

To Be Or Not To Be!

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Abstract: The chosen theme is a contemporary one and should not represent a taboo subject. If we still invoke freedom of expression, in whatever form it may be, and free will, in life decisions and for life, it would be appropriate to show honesty and submit to attention the entire range of transformations of society, because only in dialogue will we could draw defining strokes for the future. The study does not want to highlight a form of discrimination, it does not aim to deny or accept certain aspects, it does not present positions for or against, nor does it promote personal opinions, but it launches for analysis and debate an aspect that marks the present time in theatrical pedagogy. The fundamental questions, to which we have not found an answer, are outlined as follows: Which side should be cultivated during the time allocated to the training of a transgender person who aspires to become an actor? The real one or the one in the making, if there is a definitive decision on this, and the student in question is not yet in a moment of searches? In the visible situation of joining the sex opposite to the one at birth, for which gender is the student being trained?

Keywords: the art, actor, pedagogy, creativity, transgender, theater

Introduction

The actor's art pedagogy is not included in a generally valid teaching method, because the art is realized through the complexity of the human being, which carries in its consistency unique particularities. Thus, the actor's work is defined by the uniqueness of his art. Originality is based on singular truths that bear the subjective imprint of each individual or creator. I used the term individual because it contains the individual, that something that belongs to a single entity. Even if art is subjective, we have enough means and principles to which we can orientate the pedagogical process and, implicitly, the creative one.

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The present approach does not capture aspects aimed at the compact group of students, from the point of view of personal existential concepts, but refers to those young people who have a different vision of life, a different orientation or sexual affiliation. I bring up the mentioned aspect, because we are going through a period of transformations, on all levels, not only in the artistic one. We are not saying that the phenomenon itself is a first, but only that, recently, it has become much more visible. At the same time, the subject subject to the research does not want to highlight a form of discrimination, does not aim to deny or accept certain aspects, does not present positions for or against and does not promote personal opinions. In the debate space, we present a real fact that is encountered, more and more often, in higher education institutions with a vocational profile, especially in those that approach the theatrical field.

The intention is not to make a difference between students, due to some personal visions about life, but the fundamental question is shaped around the following statement What is the way to work with a transgender? And from here derive others Which side must be cultivated? The real one or the one in the making, if there is a definitive decision on this, and the student in question is not yet in a moment of searches? In the visible situation of accession, can we not say identification, with the sex opposite to the one born, for which gender is the preparation of the respective student? We believe that rhetoric provokes specialists to a serious and constructive dialogue, and the answers can become points of support in approaching such a novel subject.

The art of the actor - general aspects

We start the research with a foray into the world of words we use, precisely to clarify ourselves at a conceptual level. We begin by stating the fact that there is no single method of teaching the actor's art. This does not mean that the training process of future students is random or chaotic, depending on what a teacher wants or what he knows how to do. In fact, analyzing things from another perspective, we dare to support the statement that there is no such thing as a teacher of the Art of the actor. First of all, because the discipline invoked does not exist, but is a collection of other subjects, technical or not, which all come together under one name. On the other hand, the title of teacher is a conventional one, due to the fact that a

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practical job cannot be theorized. Based on what has been reported, we admit the need for a trainer, a teacher, who speaks from the experience of experimentation. So, before getting involved in the training of future actors, personal experience is absolutely necessary. We exclude the presence of a theoretical discourse, an exhibition that is not accompanied by explanations and examples from the activity of own creation. Consequently, only after a period of experimentation on the stage, activity supported by a rich research of the specialized bibliography, you can have the authority and credibility necessary for a career of training future actors.

„The aspiration to leave one's own individuality and enter the form of a foreign individuality is the fundamental tendency that the actor's art develops.”¹ We know that the functioning of the human being is based on two components: the intellectual and the affective. So, when we propose a debate with the theme of the theatrical field, in this case, the training of future actors, certainly the whole range of means and principles used are aimed at knowing one's own individuality and at perfecting all the elements of expression and expressiveness. First of all, the selection of applicants is a decisive step, we believe. Candidates with skills, with those willingness to adapt, shape and transfigure should go to such a field. Art, in general, but especially theater, in addition to study, will and perseverance, needs grace, but talent is very difficult to define. Its origin is of a sacred nature, and the divine, in order to manifest itself, needs nothing. Its germ is hidden in the artist's being and appears as a revelation, emphasizing every time the mystery of life and its uniqueness.

Feminine or masculine or feminine and masculine?

We will further outline some ideas in an attempt to arrive at some answers regarding the transgender student.

According to the dramaturgy, things are simple. We meet male, female, in some places roles that can be played by both sexes and scores in which cross-dressing is suggested. Obviously, over the dramatic text, the directorial vision intervenes with its fundamental idea, which can modify the initial

¹Tudor Vianu, *Scieri despre teatru*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1977, p. 31.

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concept. But still, what predominates in most theater performances in Romania is divided into feminine and masculine, according to the natural data and outlined by the evidence of the appearance. We don't want to theorize the problem brought up for discussion, nor to outline some general answers. At the same time, I don't think that the topic proposed for the debate can be resolved in the statement of methods used in other countries. The arguments would be tradition, mentality, religion, the fact that we do not know such a past and we have no reference points. The new always becomes a suspicion, and in order to be accepted, man must see in it a form of utility, a necessity, a direction to identify with and to adopt as something natural. So, we need time for anything we undertake, especially when that something includes the most sensitive side hidden in the human being.

If we refer to transgender people, what should be the relationship of the teacher to the existing reality, regardless of whether we are talking about boys or girls?

We try to develop the idea and start from the fact that the work of the artist, no matter who he is, is divided into two. The unseen, which is realized in the intimate creative laboratory of each one, and the visible, when the inner image takes on corporeality and becomes a distinct otherness, both interacting and supplementing each other. In a word, as Peter Brook said, the work of the artist appears when the invisible becomes visible². In the creative process, with reference to the actor's work with himself, we find, in perfect harmony, imagination, will, feeling, qualities without which we cannot approach the artistic act. What interests us is the inner part, the affective part, because what we feel is much stronger than what we think, a fact that leads us to take Stanislavski's words seriously „it is very difficult to stimulate the desire to create, but it is very easy to kill her”³. The interpretation that does not excite, but only boils down to the observance of a stage design, correctly executed, indicates a half measure. True art makes you feel and is not just for the intellect. Referring to the affective area, we agree that both female and male persons have the same experiences, feelings, emotions and reactions according to their individual sensitivity. But, if we make a report to the psychological and the genetic field, we cannot place the equal sign between feminine and

2 Peter Brook, *Spațiul gol*, traducere de Marian Popescu, Editura Unitex, București, 1997

3 Constantin Stanislavski, *Munca actorului cu sine însuși*, traducere de Lucia Demetrius și Sonia Filip, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, București, 1951

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masculine. And there is nothing negative in this aspect, we do not want to highlight that someone would have a greater sensitivity at the expense of someone else, but, from our genesis, from the DNA received at birth, we have certain dominants. The ability to reach the purity of feeling does not depend on the physical aspect, because both internal and external factors or stimuli participate in the triggering of feelings. Whether they are native specificities or skills developed during life or training time, it is certain that man possesses emotion as long as he is alive. We do not deviate from the emotional area, because during the training of the future artist and during the work dedicated to the creation of the character, the student or performer goes through a real labor. The term is an appropriate one, if we think about the exhausting stages of work, about the fact that the interpreter is both identity and otherness.

Whoever you are, throughout your life you make an effort to create yourself, regardless of whether you are self-taught or attend a varied range of training courses. Creating one's own identity is a continuous process, it never ends, because in essence it is the foundation of evolution as a species. Man cannot do otherwise, he cannot renounce the desire to reach the best version of his own being. And the best, is equivalent to the work of Sisyphus who stubbornly climbs a hill, again and again and again. The term creation contains in itself the divinity, and from here we can extrapolate the debate towards the transcendence invoked by André Malraux, a form of the human being's search for survival.⁴ The human condition is not clearly defined and thus we turn our thoughts to two aspects: the meaning of life and moral issues. We do not want a philosophical or theological debate, but we must admit the complexity of the whole called HUMAN. Moreover, we want to remove the relativity of terms such as good or bad from the comments, especially since the theatrical field does not operate with exactitudes.

We consider that the artist, whether he is in the making or he is consecrated, becomes a pilgrim who, in his expansion, ventures, with boldness and tenacity, towards the discovery of other sensibilities, distinct from him or similar to his own identity. And everything is done by liberating the self, by detaching from the true self, with the aim of entering another universe. The game, because it is the fundamental feature of evolution, triggers the playful

4 André Malraux, *Condiția umană*, traducere de Ion Mihăileanu, Editura Litera, București, 2021

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element of the saltinbank that reconstructs or recomposes a world detached from a dramatic text or from the ideas of a director. The inner labyrinth of an artist is impossible to put into words. There, in silence, he prepares a life, which, later, he will restore through his body.

We reserve the right to discuss only the unseen side, not because the body or corporeality would not have the same importance, but out of the desire to demonstrate, if it were still needed, the major role of emotions in the life of a student or a theater artist. We argue through the process launched by Constantin Stanislavski, namely the art of living, which involves producing art consciously through the subconscious. How to gain the ability to manipulate our subconscious in a conscious way. Only if we analyze this approach, we realize the depth of an artist's work, the inner tensions at the moment of creation and the sensitive ground on which he is. The mastery of manipulating one's own interior demands to be elevated to the level of art and can only be achieved with an energy consumption that we do not encounter in other fields. The situation requires a delicate environment, from all points of view, a space where expression and emotion are not strangled by destructive factors. The triggering of the emotion cannot be unilateral, it does not have a specific route, but can be stimulated both internally and externally; we invoke Stanislavski's principle, and in opposition we mention Michael Chekhov's study on the psychological gesture (the gesture having the quality of influencing and triggering truthful living).

Theatrical pedagogy, where?

We return to the pedagogical aspect and I reiterate the question, a legitimate one, of a different kind: What should be the role of the theater teacher in the artistic development of the transgender student? How does he exercise the pedagogical act if the transgender student does not identify with a certain direction, because he is still in the search period? They are evidence of the contemporary world, which demand to be discussed and not ignored or overlooked, due to the fact that they may give rise to controversies or discussions with divergent opinions.

Trying to get to the bottom of things, I stop at another question. Does he know what he is preparing for? Will the state of the moment be definitive or not? I address the rhetoric to myself, precisely due to the fact that in the

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actual work process, both internal and external, we operate with tools that address the emotional part, and the major interest is the comfort zone for both participants. In the theater, the working atmosphere matters enormously. The environment can inhibit or provoke the artist to the flash of genius. If it has such an impact on a professional, we understand by itself how important it is for the person in the training period.

We are faced with a problem of choice, because the two, the teacher and the student, become co-participants in the pedagogical process. But, at the same time, we know that options are fundamental, they become defining and, over time, they draw salient characteristics. As a teacher, openness to students is mandatory, here we refer to all students, especially since we are in the theater space.

Regarding the topic under debate, I have identified three aspects.

The first - transgender people who are still in the search stage and who present uncertainties in terms of belonging! So, they are not clear with themselves, they are not comfortable with their way of being and they think they need a change. According to Freud, sexuality plays an important role in human life and thus, those in such a moment resort to a biological change, canceling other possibilities such as the mental or the spiritual. We do not develop a dialogue about reasons, because we do not make it the subject of the present research. The fundamental idea would revolve around clarifying with one's own self, so that one can subsequently make informed decisions. But if there is no consensus between mental and emotional, and we ask ourselves: Does he know what he is preparing for?

We try a natural approach, namely we start from the necessity of a conversation, but even here we encounter difficulties. How exactly do we develop dialogue? Direct questions, devoid of allusions or attitudes for or against, would represent naturalness, but aren't we forcing it? Is the person asked ready for the assumption, does he have the strength to embrace, with all conviction, his identity? And I am not referring to the relationship with the teacher, because he is neutral, but to the one with the group of colleagues, because the theater is a collective work and everyone is part of the whole, and certain reactions cannot always be positive, they can also develop attitudes of rejection and thus, according to crowd psychology, group pressure can influence an individual's behavior.

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In the theatrical field, regardless of whether we refer to the professional one or to the time allocated to training, the psychological elements are defining. Empathy, as a feature of emotional intelligence, occupies a large space regarding the entire work of embodying a character. Moreover, emotional intelligence allows the individual access to the deep knowledge of his own self, but also opens up the possibility to connect with the surrounding world, a universe from which he will extract all his theatrical material. According to John Mayer and Daniel Goleman⁵, emotional intelligence means being aware of what you feel, of what others feel, and knowing how to connect the two reactions; to have emotional awareness, meaning sensitivity and ability to maximize long-term happiness and survival. The dimensions of emotional intelligence have long been studied through certain adjacent concepts (social skills, interpersonal competence, psychological maturity and emotional awareness), and the result highlighted the existence of close links between emotional intelligence and forms of leadership, group and individual performance, interpersonal social changes and adaptation to the transformations of society. We cannot talk about the artist as a separate entity, because, first of all, he is part of society and contributes to its definition.

The second aspect – transgenders who have assumed their belonging in the inner forum, but have not yet exposed it publicly! Normally, it is up to the student whether he feels the need to expose himself or not. The teacher can only be a confidant and will not intervene in the student's decisions; we again invoke privacy, deep sensitivities and respect for private life. But if the evidence speaks for itself? How do we manage the pedagogical act? (Example: a boy who has an orientation towards the feminine side, but physically looks masculine, and the manner of behavior, including gestures, suggests belonging to the opposite sex; with the mention that he does not identify with the feminine side, so the behavior is partially assumed.)

The third aspect – the transgender who has the responsibility of the condition or the public assumption! Once the social impact is overcome, the person possesses a psychological preparation formed over time, which gives him the opportunity to manage, relaxed, certain unforeseen elements. In this case, the impact, whatever it may be, cannot constitute a major discomfort.

⁵ Daniel Goleman, *Inteligența emoțională*, ed. a III-a, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2008

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We can ignore the evidence, letting the student's choices dominate, but would that be right? Or could we become intransigent and establish rules from which we do not deviate? But both options produce minuses and pluses.

Conclusions

In conclusion, I insist on the need for the teacher to know the defining elements possessed by the person to be trained. Just as the director is a „guide in the dark”⁶ and the teacher, based on his creative ability, his artistic valences, his own culture and the sensitivity to resonate with another creative entity⁷, possesses a huge role in the artistic definition of each individuality that it models.

I reflected, I reflect and I don't know how I should exercise the pedagogical act. How do we operate with the means and principles of theatrical pedagogy when we train transgender people for the stage? What will be the direction that the future actor will follow? Theater education should not be confused with a certain landmark or with an orientation deliberately directed by the teacher in a certain direction, but we give it the meaning of training in order to discover one's own creative individuality and implicitly one's own art.

I end with a quote from a great director, „How the theater should be today, no one seems to know”⁸, Cătălina Buzoianu, a statement that promotes freedom, because according to Peter Brook's statements „the game is to play”⁹.

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6 Peter Brook. *op.cit*, p. 5.

7 Otilia Huzum, *Actorul și arta vorbirii scenice*, Editura Conphys, Râmnicu-Vâlcea, 2012, p. 81.

8 Cătălina Buzoianu, *Novele teatrale*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1987, p. 51.

9 Peter Brook, *idem*, p. 127.

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