

Canonical elements in actor training

Elena-Mirbaela MOROȘANU¹

Abstract: *By identifying the canonical elements in the actor's training, the actor acquires a correct and harmonious expression of the body, perfects the scenic application of natural movements, educates and forms the basic skills and aptitudes of plastic qualities and body expression of non-verbal communication. At the same time, he understands and knows his own body as an instrument in the artistic creations acquired through the ability to create choreographic compositions specific to musical theatre performance. Body language must be deciphered, like the text we decipher in order to understand and communicate the message we need to convey.*

Keywords: *training; ritual; body training; body language; gesture;*

Introduction

Stanislavski talks about how the actor's body becomes the expression of the imagination, about the power the voice gives to speech, about breathtaking pauses, about the psychology of gesture on stage and about the ethics of an actor at work, among other things (K.N. Stanislavski).

The basic *training* elements that the Actor uses in the process of creating the role in the context of the spectacular concept must be decoded and deciphered following important working steps. All these stages of discovery, of knowledge of one's own instrument, whether we are talking about the *voice*, creativity and imagination, the physical and mental strength of the performer are essential elements in his attempt to *create* images, the Actor has the attribute of the main pawn of the artistic act, and all these qualities are measured and acquired following workshops of strength through which each must overcome his limits. The way in which you differentiate yourself from your colleague, from your stage partner, from the actor performing the score according to imposed or unexposed requirements, is achieved with the help of a unique ingredient that each individual possesses, which we generically call *Talent*. I would add, most of all, work. Talent, as an inherited individual attribute, is a form that needs to be refined and polished through long practical exercises. Both practical and laboratory hours, as well as theoretical ones, must be used to the full. Reading and watching in the theatre are essential practices, with undeniable value in their search for this profession. We need to understand through play/situations that we have a problem we need to solve. The solution is not to be found in the back of the page, as it happens in mathematics, but in yourself (actor involved in the action) looking for answers, proposing solutions to solve the situation you have to play. Theatre is about communication, and this implies a partner with whom you have to interact, to build a relationship. In this sense, theatre critic Tonitza Iordache states: "In theatre, the social role is most effectively performed precisely because of this type of contact. The social role of theatre

¹ Elena-Mirabela Moroșanu, Faculty of Arts, Ovidius University of Constanta, mirabela.morosanu@univ-ovidius.ro.

does not consist in direct changes in the structure of society, but in changes in social consciousness, in the sense of keeping people's self-consciousness awake by grounding and universalizing human values. The poetic realization of the aesthetic effect takes place through an act of consecutive processing of the data of the work"².

The actor in its definition is modeling. Like a newborn baby, he learns to walk again, to get in touch with his environment, to be aware of his own existence so that he in turn can give birth to characters. The games proposed for this first stage are a restart, a process of deconstruction and reconstruction at the same time. Thus you as an actor discover where you stand and at the same time how far you have gone towards knowledge. From simple situations in which you have to step into a room and through a small gesture or action show *where you started and where you are going*, to knowing *who you are* and *what you want*, it is a journey with ups and downs, a journey in which patience, acceptance, takes the lead. These simple situations were interpreted by the students *as children's games*, and when they were put in difficulty and failed to find a solution to a particular situation, it was found that failure stirred up anxieties, storms and uncertainties of which they were previously unaware. Gradually, they will discover that in simple actions, natural, natural gestures, lays the answer to resolving a situation. The specific training that *the Actor* goes through during his years of study is a ritual" of *vocal warm-up* exercises and *stage movement*. I call it a "ritual" because *the body* and the *voice* are the main instruments to be constantly stimulated. Every speech class or stage movement are essential rituals in the processes of harmonizing and defusing the actor-instrument element. The blending, the balance between *movement-voice-speech*, takes place with the awareness and concentration you give during the performance/exercise. With each training exercise you participate in, you acquire through repetition, the term "ritual". It becomes like an automatism that helps each individual find the concentration and patience to be aware of the rules of the game/exercise they have to solve. Thus, stimulating attention, the spirit of observation, concentration, spontaneity and imagination become levers that contribute to the development of a personal working spirit. We find that during collective exercises, if a participant is slow by nature, the emulative energy of the others leads them to become equally attentive to the game/exercise. With each stage of work, without being aware of the changes he acquires during the stages of work, the student manages to carve his own path. In this way, the desire for self-improvement appears, he gains self-control over his emotions, feelings and states that he has to keep in check, regardless of the role, the game/exercise he has to solve, shape, and create. At the same time, there is also constructive team competition, in which the final result belongs to the collective and thus helps them to form and work together towards solving the situation. In this way, the personal contribution to the construction of *the puzzle* (the show) that they have to build is of utmost importance. Where there is competition, the effort and work put in by each participant in the game is meant to add value to the artistic act. In the personal development of each student in the game, there is an awareness of the personal contribution in solving the problem, the situation, the game. He gains self-confidence, respect and takes responsibility for what he has to solve and complete in relation to himself and others.

The actor must first be shaped or formed from the inside. Alone he must learn how to consciously use his own body, how to breathe, how to move, how to focus his attention and control his emotions and reactions. He has to build his own method/technique of working

² Mihaela Tonitza- Iordache. 1980. *About the game [Despre joc]*. Iași: Editura Junimea, p. 9.

through sets of physical and mental exercises that enrich his own inner, creative world, thus becoming present in the scene, and his imagination helps him to render the active form of the world he has created. In support of this Grotowski considers: "The actor who reveals himself, sacrificing his most intimate side - the one that is not made for the eyes of the world - must be able to express his last impulse. He must be able to give life, through sound and movement, to those impulses that oscillate on the border between dream and reality. In short, he must be able to construct his own psycho-analytical language of sounds and gestures just as a great poet creates his own language of words"³.

The actor must focus his attention on training his inner potential through a complex process of relaxation and concentration, a process that leads to the personalization of creation. The actor succeeds in discovering moments and events that can help him to decipher the character. The actor is at the centre of attention, controlling the *body*, the *voice* and not least the thought.

1. The body as a creative instrument of expression

The body is the instrument with which the Actor frequently acts, and the balance between *Movement-Voice-Weight* is beneficial to the harmonization between the *body* and the space in which he spends the time necessary to create, to discover, to know him, to know himself in relation to the group he belongs to. All these interactions and relationships have the capacity to make the actor a *vehicle of meaning*. *The body* must be perfectly harmonized; the mind must be free, without any other parasitic thought that is not present to the group. In this way the energy is generated that is beneficial to sustain the working *atmosphere* of the group, necessary throughout the day until the end of the artistic act.

Bodily expression plays a decisive role in the process of polishing the future actor. The body, through the energy it contains and the vibration it emits in its dynamics, must give off a visual musicality of movement. Awareness of these attributes increases the importance of the actor as a vehicle of communication in his or her creative work the expression of the body is expressed through the body. Through non-verbal communication, through gesture and action, the body expresses before the word. The first reaction is the gesture and then the word. The first stage of the work is to know and activate the vibration and energy that we hold but are not aware of or even use. It is important that gesture and thought are in close connection. The body does not have to express something by gesture or action and the word has to say something else. "What the actor does must be - so to speak - a complete act; what he does must be done with his whole being, and not only with a limited, therefore mechanical gesture, with his hand, with his foot, with a grimace, with a logical accent or a thought that is not able to lead the whole body, but can only incite it. Because otherwise the organism ceases to live, its impulses become only appearances; the difference between a complete reaction and a reaction driven by thought is the same as between a tree and a piece of wood cut from a tree. It is finally the fact that the soul is inseparable from the body. "A soul act" the actor must not illustrate it with his body, but perform it with the body"⁴.

³ Jerzy Grotowski. 1998. *Towards a poor theater [Spre un teatru sărac]*. București: Editura Unitext Magister, p. 21.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 110.

After becoming aware that every gesture and movement of his body is as important as the word, the Actor - forms his own balance between *movement and word*.

The actor's *body* is the creative instrument of the ideas he presents on stage, and the harmony and balance between the physical and mental must be developed, because it helps to make the images and the emotions visible and felt. The actor is the main *pawn*. He is the centre of attention, he controls the body, the voice and, last but not least, the thought. He must learn to direct his attention to the daily training he gives himself in his training, having to use all the ingredients of the recipe: breathing, diction, gesture, *movement, voice, word*. We are *mechanisms* on a game board in which the body must be put into *Motion*. The effort to evolve within a group is the most terrible and difficult test through which the personality, the character of each individual, are important components in the natural development of activities, common actions in this group. It is very important, in order to achieve and become aware of each individual exercise and stage, to understand and realize how necessary it is to be PRESENT. We take part in everything that happens around us, without being influenced and distracted from the other actions that those around us do. It is vital to be aware of when you act, respond to emotions, actions and events that have meaning and connection to you and your inner self.

Training the body and connecting it to emotions is achieved through the way it learns to move and transmit emotion, the energy of movement and the balance between *Movement and Movement*. It is assumed that the gesture, the attitude, the reaction of the body, communicates non-verbally before words are spoken. Each individual, depending on the dialogue they have with an interlocutor, transmits through emotion, energy, reacting physically before the dialogue. The non-verbal response is actually communicated through reaction, before the verbal utterance on the subject brought up. Through training, the stages of awareness, harmony between gesture and word are followed. Depending on the proposed text and the character that is being taught, from the moment of *the table reading* (a term frequently used and encountered in the discovery of data on the character) we have difficulty in expressing and understanding *the subtext that the game situation proposes*. With each role/character he brings to the audience from one performance to the next, the actor gains experience and knows the way to the ideal form, aware that work, willingness, pleasure, passion are the small ingredients he must have.

Movement is the most powerful means of expression and is subordinate to the laws of art form. Gestures, facial expressions, movements, are elements that convey to the spectator the thoughts and impulses of the actor, in the absence of words. Acting is the basis of the theatrical art. The true reflection of life is represented in the theatrical performance with all the elements and procedures of theatre. This makes the *serious funny* and the *funny tragic*. During it through concentration the senses expand, the body is aware of itself. There is a form of communication between the subtle in which the body is under the control of the spirit, installing a state of liberation, where everything is possible through improvisation. This involves the participation of both the conscious and the subconscious, giving rise to a form of nonverbal, spontaneous communication.

The voice in harmony and balance with *movement and speech* induces a certain mood, produces strong attitudes and desires, and incites to express ideas, arousing strong feelings. They have an effect of bringing into consciousness and shaping the affective state of the moment and sometimes they manifest themselves to the detriment of the expression of the original message, through intonation or other specific features. In freedom of expression, *voice and word* tend to energize the process of *movement*, not control it. *Movement* describes our creative energy,

representing a way to expand feelings by putting them into a kinesthetic form, bringing a touch with potential for self-awareness, deep understanding and healing. The basic tools through which the actor expresses and communicates with the audience are *the body* and the *voice*. They become tools that he acquires through intense physical and mental exercises with the aim of developing his own inner world. Through movements, gestures, mimicry, we convey our thoughts, feelings and dispositions, rendering both inner and outer beauty. Every physical training that the actor has to go through aims at the conscious *awakening* of thought, action, gesture, movement through which he expresses himself, communicates, relates to those present at the performance. The body movements reflect the inner state of the person, the emerging inner conflicts and problems of the unconscious and conscious of the person being addressed at all levels - physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. The capacity and at the same time the evolution that the individual undertakes in the group of participants is the key to liberation from something, since the role, the purpose of the exercise “is not to acquire something, but to liberate oneself from something”⁵ (P. Brook). The importance of this training is beneficial because it helps to form a perfect *balance* in harmony and coordination between *movement-voice-speech*. The objective and purpose of physical training is to maintain a constant balance between the 3 components: *Movement-Voice-Speech*.

2. Conclusions

“In theatre, Brook says, the human is at the centre and must be served by quick and easy means”⁶. The actor must be able to decipher the mechanisms of his body that are accessible to him. By grasping these mechanisms, the actor starts working, freeing himself from all resistance. It is by knowing our body language that we are able to be in harmony with ourselves. *The body* communicates non-verbally through gesture, movement, action, before communicating the message of the text through words. A true harmonization of the self with the reality it has to present on stage is executed through physical, mental, emotional and psychic work. The actor must discover and know both the underneath and the layers from which the character has been constructed.

3. References:

- Brook, Peter. 2005. *Towards the theater of simple forms [Spre teatrul formelor simple]*. Iași: Polirom, UNITEXT.
- Grotowski, Jerzy. 1998. *Towards a poor theater [Spre un teatru sărac]*. București: Editura Unitext Magister.
- Tonitza-Iordache, Mihaela. 1980. *About the game [Despre joc]*. Iași: Editura Junimea.

⁵ Peter Brook. 2005. *Towards the theater of simple forms [Spre teatrul formelor simple]*. Iași: Polirom,

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 87.