

The actor's dramaturgy: identity, freedom, and discipline

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Abstract: The present article aims to analyze the relationship between freedom and discipline from the perspective of the actor's condition as a creative partner and the actor's dramaturgy. The delineations of the actor's identity and the actor's identity in the process of artistic creation are at the basis of this work, which attempts to define the actor's dramaturgy and the way in which an actor becomes a dramaturg in the creative process. This article addresses the main challenges facing the modern actor and discusses the necessary mechanisms that help the actor to adapt to different new forms of theatre making and, above all, how an actor can work on what Eugenio Barba calls the actor's dramaturgy.

Keywords: actor's dramaturgy, identity, theatre, discipline, actor-dramatist, collectivity

Introduction

The actor's dramaturgy and his process of embodying, reinterpreting, and performing a dramatic text are all possible through the actor's freedom to create, which is born from discipline and knowledge. Over the last few decades, the actor's identity has been altered by various innovative working methods, by the new tasks they have taken on, which have rendered the classic actor into a multivalent and expansive actor whose identity is no longer closely linked only to acting but also to his or her ability to write, to think through the prism of the other creative partners whose roles are no longer clearly defined between the classic trio of actor-director-dramaturg.

The creator actor: identity, freedom, and reflection

"If we want to define the profession of the actor in the same way as we define that of the woodworker, we will have to ask the former, first of all, for this quality. That of acting, of playing, of jumping, sometimes spontaneously, from one face to another or, as the specialist says, from one role to another."³¹The actor needs a playful spirit, freedom of expression and thought, a trained body, a sharp, attentive mind, but also certain conduct, and a set of rules. The actor must be a creator, an organized

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³¹ Andrei Vartic, *Paravanul dintre actor și rol*, Ed. Vicovia, Bacău, 2014, p. 122

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creator. Just as the playwright has his own dramaturgy, just as the director has his, the actor in turn has his own dramaturgy. Eugenio Barba defined the actor's dramaturgy as "that which acts on the spectator's nervous system"³². The actor must possess the kinaesthetic power to move something in the observer, and this can only be done through a well-defined and studied dramaturgy. We can define kinaesthesia as an inner sensation, which we feel in our own body, of our own movements, intentions, and tensions, and those of the bodies around us. Thus the actor must possess the kinaesthetic power to move something in the observer, and this can only be done through a well-defined and studied dramaturgy. Kinesthesia can be defined as an inner sensation, which we feel in our own body, of our own movements, intentions, and tensions, and those of the bodies around us. Well, we deduce that the observer feels, through this kinaesthetic sense, exactly what the actor feels on stage. When discussing the actor's dramaturgy, but especially the part and subpart, we can say that the actor builds his part together with the whole team, but the subpart can be personal, it can be somewhat independent of the director's, choreographer's, or playwright's intentions, and this, in short, means the actor's logic, a clear and concise way of thinking, working and creating.

A spectacle can be considered vivid, real, or organic when there is a superior quality to the actor's physical and vocal actions. Thus speaking of stage presence, organicity, sincerity, "seductive persuasion, body-in-life."³³ An actor needs scenic freedom, needs to have a sense of floating, and needs to feel every second that he knows what he has to do, an actor "needs the discipline to feel free."³⁴ An actor's discipline, apart from training, experience, maximum concentration, or keen attention to detail, comes from their ability to create, to compose actions, but more importantly, to be able to rehearse them. This requires great attention, concentration, and discipline: a dramaturgy of their own.

Eugenio Barba conceives a division of the actor's part into the part itself and the subpart, and these two together compose this dramaturgy of the actor. The part refers to the precision of the details of each action, to the general design of the form of a sequence of actions, but also to the dynamism and rhythm of the actions the actor performs. The part is, in other words, an objective manifestation of the actor's subjective world.

The sub-part, on the other hand, is inner support, a technical element belonging to the creative logic of each actor. The sub-part does not have to be made up of extremely valuable scenic material, or something unimaginable, it can be something insignificant. For example, it can be an image, a leaflet received on the street, a sound,

³² Eugenio Barba, *Casa în flăcări – despre regie și dramaturgie*, București, Ed. Nemira, 2013, p 63

³³ Idem, p. 65

³⁴ Declan Donnellan, *The actor and the target*, Ed. Nick Hern Book, Londra, 2018, p. 160

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a taste, it can be anything, even something childish, but this something must serve the actor in finding the nuances of his character, to give color and meaning to his actions. It is not necessary to show it on stage, it is something from the actor's intimate sphere, it is something hidden, it is an invisible engine of creation.

In this plurality of dramaturgy, Barba explains at length and in detail, especially about organic dramaturgy, which is in fact the actor's dramaturgy. This is a level in which the actor searches, practices, (throws) itself, builds, repeats a series of bodily and vocal actions in order to arrive at a well-defined score, thinks a lot, and is somehow a zone, an invisible space in which spatial dimensions are figured, sounds, thoughts, and looks are embodied, continuously imagined and created.

Another important aspect in the actor's work, in his own dramaturgy, is the sense of wholeness, the sense of rhythmic structure, and the jo-ha-kyu. Jo-ha-kyu can be defined as a small or large movement that has an "introduction, a development, a conclusion."³⁵ We find this concept everywhere, even in everyday life, for example, rainfall has a jo- beginning, the appearance of the first raindrops, a ha- unfolding of the rain, continuous falling, long duration, and the kyu- stopping of the rain, a short, sudden duration. If the actor comes to understand this rhythmic structure, applied in his own work, for example in a performance, he will understand the tempo and will be aware of the two important rhythms: the inner rhythm of the action and the rhythm of the observer, the spectator, and from here he can work on the aids, the actor knowing this total rhythm of the performance can juggle and adapt the rhythm of the action according to the rhythm of the observer and be in full harmony. From here you can get to big, real action, to a kinaesthetic that comes to be felt in the spectator's body. An entire performance has its own rhythmic structure, each part of the total structure can in turn be divided into smaller rhythmic structures, and so on until we arrive at a breakdown into details and mini-sequences of the total score we have to play. Understanding this rhythmic structure is extremely important from all points of view, you can even break down into rhythmic structures a relationship between two characters, the time you spend at the make-up booth, or a small breath, even it can be broken down and better understood by applying this concept, which urges you, in addition to paying great attention to rhythms and tempo, to always have an overview, a broad view and, paradoxically, an extremely attentive look at small details. "A deep understanding of the principles that demand the jo-ha-kyu sequence is invaluable. He who has grasped their essence will be able to play flawlessly."³⁶

The actor must create side by side with the other creators of the dramatic work, through his own dramaturgy, superimposed on the others, thus the art of drama is born. Pirandello said that "at a reading, a dramatic work will appear to be written by several authors, not by one, composed by characters, in the heat of the action, and not

³⁵ Zeami, *Șapte tratate secrete de teatru No*, trad. Irina Holca, București, Ed. Nemira, 2013, p. 15

³⁶ Idem, p. 130.

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by its author"³⁷. This is exactly the illusion mentioned when a man goes to a performance, he should not see which is the work of the actor and which is the work of the director or the playwright, all these should ideally be merged in the final artistic act, to see a whole, to see live on stage. The artistic act is an emergent one, as long as there are several creators together, we can talk about the emergence of characters. The creative contribution, of artistic creation, cannot be measured, how much, percentage-wise the actors of all the creation and how much the directors. Creation must be shared, it must boil like water, it must be under pressure, from where we do not split into atoms what is mine and what is yours, in the theatre, it will always be ours.

Besides technique and discipline, another extremely important aspect of the actor is sensitivity and vulnerability. "The actor must be able to reach a kind of raw candor, where his vulnerability is neither defended nor hidden."³⁸ Vulnerability breeds in the actor sincerity, pure attention, and freedom. These things are essential to be organic, to be sincere, to be able to believe in your own work, but above all in yourself, in yourself as an actor, actor-creator.

Discipline in actor's dramaturgy

The statement that "an actor needs the discipline to feel free"³⁹ seems a paradox. At first glance, discipline implies limits, boundaries, restrictions, and rules, which are in contrast to everything that would seem to mean freedom. Freedom on the other hand does not exist without rules and limits, but integrating and accepting rules and limits into the act of our being, until they become part of us, is the way to the feeling of freedom. The actor's artistic act cannot exist organically without discipline, or without freedom. Thus, from a psychological and neurobiological point of view, the feeling of freedom that comes from the integration of a discipline can be explained using the concepts of memory: explicit memory and implicit memory.

Explicit memory refers to the things we consciously learn, for which we make a constant and committed effort. Integrating this type of memory requires a consistent effort on the part of the brain, with a lot of energy being consumed and numerous structures being involved in the process. For example, the text of a role, and the quality and quantity of stage movements are considered learned when they reach explicit memory.⁴⁰

Implicit memory is everything we have at an unconscious level, everything we can do without being aware of the details of the act. The walk from home to school is at first a conscious act, which is part of explicit memory, but after a short time it goes

³⁷ Luigi Pirandello, *Teatru*, București, Ed. Literatură Universală, 1967, p. 587

³⁸ Robert Cohen, *Puterea interpretării scenice*, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Casa cărții de știință, 2007, p. 85

³⁹ Declan Donnellan, *The actor and the target*, Ed. Nick Hern Book, Londra, 2018, p. 160

⁴⁰ Squire, L. R., & Dede, A. J. O., *Conscious and unconscious memory systems*, Cold Spring Harbor Perspectives, 2015, în *Medicine*, 5(1)

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into implicit memory and we can walk to school without being aware of it. We walk the path while thinking about other things or being focused on other subjects and not on the path we are walking.

In this way, after a certain time in which we have practiced a behavior, an artistic act, it passes from explicit memory to implicit memory.⁴¹ Once in implicit memory, it is manifested organically, effortlessly, and naturally. For artists, for actors, bringing creativity into the world involves a methodology, a technique, a choreography, breathing, and a script, and all of these require effort to learn. Once they have been learned, they require perseverance in being applied, after which, subtly, they pass from explicit to implicit memory, and then the state of flow appears, charged with the feeling of freedom and joy characteristic of a perfect artistic act.⁴²

In this case, we understand the actor's discipline as an effort, an exercise in integrating the role, and his artistic work, into the explicit memory, which, after a time of intense exercise and perseverance, reaches the implicit memory, and then the actor enjoys the feeling of freedom, of flow.

Speech as a stage act: adaptation and meaning

Speaking as a scenic act, implies first of all the transmission of information, but how do we transmit information, how do we load it with meaning? Plato, in the *Phaidros*⁴³, makes some arguments against writing. He says that the difference between written thought and thought is like the difference between the natural landscape and a painting that reveals the landscape. In this sense, when one reads a written thought, one can consider that one has understood it, even if one has not, and the written thought cannot defend itself. Communicating thoughts through writing is, from Plato's perspective, a deficient act. In order for a thought to be communicated and understood as close as possible to the "thought itself", the thought thought, it must, in Plato's words, be "written on the soul". Writing on the soul is direct oral communication, where the thought is aided and accompanied not only by the information contained in the words, but also by that contained in the non-verbal language, the tone of voice and the emotion that accompanies it. Thus speech as a stage act is nothing more than a kind of writing on the souls of those in the audience.

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⁴¹ Dew, I. T. Z., & Cabeza, R., *The porous boundaries between explicit and implicit memory: behavioral and neural evidence*, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 2011, 1224(1), pp. 174–190

⁴² Csikszentmihályi, M., Abuhamdeh, S. & Nakamura, J., *Flow*, în Elliot, A., Ed. *Handbook of Competence and Motivation*, New York: *The Guilford Press*, 2005, pp. 598–698

⁴³ Platon, *Phaidros sau despre frumos*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2011

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and accompanied not only by the information contained in the words but also by that contained in the non-verbal language, the tone of voice, and the emotion that accompanies it. Thus speech as a stage act is nothing more than a kind of writing on the souls of those in the audience.

We need to take a look at the concept of exformation (the amount of information that although we receive, we discard - with its multiple consequences in the process of communication and the formation of perceptions), this concept also applies in drama: what is the actor saying? What does it convey to us? Do we understand his and the author's intentions? "If we keep in mind that the elimination or creation of information is what matters, then communication is of no importance: information is created or eliminated in communication for purely practical reasons. So this is not where we should be looking for what matters: meaning."⁴⁴ The actor must make the message understood and convey an idea, a concept, or a thought. The actor creates and interprets, the actor does not read or recite, the actor gives life, gives meaning to a character, to an idea. It is the actor's duty to fill the word with meaning.

In Pirandello, we find something extremely important, he explains more about what is meant by spoken action, about the importance of the word that generates action, and he brings to the fore the fact that one must "find that word that is the spoken action itself, the living word that moves, the immediate expression, organically linked to the action, the phrase that can only be one, specific to a given character in a given situation: words, expressions, phrases that cannot be coined, that are born of themselves, when the poet has merged with his plot by feeling it as it feels itself, by wanting it as it wants itself."⁴⁵ Pirandello believes that dramatic dialogue is a spoken action. Like him, Austin talks in his book⁴⁶ about dramatic dialogue being the initiator of action, and its source being a certain situation that leads to another that arises as a result of dramatic interaction and creates suspense and maintains dramatic tension, basic things for a well-written text, for a quality dramatic text.

Robert Cohen believes that "The importance of relational communication is so great that its study in acting becomes inevitable. However, as this is a recent discovery, we do not yet have an adequate term for this concept in theatre jargon. True, the term subtext, introduced by Stanislavski, refers to relational communication, but it covers a much wider sphere; [...] On the contrary, relational communication may indeed be conveyed by the line of a text or its subtext, but it may just as well disregard lines. Relational communication occurs in the absence of the text and it is even advisable not to be correlated with it - not even by the opposition."⁴⁷ Cohen introduced

⁴⁴ Nørretranders Tor, *Iluzia utilizatorului - Despre limitele conștiinței*, București, Ed. Publica, 2010, p. 281

⁴⁵ Luigi Pirandello, *Teatru*, București, Ed. Literatură Universală, 1967, p. 586

⁴⁶ Austin John Langshaw, *How to Do Things with Words*, Londra, Ed. Oxford University Press, 1962

⁴⁷ Robert Cohen, *Puterea interpretării scenice*, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Casa cărții de știință, 2007, p. 97

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the term Relacom⁴⁸, to define relationship communication in theatrical terms. He defines Relacom as the basis for the communication of content. It is always about the invocation of a relationship and not the enunciation of it, and this kind of communication always exists when people are in contact even without the adjacent communication of content. So Relacom is about "what is by far the most important and significant part of everyday interactions."⁴⁹

Therefore, speech as a scenic act is based on communication, communication of relationships, and communication of content. Everything that dramatic art conveys must be far from the word simply spoken, without the necessary, specific charge of our art, it is worthless, it is just a word, without life, without substance, it is pure literature, and literature is not theatre! The word must be an extension of the body, it must come to life from the actor's womb. The word must disturb, it must change something in man, not just metaphorically, but actually - kinaesthetically. A "theatre that wants to transform the transformers of society cannot end with rest, cannot restore balance."⁵⁰ Real, necessary, and vital communication for the actor does not produce applause and entertainment, it produces an imbalance, questions, and stillness, the silence of thought, that second of stillness before the applause, that moment when the observer reviews the life of the performance on fast-forward.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that today's actor, the essential pawn of the theatre, can and must work from all sides, both from a playwright's perspective and from a director's perspective, and must understand the mechanics of the work, always be attentive and understand the responsibilities of the profession. In order to fully understand the theatrical mechanism, the actor must possess an impressive amount of discipline and a sense of the rhythmic rhythm of the group of which he is a part. The actor's position has acquired freedom and color, a new identity, the actor has come to create side by side with the other creators of the dramatic work, and through his dramaturgy, superimposed on the others, they give birth to today's theatre.

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⁴⁸ From the english expression *Relationship Communication*

⁴⁹ Robert Cohen, *Puterea interpretării scenice*, p. 98

⁵⁰ Augusto Boal, *Teatrul oprimaților – și alte poetici politice*, trad. Georgiana Bărbulescu, București, Ed. Nemira, 2017, p. 164

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