

## PART II

### DRAMA

#### 1. THE NATIONAL AND UNIVERSAL IN EUROPEAN ART AND EDUCATION. ARTISTIC AND SPIRITUAL FEATURES IN THE ART OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY ACTORS

Iuliana Nistor<sup>173</sup>

**Abstract:** *As we are all aware of, theatre, as opposed to film stands under the spectrum of transience. Every show is unique and cannot be repeated identically. Under this shadow, what steps can the actor take so that his success, if it is a success, doesn't fade with the fall of the curtain? Moreover, we ask ourselves what are the elements that help the actor continue to be full of energy that he is ready to invest once more, after he has been through the gates of heaven and hell and back?*

*When I came across the topic of this essay, I didn't expect it to be so difficult of an endeavor. The hardship also stems from the multitude of elements that belong to the privacy of my profession. On the basis of research undertaken by professionals in the area of expertise, as well as on my personal experience on stage, I came to the conclusion that, there isn't a mandatory need in the actor's art for certain techniques, for models that he should take on at different stages of his performance. Every actor brings with him a personal technique, and the attempt to acquire a manner different from his own cannot lead to first-rate performances, unless by pure accident. However, the common landmark that actors can rely on is becoming again conscious of the relationship with their own inner being, with their creative self. I believe that, under 21<sup>st</sup> century's conditions, people, actors or viewers need more than ever, a theatre that is re-invented, in other words, spiritualized.*

*"The conclusion isn't all rosy: the theatre isn't about debating ideas, but is about making energies become manifest, and then you are left asking yourself what can be done so that the energies manifest not as brute expressions of lower impulses, is it not by intellectual refinement? It goes without saying, intuition is a formidable weapon in sensing tension, but without the aid of the mind, it becomes a blind impulse meant to excite impure essences. The result is a theatre of a low vibration, as are most flashy plays nowadays. To dwell in feelings of regret over how low the bar has gone down for acting is a waste of time and a more useful endeavor would be to look for its causes and its remedy". (Sorin Lavric<sup>174</sup>)*

**Key words:** *man, consciousness, giving, spirituality, word*

In the present day context of national and international artistic displays one can notice a tendency to stray away from spirituality, the emphasis being placed on the daily, material side of expression forms that finds support in the development of technical tools and their excessive usage, instead of finding it in the artist reaching for his inner self. This in turn leads to the birth of some pseudo-forms, which take their toll both on the artists and on the general public. "To the one who still dares to go to the theatre, only to be hit by a new serving of vulgar unrest, the feeling of an asylum stacked with demented dolls will be deeply imprinted in his mind. From a ceremony once meant to awaken deep

---

<sup>173</sup> Doctoral Candidate, "George Enescu" University of Arts from Iași of Romania, email: nistor.iulia@ymail.com

<sup>174</sup> Art.cit.

energies, as acting once was in noble times, today we are left with nothing but a histrionic delirium.“ (Sorin Lavric <sup>175</sup>)

Under these circumstances, how can an actor keep an audience’s interest in the theatre alive and to what extent can people partake in shows that deserve the right to be put on stage and considered Art? “Why are we interested in art? We are interested in it in order to break boundaries, to go beyond our own limitations, to fill our inner void, to be fulfilled. It isn’t a condition, but a process in which the darkness inside us becomes gradually transparent. In this struggle with everyone’s personal truth, in this effort to tear up life’s mask, the theatre, with its physical perception has always been a challenge for me.” (Jerzy Grotowski <sup>176</sup>)

The topic of this essay is a starting-point for a future doctoral thesis and is aimed at being a helping hand in finding a way back to the intimate, more profound side of the theatre. Supporting my endeavor are personal professional experiences, dealings with the artistic phenomenon, both as an actor, teacher as well as a spectator, all of which have given way to questions, opinions, wishes, ideals, unrest, dissatisfaction, and creative urges.

We believe that an actor wavers between the sacred and the profane. We say that in thinking that, he needs to assimilate both the technique of exterior means of expression and the inner mobility of becoming conscious about the relationship between his own being and the spiritual support that helps him, in developing his creativity.

The research space envisioned in this essay has its basis in self-knowledge, as a fundamental element of creation, both national and universal in its characteristics. In thinking that, I am saying that without knowing one’s own being, man cannot create. The universal value of a work of art is given by a close and minute analysis and knowledge of the human being. The great creators, whose works have endured through time as highlights of authentic artistic values, have gone beyond the mundane shell of things. To name only a few of them: Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Schiller, Cehov. I also bring to the table the issue of the importance of vocal, body and psychic preparation needed before one can start work with a character. The final point of this process is returning to one’s own individuality and becoming conscious of one’s being once more.

The concessions made by artists in their profession, the tendencies for an experimental theatre at any cost, using images and movement to the misfortune of the Word, shallowness instead of a profound feeling and a deep perception of the text , all lead to the debasement of one of the better gifts sent by gods to people: Theatre. Consequently, I believe that contemporary actors need a re-evaluation of attitude towards the scenic process, towards art, the viewer and not last, towards themselves.“The essence of theatre is the meeting. The one who commits an act of self-revelation can well be said to be the one who establishes

---

<sup>175</sup> The demise of stage, *Literary Romania*, nr 25/13 June 2014

<sup>176</sup> *Towards a poor theatre*, translated by George Banu and Mirella Nedelcu-Patureanu, Bucharest, Unitext Publishing, 1998,p.72

rapport with oneself. This in turn means an extreme, sincere, disciplined, clear-cut and total confrontation not only with their own thoughts, but a confrontation that involves their whole being, from their instincts and unconscious side to their most lucid state of being.” (Jerry Grotowski <sup>177</sup>)

Over time, on a national level as well as a universal one, art has stood as a barometer of man’s development. The artist represents oneself. He cannot set aside his being, his personality. Art is a landmark when man looks for answers about his inner self, and becomes a road for inner development. In the national and universal artistic world, we can witness an expansion of the experimental theatre phenomenon. To what extent are these attempts to (re)invent theatre useful for young actors? Is there a danger that, out of lack of clear landmarks, they could find themselves in the position to stray away from the meaning and beauty of their own profession? “We need to open up our hands and show that we have nothing hidden up our sleeves. Only then can we begin.” (Peter Brook <sup>178</sup>).

Every journey begins with a first step that is, more than often, the hardest to take especially when we talk about the journey towards our inner-self. It is then that we encounter many inner locked doors. These are our fears in the form of masks, with no connection to parts we have played or wish to play on stage. They lead us towards a hidden dimension of our being: the creative self, covered by the ego’s forms of manifestation. The feeling we can then have about ourselves as performers, as well as that of the success of a show may not have a foot to stand on in the artistic reality.

For an objective mind this is the moment when awareness comes into place, when an inquiring look over our individuality doubles knowledge with self-knowledge. It is necessary for actors to try to discover the characteristics of their own personalities, taking into consideration the three coordinates: physical, psychic, emotional, before embarking in their journey towards the Part, towards the encounter with the Other. You have to know who you are in order to be able to create another personality, on the basis of your own personality. The actor’s self undergoes a series of transformations, metamorphoses and is subject to a labor that ideally ends in a masterful embodiment of a character.

Finding your inner-self traits can become reality by developing intellectual abilities, in direct rapport with the emotional ones that belong to the realm of the senses. Nobody can provide you in this respect with ready-made recipes for success or unbeatable theories or sure advice. Every actor sets out on this mission alone, just as he stands alone at the last drop of the curtain, keeping in mind only the director’s input, the team’s suggestions and colleagues’ opinions...What does the actor take with him in setting out on his way? Firstly, he takes himself, along with all his energy, his enthusiasm, his anxieties, his convictions and doubts. It is a journey that changes a lot. It also changes how he returns to himself. It is a process that has its own vibrations, feelings, anxieties,

---

<sup>177</sup>*Towards a poor theatre*, translated by George Banu and Mirela Nedelcu-Patureanu, Bucharest, Unitext Publishing, 1998, p. 35

<sup>178</sup> *The Void Space*, translated by Marian Popescu, Bucharest, Unitext Publishing

all accompanied by a glissando amidst the landmarks. I go back, but where? In order to be aware of that I need to remember the place I left behind. There is a danger otherwise: the risk of cancelling your fundamental self and substituting it with a fake self, a state-of-being that is hard to recover from.

Therefore, there is a need to take a look in the mirror, to search within yourself with inquiring eyes and to set your eyes on the itinerary that you need to undertake. It is a double-sided look into the technical side and the emotional. I am not talking here about setting limits to spontaneity and creativity yet. There is need to find certain pries in the case of actors who over-act out of a desire to set themselves apart from the crowd and thus become mediocre. In this case the characters they embody gain a degree of artificiality.

“When an actor takes his reputation for granted and walks on the stage with a feeling of being immediately showered with admiration from the audience, he is indifferent and the play will be a failure.” (Sorin Lavric<sup>179</sup>) Every theatrical part implies an exercise of will, a mode of testing one’s own energy, one’s own openness to the new, to the others, a chance of finding new means of expression, of re-defining the inner self and the relationship with the elements around him.

How does the will express itself in conceiving a theatrical part? In the Romanian Dictionary of Language, will is defined thusly: “1. Psychic function, defined by the conscious orientation of the human being towards accomplishing certain goals and by the effort undertook for their attainment. 2. Intent, goal, wish.” The term Consciousness stands out in the definition. Why is it that important? Without this awareness, moments of inspiration when the actor begins to become creative cannot occur. Will implies lucidity, a conscious attitude, in other words a unity and equilibrium in the emotional sphere.

Gestures, walking, speech are expressions of will. In order for them to acquire scenic value, you need this very attention capable to fill itself with artistic feeling. You don’t walk, you don’t make gestures, you don’t talk on stage as you do on the street, or at least you shouldn’t, because on one than more occasion things can easily become confused with one another. Mundane breach into the artistic space is an error that falls in the trivial, in debasement. Of course, art is life, but a special kind of life, bewitched to have magical highlights.

The common things, the vulgar cannot be put aside, but in no way should they overtake the stage, like it seldom happens in theatre and in film, with the aid of debasing effects. The critics are also to blame for their abundance in art. To stop and do away with them can be to exercise our will. Coming back to the forms of expression that will takes in the scenic act, it is necessary to detect this coordinate in all constituent moments of the actor’s performance:

- Gesture = willful conscious act, by using the hands in a meaningful manner
- Walking = willful conscious act, by using the feet in a meaningful manner
- Speech = willful conscious act, by using the voice in a meaningful manner

---

<sup>179</sup> The demise of stage, *Literary Romania*, nr 25/13 June 2014

- Breathing = willful conscious act, by using the speech in a meaningful manner

Can it be said of a proficient actor that he is the one who, in preparing a show and in general, in his activity on stage is conscious that he needs to expand his personal outlook on things in order to be skillful in the shows that are assigned to him? How do we make the difference between a first class actor and a second-rate one? If in their personal life people often move in a restricted space, on stage actors have the unrivaled chance to go beyond that limit and confinement. They have (or gain) the ability to look beyond what common people live in their lives. They have (or seem to have) a more intense gaze, a more profound breath in terms of enhanced feeling, a tendency to rocket this feeling into the realm of expression.

Is it necessary that the artist be well-read? Or, let's ask the question differently, can first-class acting be accomplished only by well-read actors? Is the actor a man who studies? Can he rely only on his instinct? And even further, is he an instrument or is his energy in terms of talent and force of mind the one that has real impact on the viewer, a positive effect of awareness or healing?

“The Ten Commandments:

Education through Culture  
Communication through Art  
Knowledge through Experience  
Verticality through Truth  
Brotherhood through Respect

Openness through Experiment  
Identity through Value  
Insight through Dialogue  
Humanity through Spirit  
Hope through Solidarity

(Alexa Visarion<sup>180</sup>)

## References

1. ARISTOTEL, *About the soul*, translated by Alexander Baumgarten, Humanitas Publishing, Bucharest, 2005
2. ARTAUD, ANTONIN, *Theatre and its double*, translated by Vichita Sasu and Diana Tihu, Echinox Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 1997
3. BANU, GEORGE, *The actor on the untraceable track*, FCR Publishing, Bucharest, 1995
4. BATY, GASTON, CHAVANCE, RENE, *The life of theatrical art*, translated by Sanda Rapeanu, Meridiane Publishing, Bucharest, 1969
5. BUSULENGA, ZOE-DUMITRESCU, *Beliefs, confessions, learning*, Nicodim Publishing, Putna, 2013
6. BRECHT, BERTOLT, *Writings about theatre*, translated by Corina Jiva, Univers Publishing, Bucharest, 1997
7. BROOK, PETER, *The void space*, translated by Marian Popescu, Unitext Publishing, Bucharest, 1997

---

<sup>180</sup>The Word Curtain, Bucharest, Universalia Publishing

8. BROOK, PETER, *No secrets*, translated by Marian Popescu, Nemira Publishing, Bucharest, 2014
9. CALOS, STELIANA, *Vocal art and spiritual evolution*, AntetPress Publishing, Filipești, 1995
10. CEGOLEA, GABRIELA, *Vox mentis*, Armonia Publishing, Bucharest, 1995
11. CEHOV, MICHAEL, *Acting art course*, Beverly Hills, California, 1958
12. COJAR, ION, *Poetics of the actor's art*, Padideia Publishing, Bucharest, 1999
13. DELACROIX, HENRY, *The psychology of art*, translated by Victor Ivanovici and Virgil Mazilescu, Meridiane Publishing, Bucharest, 1983
14. DIMA, CELLA, *From talk to eloquence*, Albatros Publishing, Bucharest, 1982
15. DUDA, RADU, *Dincolo de masca*, Editura Unitext, București, 1997
15. GROTOWSKI, JERZY, *Towards a poor theatre*, translated by George Banu and Mirella Nedelcu Patureanu, Unitext Publishing, Bucharest, 1998
16. LIICEANU, GABRIEL, *About limit*, Humanitas Publishing, Bucharest
17. LIVESCU, ANCA, *About diction*, Scientific Publishing, Bucharest
18. MANIUTIU, MIHAI, *Re-discovering the actor*, Meridiane Publishing, Bucharest
19. MENTA, ED-ANDREI SERBAN, *The magical world behind the curtain*, Unitext Publishing, Bucharest
20. RUSU, LIVIU, *Essay on artistic creation*, Scientific Publishing, Bucharest
21. SATRE, JEAN-PAUL, *The psychology of emotion*, translated by Leonard Gavrilu, Iri Publishing, Bucharest
22. STEINER, RUDOLF, *Art and knowing art*, translated by Petre Papacostea, Triade Publishing, Bucharest, 2004
23. VIERU, ANATOL, *Words about sounds*, Cartea Romaneasca Publishing, Bucharest, 1981
24. VISARION, ALEXA, *The words curtain*, Universalia Publishing, Bucharest

This paper is made and published under the aegis of the Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy as a part of programme co-funded by the European Union within the Operational Sectorial Programme for Human Resources Development through the project for Pluri and interdisciplinary in doctoral and post-doctoral programmes Project Code: POSDRU/159/1.5/S/141086