

## In Search of Alterity

Otilia HUZUM\*

**Abstract:** Inside or outside or inside and outside are just milestones on the long road to discovering and embodying otherness. Whether we discuss the art of living, a concept elaborated by Konstantin Sergheevici Stanislavski, which proposes conscious creation through the manipulation of the subconscious, or we direct our research towards the discovery of the psychological gesture, a process developed by Michael Cehov, we come to the conclusion that the means and principles that have passed the test time and imposed themselves in the actor's work, directed towards the embodiment of alterity, are indisputable landmarks that contribute to the formation of the theater artist. The artist's product, the character, is nothing but a free creation that expresses individuality. Identity, otherness, body, emotion, word are means of artistic expression that each actor capitalizes on according to his creative potential. Nothing is denied, everything is allowed within the limits imposed by the stage situation and the character under study. The inner-outer balance opens the way to meeting the universal and the great creation.

**Key words:** actor, method, character, interpretation, means of expression, art, creation

From the inside to the outside or vice versa? The question was a preoccupation of theater researchers, but not from the desire to promote disputes of a professional nature, but from the need to discover new means of artistic expression regarding the actor's work directed towards the creation of a character. Over time, another rhetoric has developed regarding work styles. Old or current methods? Obviously, the latest ones are in accordance with the times we are going through and to which we must relate, but inevitably they are based on or intersect, in some places, with the benchmarks that have passed the test of time. The two advanced questions will be the starting point in the research that follows, and the results will materialize in the form of a debate, a synthesis that will bring together essential concepts both for the training process of the future actor and for the artist who evolves on the theater stage.

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\* Associate Professor PhD Habil., Music and Theatre Faculty, West University of Timișoara

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*We must refer to...* The term itself imposes an obligation, a necessity! And even if the theater is a space of infinity or unconditional freedom of expression, it is appropriate to understand the meaning, not with a dominating or authoritative role, but with reference to certain needs without which the creation itself would be shipwrecked between ambiguity and truth. Primary is the general specialized culture! I plead for the student and the cultured actor, not in the sense of quantifying a volume of completed titles like fiction texts, but in favor of the study aimed at knowledge, research, acquisition and experimentation of the means, old and current, in order to define him as a creative entity.

### **Inside - outside**

If we focus our comments on the grammar of the theater, we take a break by analyzing the ideas advanced by Konstantin Sergheevici Stanislavski, a prominent personality of theatrical pedagogy, who, through his study, demonstrated that the art of living is an option in order to meet the character. Moreover, he developed a concept derived from experience accumulated through experimentation, with the aim of exposing us to the importance of awareness of the value of the subconscious and its manipulation. At the same time, the vision foresees the construction of an intimate laboratory of creation, an inner space where alchemy is produced. Art created consciously through the subconscious, facilitates the emergence of pure emotion and leads to the contouring of an authentic alterity. The system, in fact, promotes a possible way of working starting from the deepest interiority of each creator where, as in a laboratory, entities, faces, characters, emotions are prepared, so that later they take on corporeality in front of the viewing public, during the theatrical performance. But, through the art of living, the director does not establish rules of the theater, but, on the contrary, proposes a set of means and principles through which one works in order to acquire those skills or inner mechanisms capable of triggering pure emotion, living that animates the character and activates the entire creative capacity of an artist. Let's not consider that the intimate creation laboratory is only intended for the creation of alterity at the mental level - a character as a product of the imagination, but also extends to the discovery of those inner working tools, of a psychological nature, with a direct impact on stimulating the triggering of emotion.

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The work of art is a human conception born from a multitude of psychological factors present in the being of the artist, to which are added social, biological, soul or instinctual phenomena. So, reasoning requires, of course, the knowledge of the functioning of one's own interior, first, after which one can move on to the research and creation of other characters, because otherness is born through one's own identity.

Art as a product of the conscious manipulation of the subconscious, proposes Konstantin Stanislavski! In this sense, we focus our analysis on the two fundamental components that are the basis of the functioning of the human being: the intellectual and the affective, which contain both the memory of the event and that of the feeling. From a psychological point of view, the terms conscious and subconscious find their counterpart in explanations such as: concrete action with a goal and oriented towards inner and outer knowledge and, respectively, a sector of psychic phenomena whose area of action is the space that does not include consciousness. The ability to consciously manipulate the subconscious is the ability to activate, in a controlled way, all the information and experiences stored in personal memory, with the aim of directing them to all the inner processes responsible for the emergence of authentic emotion. True living has a decisive role in stimulating the creative forces and emphasizes the will, an essential and defining factor in all the activities undertaken by the human being. In the view of the philosopher Schopenhauer, the will has no limits. It is the driving force that propels the artist towards the encounter with himself, and then with the great creation. But in order to possess a vast amount of information and states, the actor is required to be permanently involved in social life - a space of knowledge and experimentation. To create inspired requires both a rich inner life and a factual one, sources that offer a variety of real and correct answers to the same proposed theme.

The artist, Stanislavski's vision, must create inspired! Psychothenics proposes the attachment of the subconscious through conscious methods, „The subconscious creation of nature through the conscious psychotechnics of the artist (...) and we move towards what is accessible to us, towards the conscious study of creation and towards the conscious methods of psychotechnics”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Konstantin Sergheevici Stanislavski *Munca actorului cu sine însuși*, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, traducere Lucia Demetrius și Sonia Filip, București, 1951, p. 30

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Thus, we reach the situation to create involuntarily through the voluntary, to access the potential of the subconscious and watch it act, but without constraining it. The impact causes a rebirth of the performer, because the whole being is engulfed in an unusual and very difficult to manage energy. Somehow, the stage play is dominated by the all-powerful human nature, one that coagulates a multitude of information directed towards the embodiment of an alterity that moves and functions in a certain imposed stage situation. The mastery of the performing artist lies in his ability to balance his inner life with the outer one, something that can only be achieved through the awareness and submission, to a certain extent, of those facts and events stored at the level of the subconscious. Advanced practice leads us to *living the role*, nothing else than the emergence of another self that acts, thinks, feels and relates justly and logically in certain given situations. In fact, it takes place „the creation of the human spiritual life of the role and the transmission of this life on stage in artistic form.”<sup>2</sup> Psychic life is favored by the inner process of living, one unique to each performance of the theater performance. So, the much-used formula *here and now* is proven to be a reality that dominates the actor's creation in the theater.

Even if the Russian theater man prioritizes, in his study, the work of the actor with the unseen self, it does not mean that he has lost sight of the importance of physicality, corporeality or speech. On the contrary, he demonstrated that the gesture, the action and the utterance of the word are subject to emotion, and thus the drawing of the role is not dominated by chaotic movements and superfluous gestures. The external expression of the inner feelings derives from the simplicity of the movements that potentiate and amplify the emotion. Being unique, it attracts detachment from repetitive gestures and implicitly from one's own self, favoring refuge in the inner world of the character, a universe prepared in the intimate laboratory of creation. Thus, the actor has the possibility to find 3 or 4 gestures specific to the character under study, real points of support that will particularize the otherness and will distance him from mannerism, from showing himself. „Art

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<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p.31

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begins where the peak is found”<sup>3</sup>, referring to that unique feature capable of creating major differences. From the present context, sonority cannot be missing, with reference, in our case, to the word. Following the inner meaning of the sounds that go into the formation of the word produces an utterance devoid of pathos or exaggeration. The measure of the utterance comes from experiencing the meaning, the emotional charge that the meaning brings. The consistency or energy of the word, without omitting the intonation, the characteristics or the criteria of the voice, are elements without which the ears of the spectators will not be able to feel the music of the spoken text. Feeling the word becomes an art that is reached in years of study, of training the technique raised to the level of virtuosity. The word brings with it continuous communication both internally and externally. The dialogue with yourself creates a connection between mental and living, between consciousness and emotion, and permanent visual contact with the scene partner favors a depth from which the inner world of the other person shines through. There are actors who look at their partners, but do not see them. They do not perceive lines or intonations and then they become craftsmen. The crafty acting comes with the superficial play born of inhibition, one empty or empty of emotion. Craftsmen are also artists who have a very well prepared external plastic representation apparatus, with the help of which they can express themselves quite easily. In their actions, they cannot be creators, but only show their own individuality. There is no feeling and experience, but only gestures, attitudes, manners, movements and voice, a demonstrative and formal game. In the art of living proposed by Stanislavski, sincerity is required during the action, truth and small, precise and clear themes. The feeling of truth, which exists in us and in our partners, is born by itself, but only after a long preparation, in which the magic *if* and *the proposed situations* become the starting points for the scenic adventure.

### **Outside – inside**

We leave the interior-exterior trajectory and focus our attention on a completely opposite area, commenting on the concepts launched by Michael Cehov, who, in his research on character creation, highlighted the importance

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<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 569

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and role of gesture, movement, improvisation and action. So, this time, we will detail aspects that certify the appearance of emotion, but not through internal stimulation, but starting from an external factor.

Michael Cehov, a product of the Moscow theater school, former student of Sulerjiṭki and Vahtangov, emigrated to America due to some unfavorable personal and political situations, receives the precise assignment from his teacher, Konstantin Stanislavski, to experiment and design a study through which proves that authentic living and the creation of the character can have its genesis in something that comes from the outside. After numerous attempts in the European space, among which we mention the *Experimental Cehov Studio* in England, where he emphasized the training of the imagination, he crosses the ocean and dedicates himself to the importance of the psychological gesture and its necessity in dramatic art. Testimony - the work *Towards actors. About the technique of dramatic art*. It is easy to understand the task outlined by Stanislavski, because his vision proved that the inner process of living is in close agreement with psychic life. Even if his research did not prioritize physicality, it does not mean that he rejected the existence of working methods. We have to accept that he dedicated his whole life to the understanding of working with himself, challenging future generations to discover other new methods or means of expression.

The method developed by Michael Cehov proposes the technique of dramatic art - a compendium of vague rules, of an obvious generality, but which encourages the discovery of the path to one's own self, a difficult, capricious self, difficult to control physically and emotionally, but with infinite possibilities of expression in the process of artistic creation. The origins of the study come from the experiences he had at the Moscow Art Theater, time spent with personalities such as: Stanislavski, Danchenko, Vakhtangov or Sulerjiṭki, who gave him the opportunity to develop his acting methods. In essence, Chekhov believes that the soul concludes with the body in the same epidermis and only together will they be able to generate aspects of authentic life charged with emotion.

The road to finality is one of training, study, experimentation, discovery or rediscovery of the geography of the human body, but also of the actor's psyche. The development of the creative imagination, the ability to improvise, the discovery of the psychological gesture are just some of the points of support that favor the creation of the character, which lead to the

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understanding of the laws of composition in the theater with the aim of access to embodiment. The road is arduous, dotted with exercises, more or less comfortable at the beginning, but without which the artistic course cannot be developed.

Let's not consider that only the old school of theater proposes the exit of the young artist from the comfort zone, with reference to the physical, mental or emotional one. The present time promotes Yoshi Oida, actor of Asian origin, disciple of master Okura-San, who combines the methods of traditional Japanese theater with European ones resulting in the activation of the state of freedom. Moreover, he believes that any difficulty, through study, can become invisible. Like Michael Cehov and Jerzy Grotovski, Oida emphasized physical training aimed at rediscovering valences and expressive capacities. The form and discipline of the artist, a universally valid rule, is directed from the outside to the inside with the aim of awakening the latent. Thus, awareness of the influence that movement can have on emotion is desired. Providential was the meeting with Peter Brook who completed his style leading him to the discovery of stage truth. We stay in the proposed perimeter and find Peter Brook next to Jerzy Grotovski, a prominent figure who shared the Stanislavskian concept, Meyerhold's biomechanical training, Vahtangov's syntheses and the techniques of the oriental theater. From their collaboration it emerged that the actor is a creator capable of acting involved. Art must be dominated by the living, a mentality developed and argued by Eugenio Barba, a living that unites the actor with the spectator, establishing a relationship of reciprocity. The human being is perceived as a microcosm that tends towards a simple expression, towards a poor theatre. Not in the sense of being impoverished, with a material connotation, but eliminating all those scenic elements that could limit creativity or distort the interpretive richness. The contemporary theater, called the *Rich Theatre*, in weaknesses of course, possesses external artifices that lose their importance in front of the transformation of the actor, because the artist has the ability to pass from one character to another or from one state to another, in the form of a poor manner, only using his own body. Thus, the truth and the inner impulse defeat the trickery and the superficial. If Yoshi Oida returns to the neutral body, Grotovski proposes the *via negativa*, also with the meaning of returning to introspection, because nobody invented anything. Creation or the way to produce belongs to human nature, both physical and soul. Creativity is not the

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product of rules. No system guarantees anything. The only technique is to create one yourself, consisting of a necessary baggage for the personal incursion through the winding dramaturgy. Every researcher starts from exercises that produce peace and silence, an opportunity for knowledge, understanding and self-transcendence. Let us not imagine that the subsequent creative process develops under the sign of harmony. The work of an artist is absolutely necessary, because like Sisyphus the zero point means an experience, a way of doing things and a meeting, as the Romanian pedagogue Ion Cojar claimed. In his conception, the theater is an open space in order to meet the universal, with great knowledge, with creation. The creative spirit is one's own thinking and imagination, it is a freedom assumed and oriented towards the generation of original ideas, from n variants of response to a single stage situation. Creative imagination is nothing but a product of the mind, of construction and reconstruction through play, a playful element whose basic word is defined by action. The term contains, in its meaning, both the entire philosophy of the stanislavskian system and that of the method developed by Lee Strasberg. Whether we are talking about inner or outer action, imagination connects theory and practice; the concepts analyzed at the theoretical level justify their veracity through factual work. Inside - the Russian school of Stanislavski seen as a form of psychoanalysis, outside - the American school with an emphasis on the external reality of the being, on extroversion, are just ways that challenge us to discover again and again the art that is hidden within us.

### **Michael Cekhov and the psychological gesture**

Michael Cehov's vision oriented towards the importance of discovering the psychological gesture of the character, considered a defining element of the entire interpretation, is in antithesis, to some extent, with the stanislavskian system, but complements it by offering the interpreter alternatives. In fact, in the interpretation of a character, the actor does not operate with a single method or applies only a single way of doing things, he combines everything he knows and feels with the ultimate goal of embodiment.

Creation starts from the feeling of freedom, from liberation from the domination of prejudices and from openness to the artistic act. Coercion, no



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matter in what form or way it comes, will inhibit the desire for expression, producing an imbalance in the harmony between body and psyche, so that the visibility of the inner universe will be altered.

The actor does not bring real life to the stage as it is, but copies its external appearance! Starting from this statement, we admit that a false truth must be said credibly. In this sense, we move our analysis into the sphere of the psyche, establishing that its richness comes from the expansion of the personal circle of interests, and the body does nothing but absorb the psychic properties, it passes from the phase of receiver to that of the shaper of images, feelings and impulses the most sensitive volunteers. There are a multitude of exercises that support the actor in self-discovery or in perfecting his own way of working. It would be interesting, for example, to penetrate into the thinking of some characters, without imposing our point of view on them, after which we try to understand their own way of life and through the circumstances in which they participate. We can, within this study, become empathetic, live their lives by asking ourselves why they feel and act the way they do. The result - a certain frailty and lightness in penetrating the identity of otherness. Confidence in one's own strength, as a result of some studies, eliminates the accidental element and dominates the psyche and the physical, subjects it to the will in order to shape the new character. Imagination has a major role, and improvisation is the psychological result of the previous moment. Important will always be *the inner voice* and the psychological sequence of inner events.

However, how do we arrive at the psychological gesture of a character?

The fundamental principle that dominates the vision is freedom of expression, considered to be in antagonistic relationship with the analytical and cold mind. Reasoning hinders the ability to create, shackles freedom of expression and does not allow the artist to penetrate the essence of the character. Exaggerated thinking can create barriers or emotional blockages, proposing a character represented only on an intellectual level, one who walks, correctly and logically executes movements, takes attitudes, but devoid of feeling, devoid of feeling and emotion. Of course, we should not diminish the role of the intellect. He can correct, evolve, verify and accumulate information, offer suggestions, after which the creative intuition processes and gives life.

Another point of support is the will. Starting from an external movement done intentionally, through the will the inner tumult is activated

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and thus those gestures can reveal all the characteristics of a character. The discovered features are nothing but psychological gestures that aim to influence, shape and harmonize the entire inner life of the actor with his artistic talents and interests. The mastery of the performer consists in choosing a single gesture, which is so strong that it includes in its consistency the complexity of an alterity. It can be discovered with the help of intuition, creative imagination and artistic vision, and once found it demands to be assumed in order to trigger some inner experiences. Its incorporation will lead to the discovery of the main tendency of the character under study, and the other aspects, positive and negative, define the entity much more conclusively. Thus, without realizing it, we become the character himself.

We often hear that theater is the essentialization of life. But on stage, the actor does not assume the natural behavior of every civil day. The movement, in the theater, must be archetypal, original, because the daily, civil one is limited and particularized. Simplicity, naturalness, proposed subjects and spontaneity are taken from reality, aspects to which are joined the vocal technique and body training and that of the intimate creative laboratory. We find many similarities between the concepts of Michael Cechov and those of Konstantin Stanislavski, „The true art of living has nothing to do with the exhausting power of muscles”<sup>4</sup>, would be one. However, we admit that a harmonious body, well maintained with the help of physical exercises, a body on which a multitude of movements have been studied, in order to become aware of the muscle groups that help in performing a gesture, will be able to easily respond to the requirements coming from within.

The actor, during the interpretation, is divided, he is both identity and alterity, so the psychic force of the character's psychological gesture should not be confused with the artist's own. The interpreter's mission is to look at the role detachedly, not to impose rhythms, personal thinking or own movements. Tempo-rhythm should not overlap, because the actor and the character are distinct entities, with temperament, culture, value criteria and social backgrounds that often do not intersect. The notion of tempo-rhythm covers two aspects: external and internal. The first comes as a rapid change in

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Cechov, *Despre tehnica artei dramatice*, curs tradus la UNATC de L. Cernașov și Geta Angheluță, București, 1980, p. 80;

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thoughts, feelings and impulses, and the second is related to the interior and manifests itself in action or speech, by creating different rhythms of verbalizing the text. Applying this procedure, we notice that changing the tempo changes the existing data and thus inspires or imposes new ways of interpretation. So, through movement corresponding psychic reactions are triggered, and each change of the psychological gesture modifies all the psychic reactions. Moreover, we become aware of the fact that the psychological gesture is present behind every word, attitude and movement of the body or part of the body and has the mission of awakening a certain mental state and a tempo-rhythm that will achieve harmony between the body, psyche and speech. Like any procedure, the psychological gesture must be trained by creating different tempos until the body and speech become a direct continuation of the psyche. Approaching Michael Cechov's concept, it must be borne in mind that the psychological gesture activates the will, triggers the emotion and offers a condensed vision of the character, one that must be archetypal, strong, simple and executed in a correct theme, imposed by the given situation.

### Conclusions

The present time is marked by the search for new forms of artistic expression, some that are in line with the evolution of the current human being. But most of the time, at the base of all discoveries is what came before, because according to Hartman, „No one starts with his own thinking.”<sup>5</sup> Everyone finds a certain state of knowledge and problem-solving present in his time, a state in which he integrates and from which he starts his research".

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<sup>5</sup> Nicolai Hartmann, *Estetica*, traducerea Constantin Floru, studiu introductiv Alexandru Boboc, Editura Univers, București, 1974, pag. IX

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