release of a number of previously banned films and books” (Brumley “Russian Director Says” 2). This provided the American public with a ‘personal’ connection to the changes occurring in the Soviet Union; Lyubimov served as a barometer of sorts, supplying an ‘insider’s view.’ His comments encouraged Gorbachev, while being careful not to speak too harshly against the Soviet Government, again16. “‘If the Communists really believe in Communism, they shouldn’t be afraid. They should show their support for an open society,’ [Lyubimov] said. ‘Nobody is trying to overthrow them. And with the current state of military advances, it is out of the question for anyone to even consider’ toppling the government” (Brumley “A Banished Russian Director” 2).

Further support for Lyubimov was created by capitalizing on his wife and child. “Lyubimov, who speaks no English, has been in Washington with his wife Katalin and his 7-year-old son Pyotr since Nov. 20. [ . . .] At the party, Lyubimov’s wife thanked the

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14 See, for example, Brumley “A Banished Director Says.”
15 See, for example, Croyden 3
16 Lyubimov was stripped of his citizenship because he spoke against specific members of the Communist party while in London (Croyden 1).
cast and company, saying “It is so wonderful that Yuri could be so happy in his work” and indicating that she would like to make her home in America” (Richards “Exiled Director Gets Soviet Overtures” 2). Both the picture of a wife who wants to live in America, and a son, who spoke English, served to increase the public’s idea of providing asylum.

The Washington Post ran an article on January 4 similar to Croyden’s article in The New York Times (Rosenfeld). Though as the title of the article, “Director Without a Country,” demonstrates, this article also included comments about Lyubimov’s wanderings, again commenting on his dilemma of staying abroad or returning to the Soviet Union. When the article does comment on the production of Crime and Punishment at the Arena, it used the context of Lyubimov’s travel and other experiences abroad. Lyubimov even jokes about it; “When an actor asked him how he thinks an American audience will respond to the play, Lyubimov laughed and shrugged. ‘Don’t worry,’ he said. ‘There are a lot of countries left—I’ll have someplace to go’” (Rosenfeld 1).

Rosenfeld cleverly states the image of Lyubimov in American eyes, particularly the eyes of those in the arts, “As a prominent refugee, he represents for western artists a kind of artistic integrity—as well as a type of theater—unknown in this country, one in which the stakes are higher, both for affecting the audience and for incurring the wrath of officiudom” (1). This production was obviously a rare chance for American audiences to view the work of a prominent refugee.

Most of the press seemed to slant toward saying that Lyubimov would choose to stay in the United States without ever stating it clearly. Lyubimov himself is never quoted as saying he wished to stay. Rather, the press seemed to be arguing the how illogical it would be for him not to stay; “Banished from his homeland, Lyubimov found opportunity in the West. He has staged works in England, Israel, Sweden, and Italy. On Friday, he started public performances of his first U.S. production at the Arena Stage in Washington. He has commitments for about five years, including an offer from Harvard University to write his memoirs there” (Brumley “A Banished Russian Director” 1).

The buzz of Lyubimov’s dilemma continued even after the show had opened. On January 9, The New York Times released a brief article regarding the premier and the famous people there, with a comment on political suspense. The article quotes Lyubimov, “I have no intention of going back, […] They threw me out, and as long as the people who did that are still in place, I don’t intend to go” (“Double Drama”). Here Lyubimov finally states he is not planning on returning, but he qualifies that with a comment hinting he would return if there was a change in the government.

An article published in The New York Times on January 10 hit the nail on the head with its title, “Russians Upstage a Play” (Gamarekian). This article covered opening night, and like the article on January 9, dealt exclusively with the festivities surrounding the premier. It reads like an entertainment magazine article, dropping names and quotes from these impressive people that ooze positive comments about Lyubimov and his work.

Another layer was added to the publicity when Anatoly V. Efros, Lyubimov’s successor as head of the Taganka died on January 13, a mere three days after Crime and Punishment opened. A good part of the article that ran in The New York Times referred to Lyubimov, including references to the production at the Arena and speculation about
Lyubimov’s return to the Soviet Union. This article still states17 “Mr. Lyubimov has insisted, however, that he has no intention of returning” (Barringer 1).

All of this coverage about Lyubimov’s possible return to the Soviet Union certainly provided publicity for the production. But what kind of publicity? Though all the articles mentioned the production and basic information about where and when, they provide little background into the show itself. Instead of being a show to see for its merits, it became a show to see for its director’s merits. It is important to keep this in context when reviewing reactions to the play. It is more than possible that people felt they had to speak well of the performance, because to speak negatively of it would be to speak negatively of Lyubimov, who had been elevated to hero status. Even Frank Rich who dares to criticize the production, carefully criticizes the Arena’s faults, but still praises Lyubimov.

“Certainly, in just this way the pressure of audience response can coerce individual members to structure and interpret their experience in a way which might well not have occurred to them as solitary readers and, further, which might not have been within the interpretive boundaries planned by the creators of the performance text” (Carlson 85). Also, outside pressures, as seen with the political atmosphere surrounding Lyubimov’s American debut, can coerce the response from audience members.

“Almost no organized work has been done on […] what an audience brings to the theatre in the way of expectations, assumptions, and strategies which will creatively interact with the stimuli of the theatre event to produce whatever effect the performance has on an audience and what effect the audience has upon it” (Carlson 97). When Carlson wrote the above, the theorists discussed here were yet to write their major works; De Marinis, Blau, and Bennett’s publications all came several years later. However, even though the past fifteen years has seen theoretical work about audience expectations, assumptions, and strategies, this work has yet to be applied with any concentrated effort. This is one large area of theater in which the practitioners and the theorists, for the most part, have failed to exchange ideas successfully. That is what the rest of this study will attempt to do. Using the audience and dramaturgical theory already discussed, it will explore one particular transcultural performance.

This examination has even larger repercussions, however, as Bennett points out; Among other things, the performance from a non-Western culture sheds light on what, precisely is Western about the conditions of both reception and production environments. I remain convinced that we must understand both the cultural material specificities of the performance and the horizons of expectations brought to bear by the audience, individually and collectively, in order to begin to describe what we mean by theatre (168).

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17 It is important to note, of course, that because Lyubimov did not speak any English at this time, all of these direct quotes attributed to him had to be translated. One of the most difficult things to translate is emphatics. Though it is probable that Lyubimov spoke against his return, he might not have been quite as ardent as portrayed.
Chapter 3

Lyubimov in Russia


Yuri Lyubimov originally created his production of Crime and Punishment while in Hungry in 1978. However, the show did not complete its development until he staged it at the Taganka, his home theater, in Moscow the following year. (Yurieff 89) “He directed subsequent productions of Crime and Punishment in London, Vienna and several cities in Italy before bringing it to America” (Yurieff 116). Lyubimov often adapted literature for the stage, but was drawn to this particular novel for political reasons. Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment is about a young man who kills a pawnbroker and her sister to prove that he is a great man, a “Napoleon,” and therefore above the law. The Soviet regime taught school children to applaud the main character, Raskolnikov, for his deed because he had struck out against capitalists and czarist represented by the pawnbroker (Yurieff 94). Lyubimov, among others, was angered by this misrepresentation of Dostoevsky’s meaning. His production set out to prove the opposite, that Raskolnikov was without merit altogether.

Over the next decade, Lyubimov took his production to many different countries, and in 1987, after being stripped of his Soviet citizenship, he brought the production to the Arena Stage in Washington D.C., shortly after it had made its English language debut in London in 1984. It is this production at the Arena which this thesis will use as a case study.

Previous work has been done comparing this production in different countries. In his dissertation, Lyubimov’s theatrical synthesis: Directing The Master and Margarita and Crime and Punishment in the US and USSR, Michael Yurieff explored the changes in directorial approach between Lyubimov’s productions in the USSR and the US. His case study focuses mostly on director/actor interactions, and how these were different due to language and other barriers. He touches on translation, the process used for this production specifically. Only occasionally is the audience mentioned, mostly in interviews or tangentially.

This chapter will focus on the directing and theatrical tradition from which Lyubimov comes. Understanding Lyubimov’s history and influences, and the way he is use to working, will provide a context for his work at the Arena.

Yuri Lyubimov—the Director from Russian tradition

Like the Western world, modern theater and directing in Russia started with the Duke of Saxe-Meniningen; “The troupe of the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, under the direction of Ludwig Chronegk, toured St. Petersburg and Moscow in 1885 and again in 1890, when it was acclaimed by audiences and critics alike. The carefully organized mises en scence, with their drilled crowd scenes were singled out for praise” (Senelick 198). Top theater artists of the time, specifically Ostrovsky and Stanislavsky, were greatly impressed with what they saw, and sought to imitate it (Senelick 198). “Very
soon the majority of Russian stage-directors began to imitate me in my despotism as I 
imitated Chronegk” (Stanislavsky qtd. in Senelick 199). As Stanislavsky and the 
Moscow Art Theatre became more popular, and realism became more common, the 
notion and role of the director took hold in Russia. The country continued to produce 
some of the most innovative directors of the Modern age. Stanislavsky, of course, was 
the first to begin the regime that is commonly associated with the Russian aesthetic. The 
change in acting style was only one of his important innovations. Following in the steps 
of Meningen, Stanislavsky was intimately involved in production. “He prepared the mise 
en scene of The Seagull in its minutest details during the ‘three or four weeks’ preceding 
rehearsals. The elaborate ground plan was drawn with precision for the benefit of the 
actors as well as for the technical crew” (Senelick 213).

Building on the foundation of Stanislavsky, Meyerhold took Russian theater away 
from realism to naturalism and started the Theatre Studio in 1905 (Senelick 224). From 
naturalism, Meyerhold moved toward a specific stylized theater.

I should like to mention two distinct methods of establishing contact 
between the director and his actors [. . .]

1. A triangle, in which the apex is the director, and the two remaining 
corners, the author and the actor. The spectator comprehends the creation 
of the latter two through the creation of the director. This is method one, 
which we shall call the ‘Theatre-Triangle.’

2. A straight, horizontal line, with four theatrical elements (authors, 
director, actor, spectator) marked from left to right, represents the other 
method, which we shall the ‘Theatre of the Straight Line.’ The actor 
reveals his soul freely to the spectator, having assimilated the creation of 
the director, who in his turn, has assimilated the creation of the author. 
[. . .] In order for the straight line not to bend, the director must remain 
the sole arbiter of the mood and style of the production, but, nevertheless, 
the actor’s art remains free in the ‘Theatre of the Straight Line’ 
(Meyerhold qtd. in Senelick 236)18.

Stanislavsky, Nemirovich-Danchenko, and Meyerhold continued to grow as 
directors during the next decade, and with them, the Russian aesthetic grew as well.
Nemirovich-Danchenko approached directing with an iron fist, but a gloved one.

You must know that a director is a triple-faced creature;
1) the interpretive director: he instructs how to act; so one might 
call him the actor-director or pedagogue-director;
2) the mirror director, reflecting the individual qualities of the 
actor;
3) the organizing director of the whole production.

[. . .] No matter how deep and rich in content the director’s role may be in 
shaping of the actor’s creativity, it is absolutely essential that not a trace of 
it be visible [. . .] In this then lies the first and most significant difference 
between new and the old theatre: a single will reigns in our theatre. The 
production is permeated with a single spirit (Nemirovich-Danchenko qtd 
in Senelick 243).

18 It is noteworthy that Meyerhold included the audience in both of these models.
Between the two revolutions (1905-1917), Meyerhold continued his work, along with other great artists. Kommissarzhevsky, who was a contemporary of Meyerhold, had a similar directing philosophy to Nemirovich-Danchenko. His philosophy is very similar to Lyubimov’s;

Probably the most balanced Russian producer of his day, he adopted an eclectic approach out of his desire to remain faithful to each playwright’s intention. [. . .] However, he adopted what might be called “internal eclecticism,” in which, rather than choosing a historical period or single style for a play and then staying consistently within it, he sought for each character and action a meaningful visual metaphor that would evoke the appropriate associations within the mind of the spectator (Brockett 452).

Meanwhile, Vakhtangov also became influential—“Vakhtangov began as a faithful follower of Stanislavsky, but his strength came from his effective blending of the Moscow Art Theatre’s realistic approach with Meyerhold’s theatricalism [. . .] to this he added a heightened and stylized use of movement and design not unlike the German expressionists” (Brockett 481).

It is mostly from the Meyerhold-Vakhtangov lineage that Lyubimov’s directing style is derived.

[At the Taganka] he developed an unconventional, primarily visual approach drawing in part on Meyerhold’s esthetics, rather than on the frozen realism of the Moscow Art Theater . . . Like Meyerhold, Lyubimov eschewed acting that was only psychological and verbal in favor of more physical action. He had his actors talk to the spectators, making them “partners” in the play, and he used a mix of farce, tragedy and black humor rarely attempted in the Soviet theater (Croyden 4).

In the context of this historical background, it is easy to see that many of Lyubimov’s approaches and attitudes came from decades of traditions in Russian theater. As Yossi Pollack who worked with Lyubimov in Israel said in an interview, “Even though I don’t agree with Lyubimov’s method of directing, I have to say he’s a great director. Of course, you have to do exactly what he wants. That’s the only way to work with him” (Croyden 3). Stanislavsky started the tradition of referring to directing as a form of despotism. This tradition has continued to some extent, and is varied from the directing tradition commonly found in American regional and commercial theater.

Hierarch in USSR

De Marinis’ theory of hierarchy provides a means of comparing both directing styles and audience expectations. In prefacing his discussion of hierarchy, he develops the notion of dramaturgy of the spectator into two separate types.

1. We can speak of a dramaturgy of the spectator in a passive, or more precisely, objective sense in which we conceive of the audience as a dramaturgical object, a mark or a target for the actions/operations of the director, the performers, and if there is one, the writer.
2. We can also speak of a dramaturgy of the spectator in an active or subjective sense referring to the various receptive operations/actions that an audience carries out: perception, interpretation, aesthetic appreciation, memorization, emotive and intellectual response, etc. These
operations/actions of the audience’s members are to be considered truly
dramaturgical (not just metaphorically) since it is only through these
actions that the performance text achieves its fullness, becoming realized
in all its semantic and communicative potential (101).

In some senses, De Marinis has described the difference between American and
European audiences. Simply put, American audiences tend to be the first type of
spectator—passive. European audiences tend to be the second type—active. But perhaps
the reason that American audiences are passive is that that is the way in which they are
treated. Audiences become what is needed to fill the role that is created for them, what is
expected. That is the next step of De Marinis’ breakdown of the audience; not the
different way in which audiences approach the performance, but the different way in
which the performance approaches the audience.

However, De Marinis gives it a specific title, “How the spectator’s attention is
attracted” (108). Or in other words, ‘How the spectator has been conditioned.’ He
describes this as a hierarchy—i.e. in some productions, the lighting is most important, or
the music, or the actors. He claims there are two types of hierarchy that a
director/production team can choose.

1. As a stable hierarchy which, broadly speaking, conforms to “rules of
genre,” the most obvious example being the privileged status of the
verbal text in the Western theatrical tradition.
2. As a shifting hierarchy where a whole range of focalizing, and/or
defocalizing devices operates within the one performance, a large
portion of these devices being the scenic, lighting, and sound effects
(108).

There is even another layer to the hierarchy. De Marinis goes on to describe how
regardless of which hierarchical system is used, audiences are left to “discard and even
drastically eliminate some of the mass of stimuli to which they are exposed to both
successively and simultaneously by the performance” (107). He continues to explain
that the majority of audience members do this naturally and subconsciously. But is it not
that they have been trained to do so? These set of symbols are not innate, but are
accepted and agreed upon conventions. Conventional American audiences know that
when house-lights dim the show is about to start. They know that people in all black are
not suppose to be noticed. But if conventions are flouted, if the house lights dim, but the
show does not start, if the show starts with the house lights still up, an audience will be
confused. This is a technique used purposely by some, but some use it without realizing
the consequences because they come from a theater tradition with different conventions.
This creates a gap in communication between the performance and the audience.

Similarly, there are many comic scenes in movies where an individual who has been
raised away from civilization enters a big city and is lost. He or she has no idea about
obeying traffic signals or any of the other signs that others obey without thinking. When
conventions are changed on an audience, they end up like this individual in a big city for
the first time, crossing the street at the wrong time, or trapped by fascination of
something insignificant, such as a neon sign. When choosing a hierarchy of performance
signs, a production team must take into account what the audience expects. If they
choose to disregard expectations, they must do so purposely, and not by oversight. This
is of course part of the director’s job, but in the case of visiting, whether international or
intranational, directors, who do not have a good understanding of the local audience, this becomes a good job for the dramaturg to take on. The in-house dramaturg should know what the audience is use to and expects. The dramaturg should not tell the director that something is impermissible, but rather, draw the director’s attention to the likely result of the failure to follow the audience’s expected conventions. This is a new role for dramaturgs, one that could provide the foothold they need to become more significant in the United States.

It is De Marinis’ notions of dramaturgy, theatrical text, active/passive spectator, and hierarchy which provide the tools to examine and compare productions for different cultures. These are the tools that theater artists use, and also the stimuli that audiences react to. Therefore, these are the elements that provide a window into the complicated happening that is a theatrical performance, allowing some quantification of something that is hard to define.

However, like any theory, De Marinis’ framework, though well thought out, has its limits. He creates and defines an excellent set of vocabulary about production hierarchy. But the vocabulary is limited, he does not provide us a good way of defining exactly what specific hierarchy was used. The terms stable and shifting provide only one form of comparison. But, because hierarchies are multilayered, there are many different ways they can vary, and De Marinis does not provide us with the vocabulary needed to really explore the differences between two hierarchies.

For example, Lyubimov’s hierarchy follows in the tradition of his predecessors. Stanislavsky’s detailed approach to scenic and aural elements, are illustrations of what he called a “despotic” hierarchy. But, De Marinis does not really provide us with the vocabulary to explore this hierarchy in detail. De Marinis ends with the description of the hierarchy as shifting. To describe it more fully, we must find other descriptors from other sources, such as reviews and commentaries on productions.

Lyubimov’s *Crime and Punishment* has a long lineage. The most substantial ancestor of the American production is the production as staged at the Taganka in Moscow. This production provides a control, or a basis for comparison. It demonstrates how Lyubimov worked in his natural environment.

In Moscow, the production began before the houselights dimmed. “Lyubimov’s *Crime and Punishment* started in the foyer of the Taganka Theater where several school children’s desks were placed. Actual compositions written by Soviet school children, mostly in praise of Raskolnikov, were piled on top of the desks. The spectators could sit behind the desks and read through them before entering the theater” (Yurieff 95). After perusing these essays, the audience entered the auditorium. But, instead of entering through the house, audience members entered through a realistic door that took them on stage. There, they walked by the corpses of the pawnbroker and her sister, whose faces were hastily covered with handkerchiefs. As the audience walked by the bodies, it was almost unavoidable that they catch a glance of themselves in the blood-stained mirror on stage (Gershkovich 96).

This all set up one of the most important elements of Lyubimov’s hierarchy: the active spectator. Lyubimov, through a variety of means, engaged the spectator, requiring them to contribute to the dramaturgy of the theatrical text. Lyubimov, responding to the Soviet experience, wanted his audience to see their own experiences reflected on the stage, and then call their attention to their responsibility for what was going on in their
lives and their country. Also, because of the presence of censors and censorship in the Soviet Union, a great deal of Lyubimov’s message was buried. This also required the spectator to be active, digging through the production and finding the meaning Lyubimov had hidden.  

Within the production itself, the hierarchy continued to reflect the Russian aesthetic reviewed above. A good summary of this hierarchy can be found in Alexander Gershovich’s book on Lyubimov, where he quotes, practically in its entirety, a review of the Moscow production by K. Rudnitsky. In this two page review, certain themes and images are repeated, providing a good description of Lyubimov’s hierarchy. The first element is the lack of color on the stage—“the director almost never uses color” but uses rather “the battle between black and white” (Rudnitsky qtd. in Gershovich 97). One exception to this grayscale production is the use of blood, which is used often to remind the audience of the murders the story centers around. This theme of black and white is expanded with lighting. Often, the actors used hand held lights, even lit matches, as primary light sources, keeping some things on the stage in shadow, while illuminating others. “In his *Crime and Punishment*, Lyubimov uses lighting aggressively, as a thrusting, jabbing weapon, to force upon the audience his point” (Law qtd. in Yurieff 104). Spotlights were also used to separate characters visually from the stage and therefore society (Yurieff 105). There were other incidents in which the actors executed light cues on stage besides the use of handheld lights. In one scene, as actors walked through the door, the only light on stage poured through that door. When the door was slammed shut, the stage was plummeted into darkness. Other such moments occurred when actors lit or blew out matches that provided the only source of light on stage (Yurieff 108).

These exact uses of light and dark allowed Lyubimov to control the shadows on stage. “For example, the footlights, used to throw huge shadows on the theater’s back wall, created an eerie shadow play that ran parallel to the dialogue” (Yurieff 109). These shadows would change size to correspond to the power relationship of the characters; as one character assumed power of the other, his shadow would grow, while the other would dwarf. Both the use of shadow and use of black and white were examples of Lyubimov’s shifting hierarchy. Elements such as lighting and color choice provided a focus beyond a simple focus on the words and the actors.

The one place that Lyubimov seems to use realism in his hierarchy is in the costumes. Raskolnikov was “in the worn out, almost beggarly black coat, in the black shirt, ripped open collar, with the foul soiled hat” (Rudnitsky qtd. in Gershovich 97). While the wax corpses that greet the audience entering the house wore “cheap dresses, . . . crude stockings and old shoes” (Rudnitsky qtd. in Gershovich 96). Perhaps these more simple costumes provided another means of minimizing the actors’ bodies against the other elements of the production, keeping with the notion of a shifting hierarchy.

Lyubimov used sound reminiscent of Stanislavsky’s use of sound in his Chekhov productions;

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19 “Zelda Fichandler, Arena’s producing director, who first met Lyubimov in 1973, said that audiences would deliberately not react to potentially controversial lines or scenes in Lyubimov’s plays for fear the authorities would then remove the ‘offending’ material” (Rosenfeld 3).
Right after these words, a dissonant musical chord is struck, and the lights on the stage blacked out. They went on at the murder scene. Then they flashed on in the auditorium, calling the audiences’ attention to itself. This intrusive lighting shattered the ‘fourth wall,’ the comfortable barrier between the audience and the actors. It became uncomfortable for the audience at the Taganka as they became aware of each other. Lyubimov had again managed to link them to the stage action. The discussion of crime and society on stage was not to be taken abstractly. The audience was forced to acknowledge through their awkwardness and uncomfortability that they were part of society and had responsibility toward it. [The line] coupled with the lighting effect [and sound] also served to call boldly into mind the fact that millions of people have ‘cut off’ in Soviet history simply because they opposed the dominant theories or communist ideology. Lyubimov could not allow this line to go by without calling attention to it, if he was to be true to the principle of engaging the audience and making them think about their role in Soviet life. (Yurieff 106-07)

By drawing the audiences’ attention to their own role in Soviet life, and their own investment in the production, provide further examples of Lyubimov’s expectation of an active spectator and that expectation’s inclusion in his hierarchy.

Other mundane sounds Lyubimov used with particular purpose were the buzzing of a fly, the sound of an axe, and a door falling (Yurieff 111). Instead of using the sound of a gun, when Dunya shoots at Svidrigailov as he is trying to all but rape her, Lyubimov used lighting--with snap-outs followed by quick spots on Svidrigailov writhing in pain from the shot. “Though there was no sound of a gunshot, it was clear that Dunya had fired” (Yurieff 112).

Other sounds in the production included music. Much like “Peter and the Wolf,” “each character had his or her own leitmotif. Sonya was accompanied by a Russian church choir, a clash of cymbals was used for Raskolnikov. . . The loudness of the music increased and decreased. Crescendos accompanied the key lines of dialogue, forcing the actors to speak louder than the musical accompaniment. In general, sound and silence were used with great deliberation” (Yurieff 113).

Though the individualized themes obviously placed some focus on the actors and characters, Lyubimov’s choice to put this music and the actor’s voices in competition points again to shifting hierarchy. The actors’ words, though underlined by the music, were also undermined by the volume, once again reinforcing the hierarchy.

An interesting comment of the reviewer is on the dynamic between the actor and the character. When describing the finale, Rudnitsky says ‘when Raskolnikov-Trofimov (the actor) lit the candles in the clenched hands of the women he had murdered, two actresses. . . opened their eyes wide as if bidding him farewell. . . Then Svidrigaylov would go to center stage and Vysotsky, no longer in Svidrigaylov’s name, but now in his own name, in Lyubimov’s and the theater’s. . .’ (Rudnitsky qtd. in Gershovich 98). The fact that Rudnitsky referred to the actors as capable of action—the lighting of the candles, the opening of the eyes, and Vysotsky’s closing comments—demonstrate that he, as an audience member, was aware of the distinction that was made between actor and
character. This distinction undercut the importance of the character versus the importance of the actor and helped create the shifting hierarchy.

As the Taganka had an acting company, frequent patrons would have recognized the actors from other productions. For example, “Raskolnikov was played by A. Trofimov, who had played the role of Yeshua, the Christ character, in *The Master and Margarita*. As one Soviet reviewer wrote, Trofimov “was capable of playing Christ and Anti-Christ, Yeshua and Rodin Raskolnikov. The director was attracted to such a combination, the sense of the previous role gave an opportunity to additionally underscore Raskolnikov’s ‘disgraceful wish’” (Smelyanksy qtd. in Yurieff 93).

Similarly, “one of Lyubimov’s directorial methods, made frequent use of in *Crime and Punishment*, was direct address. By speaking out to the audience, the actor was able to communicate with them directly, bypassing the confines of the stage, no matter how unconventional the staging may have been. . . Lyubimov used [this device] to reveal the actor’s individuality and accentuate his own, directorial concept as forcefully as possible” (Yurieff 100).

An example of this was when “Raskolnikov’s friend Razumikhin, who participated in the Raskolnikov-Porfiry discussion, [. . .] addressed the audience as much as the inspector and his suspect, asking the audience to tell him what they think about this. Here, the use of direct address and the silent entrance of all the characters in quick succession put pressure on the audience both visually and textually to fulfill their moral obligations by taking a stance” (Yurieff 103). Yurieff, without using De Marinis’ vocabulary, is stating that Lyubimov expected active spectators that would compliment his shifting hierarchy.

“Again, Lyubimov stressed that the audience was not simply to observe passively, that they had a moral responsibility for what was happening on stage and in their country” (Yurieff 101). The use of the actor/character dynamic, direct address, and strong lighting and sound choices, not to mention the uncomfortable beginning of walking past the corpses, all put pressure on the audience to not remain passive spectators, but to become active or subjective spectators that complete Lyubimov’s shifting hierarchy. When Lyubimov came to the United States, he had a history of seeing the spectator as more than simply a target, more than just a consumer, but as a collaborator within the production. However, he did not necessarily have the ability to address American audiences in the way needed to encourage active spectatorship.
Chapter 4

At the Arena

By many accounts, Lyubimov’s American production was a success. The run was extended an extra two weeks after all the originally scheduled shows sold out (“‘Crime’ Extended”). And Lyubimov was invited to direct at the Arena in the next season, 1987-88 (“The 1987-88 Season”). Lyubimov was nominated for the “Outstanding Director/Resident Play” Helen Hayes Award for his direction of Crime and Punishment (J. Brown “Hayes Nominees Announced”). But, by other accounts, the production fell short of its potential and expectations. In his review, Frank Rich claims “that the Arena Stage’s acting company is woefully ill-equipped to handle Mr. Lyubimov’s artistic demands [. . .] Crime and Punishment in Washington also becomes an inadvertent condemnation of practices in American theater” (Rich 1). What accounts for these different opinions and reactions, besides the normal variation within personal accounts? Part of the cause of the disagreement stems from the publicity surrounding the production as we discussed in Chapter 2, but this was only augmented by the audience’s lack of preparation for a transcultural performance.

From the beginning, the production, aptly described as “A roiling thunderhead of dark colors, dissonant chords and frequent illuminating lightning flashes, Lyubimov’s distillation of Dostoevsky’s psychological thriller is a harrowing and hallucinatory piece of theater” (J. Brown “‘Crime’ Plays” 1) created much interest in how the piece would translate from the Soviet stage to the American stage. People were aware of the challenges, lack of common language for example, and were interested to see how things would play out.

Will an audience in the free world react the same as one in Soviet Russia? At this point, preparing to open his first American production, Lyubimov is confident it will. ‘A literary masterpiece is a masterpiece wherever it is read,’ he said. ‘Shakespeare has the same effect whether it is here or in Russia. The Venus de Milo knows no borders.’ Furthermore, he notes, when Crime and Punishment was performed in London the theater was sold out every night (Rosenfeld).

Lyubimov’s comparison to Shakespeare and the Venus de Milo raises an interesting point. Though he is sure that they have the same effect everywhere, there is not much evidence for this. Perhaps it is better to say that they have an effect everywhere, but the effect itself can vary. Few would argue that Shakespeare has the same effect today that he did in the 1600s, but even fewer would argue that he does not still have an effect.21

But there were differences much bigger than whether or not the piece would have meaning for an audience. Lyubimov’s directing tradition, as discussed in chapter 3, was very different than the directing tradition of American directors. “What that means for

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20 “‘Yuri Lyubimov Directs’—The Soviet Dissident director’s production of ‘Crime and Punishment’ was so successful it was held over in the Kreeger Theater this winter. Lyubimov also found it to be one of the most satisfying working experiences in his controversial career. Whether he brings his unique sensibilities to bear on “Hamlet” or “The Threepenny Opera,” Shakespeare or Brecht are in for a shaking up.” (“The 1987-88 Season”).

21 See Esslin’s introduction to Kott’s Shakespeare our Contemporary.
the actor, however, is that while he is rehearsing his big monologue, a technician might be adjusting a light. In a normal American rehearsal period, technical elements are usually not added until the last week of rehearsal, having been designed and prepared separately while the actors plot the emotional terrain of the play"22 (Rosenfeld 2). This rehearsal technique speaks to the shifting hierarchy that Lyubimov attempted to use in the American production. However, because both American audiences, as well as American actors, were used to stable hierarchies, this attempt to use an unfamiliar hierarchy caused problems.

“American actors’ strongest suit is naturalism, the careful building of a character,” said Kevin Tighe, who plays two parts, Svidrigailov and Marmeladov. “He works off a score. He wants you to hit the notes, and how you get there is your problem.” So the introspection, psychological probing and related research the American tends toward is strange, somewhat baffling, but not altogether off-putting to Lyubimov. He listens openly and responds with lengthy discussions of Russian culture and history, his concept of the play and the desired texture23 of a scene (Rosenfeld 1-2).

Lyubimov, it seems, failed to really understand the problem with communicating with the actors. He seemed very capable and willing to discuss the final result, and where his ideas had come from, but he failed to discuss his approach in terms of the shifting hierarchy he was using, and why he employed this hierarchy. From the beginning of the project, Lyubimov’s approach was different than what was expected.

In Washington, he began discussing his concept of Crime and Punishment (as translated by Michael Henry Heim) with the actors, who sat with him around a long table. [. . .] Lyubimov described the play as nonlinear, free, unchronological composition based on the novel (he uses film images, simultaneous actions, and incorporates his versions of the Dostoevsky dream sequences). He displayed a model of the set: a black backdrop, gray sticks of furniture, a blood-stained mirror and a blood-stained door that would move around the stage vertically and horizontally, symbolizing various aspects of the Dostoevsky characters. (Croyden 2-3).

Though it is common for there to be display of set and other designs during the first meeting of the production team and cast in American regional and commercial theater, this presentation was different on several levels. It is usually set designers who present and display the set model, not the director. Also, this presentation included a detailed description of the action of the play, which was already determined. This choreography as Tighe so aptly calls it, is not a usually part of the first rehearsal. But, because of Lyubimov’s reliance on a shifting hierarchy, this approach makes sense. Because all elements were important, they needed to be presented to the actors at this point.

22 Not only did actors have to adjust to working with a different directing and rehearsal style, but when foreign directors come to direct in the United States, they often have a hard time grasping the notion of Actors’ Equity Association, and are confused when they cannot keep actors past rehearsal time and don’t understand other such rules. (Porterfield, personal interview, Assistant Stage Manager, ART.)

23 The use of this specific term, texture, is resonant of De Marinis’ definition of theatrical text, where he discuss the etymology of the word text, and how it is related to texture and weaving together of different elements.
Lyubimov’s mistake however, came from his explanation. His detailed description should have cleared spelled out his reliance on a shifting hierarchy, and reassured the actors that they were an integral part. Instead, this was slightly unsettling to the actors, though how they reacted varied. “The Arena actors seemed enthralled. But not all the actors. Some Western performers see Lyubimov as a tyrant” (Croyden 3).

But, Lyubimov simply approached this production as he approached others in the past. Paola Dionisotti, who was in the London production of *Crime and Punishment*, expresses many similar concerns about Lyubimov’s approach in her personal account published in *Drama*.

Company meetings were held, heartfelt pleas of ‘Trust us. We Support you. We are your link with a British audience’ were put forward by us to interpreter, assistant directors, managers, Russian speaking observers, whom felt most able to convey these to Yuri without making him feel we were trying to subvert him. ‘There is no time to do it any other way’ [he replied.] We often felt time was being wasted doing it this way (22). But what the difference really broke down to is hierarchy. The London company tried to convince Lyubimov to change his hierarchy to a more stable one, closer to what the British audience expected. However, Lyubimov’s unwillingness to approach acting and directing from the naturalistic approach that Tighe spoke of was not stubbornness, but simply how Lyubimov was used to working; he had complete faith in it, because it had worked so well for twenty years.

As mentioned above, the actors were not only confronted by a different directing style, but also a different visual and scenic level, which were the foundation of the shifting hierarchy. “Typical of Lyubimov, a production’s settings are economical and clever. In *Crime and Punishment*, the doors will become a coffin, a desk, a chair, and will symbolize various aspects of Raskolnikov’s murderous act” (Croyden 3). These elements of the production complicated to execute, though simplistic in idea, created another challenge for the actors to work with. For example, Randle Mell, who played Raskolnikov, had a monologue with complicated lighting and scenery moves. To him, it was impossible and hysterical that they were rehearsing with all the technical elements by the second week of rehearsal (Rosenfeld 2). Because he was used to working within a stable hierarchy, Mell was challenged by rehearsing within the shifting hierarchy.

Technical elements were just as important to Lyubimov as the actors were. Because of his shifting hierarchy, he had to orchestrate them into the movement of the actors. “Lyubimov’s theater is a theater of synthesis—a metaphorical mixture of language, image, lighting, sound, music and minimal scenery that are as beautiful as they are powerful” (Croyden 3).

Overall, it is the production in its entirety that speaks most clearly of Lyubimov’s intent. The individual parts of the hierarchy, including the actors, work together toward one whole. “Most impressive is Lyubimov’s choreography of Raskolnikov’s tortured psyche. He’s found a way to conjure a nightmare on stage—true ‘brainstorms’ made of enormous distorted shadows, chaotic swirls of noise created by scraped and stuck piano strings, and a bloodstained door at center stage that opens to release a stream of did-I-really-see-that? apparitions” (J. Brown “‘Crime’ Plays” Jan 1).

It is difficult with the sources available to be certain what differences there were between the production in Moscow and the production at the Arena. However, there are
some production decisions that are cited for the American performances that are not cited for the Russian ones. One happened as soon as the audience entered. Again, at the Arena, the audience filed past the murder victims lying on stage. However, this time, “an actress with a flashlight wordlessly checks everyone’s shoes for traces of blood” (Cullen 1). This is an important cultural distinction. Russians are very conscious about the dirt that is on shoes. To an American, this action probably read as a means of making sure that blood did not get tracked around the theater. To a Russian, it would read more like a courtesy, a preservation of private property rather than public property. But regardless of how the audience read it, it was another way of making the audience members active spectators, which was an important part of his shifting hierarchy. This is a perfect example of an instance in which a dramaturg liaison could have helped bridged the gap, and informed Lyubimov of the probable reaction of the audience which differed from what he expected.

In the American production there are several occurrences where the characters spoke Russian. The first character to speak Russian, which happened only moments into the play, was the “Man with Ax” a character not in the novel, but a Brechtian character added to reinforce the theme of the production by Lyubimov. The line “Кошмарная невной уби́йство” (Lyubimov and Kariakin 6) or “Brutal murder in broad daylight” has been said earlier by this character seven times in English. The point was not to convey more information, but rather an aural technique included in the hierarchy. There were other insistences of the Man with the Ax providing an aural background to dialogue, without conveying new information. At the end of the third scene, he interjects a conversation between Raskolnikov and Marmeladov with several punctuated screams. As seen in the Moscow production, where Lyubimov used sound as an integral, non-textual part of his hierarchy, his use of Russian in the American production was another part of this aural fabric.

The second insistence of a character speaking Russian is in the scene after Raskolnikov has been ill and his mother and sister appear. He insists “Ничего! Ничего! You can’t stay here. . .” (Lyubimov and Kariakin 30). Ничего does not translate well into English. Literally it means, ‘of no thing,’ but can be used as a reply to “How are you?” equivalent to English’s “fine.” However, these work almost as non-verbals, also not conveying information, but providing a Russian aural ambiance.

The American production included many insistences of actors entering and exiting through the audience, eliminating the fourth wall. More than that, actors directly addressed the audience, again calling the audience’s attention to itself, as often happened in Lyubimov’s productions. Though this was common at the Taganka, this was slightly different from the regional theater fare of the Arena, and added to both the notion of the active spectator and the shifting hierarchy.

The last scenes of the play are heavy with imagery. First, in scene 12, Raskolnikov entered in “prison garb25 and chains,” and was sentenced to eight years of

24 While in Russia, I was with a group in a small bar. Due to the large number of people, we were seated in such a manner that those further in had to climb over seats in order to get out. A member of our party did exactly that, planting her foot on my seat in the process. I simply sat back down. The Russian sitting across from me asked me why I hadn’t brushed off the seat before I sat down. To him, it was illogical that I hadn’t done so.

25 It is not specified what this “garb” was: prison strips or orange jumpsuits? American or Russian? Or something else entirely?
hard labor. Scene 13 is a scene that consists only of the cast “dressed as convicts” beating Raskolnikov, and Scene 14 is a dream where a small boy “tells him to light candles for Pawnbroker, Lizaveta, and Mother. Raskolnikov does as he is bidden.” Scene 15 consists of two lines, the first delivered by Svidrigailov reinforces the theme of arithmetic. The second line, delivered by Raskolnikov, was the same as the Russian production, “So Raskolnikov was right to murder the old woman. Too bad he got caught.’ From a composition written recently by a Soviet schoolboy.” Then a lullaby began to play, and the production was over (Lyubimov and Kariakin). These highly symbolic scenes were a change from the previous scenes of the production, which, though they included symbols, were more narrative. This shift in production style created some confusion, “the play’s final scene, the redemption of a repentant Raskolnikov, is depicted entirely in symbolic imagery. Among your reactions, a certain bewilderment is likely to figure” (Richards “A Tale of Two Epics” 2).

Another element of the production mentioned in reference to the American production that did not appear in the Soviet descriptions was the trapdoor, which Svidrigailov entered to represent his suicide, opened and closed on its own, with no sign of a human hand. (Richards “A Tale of Two Epics” 2). “You have to read the novel to know that Svidrigailov actually shoots himself on the outskirts of St. Petersburg, but I’m not sure it really matters” (Richards “A Tale of Two Epics” 2). This is another valid point, even audiences familiar with Dostoevsky’s novel could have become lost during the production due to the shaping of the story, but also due to the shifting hierarchy. The stage adaptation is by no means a one to one correlation to the novel. Scenes are cut, added, and switched around. For example, the production begins after the murder, though the first several chapters of the novel are devoted to Raskolnikov deciding to and preparing to commit the act.

“Crime and Punishment” for its part, takes a sledgehammer to conventional narrative and then shuffles and reorders the pieces. If you haven’t got Dostoevsky’s plot firmly in mind, you may well find yourself periodically grasping for your bearings” (Richards “A Tale of Two Epics” 2). Not only does this grasping for bearings stem from the challenge of the order of the story and plot, but also from the shifting hierarchy, which caused audiences’ traditional reliance on the text to no longer be a suitable means of watching. Though productions in both countries were shuffled and reordered, Soviet audiences had seen other adaptations by Lyubimov and were schooled in his non-linear productions. American audiences, however, were not as well prepared for Lyubimov’s eclectic style and shifting hierarchy.

“Though Lyubimov has been called a genius by Western critics, Americans may not appreciate his work as deeply as Soviet theatergoers do. ‘You are satiated people, you have everything,’ he says. ‘But [in the U.S.S.R] there is a spiritual hunger” (Cullen 1). This limited ability to connect to Lyubimov’s work by American audiences is not limited to differences in spiritual hunger. American audiences had a limited language to communicate with the Russian director due to the differences in hierarchy. A dramaturg,

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26 “Western audiences have traditionally depended on the word and this, according to Barba, ‘explains why a “normal” theatre audience member. . . often believes that he [sic] doesn’t fully understand performances based on the simultaneous weaving together of actions and why he finds himself in difficulty when faced with the logic of oriental [or non-Western] theaters’” (Bennett 167).
however, could have helped bridge this gap by informing Lyubimov of the hierarchy familiar to the Arena audiences, and by preparing the audience to experience a different hierarchy. If nothing else, a dramaturg could have provided the needed vocabulary for discussing these differences.
Conclusion

In 1986, Lyubimov met “with representatives of the academic and theatre community at Harvard University, and visits the large Russian colony in Boston. The theme of his lecture: ‘From my personal experiences working in the East and the West.’ ‘Psychologically speaking, I don’t see a big difference: how I worked there is how I work here. To put it another way, in answer to a question that is often asked: for whom are you working here? There you have your own audience, here the audience is different, how can you establish contact with them? Be understood by them? Bring out their interest? I’ll answer in a rather banal way: I simply think that the problems I consider important, which worry me, alarm me, the moral, spiritual problems that worried me there remain with me here; people will be found in the West who are preoccupied with them and interested in them. I was convinced of this, in part, by my work on The Possessed in England with very good actors. The main arguments arose with the literate, educated people who said that the British, well, wouldn’t understand it, that everything needs to be done differently, there’s a different type of art here and different tastes. It’s funny, but they put forth almost the same arguments as representatives of the USSR Ministry of Culture. But luckily, here in the West, I am free in choosing my means, in proving that I am right and I have the right to ‘veto,’ the right to do what I want, if not with these, then with other actors I can dictate my own conditions and do everything my own way. In this is the whole difference (Gershkovich 173-74).

The quote above establishes a lot about Lyubimov and his approach to producing works in countries outside his own. He seems to be aware of some of the differences between the West and Russia. He seems to think that most of these differences would arise from what people value, what makes people emote. And to a certain degree he is right; there are basic issues that are universal, or, at least, universal enough to reach different audiences. After all, since Lyubimov was invited to do productions in other countries, audiences were expecting something foreign and different.

What Lyubimov disregards and even flouts is the difference in hierarchies between countries. Because Lyubimov was so energized by the fact that he did not have to work under the censorship of the USSR, he forgot that, in a sense, he was working under another type of censorship—that of the theatrical hierarchy of country he was visiting. The notion of dictating his own conditions and doing everything his own way, shows how little he understands the need to present things to the audience in a manner that they can interpret. The difference between Russia and the West is not limited to, or even mostly found it, the difference in ideas and issues. Rather, the bigger difference is in their theatrical hierarchies--the way things are presented, and how these ideas and issues become accessible for discussion. Unless this difference is addressed, the ideas/issues are not even a concern, since the audience is unable to access the theme.

“Of course, I can’t find an audience like I had in Moscow. It’s sad. But still, if I can acquaint audiences with Russian culture, I think I’ll be doing something useful here” (Cullen 2). That is exactly what Lyubimov’s production in the United States did, but in a manner different than he intended. In addition to introducing audiences to Russian
culture via a Russian production and a Russian story, he also introduced them to a
Russian performance hierarchy.

Dramaturgy has a long history, starting with Lessing in Germany, through its
attempted integration in the American mainstream theater in the 1980s. However, due to
the different histories and different theater traditions, the dramaturgical traditions in
Europe and America are quite different. Dramaturgs in Europe are an integral part of the
process, while, in America, dramaturgs are considered more of an accessory. Dramaturgs
in the United States are still searching for their place.

Audiences, of course, also have a long history. But the notion of the audience
being an integral part of the performance is newer. Over the past 20 years, theorists have
started to delve into the liminality between the audience and the performer. Some even
argue that it is this liminality that creates performance. However, different audiences
obviously create different liminalities based on their horizons of expectations. What an
audience expects plays a large part in how they react to the performance. The
expectations and reactions are heightened in transcultural productions. Western
audiences watching a non-Western production can become confused when their
expectations are frustrated. But also included in these expectations are anticipations
created by the current cultural and political atmosphere surrounding the target audience.
Therefore, to truly understand audience expectations, both what the audience is use to
seeing on stage, and what the audience is exposed to outside the theater, must be taken
into account.

In light of the audience and dramaturgical theory discussed earlier, Lyubimov
approached the production as a European/Russian theater artist, expecting his audience to
be an active audience, as De Marinis describes. His explicit use of lighting, costume,
sound, and scenic elements are all part of his shifting hierarchy. Both productions, the
original production in Moscow, and the translated production at the Arena used this
hierarchy. Lyubimov’s audiences in Moscow were used to this means of presentation.
But the American audiences were not as prepared for his hierarchy. Since Lyubimov
himself was so steeped in his culture and the background of the production, a typical
dramaturg who researched production history and background circumstances would have
been useless. However, Lyubimov was not familiar with the hierarchy most recognizable
to his target audience. A dramaturg who served this purpose, enlightening him regarding
how his audience would read/react to things would have been invaluable. This person
could have served the role that many other dramaturgs do: making sure that the director
did not make a choice in ignorance. If Lyubimov would have had a person who worked
in this capacity, perhaps his audience would have been able to read his production as he
intended, and truly understand and appreciate it. Instead, they read and processed the
current events and image of Lyubimov presented in the media, instead of the image
Lyubimov presented of himself on stage.

Some have argued that part of what makes performance performative is that one
is never sure how the audience will react. That these miscalculations on the director’s
behalf can lead to great discoveries. This, perhaps, is true. But this proposal of
dramaturgical liaison is aimed mostly at commercial or regional theater, where, after the
show opens, the director leaves. Therefore, besides what is listed in reviews, or

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27 Though usually this is thought of as an ignorance relating to the script, not the audience.
communicated otherwise to the director, reactions of the audience are not known by the
director. My proposal serves as a way of making the director more responsible to the
audience and increasing the communication between the director and the audience.

Some practitioners have become stuck in the idea that the dramaturg works only
with the word-text\textsuperscript{28}. But as De Marinis describes, the creation of the performance-text is
just as important as the word-text. And, more dramaturgy (according to his definition)
ocurs there than in the creation and understanding of the word-text. Therefore, I am
arguing for a dramaturg more in line with the work of Brecht. It is not his notion of
alienation that is important to this argument, but rather the idea that the dramaturg
becomes someone who works in rehearsal halls, not in an office. Dramaturgs in
American theater often do work with lobby displays and programs. They often provide
foundation research for the cast and director. However, they seem to be absent from
rehearsal halls. If they could gain a foothold there, they could become integral to the
rehearsal process. The position of liaison with visiting directors is one way they can root
themselves in the rehearsal process and start to create an American dramaturgy.

\textsuperscript{28} “American theater never did get past this idea of the dramaturg as dour researcher, the annoying expert
with rigid opinions about pronunciation, period costumes, and sacred author’s intentions” (Rosen 184).
Works Cited


