

**SPEAK THAT I MAY SEE THEE,
OR THE ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE LECTURING**

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If a man's got no audience—why then it's of no use to go on lecturing.
~ Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*

I feel sorry for flight attendants. I think the worst part of their job is before takeoff, when the plane is leaving the terminal and they are reviewing its safety features, which includes showing passengers how to buckle their seatbelts. Yeah, right. I feel sorry for them because everybody ignores them, except me. Now I admit that I am not really *listening* to them—after all, I know how to buckle my seatbelt. No, I only appear to be listening because I know what it is like to speak before a group of people who clearly are not listening—as when I have given a bad lecture. This is why I still get nervous every time I enter a classroom. It is not because I am inexperienced in the classroom—I have been teaching at the college level for more than thirteen years. Rather, I get nervous from the anticipation and fear—yes, fear—that my class will be flat. Nothing terrifies me more.

Lecturing as a means of instruction has taken a thrashing these days because it is said to make students passive. Some of the loudest complaints have come from the so-called scholars of teaching and learning, such as Alan Guskin, who writes that “the primary learning environment for undergraduate students, the fairly passive lecture-discussion format where faculty talk and most students listen, is contrary to almost every principle of optimal settings for student learning.”¹ But critics like Guskin miss the point. If that were true, students would not learn from various media—e.g. television, music, and movies—that require no interaction at all. The difference is that students find what they watch and listen to in these media interesting but most lectures boring, as one student describes in an open letter to professors: “If you literally read off of a paper for a hour and fifteen minutes this does not count as a lecture. Everyone will either be asleep or hate you. I had a professor once do this for the full fourteen weeks of the semester. She would often pause and look up at us, as if expecting some sort of

¹Alan Guskin, “Reducing Student Costs and Enhancing Student Learning: The University Challenge of the 1990s—Part II: Restructuring the Role of Faculty,” *Change* (September/October 1994), 16-2. For additional critiques, see, for example, Carl Wieman, “Why Not Try a Scientific Approach to Scientific Education,” *Change* (September/October 2007), 9-15; Robert B. Barr and John Tagg, “From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education,” *Change* (November/December 1995), 12-25; and L. Dee Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences* (Jossey-Bass, 2003). Of particular interest to historians on the issue is Lendol Calder, “Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey,” *Journal of American History*, 92 (March 2006), 1358-70.

a reaction. What did she expect us to do? Stand up and break out in raucous applause?"²

The reason for this all-too-common reaction in students is that, while most teaching is done by explaining what is vague and unknown, most professors never learn or practice how to speak effectively and instruct orally. Having been inadequately trained in graduate school for the daunting task of teaching, and having been failed by the so-called scholarship of teaching and learning, they do not know how to stimulate thought through speech and obtain the required response or reaction in students.³ Instead they often "lecture at" their students—and fit the stereotypical image of the professor standing before a class spewing out facts—which sends the message that lectures, like most things academic, must be artificial, stilted, or stiff. The fault is not with the method, but with lecturers, who do not know or understand the elements of the act. When done well, lecturing is a useful and effective mode of instruction because it gives and explains information, it gets students to think in ways they have not thought before, it fills in gaps in knowledge, and it cultivates understanding by correcting wrong impressions.

A good lecture will have at least three effects.⁴ First, it will convince students that the theme is of first-rate importance, arousing curiosity and driving them to investigate the subject further on their own. Some teachers are born with the ability to inspire this kind of enthusiasm in their students; others show mastery of the art of generalization that is one sign of an educated mind. The best lectures not only stimulate curiosity, they make students believe they are on to something big, compelling them to find out more because the information becomes important to them personally. Allan Bloom was said to have this effect on his students. When he lectured, writes his former student Clifford Orwin, "time stopped, and one felt oneself wafted to a higher plane of life and thought." He made students *feel* as if study was something exalted, "in a manner in which only feeling is believing."⁵ Most of us need help trying to arouse this kind of enthusiasm in our students, but we must never forget that the essence of

²Gina Barreca, "5 Things Professors Don't Know," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 16, 2009) at <http://chronicle.com/blogPost/-/Things-Professors-Dont/8867/>.

³For more on this point, see my essay, "Why The Professor Still Can't Teach," *Minding the Campus* (June 17, 2010), http://www.mindingthecampus.com/originals/2010/06/why_the_professor_still_cant_t.html.

⁴These are taken from Harold Laski, "Teacher and Student," in *The Dangers of Obedience and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), 91-120.

⁵Clifford Orwin, "Remembering Allan Bloom," *The American Scholar*, 62/3 (Summer 1993), 423-430 at 424.

effective lecturing is to stimulate a response or reaction in students that would otherwise take place naturally.

Second, a good lecture must impart genuinely new knowledge or a new point of view not obtainable in textbooks, from the Internet, or from other obvious sources. Unfortunately, most lectures reproduce information or summarize knowledge to save students the effort and time of reading for themselves. A common tactic, especially with new teachers, is to piece together information from textbooks. I knew a teacher who took pride in compiling her lectures from six different ones! Of course, if her graduate program had prepared her to teach, she would have mastered all the necessary sources and formulated her own thoughts on the subject. Instead she became a tertiary source (not merely a secondary source), removing herself and her students even further from the essence of their subject. This encourages laziness, not only in students, but also among teachers, who set a bad example when they fail to demonstrate a higher level of understanding or the ability to offer a new perspective on a topic. Thus we get a third requirement of a good lecture, that it should "raise new problems upon old material which force students to think out for themselves the way and the nature of their solution," as Harold Laski writes.⁶

In short, a good lecture illustrates some new connection that is not obvious to students and it produces understanding (or reduces misunderstanding) through speech. It will sustain the attention of students if it is clear and if it conveys a teachers' exact meaning, which might mean being explicit or pointing out what seems obvious. Words should be ordinary, specific, and concrete. They should never hide emptiness of thought, ambiguities, and uncertainty, or expose confusion in the teacher's mind. The closer one's language is to ordinary life, the better. Above all, good lecturers know how to connect with their students.

Indifference is deadly, and teachers must engender interest in what they are saying by establishing their *ethos* with the audience. Teaching is as much emotional as intellectual, and students are more likely to learn from teachers who are animated and visibly excited about their subject.⁷ This means affecting the emotions and passions of students, what classical rhetoric calls *pathos*, as much as it means reaching their minds. Lectures might be well arranged (*taxis*), they might be logical (*logos*), and they might use the appropriate language, vocabulary, and style (*lexis*), but they also will

⁶Laski, "Teacher and Student," 101.

⁷Recent studies confirm the connection between teacher enthusiasm and student learning. The passions that teachers display for their subject play a central role "in holding students' attention, generating student interest, and developing students' positive attitudes toward learning." Robert T. Tauber and Cathy Sargent Mester, *Acting Lessons for Teachers: Using Performance Skills in the Classroom* (Praeger, 1994), 5. Cf. David A. Sousa, *How the Brain Learns*, third ed. (Corwin Press, 2006), and James E. Zull, *The Art of the Changing Brain: Enriching Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning* (Stylus, 2002).

be merely dull recitations if those giving them do not establish their character or put students in the right frame of mind. As Aristotle once said (*Rhetoric*, Book 1), people are not only persuaded when a thing has been demonstrated to them, they are also persuaded when they believe their interests are involved or at stake. Teachers who establish their *ethos* and stir students' *pathos* are more likely to generate intellectual excitement than those who are oblivious to their audience and drone on and on and on.

Another way to fail to gain and hold your students' attention is to talk down to them. It is better to risk talking over their heads—after all, the point of a good lecture is to get them to stretch their minds and increase their knowledge—but one should never go too far over their heads and risk losing them. For instance, I use Descartes' *Discourse on Method* when teaching the Scientific Revolution in Western Civilization I, not only because it illustrates the new mode of scientific thinking, but also because it gives me an opportunity to raise larger philosophical and epistemological issues. In addition to asking them what Descartes is saying, I solicit objections to his arguments or question the validity of his first principle by asking: What does he mean by accept nothing as true except that which “was presented to my mind so *clearly and distinctly* as to exclude all grounds of doubt?” From there I ask additional questions: How does he *know* that something is *clear and distinct*? Is his answer, “I think, therefore I am,” sufficient to eliminate all doubt about our ability to know anything? What if we are brains in vats? What does this do to “objective” truth or understanding? And so on. Many students have seen the movie *The Matrix*, which helps to illustrate my point, but after dangling these questions before them for a while, I usually begin to notice eyes glazing over, or frustration or even exasperation setting in, and so turn the discussion back to the concrete matter of Descartes' method. But I have gotten students to see that, although they might be able to explain what Descartes means by deduction, we have only scratched the surface and there is still more to consider. For a similar reason, classes that exceed the typical comfort zone of about thirty minutes to an hour should include other activities or exercises.

At all costs, never read an entire lecture from notes or a PowerPoint presentation. Why not photocopy the notes or post the pps on-line and let students read them? Having to read a lecture in its entirety suggests that the professor does not know his or her subject well enough to talk about it without a script. Does the expert mechanic need notes to fix a car? The surgeon in the operating room? The actor on a stage? Why should teachers who should be experts in their subjects? As an undergraduate, I always thought it was hypocritical that professors could use notes when they lectured but would not allow me and fellow students to use them during exams. Notes are essential for preparation—reading the primary sources, organizing thoughts, and writing up the lecture—but one should avoid appearing scripted, which is a sure way to disengage students. Lecturing will always be more effective if teachers appear natural in the classroom, having prepared, organized, and rehearsed their lectures beforehand.

Teachers could learn a great deal from actors. Good actors know how to deliver a monologue and enrapture an audience, while teachers delivering lectures, also a kind

of monologue, often have difficulty keeping students' attention. The chief difference is drama, which is present on stage but often missing in the classroom. Without drama, little genuine learning takes place, and students are less likely to be drawn into the act of discovery. Instead they will simply take notes, stuff their memories for an exam, and forget everything afterwards. A person can learn just about anything from books at home, says Cardinal Newman, but "the detail, the color, the tone, the air, the life which makes it live in us" can be caught only from those in whom it lives already. To become "exact and fully furnished in any subject of teaching which is diversified and complicated," he adds, one "must consult the living man and listen to his living voice."⁸

Newman's claim is supported by cognitive scientists Daniel T. Willingham and Jeremy Hsu who have demonstrated that narrative is more effective in getting people to remember things because stories are "psychologically privileged."⁹ People find stories "interesting, easy to understand, and easy to remember," writes Willingham, and therefore generally treat them differently from other types of material. Great oral storytellers—whether Charles Dickens in the nineteenth century or Garrison Keillor today—know how to make a subject so concrete that it becomes convincing and unforgettable. The main reason is that stories move along and change.

Unfortunately many academics look down on narrative, in writing as well as in lecturing, and therefore miss a crucial opportunity to connect with their audience. Mark Edmundson of the University of Virginia states, rather proudly, "I don't teach to amuse, to divert, or even, for that matter, to be merely interesting."¹⁰ The qualifier "merely" is telling. He apparently thinks, like many professors, that he is interesting, or that his subject is interesting, because it is interesting to him. But Edmundson and others like him ignore that they can teach their students only if they attract and hold their attention. Adding suspense and surprise to lectures, rather than teaching as if the world were logical and predictable, is more likely to elicit the appropriate physical and emotional responses in students, help stave off boredom, and stimulate the desired reaction.¹¹

⁸John Henry Newman, *The Rise and Progress of Universities in Historical Sketches* (Longman, Green, and Co., 1909), 9.

⁹Daniel T. Willingham, "The Privileged Status of Story," *American Educator* (Summer 2004), at <http://www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/summer2004/willingham.cfm>; Jeremy Hsu, "The Secrets of Storytelling: Why We Love A Good Yarn," *Scientific American Mind* (September 18, 2008), at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=the-secrets-of-storytelling>. Willingham discusses his views in greater detail in *Why Don't Students Like School?: A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom* (Jossey-Bass, 2009), Chap. 3.

¹⁰Mark Edmundson, "On the Uses of a Liberal Education I. As Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students," *Harper's Magazine*, 259/1768 (September 1997), 39-49.

¹¹B. Rammell, "The Poetic Experience of Surprise and the Art of Teaching," *The English Journal*, 67/5 (1978), 22-25.

"The lecture room is the one place where drama properly becomes theater," writes Jacques Barzun, which is another reason why teachers should recognize how much they have in common with actors when practicing their art: Both use captive devices to hold the attention of their audience, and both must always seem fresh.¹² A good lecture, like a good performance on stage, will always appear as if it is being given for the first time, heightening the sense of novelty by dramatizing the moments of discovery. Great teachers are able to transform themselves before their students: When teaching St. Augustine, they are pious Christians; when teaching Locke, good bourgeoisie; when teaching Marx, avid communists and atheists. Teachers who understand the importance of drama in the classroom often develop a "teacher-self" by acting a part or performing a role, as one finds in a theater, and by showing "verve, color, humor, creativity, surprise."¹³

Dramatic lecturing takes a fluent speaker who neither uses notes nor is shy about effects; it requires emphasis, timing, and organization, even humor, props, and role-playing. At Syracuse University, when I was a teaching assistant, Professor Kenneth Pennington would dress up and give a monologue as Peter Abelard when he talked about the philosopher's life and times. It was not beneath this world-class scholar to don a costume and play the part. Weather permitting, I have taken students outside of the classroom to enact the Battle of Crécy. And although one should never read an entire lecture, for the reasons mentioned above, notes can occasionally be used as an effective prop. Sometimes I stand before my students with a page in hand and read lengthy quotations or statistics while gesturing; sometime I deliberately consult my notes to look up a fact or appear as if I need them to put myself back on track when the discussion has taken a detour; sometimes I script jokes and gestures into my lectures, a tactic I learned from studying the oratory of Winston Churchill.

Perhaps teachers such as Edmundson will say that these measures are unnecessary or extreme, but already we play roles every day and use props in the classroom, whether drawing diagrams on a blackboard or projecting a PowerPoint presentation. Properly used, technology is a wonderful prop that should be available in every classroom. For instance, I create websites for all of my courses and use them to facilitate my lectures. I show maps, images, portraits of people I am discussing; I post quotations from primary sources so that students can follow what I am reading; sometimes I have students read quotations aloud and then analyze them. If I must dwell on a point for some time, I often show images related to the topic, not to distract them, but to hold their attention through a sense of movement, since no unvarying object can

¹²Jacques Barzun, "What Is Teaching?" *The Atlantic Monthly* (December 1944), 81-87.

¹³M. D. Baughman, "Teaching with Humor: A Performing Art," *Contemporary Education*, 51/1 (1979), 26-30; cf. R. W. Hanning, "The Classroom as Theater of Self: Some Observations for Beginning Teachers," *ADE Bulletin*, 77 (1984), 33-37.

hold the mind for long. I use a remote mouse with my Internet hookup so I can walk up and down the aisles and interact with students. "The genius of the interesting teacher," says William James, "consists in sympathetic divination of the sort of material with which the pupil's mind is likely to be spontaneously engaged—and in the ingenuity which discovers paths of connection from the material to matters to be newly learned."¹⁴ Properly used, technology makes teaching vivid; it can make abstract subjects concrete and therefore more memorable and relevant; and it is a medium that students understand, like to use, and learn from.

However, technology can never replace living teachers, who should be animated and highly expressive, both in their voice and in their bodily movements. "It is not enough to show what we ought to say," again says Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, Book 3), "we must also say it as we ought" and "work toward producing the right impression of a speaker."¹⁵ We must know, in other words, how to deliver our message: Delivery ... Delivery ... Delivery. Everything comes down to delivery, or the right manner and management of public speaking. Teachers spend most of their time in the classroom talking and explaining, but how many have ever trained their voices or their bodies? How many pay attention to the rhythms of their sentences and the lengths of words? How many find ways to keep and drive a passage through without rushing? How many practice speaking loudly or softly, or with a high or a low pitch? How many know how to vary their manner to suit the subject at hand? Trained speakers modulate their voices and regulate their speed of speaking. For instance, they deliver salient points slowly and emphatically but deliver the connecting arguments in a more conversational tone; they punctuate their voices by pausing and adding variety to their manner of speaking. In short, they know how to use their voices and their bodies to convey their message and avoid monotony. "The most effective fact in oratory," said G. K. Chesterton, who knew a thing or two about the subject, "is an unexpected change in the voice."¹⁶

Acting coach Cicely Berry writes that voice is a personal statement through which "you convey your precise thought and feelings."¹⁷ She advocates opening up the voice's possibilities by doing exercises for relaxation and breathing, by increasing the muscularity of the lips and tongue, and by changing one's standards and expectations. Just as we build our vocabulary so that we can choose the exact words to convey our

¹⁴William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (Dover Publications, n.d.), 55.

¹⁵For more on this topic, one should also consult Gilbert Highet, *The Art of Teaching* (Vintage, 1989). This indispensable classic text on teaching was first published in 1950.

¹⁶G. K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1908), Chap. 3.

¹⁷Cicely Berry, *Voice and the Actor* (Wiley Publishing, Inc., 1973), 7. Another modern classic text on the subject worth consulting is Virgil Anderson's *Training the Speaking Voice*, third ed. (Oxford, 1977).

precise meaning, we should exercise our voices to convey our meaning accurately. Berry lists four traits that affect the responsiveness and efficiency of the voice. The first is *environment*, because we learn to speak like those around us; the second is *ear*, or the ability to perceive of sound; the third is *physical agility*, because the degree of speech depends on muscular awareness and use; the fourth is *personality*, or the individual traits that express one's physical and psychological state. Trained actors know how to manage these traits, whereas untrained speakers often "push the energy" from within and force emotion and feeling. For instance, if they are anxious or tense, they waste energy, which in turn interferes with their pronunciation and volume and is more likely to cause an audience to recoil. "In real life," Berry observes, "you step back from the person who is over-anxious, over-enthusiastic, the person who gets you in a corner when he talks to you, and it is the same with the actor's relationship with his audience." Effective speakers find "the right balance in the voice" among clarity, pleasure, euphony, variation, and credibility.¹⁸

Delivery also means finding the right manner and management of the body, because, as St. Augustine correctly observed, only "a very small measure of what a speaker thinks is expressed in his words."¹⁹ Teachers, again like actors, need to know how to use the physical animation of their bodies—facial expressions, gestures, postures, movement, eye contact—in short, all the modes of nonverbal expression. They should train their bodies to gain the attention of their students and keep them focused on their message, lest they "lose the house," as the actors call it, and break the bond between them and their students. This can be something as simple as knowing how to guide them by maintaining eye-contact or changing one's posture during dull or unexciting parts. Listeners typically "put more faith in a speaker's nonverbal message than the verbal," writes Michael Chekov, who suggests that we pay attention to the constant interplay between the human body and psychology. Chekov also reiterates what Montaigne taught us about body language long ago: "Every movement reveals us." Acting coach Howard Fine also reminds us that true emotion travels and "is reflected in body language and in the voice."²⁰

¹⁸Berry, *Voice and the Actor*, 13.

¹⁹Augustine, *Concerning the Teacher*, trans. G. C. Leckie in *Basic Writing of St. Augustine*, vol. 1, ed. Whitney J. Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), 395.

²⁰Michael Chekov, *To the Actor on Techniques of Acting* (Routledge, 2002). The Montaigne quote comes from the essay "Of Democritus and Heraclitus," in *The Complete Essays*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford University Press, 1976), 219; Howard Fine, "What Caused Bobby Jindal's Speech to Be a Disaster?" The Huffington Post (February 26, 2009), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/howard-fine/what-caused-bobby-jindals_b_170179.html. Also worth consulting is Viola Spolin's *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*, third ed. (Northwestern University Press, 1999).

Chekov recommends training the body as an effective instrument of creative expression, which he calls *radiation*. To radiate is to give or to send out—the opposite of receiving or reception—although in acting and teaching there is a constant exchange of the two. Passive actors and teachers risk creating a psychological vacuum and weakening the audience's attention; imaginative actors and teachers, aware of the interaction between physical bodies and psychological gestures, radiate the realm of their feelings—ease, form, beauty, entirety—and move beyond the monotony of mannerisms. The “actor in the truest sense,” says Chekov, is “a being who is endowed with the ability to see and experience things which are obscure to the average person.” We might also say that the “teacher in the truest sense” likewise interprets life itself. Both actors and teachers convey what they see and feel; therefore, both must be able to use their bodies to convey their impressions from within.²¹

In sum, delivery is essential for conveying one's message while lecturing and for eliciting the appropriate physical and emotional reaction in one's students during a lecture. It means evoking prompt and ready responses from them, adding variety, employing recapitulations, illustrations, examples, novelty of order, and breaking up routine. Teachers who are lively and alert are more likely to affect students through their example than those who are not.²² If abstract, they will show the nature of their subject with concrete examples; if discussing something unfamiliar, they will trace it by making analogies with what students know; if dealing with an inanimate topic, they will enliven it through a story. They know how to elicit interest in the subject from within by the warmth with which they care for their topic. They use variety in their voices, their gestures, and in their overall manner of speaking. In fine, they understand that they make an impression every time they step in the classroom—by their speech, by their manners, even by their clothes.

Yes, clothes. If few teachers think about the effect of voice and bodily movements on teaching, even fewer, I imagine, think about the effect of their clothes. Clothes are “nothing less than the furniture of the mind made visible,” James Laver wrote some time ago.²³ They give information about us—our occupation, social origins, economic class, personality, opinions, or current mood. Alison Lurie calls clothes a “universal tongue,” a form of non-verbal communication, a language of signs, which people choose to define and describe themselves. “In language we distinguish between someone who speaks a sentence well—clearly, and with confidence and

²¹Chekov, *To the Actor*, 3.

²²In “Effective Lecturing Techniques,” *The Clearing House*, 55 (1981), 20-23, Richard Weaver writes: “The real problem with college teaching is that so few college professors are passionate about teaching. Most approach teaching as a job or a distraction which inhibits them from generating the enthusiasm that will enable them to teach well.”

²³Quoted in Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (New York, 1981), on whom I rely for what follows.

dignity—and someone who speaks it badly.”²⁴ Likewise in dress the manner is important because we judge the fitness of the garment. Is it too big or too small or just right? No one is actually indifferent to the way he or she dresses. “Even those who seem not to care whether their garments are in fashion or not, or eccentric in style,” writes Lawrence Langer, “really achieve a feeling of superiority because of the fact that they are shockingly unconcerned.”²⁵ Teachers should think of their clothes as another form of non-verbal expression, an extension of personality, “For the apparel doth proclaim the man” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.3.72.)

I hear the objections. “The way I dress is no one’s business. I am here to teach students, not participate in a fashion show. My authority comes from what I teach, not the way I dress.” True, but it is also true that clothes can detract from one’s authority in the classroom. Like speech, behavior, even cleanliness, for example, they are a sign of respectability, or at least of self-respect. We wear suits to job interviews, not only because they are appropriate attire, but because we want to make a good impression on our prospective colleagues. We avoid inappropriate speech and behavior in the classroom, so why should we accept inappropriate appearance? Professor Pennington wore a suit when he taught (when he wasn’t dressing up like Abelard) to distinguish himself from his students. I am not advocating snobbery, or suggesting some kind of dress-for-success strategy, or even a dress code; I am suggesting that teachers should pay attention to their appearance, not only because it makes a statement about themselves, but also because, and more importantly, students pay attention to what their teachers wear and draw conclusions about them based on it. For better or worse, clothes reinforce the impression we give our students about our subject and ourselves. I know Thoreau says, “beware of all enterprises that require new clothes,” but this time he was wrong.²⁶

Perhaps clothes should be thought of as a costume that adds to the classroom environment. Atmosphere, says Chekov, is the heart, the feelings, the soul of every piece of art. It must prevail over individual feelings and affect the three psychological functions of people—their thoughts, feelings, and will impulses; it must deepen the perception of spectators and create reciprocal action between the actor and his audience. Teachers who establish the desired relationship between themselves and their students will be more expressive; they can use atmosphere to emphasize important points or ideas. In short, knowing how to use classroom space and its limitations can inspire learning by reinforcing the bond between teachers and their students; not

²⁴Ibid., 13.

²⁵Lawrence Langer, *The Importance of Wearing Clothes* (Elysium Growth Press, 1991). This book was first published in 1959.

²⁶Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, Chapter 1.

knowing how to use it (or ignoring it altogether) can stifle learning by widening the psychologically void space between them.

Another way to “lose the house” is to disrupt the flow or dramatic effect of a lecture by stopping to rearrange the set. Every chair, desk, or board—i.e. every prop—should be prearranged to meet your needs, which might mean getting to class early to set up. In theater, this is called *proxemics*, or the effect that spatial distances between individuals have on the performance. Proxemics establishes the relationship between students and teachers in the classroom as much as the relationship between an audience and the actors on stage. Is the sight line blocked? What movement around the classroom will best convey certain points? Where are students sitting? Students in front or within the direct sight of the professor tend to be more attentive and responsive than those in back. In large lecture halls I impose a five-row rule (or a six- or an eight-, depending on the number of students). Students must sit within the assigned rows because I refuse to address a scattered audience and try to make appropriate use of my space. We must try to make the classroom or lecture hall—our stage—fit the course. I realize that this is often beyond our control, we do not always get to pick our classrooms, but there are some things that we can do to create the appropriate atmosphere.

Lecturing is one mode of oral instruction that promotes learning. It should never be just spewing out facts or tidbits of information, but a way of getting students to cultivate habits of thought and mind. When done well, it promotes genuine synergy of learning by encouraging students to pay attention, copy accurately, follow an argument, detect ambiguities or false inference, test guesses by summoning up contrary instances, organize their time and their thought for study—all these arts, writes Jacques Barzun, “cannot be taught in the air but only through the difficulties of a defined subject; they cannot be taught in one course or in one year, but must be acquired gradually in dozens of connections.”²⁷ Lecturing is a part of the conversation—the formative process of higher education—that aims to convince students of a subject’s importance, impart genuinely new knowledge, and change students’ minds. When done properly, it is an effective mode of instruction because it generates understanding, encourages students to think on their own, and promotes active learning, despite what critics say.

²⁷Jacques Barzun, *The House of Intellect* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1959), 113-14.