

SHAPING FUTURE ARTISTIC PERSONALITIES

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Abstract

The effort to encourage barely detectable creative valences are the ineluctable commands of the process of forming an actor. Because the period of personality building is a very important point in the development of future servants of artistic beauty. The need for an actor's art intuition of the valences of each individual personality is one of the specific requirements of artistic pedagogy. However, up to the moment of discovering the creative capacities of the young actors (since the personalities are finalized after the training period in the actor's theater workshops), certain basic coordinates of the personality of the students in the process of preparation for Stage must be kept in mind.

Keywords: *Actor's Art, creativity, artistic pedagogy, training, blockage*

The interest in theatre could be considered as a first and major starting point in the future evolution, which makes us believe that it can become a basic coordinate of the student's personality; and this is because the passion for all that is related to the wonderful space of the stage is the decisive element that guides their steps towards the theatre faculty and, moreover, that which induces the young person's availability to the beautiful sacrifice (which is essential) and to physical effort and, above all,

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intellectual (without which success is impossible to achieve). Another basic coordinate could be the ability to communicate with colleagues and teachers. It is essential that the appetite for success does not break the inter-human relations established between the members of the group. Students form by definition a dynamic group, full of ambitions and eager for spectacular artistic achievements; in fact, young people can represent the beneficial ferment from the activity of the institution in which they operate. The relationships between the members of this group are (as a rule) friendship, communion of interests and group ambitions. What is decisive, however, is that the exchange of opinions, ideas, impressions, in fact, communication (in the true sense of the word) is likely to give the solidity and endurance to such a group. Another basic coordinate of a student's personality can be the finding of complementary points of interest. From this point of view, it is essential that the collateral concerns (collaborations in professional theatre, film or television) do not weaken over time the interest in artistic evolution within the educational institution. One thing is certain: because the creative evolution state within the group of students is maintained between the desired parameters, the leader of the group (in this case, the teacher) is called upon at certain times (quite common, naturally) to know how to nurture relations between group members or dispel the creativity bottlenecks at an individual level; they can become a source of dissatisfaction or general anxiety. But let us remember what creativity means.

The story of the research of creativity is relatively recent. If the first signal was given in 1869 by Sir Francis Galton in the work of the Hereditary Genius, in which he brought before the audience the creative personality he associated with genius, only after the mid-twentieth century did psychology resume the inquiring research into creativity, driven by the following motto: "In order for

the nation to survive (in the United States of America), the individual has to think creatively”². That’s how psychologists like Gordon Allport, G. P. Guilford or R. J. Sternberg and so on, decided in 1950 at the Congress of the Association of American Psychologists, that “the phenomenon of creativity is a general human trait and that all people can be distributed on a common scale of creativity at different levels”³. From then on, once the road was open, the psychology of creativity made significant steps forward.

Creativity is dependent on the socio-cultural environment in which the individual lives and requires favourable conditions in order to manifest itself. The fear of judgment, the accusations of ‘deflection’ from common thinking, the imposition of conformity are obviously blockages in the way of creativity. Out of the desire to liberate the imagination, which is decisive in the process of creativity, various techniques have been developed, either analysis or group work, in which the theme is: expressing all ideas, even the most bizarre. Improvisation deals with the steps to be taken in the very complex process of the young creator’s inner organization; analysing the mental processes involved in this plan, listing the types of exercises to be applied, and their explanation from the point of view of Actor’s Art we have determined the effective steps to be taken... in search of creativity. Observation, Attention and Concentration, Imagination, Empathy, Sensualisation and Conscious Sensory, Spontaneity, Memory and Affective Memory, Intuition, to name but a few skills that the actors seek to trigger and use effectively and creatively. But there is a problem: even if all these steps can be followed with conscientiousness, it may occur that this whole process is tainted

² Erika Landau, *Psihologia creativității*, E.D.P., Bucharest, 1979, p. 11

³ *Ibidem*

by... something. Something that leads to an inherent blockade. But let's see what a 'block' is.

From a neurological point of view, a blockage is considered to be an obstruction that can occur when a pulse passes through a synapse or joint; in the psychology of activity or learning, it is a moment of interruption and impermeability to information caused by overload and emotional shock, the equivalent of the psychological barrier. In psychoanalysis, the retention or the awareness of an idea or the blurring of one of the terms of conflict can be considered bottlenecks. There are blockages of various types: affective, cognitive and voluntary. Upon closer analysis we discover that affection is an elemental way of affective reactivity, a primary emotion characterized by high intensity, expansiveness, reduced duration, unipolar development and direct expression in behaviour; instinctive provisions are involved in the context of affection. However, affective states also reproduce social patterns without complying with a rational organization. Dictionaries of psychology accredit the idea that emotional manifestations can be: states of joy, pleasure, satisfaction, but also anger, self-abandonment, blind aggression, horror, uncontrolled access to laughter or crying. In modern psychology, recommendations are being made to prevent or eliminate the negative effects of the affection by postponing and switching the reactions, taking steps to reduce the strain, or moving to the detailed analysis of the situation that created the moment of crisis.

It is an accredited idea that, from the point of view of psychology, there may be two types of blockages: external and internal, or, in other words, translated from within, or induced from outside. In the case of the former, these may occur due to several factors such as: dissatisfaction, professional misconduct, lack of empathy from the group or working partners; here it must be said that the student feels that the people around them to

unjustifiably criticize their evolution, judge them without reason, or, even more, laugh at their alleged incompetence. The consequence is the (almost spontaneous) appearance of the inner blockages; the most dangerous, in fact, that lead to the establishment of inhibition, that is to say of that mental process which involves the reduction, delay or even cessation of the activity of a functional ensemble under the effect of an inhibitory impulse.

Psychology speaks of postponing inhibition - when there is a greater interval than the natural one between stimulus and response; discriminatory inhibition or differentiated inhibition - occurs when certain external stimuli do not respond; intellectual inhibition - in this case is the functional disruption of intelligence characterized by the emergence of incapacity or refusal, often clearly announced, to achieve performance in relation to the real intellectual potential of the individual. Intellectual inhibition may become more acute, giving the impression (false, of course) to others that the subject has entered a mental debilitating area, although that is not the case. Intellectual inhibition, if not addressed with care and interest, first of all by parents, friends, teachers etc. can induce panic, phobias, isolation and obsession. Anxiety can occur almost immediately, spontaneously. More and more obvious anxiety disorders, generalized anxiety, panic, phobic and obsessional disorders appear. Whether it is primary or secondary, isolated or associated with phobias, anxiety is classically defined as fear without grounds. In another stage there may be physical anxiety, manifested by: 'globus' sensation, sweating, palpitations, accelerated breathing, 'weak in the knees' sensation etc. If they are not removed (with individual or group therapy), anxiety attacks can alter, even irrevocably, the process of intellectual formation of an individual.

In the case of theatrical artistic education, all these blockages can arise for various reasons: rejection (from partners, teachers), denial of a role, non-mastery of the typical means of stage expression, lack of mastery of the text or ideological nuances of the text, all grafted on the need (also manifested in the overwhelming majority of student actors) to always be in front of others, to be always better than others, more... dramatic, more... comical, more... spiritual, more... intelligent, more... talented. But these bottlenecks can also occur when the leader of the group (the teacher) fails to find the right way of communicating with the students, making the relationship between the head of the class and the young prospective actors become poor, inadequate or even incorrect; this is because it is very difficult to realize and even more difficult to maintain a stable balance and a creative atmosphere in classes and practical workshops without taking into account the basic coordinates of the students' personality.

One thing is certain: the teacher has a moral duty to establish a specific framework for creative work, dominated by mutual respect and tolerance for fellow partners, trust in their own leadership skills and initiate the effort to develop artistic creations, be a good adviser in inherent moments of crisis in the group or at an individual level and be completely sincere and open when it comes to evaluating the activity of each individual student. Although all of these commands are undoubtedly difficult to achieve (for the work of forming a young actor is not an easy thing), in order for the results to appear, the actor's art teacher has the great mission before forming great actors, to participate in the great process of training the great personalities. Because the theatre lives through great personalities. They are the ones that open unpredictable paths, unknown roads, or, better said, they are those that manage to take the spectators' steps towards ineffable sustainable stages creation. And for that, no

effort is too great. No matter how hard it would seem, as this work involves very difficult characters, 'tough crowds', the result is worth all the trouble. A great actor, can become, in their turn, an influential and important mentor to young learners. That is why I tend to agree with the classic German writer Friedrich Schiller who wrote: "It is a crime against yourself, a killing of talents, when a capacity that would bring endless benefits to the supreme interests of mankind is wasted, like a matter of minor importance"⁴. Perhaps less dramatically, but Russian director Anatoly Vasilyev (1942, director and professor of Actor's Art) speaks of the same idea: "Within them (the teacher) there are the sources of dramatic art, for the young person comes first to the teacher, that is where his thinking, sentiment, profession are formed. In education, everything is done"⁵. That is why the small (or, of course, the great) blockages of communication or creativity fade in front of the ideal towards which a true School of Actors is aiming.

In the history of the theatre, there was also an important teacher of Actor's Art, the French Antoine Vitez. The one who became an actor, director, playwright, poet, theatre director and professor at the Paris Art Conservatoire, Antoine Vitez was born in 1930 in Paris; he was also a translator of Greek and Russian. Antoine Vitez studied theatre with Tania Balachova, a follower of Stanislavski, who taught the master's method. He admired her greatly and considered her the pride of the theatre school in France, as he believed Stanislavski had modernized theatre all over the world. In the volume *Chaillot à Chaillot*⁶, the French director makes a clear description of the two theatrical trends

⁴ Friedrich Schiller, *Scrieri estetice*, Univers, Bucharest, 1981

⁵ Maria Sârbu, "Anatoli Vasiliev - La Teatrul Bolşoi e o rutină sovietică", *Jurnalul.ro*, published 7.12.2010

⁶ *Ibidem*

that were present in 1950's Paris. On the one hand, there were the traditionalists, most notably Louis Jouvet, who thought the character was an empty form, a perfect form to be filled. Therefore, the director or the theatre tutor had to shape the actor inside the character; to fit a bed of Procust.

On the other hand, Stanislavski, through Balachova, taught young aspirants to the stage glory that 'you are all the characters'. To the question 'Who is my character now? What do they think?' The answer comes promptly: 'Think and live. And then inevitably the character will be you'.

As actor, Vitez was remarkable in *The Fugue* by M. Bulgakov (The Amandieres Theatre in Nanterre, 1970), in which he wrote the French version, or in *Schliemann*, episodes ignored by Bruno Bayen (The Chaillot Theatre, 1982). As a director, he will become famous; he tried to find the 'old form' of the show, that of mysteries and farces. This approach rejected the technique, modern equipment, and opted, for example, for a table and two chairs. It put emphasis on the text and the actor's truth. He undertook a new reading of the dramatic texts that had been played, achieving surprising effects over a certain articulation of the text that appears so in a new light. Theatre, he says, is "the end of a chain of research into narrative in the theatre, perhaps a farewell to a certain form of theatre, the narrative itself"⁷. It would be interesting, however, to observe Vitez the professor for so many generations and Vitez the trainer of many theater companies.

"School is the most beautiful theatre in the world"⁸ it is the place where, although poor - with little set, costumes, lights, creates the greatest acting performances. The theatre school, in Vitez's view, was far from any controversy that has always arisen in theatrical life; to be free and uninfluenced by anything from the

⁷ Antoine Vitez, *Chaillot à Chaillot*, Hachette, Paris, 1981

⁸ Michaela Tonitza-lordache, *Arta Teatrului*, Nemira, Bucharest, 2004, p. 486

outside. I happened to choose to talk about the school in Vitez's vision. For the French professor has always sought, and succeeded, to unite a group of people: students and professors in love with theatre. Vitez is an example of an almost perfect group trainer. He associated the school's image with a circle, a circle of attention (with a deep bow to Master Stanislavski), which is not fragmented by pedagogical programs, divisions in years of studies etc., but lasts as long as it is needed. A circle in which the students and the teacher stand shoulder to shoulder and follow the centre, where the ineffable lies.

The role of the teacher, considered Vitez, is not to tell the student how to act, but to ask students to decipher the signs that come from the centre. Therefore, the education of the actor student is, in Antoine Vitez's view, "the conclusion of self-discovery"⁹.

The French director and teacher suggested that every big theatre or cultural centre should have a school of its own. These schools would differ from each other, imposing their own identities, different philosophies, and thus, maintains Vitez, the diversity of experiences would guarantee the permanent renewal and freedom of art. What a beautiful proof of generosity and lack of exclusivity. Therefore, Vitez does not consider that only his 'circle' is perfect, but that the circle itself, whoever belongs to it, when it is 'filled', furnished with good creative intentions, becomes perfect. Vitez succeeded in establishing a theatre-based school which offered both students and teachers the chance to meet in a predetermined location within a certain time frame and in an aesthetic configuration prepared; the area of free talks was comfortably tempting.

Antoine Vitez had the great merit of knowing how to form true groups (whether students or actors), with whom he explored

⁹ *Ibidem*

interesting research themes. Perhaps that is why the experiment did not frighten him and as a director he managed, for example, to perform a version of *Mother Courage* by B. Brecht (1973) in which he used actors of different nationalities (an Algerian, a Turk, a New-Zealander who spoke Swedish, and a Senegalese). The idea of mixing nationalities may not have been a novelty (Ariane Mnouchkine had done it), but it was certainly proof that when a group, regardless of composition, if animated by an idea in which to believe, starts on a journey out of the desire to achieve a high artistic product, then he becomes a true collective character, whom (in my PhD thesis) I have named extended character¹⁰.

Students of Theatre Pedagogy MA at UNATC Bucharest are urged in the courses for Actors' Art Teachers to put a great emphasis on the organization of the workshop and be aware that beyond the structure of the classes, a future acting teacher must know how to be a good binder within the group, with understanding, attention, respect and consideration for each student. Only in this way will all members of the workshop understand how to behave towards one another and will get on with everybody, without focusing on superficial hierarchies, but only in notable professional achievements.

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¹⁰ Bogdana Darie, *Personajul extins*, EstFalia, Bucharest, 2011