

Truth and Temporality - Points of Intersection Between Actor and Character

Alexandra DIACONITA •

Abstract: Starting from a saying of Steinhardt, "the meaning of truth this is: truth exists, but it has a time and a space in which it is really truth"¹, the intention is to outline a perspective on how the concept of truth overlaps or, in any case, works with the idea of temporality on stage. Historical time reflects tensions, rhythms and meanings that offer insights into the pulse of society, but also directions of interpretation. Theatre reflects time and takes up, in one way or another, ways of both propagating and receiving stage discourse. The idea of truth on stage proposes to the actor a permanent questioning of the way he treats the acting instruments, because the actor repeats gestures, texts, states; and often, what yesterday could be considered truth, today seems suspicious. How does time construct and *de*-construct the feeling or concept of truth for the actor?

Keywords: truth, character, theatre, time

The instance of truth is located, almost involuntarily, in the proximity of those states that haunt the creation of acting, such as authenticity, truthfulness, verisimilitude, believable, etc. – elements that can nevertheless appear on the stage from the context created either from the atmosphere of the space, from the directorial or acting construction, from the relations between the components: lights, video, stage situation, etc. The stage context is to a certain extent a sensitive and subtle x-ray of a social-historical context, in the wake of which the stage discourses seem reverberations of the rhythm of society. What causes the sense of separation of these contexts to occur is the temporal aspect. If we are to consider a particular fragment of a historical period as the truth of that era, it means that time alters the nuance that the dimension of truth acquires.

The character construction is subject to the rules of time. The character reveals itself gradually, in a constant evolution, delimited by stage conjunctures. From the repetition of an action or situation arises the dilemma of precise, exact and faithful repetition of the same psycho-emotional charge. The human variable thus creates difficulties. Taking all this into account, there is a clash of unintentionally perceived truths: the profound particularity of the performer, as a personal truth, with the particularity of the character as the stage truth. We could then question the possibility

• PhD Student, Doctoral Studies of "George Enescu" National University of Arts of Iasi

¹ Nicolae Steinhardt, *The Diary of Happiness*, Rohia Publishing, 2005.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

of their convergence. George Banu observes that "from the need for truth, the subjectivity of the interpreter substitutes that of the character"². In another words, we might suppose that as far as off-stage reality is concerned, truth would insinuate itself there as an event out of control, whereas the scenic truth is constructed with the interpretation of the other as a reference point – one truth mirroring another. The necessary intervention of temporality cannot be excluded. On the stage, time expands or contracts, depending on the requirements of the scene, and the actor assumes an inner trajectory that is limited to the temporal axis proposed by the stage. What in reality might take him four days, in the stage he can only spare ten minutes and at the same time being connected to authentic sources – the confrontation with time announces the confrontation with truth. How does the actor detect the truth of the character and how does the actor become able to give it a form so that he can convey it to the audience? If the truth does not contain precise information, it is in any case contained in information. Therefore, truth does not have a specific meaning or form, but *provides* meaning and form.

For Stanislavski, for example, it was never so much the truth of his method as his method that could achieve the truth that particularly interested him. Faithfully orienting himself towards such an understanding of the theatrical process, the theorist ardently dislikes "accidental" acting "in general" acting, believing it to be far from the truth. At the basis of his research is formulated a technique to regulate the actor's inconsistency defined by the hazard of a sudden inspiration that he cannot control, and it is proposed to direct him towards learning conscious, controlled mechanisms, towards his own nature, which will help him to incorporate a "new nature"; that is why "the actor's profession, the basis of the actor's art is a monstrous thing because it is made of the same flesh, the same blood, the same muscles as those you use to make ordinary gestures, real gestures"³. For Stanislavski, this overlapping of the two hypostases – actor/character – is obvious. George Banu makes a very relevant observation on the meeting points between the two: "The unique actor (...) frees himself on the one hand from servitude to the prior material proposed by the role, and on the other hand does not expose himself completely, nor does he constitute himself (...) out of «material»: this actor is present, always present, but always partly secret. And the spectator likes this reserve, because he detects what the actor amputates from the role and it is attracted by these absences which do not prevent him from returning to the character later (...) The actor (...) evolves between the role and himself"⁴.

² George Banu, *Theatre Reforms in the Century of Renewal*, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011, p. 52.

³ Stanislavski, K. S., *The actor's work with himself*, vol. I, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, pp. 77-79.

⁴ Banu, George, *Beyond the role or the unsubmitive actor*, trans. Delia Voicu, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, pp. 16-17.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

At the same time, the stage context and its *unreality* are mentioned as a problem for the actor, a problem that cannot be ignored, however malleable the context may be, it can remain far from the actor, from *real life* and therefore fake.

Strongly influenced by the century's inclination towards systems, Stanislavski sought to configure a new theatrical language that would not place the actor's art on the level of arts that manifest themselves "random", but would restore to the very essence of its language a precise, technical, helpful semantics that would give meaning to theatrical creation, a coherent meaning.

Living comes into the possession of technology and becomes a "form of knowledge". Moreover, entering to a certain extent into the realms of psychoanalysis, Stanislavski is introduced to a terminology that laid the foundations of the so-called system. Fascinated by the unconscious, affective memory - the theme of modern consciousness at that time - he finds a possible key to freeing the actor from the grip of stereotyped representations. The functionality of this approach lies precisely in the need to push the actor beyond the limits of the conscious, into the area reserved for unconscious impulses.

The whole set of feelings, emotions, thoughts that has been stored in the psychic baggage of a human being can represent the truth of that being, baggage that cannot be accessed anyway. Stanislavski therefore proposed a simple "game" to gradually gain access to this stored psychic baggage, which he himself called the subconscious. Thus, the actor will give up the effort of directly confronting an intense struggle, that of insisting on convincing himself of states, thoughts, feelings, situations, which the subconscious only rejects, which can only lead, eventually, to the construction of a fragile and artificial image of a character, a state or a thought, and will propose a game to himself, starting from a simple "if" (if it were true, what would I do?). The game offers access to possibility, which has the capacity to tighten the psyche, so that subconscious stimulation produces solutions and the actor is in a position to produce actions. It is not necessarily enough in the scene just to have the solution appeared, it is at this point that creativity comes into play, ingenuity coming from a practice of solutions which, although limited to the personal psychic context, can be aided by imagination. At that point the actor no longer insists, but gives himself the opportunity to imagine how he would act, and then he acts. In this way, the possibility of context becomes more real than strategies to convince oneself of the same context. In other words, the subconscious only accepts the stage reality by filtering it through a possibility of it. But this by no means solves the whole acting mechanism, it only reconfigures the stage parameters for the actor's work - the "if" is only part of a long line of tools an actor can use in his or her journey to conquer truth on stage.

As we can see, the concept of truth is not provided by the stage, it is aesthetically nourished by organic feelings, which in turn come from both conscious and subconscious spheres of the artist. We may wonder where it originates, or more

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

precisely, where it builds its origin. One starting point could be the emotional memory, which essentially only creates the sensation of truth. Access to emotional memory makes the actor a "permeable medium of his own memory, which he invokes through the techniques of «I am» and «magical if»; the memory emerges from the biographical involvement of the performer in the proposed situations"⁵.

Thus, the actor's emotional reaction responds somewhat to the requirements of truth, because, through authenticity, it has the effect of a confession; the actor is aware of these reactions and categorizes them within himself as *small truths*. Authenticity, on the other hand, reflects the definition that theatrical actuality gives it, so that time neither eliminates truth nor represses it, but updates its direction, dimension and expression. As far as the actor is concerned, it seems that he often "has to live from his own being, not from the role, taking from the latter only the proposed circumstances"⁶. With this in mind, it is not necessarily a matter of bringing instinct to the fore, but of preparing the conscious ground for subconscious reflexes, so we can invoke what is called organicity in the scene. Liviu Rusu remarks: "Consciousness is nothing but the continuation of an unconscious inner process, which from latent becomes actual"⁷.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Banu, George, *Theatre Reforms in the Century of Renewal*, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011
Stanislavski, K. S., *The actor's work with himself*, vol. I, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest,
Rusu, Liviu, *Essay on artistic creation. Contribution to a dynamic aesthetics*, Dacia Publishing, 2005
Banu, George, *Beyond the role or the unsubmitive actor*, trans. Delia Voicu, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008
Barba, Eugenio, *Theatre. Loneliness, craft, revolt*, trans. Doina Condrea Derer, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010

⁵ Banu, George, *Theatre Reforms in the Century of Renewal*, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011, p. 55.

⁶ Stanislavski, K. S., *The actor's work with himself*, vol. I, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, pp. 105-108.

⁷ Rusu, Liviu, *Essay on artistic creation. Contribution to a dynamic aesthetics*, Dacia Publishing, 2005.