

“Babeş-Bolyai” University Cluj-Napoca
Faculty of Theatre and Television
Field: Theatre

Abstract of the PhD thesis

**METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN THE ACTOR’S
TRAINING**

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Cluj-Napoca
November 2012

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“...imagine there is another double of yours in the world, and that they simply observe what happens. They observe your physical position and the way you interact with other people. Now, you have three levels of activity and consciousness: your physical body in space, your relationship with the others and the silent observer.”

Yoshi Oida

I. Keywords, concepts

Instruction/ training, interdisciplinarity, daily/extra-daily regime, exercises as models of behavior, creativity-improvisation tandem, solving problems, conceptual pedagogue, reverse connection, feedback loop, metacognition, energy center, body-mind unit, Zero Point, to support/ to radiate, soft focus, Step in the Unknown, creative imbalance, “offer-blocking” cycle, “give and take”, complete form/ the sense of entirety, work in the abstract, body memory, spatial relationship, tempo, kinesthetic response, body-voice-imagination connection, metamorphosis, target, meta-game, composition

II. Object and main directions of research

The paper Metacognitive Strategies in the Actor’s Training puts forward a complex approach of the issue of the actor’s instruction, relying on the observation of the key role played by the metacognitive attitude, both in the training phase, and in the subsequent practice of the profession. Noting that, in the twenty-first century, the actor faces unprecedented challenges, the author of this study proposes a new analysis of the objectives, contents and methods of training. We are considering a “pedagogy” of the actor, a pedagogy that focuses on two interdependent purposes: a) instrumental ability and skill development, as well as the development of the student’s creativity, in order to acquire competence and professional performance; b) the formation/development of the student’s personality, as well as the modeling of his/her attitude, as an artist.

The qualities that outline the “artist-actor’s” profile – the center of the metacognitive theory of the actor’s training, submitted in this thesis – are, among other: a solid, alert technique, emotional intelligence, availability, the nerve to step in the Unknown, awareness of the need of continuous training and so on and so forth. Such ends can only be met if they are operationalized, as objectives of a pedagogic discourse, solidly anchored in the principles of modern didactics, analyzed thoroughly in this paper.

In order to draw an innovative pedagogic vision, the work Metacognitive Strategies in the Actor’s Training pays particular attention to the field of neurosciences and to the representation of the human being as a “body-mind unit”.

At the same time, the type of methodological design drawn in this thesis considers the handbooks and studies on acting that are strongly interdisciplinary: Michael Chekhov, Viola Spolin, Rudolf Laban, David Zinder, Robert Cohen, Robert Benedetti, Declan Donellan, Rhonda Blair, R. J. Kemp, Viewpoints. By relating the didactic, psychological, neuro-scientific etc. theories with the poetics dedicated to the actor, we enable the selection and the classification of the field-appropriate pedagogic methods, of the techniques of assessment and self-assessment of performances/competences, outlining, in the end, a “logic/system of the actor’s training”, based on metacognitive strategies. This materializes in an acting method.

III. Structure of the paper

The thesis Metacognitive Strategies in the Actor’s Training includes: one first part, containing a theoretical approach structured on five chapters; a second, applicative part, containing three chapters, and, at the end, the appendixes, amounting, overall, to 438 pages. Each chapter is structured in an introduction, a body of argumentative text and a conclusion.

The first chapter, “The Actor’s Training. The Necessity of the Method”, attempts, via extended documentation, to establish that, while the efforts to systematize training have been, usually, the reflex of the initiatives to “re-dramatize” theatre, nowadays, a review of the dramatic education is required, from the viewpoint of the methods, as well as from the one of the contents.

The second chapter, “The Theories of Modern Didactics and the Actor’s Pedagogy”, produces a comparative analysis of the principles of contemporary education and of those that govern the actor’s pedagogy. Thus, many shared aspects are identified: the principle of learning and of character-shaping by action and discovery, the focus on the student (by his/her alert and active participation in the learning process), the emphasis on self-training and, finally, the principles of the *inverse connection* – self-awareness as to the partial and overall results of learning, with provision of the necessary feedback. By expanding the framework of analysis, we establish the main points of reference of the theatrical educational process and, at the same time, we propose actual models of evaluation of the acting performance.

The third chapter, “Cognitive Sciences. New Perspectives for the Actor”, situates the actor’s training in an interdisciplinary context; the premise is that the most efficient training systems in the twentieth century integrated in the scientific climate of the era. The study examines the possible contribution of neurosciences in the clarification of the stage actor’s creative process. Description is provided for

modalities through which cognitive sciences can contribute to the *deconstruction* of the actor's training process. This perspective gives rise to a re-definition of the training as *system of non-linear strategies/paths* (translated in exercises and procedures), steered by *self-adjustment* mechanisms and centered on the *body-mind* unit (i.e. on the physical expression – “concept-image” interdependence).

Upshot of the theoretical research in the previous chapters, the fourth chapter, “The Actor's Training by the Application of Metacognitive Strategies, defines “the metacognitive strategies” that can help draw a methodological metacognitive design in the actor's art and **identity its scope**.

The fifth chapter, “A Potential Training System”, establishes the main elements of the acting method suggested: the source-materials, the selection criteria and the content structuring principles, preliminary technical aspects.

The applicative part of the thesis, (“Praxis“), structured in three chapters, proposes a selection of 132 dramatic exercises and games, provided by multiple sources and organized according to the educational strategy drawn in the previous chapters. Each exercise includes a description, as well as a theoretical argumentation which indicates its origin, filiations, specific objectives, potential developments and which, in some cases, explains the concepts that relate also to fields different from the theatre (psychology, neurocognition, other arts, linguistics etc.)

The first chapter, “Body and Space” is, in its turn, divided in the *Physical-nonverbal module* and the *Creative-imaginative module*. Both of these modules embrace an extensive range of procedures and exercises, clustered in “families” and improvisational nuclei, meant to provide the actors with an enduring training foundation.

The exercises in the second chapter, “Body and Voice”, focus on the use of voice as means to *project the presence*, additional to the techniques of vocalization (pitching) and development of the vocal-expressive range.

The techniques and exercises described in the third chapter, “The Imagination and Grammar of the ‘Actor's Art’” target complex purposes: the development of the actor's ability to understand and control the mechanisms with which the imagination operates, the mastery of the character development procedures and the construction of performance scenes.