

## The Actor's Craft at the Intersection of Emotion and Rigour

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**Abstract:** The art of acting involves the dramatic interpretation of different characters, integrating the emotional, vocal and physical skills developed from rigorous training methods. The emotion, essential in the actor's craft, is based on techniques that support the exploration and honest transmission of affective feelings, adding a nuance of originality to the interpretation. The techniques developed by Stanislavski and Meisner are based on a rigorous training of the actor, thus allowing him to access various psychological experiences and communicate them in an authentic way. The disciplined conduct of an actor is the effect of the study of strict techniques in the process of interpretation, which gives precision and coherence to the artistic act. Through rigor, the actor can achieve high standards of professionalism through the characters performed. Expressing feelings in an original manner requires the use of demanding methods that give consistency to interpretation, a process that takes place only when the rigour and emotion of the actor are interconnected, the result being a plausible and original artistic act.

**Keywords:** emotion, rigour, technique, creativity, improvisation.

*„Acting is an art.(..) Ultimately it's a question of talent.”<sup>1</sup>*

The main feature in the actor's craft is his extraordinary ability to convey deep, authentic and vital emotions in creating a connection between him and the audience.

In acting, the performer's interpretative, physical, vocal and emotional skills are fundamental, being the engine of communicating the character's story is emotion.

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<sup>1</sup> Sanford Meisner, Dennis Longwell, Sanford Meisner on Acting, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, pg. 25

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While emotion is the connection of the actor's inner feelings with those of the interpreted character, rigour reflects discipline in the process of technique, work and systematic approaches.

The purpose of this study is to assay the role of emotion in the the actor's art, the dependence or interdependence of the points of congruence between emotion and rigour, exploring specific methods through which actors develop their expression skills and impact on the audience.

## **Emotion in the actor's craft**

We can define emotion as a complex psychophysiological state, involving behavioural, expression, cognitive changes, in order to convey an authentic, subjective experience and trigger the empathic reaction of the audience. In an artistic act, the emotion can be simulated or induced, it can be influenced by personal experiences, dramatic context, various techniques of interpretation, in order to perform a convincing character.

Stanislavski said: *„Any great actor needs to feel and realise what he represents. I even think that he is not only obliged to live the emotion of the role once or twice, as long as he studies it, but he must try this emotion not a few times, until he studies his role, but, to a greater or lesser extent, at every interpretation of it, and at the first - and at the thousandth time...“*<sup>2</sup>

Emotions, as described in the literature, are divided into two categories, called basic emotions where happiness, sadness, surprise, anger, fear, disgust can be found, and complex emotions such as guilt, pride.

Following the release of serotonin and dopamine, one gets to experience happiness, which is associated with the state of well-being. Energetic gestures, facial expressions such as smiles, an open body posture, convey to the viewer that the character is happy.

A complex emotion is sadness, a process in which the level of serotonin decreases and is closely related to sensations such as disappointment, loss of a loved one. A melancholic face, associated with a closed body posture, with slow movements, a closed vocal stamp, low volume project to the audience the image of a sad character.

The surprise, an emotion triggered by a novel event, occurs due to increased heart rate and brain activity. In the scene it can be recognized in the

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<sup>2</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, Bucharest, Translation by Raluca Rădulescu, Nemira Publishing House, 2021, pg. 19

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form of facial expressions such as wide-open eyes, arched eyebrows, slightly immobile posture. Surprise can be practiced mainly through improvisation exercises.

Anger reflects injustice, frustration, and occurs as a result of a combination of cortisol and noradrenaline. In the scene it is illustrated by means of a frowned expression, high volume of voice, sudden, aggressive movements, clenched fists.

Fear, a primary emotion, triggered by the activation of the sympathetic nervous system, is suggested in scene by means of a stunned facial expression, a short, fast breathing accompanied by a defensive posture.

Disgust appears as a reaction of an offensive gesture, arising from the activation of the brain island. In the scene, it is recognized by wrinkled nose, tight lips, suggesting the idea of physical withdrawal.

In the context of the actor's art, the emotion reflects the inner feelings of the character, gives veracity to the actor's interpretation, being the component that ensures the uniqueness of each interpretation.

### **The actor and the character**

Authentic emotion is created by the actor, transmitted to the character through techniques and means characteristic only to the art of the actor.

An important role in the development of a complex emotional structure is attributed to improvisation exercises through which actors can experience different emotions in real way, thus developing their ability to react authentically on stage.

Analyzing his experiences through a process of introspection, the actor gains a better understanding of his emotions, this aspect facilitating the transposition of emotions into the interpreted characters.

Specialized studies have shown that the emotions transmitted by actors can be taken over by the audience creating a strong connection with them, coordinated by the intensity and authenticity of the emotions. However, emotions are the result of a mixture of discipline, technique, rigour and talent.

A broad understanding of the character's psychology and emotions, allows the actor to have greater control over his own emotions, dosing them according to the requirements of the stage situation and the evolution of the character.

With the understanding and possibility of assuming emotions, the artistic act can take a personal appearance, turning into a memorable

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experience in which viewers can identify themselves both from an intellectual perspective, as well as from an emotional perspective with the characters and story represented on stage.

Certain methods and exercises contribute to the emotional development of improvisation exercises, which allow actors to experience different situations, different emotions, at the time of the events, thus developing their abilities to react authentically in the stage situations. These specific self-knowledge exercises allow the actor to access an area of scenic truth that the viewer will recognize and accept.

Through self-reflection, the actor can analyze his emotions, thoughts and behaviour, this being an intimate process centered on a broad research of the inner world, the result of which is the emotional development<sup>3</sup>, the acquisition of control over emotions, a better understanding of the artistic self and human relationships.

In this process, the actor detaches himself from everyday events, focusing on his own experiences, discovering his true principles, values and the repercussions of his actions.

The actor who is able to control, manage and recognize his emotions, can change his behaviour in relation to external stimuli. In this case, an actor with a well-developed inner mobility will be able to create authentic characters, juggling with the intensity of emotions.

Another component in the management of emotions is closely related to the body awareness of the performer. The way in which the actor is aware of his body on stage is reflected in his acting style. The way he reacts to external stimuli, as well as posture, physical sensations, have an important role in the emotional development of the actor, increasing the quality of human relationships.

Certain emotions can be attributed to physical sensations, an actor aware of his body will know how to manage and control emotions, being ready to face any emotional challenge.

Through various practices such as meditation, yoga, or breathing exercises, the actor can focus on his body, developing the ability to transmit emotions through various physical sensations. Thus, the body becomes a malleable instrument of stage expression, with countless possibilities to respond to internal and external stimuli.

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<sup>3</sup> This is an important fact for an authentic and convincing interpretation.

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Konstantin Stanislavski was among those who supported the inclusion of emotion in the actor's creative process, encouraging him to associate the feelings of the character with his own experiences. By researching Stanislavski's technique, the actor can gain a better skill in using emotions and creating an authentic connection with the played character.

Control over emotion in interpretation is a result of discipline and rigour in the actor's training. The well-managed emotion is favourable to the stage interpretation, avoiding some situations where it becomes overwhelming, affecting the scenic truth, ultimately giving rise to exaggerated inverting experiences.

The actor can use his own techniques in the management of stage events, but they are acquired after rigorous training and long studies.

In an interview with Monica Andronescu, Andrei Șerban stated the following:

*„... Some of us feel the need of total rigour. To be free and at the same time to have rigour – these things are beating head-to-head. Rigour involves discipline, discipline implies something heavy, something limited.”*<sup>4</sup>

However, following an intense, continuous training style, the actor can discover his freedom in interpretation even in a rigorous setting with well-established limits.

Andrei Șerban, through his working method, managed to implement a rigorous technique of interpretation within the teams he collaborated with. His creative style emphasizes the development of emotional expressiveness, in parallel with body and spiritual development. In this case, the body becomes the main instrument for the transmission of emotions, therefore, the development of harmony between the body and the soul is mandatory in order to develop strong, convincing archetypes with which the audience can empathize. The connection between the body and emotion occurs only when the actor is confident enough and ready to explore deep emotions, and a correct vocal technique is also required, which used in this rigorous setting, contributes to the development of harmony between the voice-body-soul.

Konstantin Stanislavski laid the foundation for one of the most influential techniques of the actor's art, being applied in many theatre schools around the world. By his method, he promotes the idea that the actor must transpose himself into the character starting from his inner truth.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ziarulmetropolis.ro/andrei-serban-daca-nu-afirma-ceva-arta-care-provoaca-este-mediocra-sau-submediocra/>

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The training proposed by Stanislavski requires special attention to detail, resort to discipline, rigour, developing emotional authenticity and the ability to concentrate.

*„ You have to get excited unwillingly and you will start to feel yourself in the situation of the character in the play. You will begin to experience your feelings, but analogous to his. Try the whole role in this way and you will notice that every moment of your stage life will arouse appropriate experiences. An uninterrupted series of such moments creates the full line of living the role, „the life of the human spirit ”. ”<sup>5</sup>*

The processes by which the actor discovers ways to connect to the character's emotions require a thorough study of the character's motivation, his inner experiences, a long process of introspection in order to discover the elements he has in common with the character so that he can then transpose them strategically.

Converting the actor to imaginary situations by developing the imaginary spectrum of the actor can bring the magic element to the fore in a complex process of work that can facilitate a good preparation for each performed role. The development of attention allows the actor's style to be more nuanced, bringing new information on the character interpreted through a broad process of observing common human emotions and behaviours.

Through the rigorous work plan, Stanislavski develops discipline in the creative process by integrating specific exercises for the development of technique and emotional component in rehearsals. Having a special rigour, the actor responds to the impulses received from the partners in the scene in a valid, honest manner, the reactions being immediate, enriching the quality of the performance.

*„But, no matter how perfect the acting patterns may be, they cannot excite the audience by themselves. For this, some additional incentives are needed; these are special procedures, which we call acting emotion. ”<sup>6</sup>*

The rigour that Stanislavsky's model requires is reflected in the study of the character, the making of a detailed biography of him, the creation of a

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<sup>5</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, Bucharest, Translation by Raluca Rădulescu, Nemira Publishing House, 2021, pg. 19

<sup>6</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, Bucharest, Translation by Raluca Rădulescu, Nemira Publishing House, 2021, pg. 29

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specific action plan, called units of action<sup>7</sup> that help the actor to maintain concentration and discipline during the performance. Also, the self-assessment process determines the increase of discipline and rigour, the quality of the interpretation being influenced in a positive way.

Emotion is expressed authentically in the context of performance rigour. This also helps to shape a coherent, anxiety-free act. However, the emotion can be overwhelming if discipline and rigour are not appropriated to the creative process. An unbridled emotion can turn interpretation in an inappropriate way. Intense emotions can be easily controlled and handled based on rigorous support.

Discovering and achieving a balance between emotion and rigour allows the performer a much stronger connection with the character and his audience.

Sanford Meisner develops his own method of work in which attention is directed to the actor's spontaneity and emotional originality, integrating these concepts as fundamental tools in the transmission of plausible emotions within a rigorous technique.

As for Meisner's conception of the actor's play, through his method he demonstrated that emotion and rigour are complementary elements in the actor's art of theatre and film, far from being considered opposing concepts.

Through a constant and rigorous training, from a technical and emotional point of view, the actors come to forge deeply human interpretations, Meisner being convinced that the artistic act gains verisimilitude, authenticity and has a profound impact on the audience as long as the creator is in a deep connection with his own inner experiences.

Starting from the concrete events, the fundamental of this method is the complete commitment of the actor in concrete actions through the reality of doing, the emotion being expressed in a plausible context, as a result of the interaction of the actors in the scene.

*„You know, it's all right to be wrong, but it's not all right not to try.”<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> In Stanislavski's vision, the unity of action refers to a specific action that the character carries out at a certain moment.

<sup>8</sup> Sanford Meisner, Dennis Longwell, Sanford Meisner on Acting, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, pg. 19

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The moment the actor's attention is directed into what he does in the process of doing something he is „ *attached to something outside of yourself* ”<sup>9</sup>.

The originality of an actor does not result from the way he plays an emotion, but when he really feels the emotion, being actively involved in everything that unfolds in his neighbourhood, this reality being far from being a simulation, coming rather from the authenticity of the interactions and the deep connection with those around him.

An important exercise developed by Meisner which contributes to what will be in the future the rigorous conduct of the actor, is the mechanical repetition, followed by repetition from a personal perspective. In the training process, repetition is an important aspect, which involves more than a simple repetition of the lines, as well as exploring the characters' emotions and their relationships with the other characters. The rigour developed through exercises contributes to the formation of a solid technique, the actors becoming relaxed in the moments of the scene, not being forced to think about their interpretation from a technical point of view. Through constant repetition, the actor learns to adapt to possible changes in the scene and regulate his reactions.

„ *Every play is based on the reality of doing.* ”<sup>10</sup>

A relevant foundation in the Meisner technique is emotion, being the main resource in communicating human experience. By accessing their own emotions and using them to facilitate connection with the audience, emotion becomes the central engine of action, enriching the theatrical experience.

The reality of doing and emotion are correlated, at the core being the belief that the emotion cannot be simulated within the artistic act in order to be transmitted to the audience, on the contrary, it must be lived at the moment.

The idea that authentic emotion results from real actions, and the way the performer acts is the result of how he feels at the moment, is defining this technique. Connecting with your own emotions through specific exercises is essential to the way the actor responds to the surrounding stimuli in a manner as sincere as possible.

The source of our imagination dwells in real experiences, but a quality of it is that it can enhance personal experiences, creating new imaginary ones.

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<sup>9</sup> Sanford Meisner, Dennis Longwell, Sanford Meisner on Acting, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, pg. 24

<sup>10</sup> Sanford Meisner, Dennis Longwell, Sanford Meisner on Acting, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, pg. 25



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Real experiences bring with them additional baggage, emotions, memories, information about certain experiences, objects, and new ones can be explored through improvisation. Improvisation exercises can support a deep understanding of the inner feelings of the actors, which will add value to their authenticity and emotional expressiveness.

*„ If you are neutral, you will achieve a kind of emotional flexibility.”<sup>11</sup>*

The way actors are prepared to respond to various emotional stimuli in unpredictable ways outlines a crucial emotional resilience in authentic interpretation. By detaching from preconceptions and archetypes, ways of reaction, actors accept the emotions that are born in that moment. The ability to stay anchored in the present moment allows the actor to create deep connections with his character and audience.

A compelling performance is a result of the means by which the actor manages to integrate the emotion with the reality of doing, thus the audience is attracted by the uniqueness of the emotions received, thus facilitating a better understanding of the character and the story.

*„ When you do something you really do it rather than pretend that you're doing it.”<sup>12</sup>*

Emotion is not only a part of the actor's craft but a reflection of human reality in all its variations simplifying emotional and effective communication with the audience. At the same time, emotion is amplified through the relations between the characters and their reactions. A reaction and emotion that is generated honestly, spontaneously, have the possibility to bring a significant change in the scene.

*„ Preparation is the self-stimulation of your emotion”<sup>13</sup>*

The method developed by Meisner is not limited to the above mentioned, the reality of doing, emotional elasticity, neutrality, but also focuses on the importance of the body in relation to the elements of the interpretative technique – voice, emotion, thought.

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<sup>11</sup> Sanford Meisner, Dennis Longwell, Sanford Meisner on Acting, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, pg. 69

<sup>12</sup> Sanford Meisner, Dennis Longwell, Sanford Meisner on Acting, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, pg. 24

<sup>13</sup> Sanford Meisner, Dennis Longwell, Sanford Meisner on Acting, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, pg. 74

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Knowing how the body behaves on stage, being in control of the movements, the possibility of expressing emotions through movements, gestures, are the effect of rigorous training as a result of which motor coordination and flexibility develop.

The actor invests a certain type of energy in his character, a well-controlled body will support that energy level, thus contributing to an authentic interpretation. Through improvisation exercises, actors learn to actively listen and respond to the impulses of their stage partners, discovering how their body communicates and reacts to external stimuli.

The rigour to which Meisner appeals through exercises is indispensable in the development of an actor's discipline in the process. Through repetition, preparation, systematic practice, the actor develops his physical abilities and mental resilience, being able to manage his physical limits and constantly self-improve. This event not only increases self-confidence, but develops a sense of responsibility of the actor in the artistic act.

*„How you feel about what you see is already in you when you're sitting there reading the script.”<sup>14</sup>*

Each exercise is focused on the reality of doing, the viewpoint, and the truth of the actor. The goal is to instinctively develop it within a framework of rules designed to eliminate prepared responses and develop truthful responses, balanced with the scenic reality. These exercises are the first steps towards preparing a more anchored actor in the situations, more communicative.

### **The mechanical repetition**

Starting from a basic conversation, the actor can go into the depth of the emotions that underlie their reactions by mechanical repetition. This, at its basic level, begins with physical observation and direct repetition of this observation, starting from the premise that the actor can listen and repeat what he hears. The actor is obliged to listen and repeat the things heard, creating a dialogue, based on short lines. In Meisner's view, this exercise is the foundation of emotional dialogue.

*„Your hair is shiny,” John says.*

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<sup>14</sup> Sanford Meisner, Dennis Longwell, Sanford Meisner on Acting, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, pg. 74

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„ *Your hair is shiny,* ” *Rose Marie repeats.*

„ *Your hair is shiny.* ”

„ *Your hair is shiny.* ”

„ *Your hair is shiny.* ”

„ *Your hair is shiny.* ”

„ *Your hair is shiny.* ” “<sup>15</sup>

The purpose of this exercise is not the idea of repeating without changing a word, rather repeating without changing attention. When the partner changes the way they repeat a particular statement – pitch, idea –, it means that they have moved their focus from the partner.

Variations of this exercise encourage actors to follow their instinct when they get to choose what they are interested in to start rehearsing.

### **Repetition from a personal perspective**

For the next stage of work, starting from the mechanical repetition, the actor is encouraged to trust his instinct, which will cause changes in both his behaviour and the dialogue with the stage partner.

„ *I’m staring at you.* ”

„ *You’re staring at me.* ”

„ *I’m staring at you.* ”

„ *You admit it?* ”

„ *I admit it.* ”

„ *You admit it.* ”

„ *I admit it.* ”

„ *I don’t like it.* ”

„ *You don’t like it.* ”

„ *You don’t care ?* ”

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<sup>15</sup> Sanford Meisner, Dennis Longwell, Sanford Meisner on Acting, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, pg. 21

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„ I don't care. ”

„ You don't care ? ”

„ I don't care! ”. ”<sup>16</sup>

The actors can explore in this exercise how they really feel in that moment, not only the basic statement, as their inner path starts from the partner, making physical observations, then being able to bring observations of that partner's behavior.

*„Listen, I'd suggest going on with the word repetition, just working off each other, and the more brainless it is the chances are the better off you'll be. It's a question of repeating what you hear. ”*<sup>17</sup>

As the exercise develops, the actors can integrate reactions and personal emotions, not being forced to develop only based on the initial statement, but also on the way they feel in that particular situation.

When an actor is disciplined in the process of creation, he can focus on concrete details in the present moment, actively listen to their partners, responding to the stimuli he receives from them while managing to eliminate excessive thinking, an intellectual approach to what he does on stage, allowing the emotions to develop authentically, will manage to refine his technique, the authenticity of the performance and how the audience responds to their actions on stage.

Studying methods such as Stanislavski or Meisner, rigour combines with emotion in an organic way, improving the quality of the artistic act through the elements of authenticity and spontaneity acquired in interpretation.

The creative process in the actor's craft is deep, complex and is based on the discipline of the actor, on learned techniques that, in a rigorous framework, contribute to the success of each performance.

Emotion and rigour are fundamental for the actor's training, as emotion allows the actor to penetrate the inner universe of the character, creating a sincere, original interpretation of inner feelings, contributing to a

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<sup>16</sup> Sanford Meisner, Dennis Longwell, Sanford Meisner on Acting, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, pg. 23

<sup>17</sup> Sanford Meisner, Dennis Longwell, Sanford Meisner on Acting, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, pg. 44

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strong connection with the audience. In the absence of an authentic emotion in interpretation, the artistic act tends to become bland, without triggering reactions in the viewers, the efficiency of the artistic act being at risk of being diminished.

On the other hand, rigour is fundamental for the actor, preparing him for an in-depth study of the character and the development of a discipline of each acting technique. A rigorous way of working increases the value of the artistic act, the collaboration between actors and contributes to creating a connection with the audience. The success of the artistic act can be triggered by the fusion of emotion and rigour, developing a memorable artistic act for both professionals and audience.

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