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THE FACULTY OF THEATRE**

DOCTORATE THESIS

**THE ACTOR OF DANCE-THEATRE –
TECHNIQUE AND CREATIVITY**

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I. KEY WORDS

Dance-theatre, body language, body-message, choreographic language, actor, theatre pedagogy, choreographic pedagogy, body dynamics, gesture-symbol, the harmony of movement, teaching method, analysis of body plasticity.

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III. ARGUMENT

“The actor is a person who works with his/her body in public. If this body is content to show only itself, which any ordinary person can do, then it is not an obedient tool, able to achieve a spiritual act.” (J. Grotowski)¹

Along the history, the body has been given multiple significations – the body-symbol, the body-rite object, the body-acting tool, the body-text, the body-manifesto, the body-absent, the body-shelter for the soul, the body-tomb, the body-car, and – recently –, the body-cyborg, the bionic body etc. The expressiveness of the human body, especially of the contemporary actor, has socio-cultural determinations (is submitted to transformations, in the rhythm of time). Along history, body expression and word have been hand in hand; the appearance of dance-theatre being an example of stage formula in which the expressiveness of the movement/body becomes support or replacer of the word. In fact, we can consider that dance-theatre is more than a form of show; it can be looked at as a phenomenon characteristic to a moment of evolution in the artistic interpretation. The way in which it was approached, both by the actors and by the dancers, creates for it an aura of authenticity and attraction.

Towards the end of the 20th century, there was a reconsideration of the art of the show, by rearranging the interpreter in the centre of it. But the art of the contemporary show is not limited only to the actor(the human being acting on a stage), to his/her acting, it includes also the text/ the script, the music, the scenery, the costumes, the stage technique, the lights and multimedia techniques. This is why the exegetes had to respond to the challenges of the creators and to the tendencies of interaction from the stage, generating new forms defined through concepts found in an explosive dynamics: theatrical mosaic, epic works, theatrical musical compositions, live films, heterogeneous theatre, non-verbal works, visual poetry, dance of images or – the already classicized – dance-theatre. The new generations of creators – directors or choreographers – who were looking for their place, escaped from the “traditional” stage towards alternative playgrounds, which facilitate the artistic experiment. Just like in the 20s or the 60s, “the new avangarde” stands out through “the new tendencies”, through a critical attitude pointed at the society, at the economic interests networks and at the aesthetic values

¹ Jerzy Grotowski – *Spre un teatru sărac*, trad. George Banu și Mirella Nedelcu-Patureanu, Editura Unitext, București, 1998, p. 38

promoted by these, the revolt against an ideology which considers the show an object, the artist a manager, the spectator a consumer and the work of art a construction achieved according to certain rules.

All these new formulas represent, in fact, just a rediscovery, a rehearsal of the already invented forms, of the questions already asked, of the battles already fought and of the critics already formulated along the history of the art of theatre, of music and of dance. The training of today's student has as a background the verified principles. Only the illusion of a new result differentiates us: „For us, educating an actor does not mean teaching him/her something. We are just trying to eliminate his/her organic resistances to this process.”²

IV. THE GOAL AND THE OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS

Our doctoral research has as a background the principles proposed by the main drama schools, research laboratories, studios, within which orientations, polemics, forms of training and aesthetic visions were structured. „In the West, the 20th century was the century of pedagogy. The strictness of training the actors and of articulating their apprenticeship had never been questioned so acutely. Strangely, the great inheritance that the 20th century left us in the field of theatrical pedagogy is not linked to „schooling” schools, but to the Studios of Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Vahtangov and Tairov, to Copeau's Vieux Colombier, to Dullin's Workshop, to Craig, Appia, Fuchs and Osterwa's Projects, to the intransigent extremism of Decroux, to the Living Theatre, to Grotowski's Laboratory, to the constant training of actors from Odin Teatret, spread along several decades.”³

In the activity of teaching/ training of the future actions (and not only), the best starting point is represented by a topic, through which a research can be outlined and which permits the analysis of the stage experiences and of the means which contribute, further on, to their development. From this perspective, the human body, in a symbiosis with the logos/the word, constitutes an inexhaustible source of research. There are multiple perspectives of approach. Out of these we distinguish:

² Idem, p. 10

³ Eugenio Barba, Nicola Savarese – *Cele cinci continente ale teatrului: fapte și legende din cultura materială a actorului*, trad. Vlad Russo, Editura Nemira, București, 2018, pg. 164

– The body – the actor’s tool, which permanently emits signals, social and cultural messages;

– The actor’s body as a „hieroglyph”, as Antonin Artaud⁴ was saying, in whose vision the word has lost, in the theatre, the force of significance. The theatrical representation has to be the result of elements melting – body, gesture, movement, voice, facial expression, in the director’s melting pot. The roots get lost: „In Bali theatre a mood before the appearance of language is being felt: music, gestures, movements, words.”⁵ These ideas can be found in the volume *Towards a Poor Theatre*, previously mentioned.

– The body represents a reality permeable to cultural and social influences, getting in the 20th century, to communicate, mainly, through means and cultural “accessories” associated to it, that is: outfit, jewellery, make-up, tattoos, piercing ş.a.

In this work we intend to present the role of body language and the aspects shaping it, in the education of the actor who is a trainee, relying on theoretical research and practical/stage experiences.

V. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The research intends to approach the formulating of a coherent method of training the movement necessary to the development of the actor’s body plasticity. The proposed vision is based on the unitary articulation of the elements of theoretical documenting and approach with the applicable practical ones.

The studies and stage experiments done within the present doctoral research have directed me to the necessity of understanding by the future actors of the training process and of the developing of choreographic abilities, integrated in the general training specific to the actor’s art.

Considering this, I have made a comparative study of approaching the choreographic elements which highlight the relationship between them and the interpreter. In order to be specific, I caught in photos pieces from the exercises achieved with the students.

⁴ Antonin Artaud – *Teatrul și dublul său*, trad. Voichița Sasu și Diana Tihu-Suciu, Editura Echinox, Cluj-Napoca, 1997

⁵ Idem, p. 52

These observations are, in fact, the outcome of a prolonged stage activity and teaching, but also of an attentive analysis.

The methodology contains activities of documenting and analysing the techniques, both from the theatrical art and from the choreographic art, synthesizing them coherently and extracting the essential features.

Framing the research in the subfield of theatrical pedagogy has determined not only the selection of contents, but also the modality of presenting it, structuring it in synthetic forms which can allow it the highlighting of certain technical aspects of dance-theatre. The teaching method has to ensure, equally, the understanding of the importance of the role of knowing the history of this form of theatrical expression, of the characteristic technical elements proposed by representative creators and of structuring a programme of training adapted to the psycho-professional profile of the involved parties. The contents and the presentation form will be the vehicle through which the proposed variant will become useful to those interested.

The teaching method, specific to this subject, being mainly practical, consists of developing the general actuating abilities by developing the body expressiveness and by making a framework of uninhibited expressing your own thoughts and feelings, with the goal of creating a harmonious and original personality. These aspects constitute the priority of our research, as the approach of the acting often involves the necessity of a trained body, able to convey all the stage actions from the perspective of the presented show.

VI. THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The present doctoral thesis intends to structure an efficient formula of training, which looks both at the acting techniques from the dance-theatre (the proposed solutions can have a major impact on the development of the body plasticity of the future actors and choreographers), and at the ways of developing the choreographic and theatrical material.

Structuring the thesis in four main chapters intended to create a logical thread which can lead the people involved in the training process – in a possible course dance-theatre –, starting from „the temptation of defining the concept dance-theatre”, knowing the important personalities from the history of theatre and dance, who combined the acting and training techniques (and concepts), changing them into a manner of artistic expression, continuing with the analysis of representative methods and extracting the elements which can still help the

future stage creators so that, afterwards to get to „the heart” of the process– the creativity –, and to end with a series of proposed exercises, after experimenting them (years on end), in the pre-university, university and theatrical environments.

The central objective of this proposed method aims at going through all the theoretical and practical elements, which can determine the developing of the future actor and choreographer’s creativity. The process can have four big stages and they are: *the theoretical, physical and psychic training, the training/ the experiment, creating your own stage discourse (with the artistic expression/ presentation of one own’ s artistic “product”)* and *the checking*. All the stages are strictly necessary, even if their importance is different:

I. *The theoretical, physical and psychic training* – it is a very complex stage, sometimes decisive for the success of the creating process.

II. *The training/ the experiment* – it is the experimenting stage. In this stage, the success presupposes suspending the criticism and self-criticism and trusting the partners and the teacher. The acting/the stage improvisation has a big importance, in this stage.

III. *Creating your own stage discourse* – it is the central moment of creation. The inspiration is based on the previous stages of acquiring information and conscientious training, pre and unconscious working of the old data and the new data. This stage points out that moment of uniqueness of each individual.

IV. *The checking* – it is a very important stage, both for the student and for the teacher. Even if a dance-theatre moment goes through a very long, weary and thorough process, the checking should be carried out in three big stages:

- completing the idea and materialising it into a real technical/ stage solution;
- creating, physically materialising and applying the technical solution in the artistic material;
- the performing stage, with the goal of confirming or infirming the validity of that solution.

Creating such a hypothetical training route made me approach the training programme of the future actors and choreographers from an interdisciplinary perspective. The theoretical contents and the demonstrative materials become, thus, support for understanding the elements specific to the dance-theatre, for the way in which the theatrical language intertwines with the choreographic one, in order to get reformulated in a kind of show with its own identity. Getting close to the methods proposed by the creators and the reference schools facilitates the passing towards the practical and creative exercises.

The variety of the students' personalities, as well as the practical character of a future course of dance-theatre cannot lead to a rigid method of teaching; The teacher has to be characterised by flexibility in a concrete, individual, personalised orientation, always inventive. These abilities involve patience in researching each study, but also each student in particular, creativity in solving difficulties/ challenges, availability, enthusiasm. At the same time, it is absolutely necessary for the students to trust the teacher in front of them, who tries to develop/ value their artistic personality. This does not mean that things will be carried out at random, but through the teacher taking responsibility, by showing that he/she is a presence capable of registering and directing their movements, in order to develop, creatively, all their abilities. With this goal, clear criteria of evaluating the method of doing a task/an exercise will be established: the wideness and the expressiveness of the movements, the concentration, occupying the space, the relationship with the partner etc. Thus, there will be two types of objectives taken into consideration: on one hand, an unchaining, which allows a free expression and on the other hand, the conviction that this expression cannot progress unless it accepts the attentive control and directing of the teacher/coordinator.

Being a creative field, if between the students and the teacher there is a constructive communication, progress will be possible; the teacher/ coordinator has the duty to enter, carefully, the mechanism of thinking of each student, in order to get to know their needs and reactions. In fact, both through one own' s searches and by invoking recognised trainers such as Michael Chekhov, Kurt Jooss, Viola Spolin, Pina Bausch and not only, we get close to the meanings of the concept of "pedagogic authority", which "synthesises three *fundamental qualities of the educator*, determined individually and collectively, psychologically and socially:

1. *Competence*, proved by achieving professional *status* through a multitude of *roles* done in an exemplary manner: speciality teacher (...), counsellor teacher, (...) researcher teacher etc.

2. *Popularity*, obtained in the context of the professional community, directly and indirectly reflected within the reference social organisation, in its standing out locally, regionally, nationally etc.

3. *The prestige*, acquired in the extent in which the natural abilities of the teacher are transformed into resources and social values, taken over and integrated (...)”⁶ at the level of teaching institution.

⁶ Sorin Cristea, Op. cit., pp. 190-191

These aspects are valid also in the university theatrical education, where the prestige and competence are based on the results from the world of the arts of show and where the tendency to get rid of the bureaucratic elements through "... the priority given to *the contents of the activity* in a report with the procedures maintained through numerous ways of getting formal, multiplying, artificially hierarchization, impersonal manifestation etc."⁷ Presenting the personal stage performance in the subchapter *Creative stage laboratory*, was done following the understanding of these principles, which function as a motor of the teaching and artistic activity that I carry out.

You cannot lead the others on unknown paths, in the same way that you cannot offer what you do not possess; in order to claim you have to offer. Correlating the exercises with presenting some practical examples leads to the understanding of the need for constant training and searching/ valuing your own personal creativity resources. The exercises are, for us, the technical pretext of a possible stage moment or even (why not) of a show. "There are several categories of exercises having different goals: overcoming obstacles and inhibitions, specialising in various practices; acquiring specific abilities; getting free from certain conditioning, of the personal «spontaneity» and of one own's mannerism; acquiring a special capacity of involving the brain and the central system. The exercises do not have as a goal teaching you how to play. They do not develop a single ability. They rather constitute models of drama and composition, not at a narrative level, but at an organic level. They are a pure form, a row of dynamic adventures, without trauma, full of information which constitute «the essence of the stage movement», as Meyerhold was saying about biomechanics."⁸

The presented exercises sketch a possible method, a possible path towards the way in which dance-theatre can become the vehicle for some stories, messages, ideas. The path can be walked through a process which creates expressive stage forms only if each student (trainee actor/ choreographer) understands the indestructible relationship between self-discipline and the liberty of creation.

The creation workshops in which I play together with my students represent another practical formula of stimulating the creative potential of the students. Even if they do not have the form of professional shows, they constitute an efficient teaching technique, as in the centre of the proposed teaching process is the *search*, which becomes, sometimes synonymous with the *expressing*. At this point it is worth reflecting about a perspective proposed by Jacques

⁷ Idem, p. 191

⁸ Eugenio Barba, Nicola Savarese, op. cit., p. 164

Lecoq: „The difference between an act of expression and an act of creation consists in the fact that the play is given back to itself rather than to the public. I always watch if the actors shine, if they develop around them a space in which the spectators are present. (...) In a creation process, the created object does no longer belong to the creator. The objective is to make that creative act: to offer a fruit which comes from the tree!”⁹

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Following the observing of the present situation in the world of the show art, in which the balance between the text and the movement has turned upside down, but also of the reading of reference theoretical papers dedicated to postmodernism, we can see an essential challenge in training the actor: he/she has to acquire a corpus of theoretical and especially practical knowledge regarding the different formulas of choreographic language and to be aware of the role that they play in building a character. This process is conditioned by the existence/the presence of a well shaped body (the physical condition has a significant contribution to the achievement of the plastic movements) and, at the same time by assimilating the knowledge which will contribute to the aesthetic development of the organic movements. It is an important aspect, as both the actor and the dancer have dedicated themselves to a career in which they use their own body and the public, before any verbal or nonverbal action, observes *the alive body* on stage, which becomes the main instrument of expression for the actor, the bearer of message and significance. The human body represents the support and the place of intersection for the majority of the active languages in the theatrical act. All the means of expression, active on stage, are submitted to the actor and this is seen, first of all, through his/her own body.

I consider that no movement, imposed or initiated, practised or improvised should be executed mechanically, but only as following an interiorising process, based on the knowing and being aware of your own body. Our goal is to prove to the students the necessity of a good, consistent body training for the actor and the role of this aspect in developing the capacity of free expression through the choreographic and theatrical non verbal language. The body – stage indicator, in order to have maximum expressive dimensions, has to have the capacity to assimilate and transmit through dynamics and posture meanings, ideas and

⁹ Jacques Lecoq – *Corpul poetic; O pedagogie a creației teatrale*, Ed. cit., p. 29

emotions. This aspect leads to a double perspective of the way in which the body of the actor dance-theatre can be looked at: both as an expression of force and as one of vulnerability. If the force results from the ability of sustaining his/her own movements and getting integrated into those of his/her partner, next to resistance to getting injured, the vulnerability is translated into, on one hand, the limits of corporality and, on the other hand, in the changes of the body for the stage expression and the inherent pressures of this process.

Any compass needs points of reference, any new construction needs a foundation, any form of artistic expression implies a technique.

VIII. PERSONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The following are personal contributions to this research:

1. A defining of dance-theatre has been attempted.
2. Some of the forerunners of dance-theatre have been identified.
3. The differences between the classical dance and the modern dance have been established.
4. The connection between anatomy and movement has been analysed.
5. A few ways of dance-theatre communication have been established.
6. A model of an internationally valid lesson has been created, model which can be applied to any physical structure and which can positively respond to any theatrical act. Based on this, a multitude of choreographic combinations can be achieved.
7. The details offered in this study, were, first of all, tested on stage and in teaching, so that, all the data in this thesis benefit from the being achieved and finalised.

We consider that the delivering of validated information, believable and verifiable up to their origins can offer a tool indispensable to the physical acting.

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