

## VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE IN THEATRICAL COMMUNICATION

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*"When the people lie, their hands tell the truth!"  
(Chinese proverb)*

### Abstract

For the actor, especially for the beginner actor, in the moment of the first rehearsals on the stage, there can appear two frustrating problems. The first one "What should I do now?" and the second one, maybe the most wrenching one, "What should I do with the hands?". Such a study based on the interference between the communication science and the art of acting, may give answer to many unknowns of this type.

**Keywords:** *verbal language, non-verbal language, theatre, communication*

### Introduction

The methods of communication have evolved rapidly and spectacularly, dominating the theatrical space too, and today there are more and more dense discussions about communication. But what is the human communication?

In his study "Treatise of communication and negotiation", Stefan Prutianu mentioned about the 126 definitions of communication gathered by Frank Dance and Carl Larson, but he considered that, in time, none has proved fully relevant. However, he referred to some of them, probably those considered the most important. So we find out in his study, the biologist Edward Wilson's definition, for which the communication is „the action of a body that changes the behavior of another body in an adaptive manner to one or both participants"<sup>1</sup>. In other words, for Edward Wilson the communication implies the invasion of an entity to another, *the action that modifies* by denouncing the relationship's idea by constraint. So, we have a communication transformed into a communion, but of course, adapted to the new conditions.

The philosopher Charles Morris defines the communication only that „a relationship and an interaction between the initially distinct entities"<sup>2</sup>. The philosopher's analysis doesn't have anymore the biologist Edward Wilson's incision, but rather, it refers to a cohabitation without any kind of hierarchical differences; „A pooling "as it called the Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica in *The Romanian*

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<sup>1</sup> apud. Ștefan Prutianu, *Tratat de comunicare și negociere*, Ed. Polirom, București, 2008, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p. 2.

*Philosophical Speech*: “ the communication is the action to share, to put together, to mix and to unite”<sup>3</sup>.

For Stefan Prutianu the most relevant definition belongs to Warren Weaver: „ the communication is the totality of the processes by way of a mind can influence another”<sup>4</sup> and his preference's argument is based by the fact that „ although computer scientist, Warren Weaver defines the human communication in another way than the one between machines. He avoids to conceive it in the absence of some subjects that can realize it. The machines inform, meaning that they emit or forward the information received, created or processed. But people do not limit to the act of simply informing. They relate each other. They influence each other and persuade each other or not. Beyond the actual information content that can circulate between the intelligent machines, the human communication triggers and moves emotions, feelings, attitudes and beliefs”<sup>5</sup>.

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So, we reach to the most complex form of communication, the human one, against which both biological or computer scientist and philosopher build their arguments and theories. It is considered that *the verbal language* is the argument that puts us in top of the food chain. For homo sapiens the articulate language is the most common form of conscious communication, withal imperfect. There are two prerequisites of this imperfection. The first refers to the differences in verbal language depending on geographic, cultural or ethnic zones. But there is a tendency to blur this distinction by the globalization of English language, which tends to be universally valid language, but until the perfect assumption of it, the differences of the verbal language will continue to be an obstacle to communication. The second premise has its argument in the highest valence of a human, the thinking and words that do not cover all the nuances related to the sphere of knowledge and experience, totally never say what we think, either the inability of integration into words of the whole plan or by willful dissimulation of it.

The profound communication transcends the limit of verbal language toward *the non-verbal language* side, that aspect that involves the subconscious size of the language and by default, of the communication. But the complexity of this method of communication implies a ramification of the expression's forms on several levels. Para-language totals all the methods of the vocal expression to complete the meaning of the words, and here I mean the tone, the rhythm, the volume, the accent, etc. Meta-language involves physico-chemical reaction of the body to states which he records, for example pallor or, on the contrary, redness of the cheeks, the skin excitation system which produces sweat and sweat gland stimulation, etc. The body language represents all the gestures, the posture, the facial and corporal expressions that accompany, complete or emphasize the other forms. But the latter one is also divided into two branches, *the micro-expressions*, that supposing almost imperceptible those reactions of the person,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> idem.

<sup>5</sup> idem.

and the *macro-expressions*, that means those highly visible actions. If about the micro-expressions we talk about a distinguishable gesture only by a very careful research, because this kind of expression is manifested by discrete, minimal reactions (eyeball dilatation, a short straining of a cheekbone's muscles, a rictus, a short retention of breath, etc.) and by a short term-means seconds; within macro expressions we have wider and more visible gestures (the wide opening of the arms, or on the contrary, their crossing, upright, haughty, or left it down, a domineering and firm handshake or a humble one etc.).

Another important aspects are the ambiance and the appearance. The space where the interaction occurs determines, in its turn, the form of communication that all those concerned manifest it. The ambiance is given by the familiarity, the neutrality or the novelty site, issues that put their decisive mark on the form approach to interaction. The appearance consists of all those elements that create a superficial perception on the subject. In this sense the appearance always hides something, it pretends to be something that is not, it represents the overwise of the essence. For example, the appearance's game is at the bottom of any disguise, indifferent of its motives, when someone wants to pretend to be someone else that he really is. For example, a public appearance that falls within higher standard of social position (a neat image and a stylish outfit) will lead to an approach of that person with a higher dose of respect and consideration, the observation that highlights the superficiality of the communicational judgments when they start from the appearance.

*The psychological* aspect also has an extremely great importance in defining the communication; the personality types are crucial in approach of any relationship, whether we talk about the socio-professional differences, emotional issues or exceptional reasons. Especially in extreme situations the individual character of the personality is responsible for communication, active or passive.

More important than an exclusive definition of communication seems to me the nuanced analyse of the forms of communication, essential for the art of acting, all the more this art has as object of study exactly those questions that reveal the decoding of the communication premises. When an actor works on the *character sheet*, he looks for answers to all the problems discussed above: what does he look like, how does he talk, how does he move, how does he think, who is himself, where is he, which are the relationships with other characters; how does he react to various stimuluses depending on all other dates.

On the other hand, the actor's word on the scene is creator of images and it's full of meanings and its states on stage translate into feelings among viewers. The artistic act implies an empathic communication between the two entities - creator (director, actor) and stander-by (spectator), communication based by a basic condition: the availability of both entities to coexist in a true virtual matrix. So we have to do with a "meeting", as Naim Kattan observed in the interview given in *America* (over the volume - *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Odin Teatrets Forlag, 1968, trans. LC) <sup>6</sup>, a meeting marked by the vulnerability of creation and by sensitivity and acuity of reception. Starting from the premise that the viewer comes prepared to enter into a virtual world, the

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<sup>6</sup> apud. Michaela Tonitza - Iordache, George Banu, *Arta Teatrului*, Ed. Nemira, 2004, București, p. 330.

impermanence of this meeting can be surpassed only by the histrionic artistry and the sensitive-creating richness of those that create the atmosphere (director, sound engineer, lighting engineer, designer, costume designer, makeup designer, etc.).

### Conclusion

The spectator in love by theatre or just curious, needs to be surprised, challenged, questioned, cleared, excited, intrigued etc. and then he will accept the offer with gratitude, with love, understanding and admiration. The two existential spaces, the stage and the spectator, meet on the common realm of the show and coexist in a parallel reality, leaving traces, sometimes deeply, in the two entities, traces which exceed the limits of the cultural, educational or entertainment premise. When the theatrical meeting is qualitative, her effects last longer than the meeting itself, so the actor will feel in the spectator's feed-back the happiness to be able to fulfill his message and the viewer will feel the effects of the lived experience. That is why there will always be unforgettable artistic moments, directors or actors whereof we still talk about, long after they left the stage (of life), because they represented at least a reference point in what we call the education of our artistic taste.

Trying to use perfectly the elements of the communication and holding the artistic depth, the art of acting represents the supreme way of communication. Therefore, the actors through their art explore the vast field of communication, not only to find new ways of communication but to reveal the ineffable and nuances of this deep dimension of the human being.

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### About the author

Since working on a PhD thesis that deepens the verbal language and the non-verbal language in the theatre, I consider that those lines may come in greeting every student passionate about what we can call the theatrical gesture.

Between the ages 1999-2004, I've studied acting at the Arts Collage of the Ovidius University, so that later on, since 2004 until the present, to embrace my pedagogical side at the same collage, occupying the position of assistant professor.

Graduate of the masters of art courses at UNATC Bucharest an now PhD student in philology at Ovidius University, I've accompanied the pedagogical experience with the artistic practice experience, realizing many roles in professional institutes of arts and student projects (exams, performances), the last role played was Pampon from the theatre play „D-ale carnavalului” written by I.L. Caragiale, performance that took place at Jear Bart Theatre from Tulcea.