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ART AND RESEARCH – CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

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Actor's Art in Support of General Education

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Abstract: The concept of emotional intelligence is increasingly used in various fields of activity. It is presented and perceived as the primary source of success in life. Specialists in areas such as human resource management, psychology, psychotherapy, psychosociology, alternative medicine, fitness coaches, business people – successful individuals etc. – offer advice, in written form, through articles, books, journals or by holding seminars, workshops, courses etc., on how to be present, to communicate effectively and be creative, to change your life. But the "recipes" to be more present, more communicative, more creative, are not effective if you do not have the necessary "ingredients". These can only come from within us. And the theatre actor knows this best because he has the most appropriate training. In probing this phenomenon, I have noticed that, in terms of approaching personal development, from the perspective of emotional intelligence, intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, both in organizations (team-building sessions) and in workshops by psychologists or psychotherapists, one must rely on self-knowledge. The actions and activities proposed in this regard have objectives that we find in the professional training of the actor. Often the exercises and "games" in these seminars are specific to the training of actors. Consequently, individuals who have no training in the art of theatre, or the actor's art, use tools from theatre pedagogy (exercises and theatre games), just because they have read about their effects or learned them in a professional training course. The work of the actor and the skills he acquires in his professional training are not known, valued and capitalized in the social environment. The profession of the actor is generally considered to be impractical, unproductive in an economic sense. However, we note that social, economic and educational policies increasingly require skills and abilities that the actor develops through the nature of his profession.

Keywords: actor's art, methods, theatre pedagogy, learning through the actor's art (craft), education.

The power of theatre lies in being both a personal and a shared experience. Theatre is a form of art, but it can also provide a safe environment

to explore challenging ideas and problems, it studies relationships and behavioural systems, creates awareness of new knowledge and feelings, and changes perspectives. This paper explores how the actor's art offers an interdisciplinary approach to education. I will highlight the benefits of this approach by focusing on personal development and interpersonal skills. It embodies the belief that holistically developing a person is extremely valuable in our schools, but also for global education. The paper highlights the relationship between emotional intelligence skills and their development through the techniques of the actor's art.

We all witness the magnitude that the phenomenon of personal development has reached in today's Romanian society and beyond. Beyond this trend and the fact that it is fashionable to participate in personal development seminars, we notice that there is another motivation. For some participants to such events, it is a quest to find solutions to improve their existence, their quality of life. In a perpetually changing world, in which new technologies have revolutionized the nature of work, in which twenty-four hours per day are not enough, in which we prefer socializing in front of the computer than face to face, in which children prefer to play on their computer than to play with friends outside with a ball, it should be no surprise that man has come to believe that happiness, fulfilment, success can be found elsewhere than Himself. And in this dizzying pursuit of material and spiritual well-being, the individual becomes the slave of the social status, of social roles and masks. His own identity is lost in conformity and uniformity, in routine and superficial.

The actor's art is a process of metamorphosis of feelings, their sphere of origin being in the psycho-technics of their rendering, in the presence of an audience, called a receiver, and of a transmitter, called an actor. The theories from which I start have their origins in the early nineteenth century, in the first treatise on the Actor's Art, which became the universal working tool in the methods of teaching performing arts: the famous work of Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*. His system represents a series of professional techniques used by actors in pedagogy and then in creative work based on the concept of emotional memory that the actor concentrates from within, to portray, on stage, the emotions of the character. Later, this technique evolved into a method of physical actions, in which emotions are produced by actions. This last technique is known as Stanislavski's System and is the result of long theatre research to determine how one can control, in a performance, the most intangible and uncontrollable aspects of human behaviour, such as emotions

and artistic inspiration. The most influential teachers of performing art, such as Vsevolod Meyerhold, Richard Boleslavsky, Michael Chekhov, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Harold Clurman, Robert Lewis, Sanford Meisner, Uta Hagen and Ivana Chubbuck, were inspired by Stanislavski, and/or by his disciples' theories. Theatre was always a laboratory of creation, experimentation, and discovery, but also a field of debate, which has often led to dispute and conflict. But conflict is an essential element, mobilizing energies and triggering forces, without which we could not talk about theatre. One of the eternal disputes starts with the question, *What is theatre?* Is it an accessory of dramatic literature? A place of entertainment, as they say, more recently? Is theatre just dramatic text or more? Theatre means content of ideas and emotion, of course. Can we talk about theatre outside of a text? What about emotion? Does it require textual support, or does it emanate from the actor's own presence? But what does the presence of the actor, or the pre-expressive work that Eugenio Barba was talking about, mean?

It is an extra-everyday quality of energy through which the body becomes 'concise', 'alive', 'credible' on stage; thus, the presence of the actor, his stage bios, is able to demand the viewer's attention even before sending a message. This is a logical advance and not a chronological one. The pre-expressive basis is the level of basic organization of the theatre. [...] Theatre anthropology designates a new field of research: the study of the pre-expressive behaviour of the human being in the situation of organized representation[1].

All these questions have found partial and temporary answers, because theatre creators, be they playwrights, actors, directors, set designers, critics, tip the scales from one side to the other, depending on their own sensitivity and training, their mentality, according to trends, intellectual-spiritual affinities, preferably for one theatre form or another. If man was created in the image and likeness of God, and the most important role of God is as Creator, then every man is obliged to create! The actor can be a creator and not a performer only when he goes through a series of authentic psycho-emotional-intuitive processes. These processes can only be authentic when:

- they are new, unknown, until the moment of creation, they cannot be anticipated;

[1] E. Barba, *O canoe de hârtie – tratat de antropologie teatrală*, București, Editura Unitext (*A Paper Canoe - Theatrical Anthropology Treaty* Bucharest: Unitext), 2003, p. 31

- are unique and unrepeatable;
- cannot be consciously controlled or analyzed while taking place; man cannot observe himself during the authentic process of creation; otherwise, it will interrupt the process.

The actor's work of art is represented precisely by these subconscious, conscious and superconscious processes and not by their result, as is the case with other arts. Paradoxically, theatre art is opposed to the actor's art, aiming at the final result and not the process, which is why theatre can be considered the actor's greatest enemy. The art of the theatrical performance starts from the vision of a performance (play), it starts from a finished product that must be reached, in contrast in the actor's art the creation is possible only if we start on the road without knowing the destination, following only the process.

The method actor is the man who turns conventions into the truth of life. He is not interested in the idea of acting, but in the method (path) by which to increase his vulnerability in assuming conventions, in order to reach a total, authentic, genuine, real being, at the end of which he is transformed, transfigured, irreversibly changed as a human being. Only then can the spectator totally empathize with the actor. Creation processes cannot be consciously controlled, but the circumstances in which they could manifest, the circumstances in which creativity could manifest in any field, not only the artistic one, can be controlled:

- the tendency towards a valid universal human ideal (with optimism, through imagination, dreaming);
- assuming the rules of the "game" (through discipline and self-discipline);
- venturing into the unknown (with vulnerability, giving up certainties, giving us the freedom to make mistakes, using our playful spirit, anchoring ourselves in the real, in the present, making choices and acting without half measures to achieve a goal inspired by genuine desire to change something in a person or a group of individuals).

There, in the unknown, the "angel descends" - as Professor Ion Cojar[2] called the revelation in the actor's creation. He founded the Romanian method school in the art of acting, guided by the principle of process, not success. As

[2] Ion Cojar (b. January 9, 1931, Recaș, Romania - d. October 18, 2009, Bucharest) was an acting teacher, researcher, theatre director and, occasionally, film actor. He is the founder of a unique method that revolutionized the Romanian school of acting.

a professor and researcher at UNATC, Ion Cojar aimed for students to develop a psycho-emotional "mechanism" specific to the transformation of conventions into the truth of life, unlike the old school of acting where students were taught how to play theatre. He always said that the actor's art has nothing in common with theatre. The study environment of the student-actor must be one of laboratory, experimentation, self-knowledge, despecialization and release of the preconceptions acquired in the family, school and society, an environment in which the student has to be aware and use his entire native creative potential that makes him unique.

Sanford Meisner[3] is the one who created the first working method specific to the creative actor, being concerned with the actual relationship process between stage partners and not with the result of that process, a result that cannot be anticipated, just like in the case of a real conflict between two or more individuals, one can never know what the outcome will be. If the result is known, then the process of reaching it is no longer an authentic one, of rushing into the unknown; creation requires first of all novelty; nothing new can be born when the finality is anticipated. The true actor's art is an art of the human, of assumption, of vulnerability, of process, of going into the unknown and of the truth of life, an independent art that has nothing in common with theatre, pretending, the art of directing, or the art of performance, in which the authentic actor is not a performer, but a creator!

I think that the role of the pedagogue is not to work with the student, but to make him work with himself. If the student leaves the course or the laboratory or the seminar unchanged, if he did not have revelations, if he does not finish the course with existential problems that do not give him peace, if he does not leave modified, transfigured from the course, then it was just lost time. Both pedagogue and student have to go through an entire, revealing process, both of them go into the unknown and become different people at the end of the process.

Three great theatre men of the twentieth century, Meyerhold, Grotowski, Barba focused their attention on aspects related to the body (physical, mental and vocal) training in the laboratories they set up in the

[3] Sanford Meisner (b. August 31, 1905 - d. February 2, 1997) was an American actor and acting teacher who developed a new approach to the actor's art that over time became known as the Meisner technique. His approach is different in that he completely abandoned the use of affective memory, emphasizing the "reality of doing."

twentieth century. All three mentioned theatre reformers have as common elements the exploration of the actor's body as a means of expression and communication and the attempt to develop scientifically the actor's techniques. In the theatre laboratories, the research and discovery of the expressive potential of the actor involved the creation of physical, mental and vocal training that was imposed both as a way of professional practice and as a discovery of the self. Through the methods, techniques and exercises approached in explorations and experiments on the human body (discovering the physical, mental, intellectual potential) they demonstrated the ability of these research tools to open the way to self-knowledge, through a physical, mental (psychological) and spiritual dive into the depths of oneself. On the one hand, this aspect (self-knowledge) and the temporal characteristic of training, I consider being elements that justify the possibility of associating the results of body training specific to the actor, with humanistic psychotherapy and the phenomenon of personal development (intrapersonal dimension). On the other hand, in the professional training of actors, theatre schools took over a series of exercises from Meyerhold's biomechanical training, from training focused on Grotowski's via negativa method and from the actor's pre-expressive technique used at the Odin Teatre. Thus, the knowledge, exploration and practice of these training develop the professional and transversal skills of the actors necessary in the activities aimed at personal development. The individual development movement is closely linked to the paradigm of humanistic psychology, especially in the direction of education and therapy, but also to existential philosophy due to the themes approached by existentialist philosophers: human subjectivity, the problem of freedom of individual choice of existence, and the feeling of anxiety. The representatives of humanistic psychology gave a long elaborated response to the physiological and behavioural reductionism, in defence of the concrete, real man, with his analytical and aspirational purposes; they brought to the fore the concept of Self, of inner experience and self-image, they treated interpersonal problems as factors of growth and correction of the internal organization of the personality; they revealed the continuous evolution of the Self and the favourable aspects of this process. Concepts such as the *feeling of social*

communion (Alfred Adler)[4], *self-actualization* (Maslow)[5], became fundamental in the phenomenon called *personal development*. The elements that bring closer humanistic psychotherapy and the actor's body training, through the prism of personal development are: learning through experience (acquiring adaptive skills) and living and becoming aware of the *here and now* experience, an essential component in self-knowledge. This congruence produces significant changes in one's perception and readjustments in thinking, beliefs and behaviours.

The experience lived *here and now* both in psychotherapy sessions, either individually or in groups, as well as many of the exercises and theatre games used by actors in body training, and primarily through improvisation, involves mental processes (sensations and perceptions) that engage the body in an organic manifestation. This manifestation projects outwardly, naturally and spontaneously, what is happening inside the mind and body, thus restoring the mind-body connection. The methods and techniques used in stimulating the creative potential, aim, first of all, to eliminate the blockages at a mental and physical level.

If we use established terms from humanistic psychotherapy, in that case, we can say that improvisation also helps *openness to new experiences*, develops flexibility in thinking and spontaneity, helps to adapt reaction and behaviour to new situations and problems, but also to find new solutions.

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[4] Alfred Adler (February 7, 1870 - May 28, 1937) was an Austrian psychiatrist, founder of the School of Individual Psychology and the second Viennese School of Psychotherapy, in chronological order (after the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and before of Viktor Frank's speech therapy). In the *The Meaning of Life*, book published in 1933, Adler understands the individual only in a social context, he says that this is where our balance comes from - the more isolated we are from the group, the more badly adapted we are. Social communion represents the inner need of each of us to create connections with others, to have an identity, to be recognized by others and to recognize ourselves in others.

[5] Abraham Maslow, (April 1, 1908 - June 8, 1970), American psychologist, professor of psychology at Alliant International University, Brandeis University, Brooklyn College, New School for Social Research and Columbia University, best known for creating the hierarchy of needs, a theory of psychological health based on the priority fulfillment of innate human needs, culminating in self-actualization. He believes that the human individual has the ability to reach the maximum potential for development and self-actualization using the activities he performs during his existence. Free will offers man the possibility and capacity for development beyond the physiological level, to the point of discovering the true self. Self-actualization is, therefore, the defining element of human capabilities, being grouped by Maslow in four dimensions: awareness, honesty, freedom, trust.

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Experience is the result of information received through the sense organs that cause reactions throughout the body, and behaviour is the expression of the body's responses. Or, the actor through technique and experimentation, understands and learns how the body works and how it is expressed in its entirety. The principles and techniques of body training focus on universal aspects of human communication. When an actor learns to move correctly, internally and externally, psychologically and physically, the mind and body are simultaneously engaged in the action of communication. By the nature of his profession, the actor acquires abilities and skills of emotional intelligence. The term emotional intelligence was first used in a 1990 article by psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer. Although this term is relatively new, the components of the concept, emotional intelligence can be dated to the well-known statement of Socrates (470 - 399 BC), "know yourself." In the Bible, both in the Old and in the New Testament, " Do unto others as you would have them do unto you and love thy neighbour as thyself" can be seen as elements of emotional intelligence. Effective awareness, understanding, control and expression of emotions are essential skills that the actor continually exercises. Only this way, his communication can be expressive and authentic. If psychologists rely on theory and specialized vocabulary, actors rely on the practice of theory. Thus we can understand why "[...] an actor, who has no specialized psychological training, can understand so clearly and directly the functioning of the human psyche?"[6]

Going beyond the director and text instructions, the actor on stage is seen as a living person in a life situation. All its psychic processes and all the mechanisms of realization require an interdisciplinary approach, from psychology to psychoanalysis, or from aesthetics to physics. These directions guided Ion Cojar in his in-depth analysis of the creative process and the actor's art as human art. The product of the actor's art is the creative process. The actor's art is a specific way of thinking.[7]

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[6] Peter Brook, *Împreună cu Grotowski: teatrul e doar o formă*, traducere din limba engleză de Anca Mănuţiu, Eugen Wohl şi Andreea Iacob vol. editat de George Banu şi Grzegorz Ziółkowski, București, Editura Cheiron, p,43
(Peter Brook, Together with Grotowski: theater is just a form, translated from English by Anca Mănuţiu, Eugen Wohl and Andreea Iacob vol. Edited by George Banu and Grzegorz Ziółkowski, Bucharest, Cheiron Publishing House, p, 43)

[7] Ion Cojar, *O poetică a artei actorului*, București, Editura Unitext, 1996.
(Ion Cojar, A poetics of the actor's art, Bucharest, Unitext Publishing House, 1996)

Thus, the creative process cannot be achieved without thought; without awareness, self-awareness allows a person to make choices in his life that best aligns with this worldview. As a result, the individual will be happier. The actor's art techniques can be adapted for different ages and levels of experience, including very young children. The interdisciplinarity of the actor's art creates a valuable learning experience for everyone, whether they want to become actors or not. It is an excellent tool through which learners can be challenged to become more connected to themselves, to others and the world they belong to.

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