

ELABORATION ON A TOPIC FOR THE DIGITAL TRAINING MATERIAL FOR AMATEUR ACTORS

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INTRODUCTION

MOTIVATIONAL DISCUSSION, ELEMENTARY EXERCISES

As an encouragement to all participants, here are the lines of József Ruszt¹:
*“A parallel can be drawn between the great theatrical innovators or radical experimenters and the amateurs, those who, immensely disappointed in the theatre of their time, **with the involvement of amateurs and civils** /emphasis mine!/ tried to create a new kind of theatre, such as Stanislavsky, Antonin Artaud, André Antoine, Tadeusz Kantor”* - and let's add the names of some Hungarian creators: Tamás Fodor, István Paál, András Jeles, József Nagy - Szkipe, István Somogyi, Béla Pintér.

Amateur actors /in the following, as I will often use this word, I will call them **actors** for short/ have a freer spirit to learn the tricks of the profession, they have no existential dependency, at most within the group (to which the director has to pay attention!), the internal hierarchy is more naturally formed and more value-conscious than in the case of professionals. All this can become a creative power in amateurs. In good case, the system of expectations is not imposed on the company from the outside either /here we will have to talk separately about the external clients of “festive programs” and how to manage them well in the joint work/. There is no production constraint, even if for many companies the only reason for being together is the “schedule” of play-rehearsals-performance- /maybe/ festival events. But even in this case, it is important to learn certain professional basics in practice - this is the aim of this training material - if there is no other way, then during the performance of a specific play.

ENTRANCE ASSESSMENT

It is highly important to avoid that anyone experiencing the first meeting lives it as an “entrance exam”. Let's start with a playful, relaxed atmosphere, whether it is the first meeting of a completely new group or the start of rehearsals for a new play with an existing group. Don't use the word “assessment” present in the chapter title at all! A good observation by the director/group

¹ József Ruszt (1937-2005): Kossuth and Jászai Mari Prize-winning theatre director, theatre director, actor-educator, theatre writer. The quotations are from his book *Színészdráma-
gia és színész mesterség (Dramaturgy and Acting)* p.41. Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, Bp. 1977.

leader during the kick-off talk or the introductory physical training is worth more than anything else in terms of the subsequent assignment of tasks. This way we get to know the basic skills of our actors (speaking technique, metacommunication, self-awareness, openness-alloofness, body-awareness, courage or shyness in acting, concentration, etc.)

Procedure in case of a new group:

- starter discussion: oral biographies
- who, why and for what purpose joined the group
- tell an important memory or story from their life
- conduct interviews with each other,
- observation and concentration exercises
- memory exercises, imitation exercises (with texts, in movement),
- distinguishing between natural and contrived action-reaction
- What would I do if this happened to me? Performed in action! Eg: I catch an infectious disease; I have to bleed and skin a chicken.
- to measure reflex, reaction speed, e.g.: blowing an empty soap bubble towards the other person. Reaction: grabs eyes or blocks in confusion.
- perception exercises
- trust exercises (with movement and touch)
- interaction exercises (with movement and touch)
- object-creativity exercises: e.g. how many ways can you use a brick? Unimaginative: I can use it to build a wall, a house; strong and bold imagination: e.g. you could grind it, make a powder for diarrhoea, etc.

In the case of a group of people who have been working together for several years and know each other well, there is of course no need for the above assessment procedure, the first conversation should rather be about the play, the topic to be worked on, and why it is important for each person to participate in the work. If it's been a while since a new piece was rehearsed, it's also

worth talking about the current life situation of each member. When a new member joins, it is very important to have a sense of trust, genuine curiosity and patience. So, there are many different situations in which a theatre group starts or continues its life. When preparing for a performance, the following questions should be asked and some kind of joint answer should be given:

where, when, with whom, what, to whom and why

These are the questions we will now address:

WHERE, WHEN?

It makes a difference whether you work in a village, a small town or a big city in Budapest, in the suburbs or in the city centre, in a community centre, in a primary or secondary school or in a university institution. Whether we have access to rehearsal space free of charge or we have to pay for it, what time of the day or day of the week we can rehearse. What time of year we plan a premiere, as it is not a good idea to prepare a premiere during the harvest in a wine region, for example. It is also important to know what we have to unpack or pack in order to work, where we can store our things, whether we are disturbing others /e.g. the yoga class in the next room/ or others disturb us /e.g. a band or folk dance group rehearsing in the next room/, etc. Based on my experience of more than 30 years in the Szkéné Theatre on the 2nd floor of the Central Building of the Budapest University of Technology, I can say that it is very important to take the above into account before we do anything. We should try to maximise the working conditions, so that we can rehearse in a relaxed atmosphere and with a safe background. If necessary, you should also sign a written contract with the house and the owner of the premises [more on this later].

WITH WHOM?

Age specificities

1. Stage for students 14-18 year-olds: usually led by a teacher or drama teacher. Practice shows that this age group mostly draws on their own family/school/religious experiences, as opposed to primary school age groups, who are mostly involved in fairy-tale productions. Important compositional aspects of performances that draw on their own experiences are editing, filtering,

transferring the life-material offered by the students to a denser, processed, more theatrically relevant level. Many problems arise from age differences within the age group as well. Just because something has happened/has occurred to them in real life does not necessarily mean that it can be effective in performance. But all this will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on *dramaturgy, performance composition*. Special empathy and pedagogical sensitivity are required when working with child actors from a cumulatively disadvantaged background (gypsy children, children in state care, children with disabilities).

2. university/college actors 18-25 year-olds: mostly with serious professional ambitions, they work targeting the alternative scene also, with a director of their choice/trained by themselves on a play or theme they decided on together. In their case, discussions, “detours”, a longer process of preparation and daring theatrical experiments play an important role. These should not be avoided, even if some experiments turn out to be dead ends.

3. adult or mixed-age theatre groups: usually based in villages or small towns, they attend rehearsals while having a job, often organised on a family basis, sometimes involving almost the whole community. The aim is almost exclusively to create a certain performance or an occasional performance, so the minimum skills necessary for the professional development of the participants, adapted to the age groups, must be incorporated somehow into the rehearsal process itself (more on this later too).

4. Mixed age groups, semi-professional groups with their own professional programme, including youth training:

In their case, there is a complex professional, professional pedagogical work going on in parallel: training, rehearsals, youth training, tours, drama pedagogy line, professional services, etc. We will not deal with them here, as this material is intended to contribute to the training of amateur actors.

WHAT?

This issue will be dealt with in detail in the chapter on *composing a performance*, but for now I will just say that each of the aspects listed here - “where, when, with whom, what, for whom and why” - should get the chosen text material reflected, or in the case of a self-devised piece, the theme and

idea. If this is not thought through carefully enough, it is very easy for the whole work invested to go astray, to lose its meaning, and it is not primarily the professional/theatrical work that is wasted, but the group cohesion and the internal value system that is damaged, often irreparably.

FOR WHOM?

It does matter who we are going to perform for. Only in front of our own school community, or maybe in a festival in ascending system, in front of students, teachers, theatre professionals from other schools, in a competitive way, if there is a jury. In the case of village/small town adult actors, a similar audience model can be described for their own, more restricted community, or for the wider festival or touring audience. The natural and most common case is when the aim is to present to their own smaller community. However, it may be a festival, an invitation, or participation in an advertised movement that brings the group together. In such a case, it is not a bad idea to invite an ‘outside eye’ at the end of the rehearsal process, a friend close to us, perhaps a theatre professional /mentor/ whose taste and value judgement you trust. It is often disappointing and disheartening to see a local success followed by a foreign failure, negative criticism, an insensitive, doubting audience that does not laugh at the jokes that are so much at home, does not give the local star actor an ovation. It’s good to prepare your team for all this in advance, even if we are 100 per cent sure of success.

WHY?

The hardest question, though, is seemingly simple and has many answers: because we are asked to; because we want to entertain ourselves and the audience; because we love performing; because it is fun to be together/create in this community; because our wives, children, parents are also involved in the group’s work; because we are seeking a prize at a prestigious festival; because it is important, vitally important, to speak about our personal and common issues; or simply to strengthen our spiritual/physical stamina. What all of these motives have in common is some kind of **personal ambition to co-create and a principle of joy.**

Because the actor “must be a ‘joyful soul’, because if this joyful soul flies away - the actor is no longer an actor.”²

² Honti Katalin, *Commedia dell’arte, rögtönző színház, improvizáció, (Commedia dell’arte,*

SETTING COMMON GOALS

The ultimate goal is, of course, and is always, to create a performance, even if there is no specific play or theme, even if the team is “only” coming together for theatre training. After all, we are talking about a theatre group, not a togetherness for mental health or psychotherapeutic cause, a community sport, a cultic community, even if such activities do have a theatrical element. In order to create a performance as a main objective, it is advisable to set the following “sub-objectives”:

On a personal level:

- develop **self-awareness**, release inhibition in public:

This can be facilitated by all improvisation exercises and the rehearsal process itself; pair exercises are particularly useful here, the following exercises serve this purpose well: the *Look at the other!*; *What is the partner saying?*; *Ask back!*; “*I want*” exercise; *Internal tempos, internal rhythms*; *Internal sounds*, *Energy transfer exercises*³

- the development of **shared attention**:

The actor has to pay attention to the text; to the partners, to the space at the same time, and there are exercises for this: *Look at the other! What is the partner saying? Ask back! I say it word by word*; *Energy transfer*; *In a pair position*; *Energy transfer in a different way*; *space dividing walk*; *collision exercises*; *What’s behind my back?*; *Space filling*.⁴

- developing **concentration skills**, including the techniques of experiencing, resulting in TRANSUBSTANTIATION: it is the experiencing of an entire human destiny, but if it is only a minor character (e.g. a closed scene, it is the experiencing of the one situation in which the character appears). To maintain the inner and outer nature of a character consistently and till the end, even

extemporizational theatre, improvisation) Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, Bp.1982. 27.1 (hereinafter: Honti)

³ A detailed description of these and other exercises can be found in Balázs Perényi’s book *Improvizációs gyakorlatok (Improvisational exercises)*, on pages 28-124, Vojvodina Cultural Institute, 2009, Zenta (hereinafter: Perényi) Download:

https://www.vamadia.rs/sites/default/files/2020-02/PERENYI_IMPRO.pdf.

⁴ In: Perényi

over a longer period of time, constant attention and concentration are needed. Concentrated attention carries tension, motivates partners, and generates attention in the audience.

- the development of a sense of time and rhythm: a diagram of the temporal progression, regulation and structuring of actions, the “fever curve” of the role (Ruszt⁵). This certainly introduces a kind of cold mechanics into the performance, a repetitive tempo and rhythm that helps the performance to be repeatable and occasionally “recharged”. Here we can use texts, simple dialogues in slow motion, acceleration, movement with external rhythm, etc. More details on this later as well.

- developing body-awareness, body and spatial perception: Johnstone quotes Jean-Luis Barrault, “Just as the earth is surrounded by an atmosphere, so the human being is surrounded by a luminous aura, which creates a contact with external things without any real contact with the human body. The intensity of this aura or atmosphere varies according to the vitality of the human being...”⁶ Awareness of bodily characteristics, movement characteristics and skills, space utilization, reaction time, delay, anticipation, defense, aggression. “I have been told many times that the actor should be aware of his body. But I didn’t understand this until I tried to keep my head still while speaking.”⁷

Perényi’s spatial games serve this purpose: *How do we sit?; Walking modes, figures; From the outside in; From the inside out; Transferring walking characters; End beginning; Found locations; Differently in the same place; Enchanted.*⁸

- learn to analyse texts from a theatrical point of view: to create the full range of words, the vivid figure and personality of the person who speaks these words, to transform the words into action. It is not the ‘literary’ value of the text that is important, but the theatrical one; it is always the beyond-the-text that must be sought: who is saying it, to whom, with what intention, in

⁵ In: Ruszt

⁶ Keith Johnstone: IMPRO - improvisation and the theatre The House of Public Culture, Tatabánya, 1993. Hungarian translation by Katalin Honti p. 67. (Hereinafter: Johnstone)

⁷ In: Johnstone p. 52.

⁸ In Perényi p. 41-48. and p. 105-107.

what state of mind, after or before what action, in what status in relation to the partner? Basic exercises here: status-seesaw: above-below below-above – we can read many interesting things about this in Johnstone's book.

- **awareness of being in action:** the word is born of action and becomes action itself. Acting analysis and recording leads back to the found natural vitality, to spontaneity, to create the full life of words, the living form and personality of the person who utters them, to transform the uttered words into action.

Example-exercise: *at the end of A's action, a word, at the end of A's action, a reaction verbally from B, text coming from the others, A reacts with action, then text and others react (can be from play!), same with rejection.*

- **emotions under the control of the personality:** putting the physical and psychic of the whole personality at the service of the form, dominating all its manifestations. Example-exercise: *the group provokes A, who can remain resistant. /requires caution from the part of the provoking people!/.*

- **to reach the stage of creative behaviour:** the constant reshaping of the emotional world and the expressive means of the personality, techniques for the multiplication of the individuality, all this while respecting the laws of the stage art and not overstepping the limits of one's own human nature.

All this at the community level:

Actors as a group: being able to listen to each other, learning techniques for moving together, creating atmosphere, vectors and counter-vectors. Dynamics of solos and group actions: how can those in joint action direct the attention of the spectator so that he/she is always focused on the important moment of the stage action /techniques of activity-inactivity/. We are present, but we are not the one to be watched - often the most difficult to learn and apply! Exercises from Perényi's collection:

*Seat occupation; Space filling; Collisions; Don't swerve; Fish swarm; Phase movement; Quick start and stop; Coordinated start and stop; Multi-phase movements; Moving together in individual character.*⁹

⁹ In: Perényi, p. 112-118.

My own collection: *clinging exercises; row exercises; pulse-transfer exercises; up-and-down exercises; pile-down exercises; roll-over exercises; one-part-touching exercises; stick exercises; sneaking under each other exercises; knot-twisting exercises.*

Johnstone's exercises: *say something pleasant to the other person, then something unpleasant; eye contact games, "I opened the wrong door" game; status switching exercises;*

Exercises from the Perényi material: *Text-knowledge; Text learning; Saying it word by word; Using your own words; Narrative monologue.*

I. STAGE MOVEMENT

CONQUERING SPACE

"The actor must be aware of his unlimited relationship with things. THERE IS NO INSULATING LAYER BETWEEN MAN AND THE OUTDOOR. He who moves makes the world around him ripple in the same way as a fish when it moves in water." J. L. Barrault.

Movement, the physicality that encompasses the whole gestural system, plays a fundamental role in both everyday life and the theatre. In the case of the latter, however, even a performance in the so-called realistic style cannot remain at the level of the everyday. There are several reasons for this. The first originates from the elementary fact that **all theatrical events take place in front of an audience** (if not, it is not theatre), and therefore cannot exist without having an impact, one way or another, on an occasional community that comes to the performance as non-insiders. For this to happen, everyday gestures must be given a special expressive power and charge.

The other is **framing**: whatever the theatrical space is in which the performance takes place, it has tangible physical frameworks, the world of physical actions cannot cross the spatial boundaries of perceptibility, or if it happens, it will have an extra meaning (stepping from/to the stage, exits and antrées, play among the audience, etc.).

The third is what I would call **dramatic** framing, by which I mean that every performance, even spontaneous happenings, street theatre that incorporates the unexpected, has some kind of dramatic, loose or strict structure of movement and framework, a spatial “rule of the game” accepted by the actors, according to which it takes place. And here I am not only referring to the gait, the regulated manner of “movement” on stage, but also to the proxemic¹⁰ relations between actors, and to the fact that all replicas - including the multi-actor ones! - takes place within a planned, rehearsed or pre-arranged



framework. If this was not the case, the theatrical event would disintegrate in space and time, and the audience would leave the whole thing after a while. Such a situation is sometimes deliberately created by a director when he the end of a

performance is “left open”. He ends the performance with endless movement, or just with some kind of sustained tableau. The audience looks at each other, who has the courage to break the silence of the auditorium and applaud, or to get up from their seats, perhaps go on stage and talk to the actors... The famous final scene of Mejerhold’s 1926 production of *Revizor* is very instructive from the point of view of the use of space and the organisation of movement. He writes about it like this:

“Now the last scene. I’ll leave out some details from the beginning,..., but I know the final scene,[...] The stage is empty again [...] Behind the doors the gorging is going on. They eat and drink there, and arrive here with tablecloths around their necks. The tablecloth is covering their breasts, so it’s clear that they’re gorging[...] It’s a silent scene, about which Gogol wrote a lot... He wrote this: “the whole company... is frozen, a silent scene”. He even drew a picture of how they are frozen, and he says: “The silent company remains like this for about a minute and a half.” How do we relate to this scene? It’s not a question of how to show it, but how to approach it, how to creep up close to it, how much pause to take. People have been gorging, people have been

¹⁰ Proxemics: the distance kept between people in communication and everyday activities.

drinking; there's a band invited for this special occasion - they start dancing the French quartet in the empty space in front of the doors. The spectators are clueless [...] Suddenly a gendarme appears at every door of the auditorium. We have seven doors. So not one, but seven gendarmes. That's the "boom"! The spectators stare at the gendarmes, the whole auditorium starts to spin. Then one of the gendarmes goes on stage...he steps into Hlesztakov space, from there into the mayor's house, and he starts to speak. Everyone on the stage runs straight back behind the doors [and closes it behind them]. A moment's pause, the doors open, and in each door stand the figures painted with Gogol's precision: one tilts his head to one side, another spreads his arms. It is dark everywhere. These figures are standing there... What are they - living people? In the doorway papier-mâché puppets will stand with stuffed bodies.

The audience can then stay as long as they like. This is the real silent scene... "Do you want to know how it was made?" You can go up on stage to see it.

Andrea Tompa writes about Mejerhold's theory of space and movement:

*What is mimic game [at Mejerhold]? Does it only mean face play? No, it's also a play of hands and body movement, including not only turning the head or shoulders, but also sitting in a chair, armchair, etc. It is not the psychological complexity of the individual characters, but the relationship of the characters to each other and to the space, the spatial positioning is crucial. Mejerhold has a particular vocabulary for this ("vkomponovatyszja v sztul", he says, **so the actors do not sit in a chair, but rather compose themselves into it;** ... and gestures: the games of the hand and head, the so-called mimic games, which can demonstrate its biomechanics in practice. The spatial structure of the performance is also peculiar: in the narrow, crowded playing space, a very large number of actors, often more than a dozen, play, not in depth, but in relief, copying the plains of space on top of each other. This relationship between body and space offered new compositional possibilities.¹¹*

Consider this long but instructive quote as a basic principle for everything we

¹¹ Vszevolod Mejerhold: *A Revizor (The Revizor)*, Drama analysis, with an introduction by Andrea Tompa, p. 83, [hereinafter Andrea Tompa] Available from: <http://szinhaz.net/2008/11/08/vszevolod-mejerhold-a-revizor/>

think about the complexity of the use of movement and space on stage, and its pervasive importance for everything and everyone. Of course, it is not a question of inventing and planning every movement and spatial relationship in advance, with Mejerhold's precision. What is important here is the director's/actor's attitude, the fact that in the light of the text or the idea, every facial play, gesture, posture, movement, spatial direction has, can have, has a role. Nor is it a question of working out the »choreography« of each scene with such precision and detail at an amateur theatre level. What is important here is the attitude, the fact that in our group it becomes natural to take these aspects into account and incorporate them into the creative process. For amateurs, of course, there is neither the time nor the opportunity to learn a movement technique professionally. But if you do use a technique, be it pantomime, ballet, folk dance character or ballroom dancing, it is worthwhile to seek the help of a professional. According to Stanislavsky, as long as the physical culture is used for the main task, there is no problem in using it, but if it is used as self-serving, it can conflict with the intellectual space of the performance and become a show-off. If someone in the group is skilled in acrobatics, ballet or folk dancing, it is up to the director to decide when and how much of these skills to use in the performance. A very good physical exercise, and one that can help a lot in finding the character's movement and voice-character, is the sculpture that comes to life exercise. This is when, starting from a motionless prone position, two or three assistants set up/build the character's posture, then set the still loose medium in motion, »walking« it, and finally setting it on its way. Thinking through the spatial relationships is important not only for the spatial placement of the walks and movements, but also for the overall performance arc. Particularly if we want to create a special "private space" for each character, in which he or she "feels at home" in terms of their movement, or, on the contrary, has a sense of discomfort, and from which, by stepping out or into someone else's space, or into some "public" space, his or her kinetic behaviour changes. It is worthwhile to have each character do a series of lead-up exercises in which they look for the character's characteristic gait, posture, hand gestures. I have used such private spaces and the movement automatisms they evoke, for example, in my play *Red Riding Hood, Family Hysterics*. The realm of the title character,

Grandmother Red Riding Hood, is her comfortably furnished couch where everything is at hand: here she does needlework, staples the excess yarn on the tapestry wall protectors, pees in her newspaper-covered potty on her bedside table, keeps her treasures under the mattress, makes phone calls, manages the house, keeps an eye on things; for her husband, retired engineer Uncle Gyuszi, this private space is his writing-design table; Aniko, their moody daughter - her little private space is the rubber-covered, cigarette-holed couch where she chain-smokes, eats greedily, and from here she launches her own “attacks” against her mother, Red Riding Hood, and occupies other rooms in the apartment. Their common spaces - the living room, kitchen, bathroom - all become sites of conflict in the play, with serious consequences for the movement of the characters. The division of space dictates the spatial course of the plot, i.e. the possibilities for the actor’s movement. If an actor cannot get in and out well, if he is obstructed by furniture, then the actor is not only limited in his “transport”, but also in his movement possibilities in general. This paralyses his movement fantasy. Don’t forget to always have a stage visit for a guest performance, if there is opportunity and time, “walk through” the whole performance, if not - children’s and student drama sessions! - at least get to know the paths and cover-ups. In a new performance space, don’t be afraid to use space creatively, to incorporate new elements into the movement and organisation of the space.

ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF WARMING UP

“An actor needs to be fit not to feel good or to look good, but to be alert and receptive to outside stimuli.”¹²

It is useful, especially for younger, beginner groups, to start each rehearsal with a physical warm-up. It’s also a good idea to spend half an hour before the performance warming up together, or individually for more experienced actors. This not only helps us to get physically ready and concentrate, but - most importantly - it takes us from everyday life to performance, from individual to communal existence. This can be a common set of gymnastics, breathing exercises, vocal exercises, contact exercises, articulation warm-

¹² Declan Donnellan: *Actor and Target*, Corvina, Budapest, 2021. [Hereinafter: Donnellan]

ups and of course completely individual preparation. My own memories are linked to the Arvisura performances: here we started with full inhalation and exhalation /gradual filling and emptying of the chest, abdomen, shoulders/, space-dividing walking, floor exercises, voice exercises, stretching and relaxing exercises, singing together, and then later - before the performances - everyone continued individually: articulation, jumps, tilts, text recitation, but there were also folk songs, contrabass playing, and all-men-dances. The point was to gradually replace the initial, director-led exercise sequence with a looser, more open, individual warm-up.

Here are some of these warm-up exercises from Balázs Perényi's book:

»Walking exercises: walk in space at a steady medium pace; neither too slow nor too fast. Try to walk without showing either a figure or a state. Don't be too relaxed or too put together; don't stroll but don't gallop, don't wander aimlessly but don't ramble in a determined manner! Let's stand upright, back straight, shoulders back and down! Don't swing your arms, but don't hold them to your body! Our steps should be neither too small nor too huge! Look straight ahead, neither up to the sky nor down to the ground! Do not form a figure! Our walk should not suggest emotion, figure, situation: let's strive for total inexpressiveness! Breathe deeply and evenly, keep the tempo! Walk loosely and energetically! Change direction, don't go in circles! Let us strive not to let our thoughts wander, not to be carried away by emotions.

Let's change this basic gait a little, not a big change, just a small one; in the posture of the head, shoulders, spine, hips, the swinging of the arms, the length of the steps, the flexibility, the pace.«

The second joint spatial movement exercise: *»Everyone should walk in a circle around the edge of the space at a steady medium pace; neither too slow nor too fast. Try not to walk in a way that shows either a figure or a state. Breathe deeply and calmly. We walk with more and more energy and pace! Turn from the edge of the room to the centre and cross the room firmly. Try not to slow down, try not to swerve, but do not collide. When you get to the edge, change direction and after a step or two, turn back towards the centre.. Walk deliberately and firmly, do not swerve, but do not crash! ... Fill the space*

*evenly! No large empty spaces, no denser spots for even seconds. Listen to the others, sense where they are moving, where empty space is created, into which direction you have to start.”*¹³ To do this, the group leader can give various mood and situational instructions.

EVERYDAY MOVEMENT – STAGE MOVEMENT

*“Our bodies are used to the petty, everyday life, everyday feelings. When it has to convey more elevated emotions, actors usually draw on a particular set of commonplaces in use: arms raised, fingers and hands outstretched, solemn falls, theatrical gait, etc. [...] We have two kinds of movement and gesture: on the one hand, our domestic, natural, life-like movement, and on the other, our old-fashioned, artificial movement, designed to represent nobility and detachment and suitable only for the stage.”*¹⁴

Let's first deal with the seemingly simple movements used in theatrical realism. In this case, we are basically using everyday, socio-culturally accepted forms of movement that have been inculcated in us through the so-called “inculturation”¹⁵ process, but – as we will see – this is modulated in various ways by the theatrical situation. First of all, the mere fact that we have to move in the context of a play, in a role. Consciously or instinctively, we have to find the physicality, the world of movement and gesture of a character, with the help of ourselves, the director and our acting partners. This can be facilitated by a variety of acting pedagogical methods: the most common is to find the physical plasticity of a character while working out a scene in a play, but we can also start from a more distant place – and here again I must recall my theatre memories of Arvisura: when I was preparing for the role of Vackor in our production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, during the introductory rehearsal, three of my fellow actors “brought me to life” from a lying, relaxed position by touching me, moving my body like a “puppet”, teaching me to walk “again”, gesticulating, giving me parts of the text from the play to recite. It all reminded me of Japanese bunraku puppet-movement. But the same

¹³ In: Perényi p. 46.

¹⁴ K. Stanislavsky: *My Life*, Madách Színház-Új Színház Kft. Budapest, p. 166. Translated by Géza Staud.

¹⁵ Inculturation: the system of perception, interpretation, evaluation, expression and behaviour of the members of a community in order to acquire a culture.

kind of guiding exercises led the actors to find the movement character of the master craftsmen in the play, so that from the physical character they found they could develop and harmonize a role and then a whole group of roles, including the characters in the scene with Pyramus and Thisbe, which they later performed, where they had to work in character and role-in-a-role at the same time. With this method you can also avoid the found movement character to be completely alien, imposed on the actor from outside. It is important to be attentive to, and aware of the metacommunicative movements that arise from speech, text and situation. It is possible to start in an exaggerated way and then gradually back off, but it is also worth trying 'counter-metacommunication' of text/situation. The gestures expand, complement, underline, make fuller, perhaps awaken more meanings, while creating a sense of involvement in the viewer. Facial expressions and the direction of the gaze can reveal a lot about the character's "hidden, unspoken" thoughts, intentions, feelings and opinions. This is mainly a characteristic of the psychological score of Chekhov and Ibsen plays, but it is not surprising that Géza Hofi's monologues are also full of such "background noises", populated with gestures and "guest characters", displayed with almost choreographic elements of movement. The director has to pay attention to the actors' movements during speech, to their involuntary outgrowths / wobbles, over-movements, unnecessary pacing, during small monologues the actors stagger, peep, "squelch", shift their centre of gravity from one foot to the other. Here we need to strive for restraint, no frills, an economy of accompanying movements must be sought, otherwise the actor shows uncertainty, resembling a student who is having an oral examination, which causes the audience's attention to wander and the pace to slow down. This is particularly important for children and student actors. Here are a few more exercises that can help you find a character movement:

- mirror exercises
- imitation exercises

It is worth trying one of Balázs Perényi's related exercises:

Only by moving

"If you've already spent a lot of time on a scene, if you've got the "score" (the sequence of actions, activities, movements), it's worth playing the

*scene without the text. Inside, the sentences are spinning and everything is happening, just silently. The silence thickens, the movements, gestures and glances take on meaning. Comments: It is worth trying this out once, if the scene is more or less ready. Acting signals beyond words will be much more plastic and expressive. It also helps with the fixation.”*¹⁶

STATUS AND MOVEMENT:

A very interesting perspective on the relationship between movement and character on stage is provided by Keith Johnstone, who in the chapter of his book.¹⁷ *Status* explains that

the stage status shifts work like a seesaw when generating or extinguishing and shifting tension within a scene, and that it is this process that maintains and excites the audience with the dramatic tension between the characters. All this has very serious consequences for stage movement. For, as he writes at one point: “...every status also carries a certain physical posture/movement.”

He also gives examples and exercises:

*“I encourage my students to... try out the different possibilities for changing status. One of them should move softly (high status), while his partner should move in a lumpy way (low status). Slow movements give the impression of high status, so the movements of the gunslingers, who are capable of superhuman speed, are shown in slow motion; if the film was sped up, the heroes would move in a jerky way, and their status would sink into ridicule.”*¹⁸ On stage, by the way, it’s just the other way around. I remember that the pub brawl that started Arvisura’s production of *Dirty Fred the Captain* was made irresistibly comic by the slow motion, since it gave the audience a glimpse into the details of the fight. This, of course, required a long physical training session to learn the technique of slow motion, how to skilfully circumvent the law of gravity when falling. Let’s look at some of Johnstone’s instructions for status exercises:

High status: soft movement, head relaxed, legs crossed, or leaning back on

¹⁶ In: Perényi, p. 135.

¹⁷ In: Johnstone, p. 85-127.

¹⁸ In: Johnstone, p. 51-52.

the table or chair, stretched out, while partner is **in low status** - spasming, twitching, shaking legs. Related to this, sequential physical exercises can be done, for example, trying out physical gestures of obstruction or helping.

Think of the *Columbo* series, where there is a gradual change of status between the detective and the killer. The perpetrator – usually a high social status figure – initially looks down on the unkempt-looking, hesitant but steadfast detective wearing a wrinkled trenchcoat. He is the very important and busy man. He sprawls haughtily, feet propped up on the table in his boss armchair in the living room of his luxury villa, then grows increasingly nervous, only to admit his guilt in a mostly catatonic state and fall into low status as the detective rises to high status.

Delsarte's movement system can be a resource for actors on the role of stage movement and posture in creating meaning when setting a scene. Delsarte's stage "topography" details the emotional-inductive yield of each body position.

Here we will only quote excerpts from Katalin Lőrinc's book¹⁹, as Delsarte, based on Ted Shawn's book²⁰ takes up the expressive domain of the body and the "meanings" that arise from the posture, position and movement of the palm and the whole figure.²¹

In Delasarte's system:

- **the head** = the *mental* field of expression (wisdom)
- **the upper body with the upper limbs** = space for *emotional* expression (love)
- **the lower body with the legs** = the space of *physical-lively* expression (eccentric)²²

The direction of holding the palm based on the six cards of the dice: pointing at the side facing us: rejection; facing the top card: blessing; facing the bottom card: support, lifting, helping; facing the outer side: possession, protection; facing the inner side: pushing away

¹⁹ Katalin Lőrinc: *A test mint szöveg (The body as text)*, OSZK, Budapest, 2018, p. 86-87. [hereinafter: Katalin Lőrinc]

²⁰ Shawn, Ted, *Every Little Movement. A Book About François Delsarte*, Dance Horizons, 1974.

²¹ In: Katalin Lőrinc, 86-87.p.

²² In: Katalin Lőrinc, p. 83.

If the bust

- in relation to another or to other bodies
face to face: harmonious, understanding communication
perpendicular: disconnection
backwards: rejection
- if compared to the viewer
facing them: positive, strong impact
side, in profile: weaker effect, turning away
backwards: strong and multiple effects

Of course, there is no mention of applying this with such precision in everyday rehearsal work. Let this be the business of dancers and movement artists. But the fact that it is worth paying attention to such details is something I can recommend to anyone who is involved in acting.

HOW DOES MOVEMENT BECOME A SIGNAL?

For the special attention of amateur actors who are entering the field of movement theatre.

The first big successes of Hungarian amateur theatre were marked by groups/performances that, in the seventies and eighties, under the indirect influence of Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba, created the forebears of what we now call movement theatre or physical theatre. Such were the Miskolc Manézs Stage *Shaman's Song*; the Szeged JATE Stage *Petőfi Rock*, *Kőműves Kelemen*; Universitas Ensemble *The Eighth Circle of Hell*, *Birds of Aristophanes*; Tatabánya Bányász Stage *Kukabúvárok*; Arvisura Theatre's *Hungarian Electra*, to name a few of the outstanding productions. In all of these performances, group movement elements beyond words/texts and imagery had the main role.

We must not forget about the theatre workshops that still give a prominent role to collective movement, acrobatics and various dance elements in their training and performances. It is clear that those who wish to enter this field need much more physical preparation than the groups which opt for theatrical realism, although the former also need some background work in this area.

BODY-AWARENESS

What language cannot do, the body can show. Developing body awareness is an important task for all acting groups, whether they are movement or text-based. The so-called body position observation exercises are very useful for this. One form of this is when a partner gives a description of a pose of the body (basic-neutral, statue-like pose, in movement) and we perform movements based on his or her instructions. But it can also be a useful self-awareness exercise to report on the here-and-now of our own bodies.

The fundamental law of physics and stage movement: about gravity

We quote an important thought from Katalin Lőrinc's book *"My body expresses me, even before I intend to do anything... Everything that happens inside us is expressed in every movement of ours (regardless of intention), which expresses, in a primary way, our own unique being, our own meaning, our own biographical context."*²³

Eugenio Barba introduces the notion of pre-expressivity when he talks about the actor-dancer-performer's use of the body, his movement, which is different from the ordinary, and which is based on a common (though different in the technique of its creation) biological level, pre-expressivity. The theatrical effect lies fundamentally in the tension: in the operation of opposing or temporarily restrained energies. He calls SATS the state in which action flows out of strong attention or force accumulation. It is a state like that of a spring before it pops up.

A common feature of all theatrical body techniques is an unusual balance position. Katalin Lőrinc writes: *"The closer the tipping out of the balance position comes to the dangerous, the more excitement it generates... In everyday life we avoid risk, in theatrical movement the body comes to life in this danger."*²⁴

Actors – if they want movement to play a prominent role in their performances – have to learn to 'shape' the spinal column to act against the natural

²³ In: Katalin Lőrinc, p. 144.

²⁴ In: Katalin Lőrinc, p. 95.

impulse that wants to tilt it forward, to act as a rudder to control and orient the rest of the body. »According to Japanese dance artist and noh expert Katsuko Azuma, the *centre of gravity is the* midpoint of the imaginary line connecting the navel to the tailbone.«²⁵

There can be no equivalence between the personal energies used in the performance and the energies used and required to portray the character's life on stage. Stage struggles are never characterised by maximum energy use, but by MAXIMUM ENERGY CONCENTRATION and ECONOMY.

Even in the midst of stage life, the actor has to make the smallest physical effort. Only this way can he or she endure the extraordinary physical strain of life on stage, both mentally and physically. The explanation for this apparent contradiction is that if we were to perform every physical action at one hundred per cent - like a 100-metre runner - we would be unable, through exhaustion, to mobilise energies that would sustain us for the duration of, say, a whole performance and bridge the gap between us and the audience, in other words, hold the spectator's attention. Whatever the case, the actor must be able to play in such a way that the spectator perceives it to be a maximum energy injection, but what only appears to be so. This requires the mastery of many tricks. An energetic arm gesture, for example, is not created by the energy of the arm muscles, but only by using the most necessary muscles. The muscles only carry out and express the action on which our whole attitude is concentrated, in which our whole physical apparatus is involved. An example-exercise of how to accurately construct a physical action sequence with a beginning, middle and end, while including an unexpected diversion:

1. From SATS (the direction opposite to the final direction - the spring before it pops up!), an action is started where all energies point in a specific direction;
2. a counter-impulse is introduced in-process, which deflects its direction and changes its dynamics, and
3. ensure arrival at a precise position that already contains the impulse for the next action, its SATS

²⁵ Quoted in Eugenio Barba: *Papírkeny*, Kijárat Kiadó Bp. 2001., p. 48.

The counter-gestures, the counter-gaits: we cannot avoid here to make a small detour towards the pantomime technique. Almost every group wants to use the technique of mime for some theatrical event. The risk is high, since pantomime is a technically codified, learned (came about through acculturation) movement system just like ballet, although perhaps a little easier to learn.

Balázs Perényi writes: *“Mute plays are not scenes of people who are not able to speak, who are acting out what they want to say (the words), but situations in which inner events can be expressed in full, and communication can take place. The silent play: concentrated presence, real connection, condensed expression, clear and expressive play. It is not possible to “talk the scene out”. You have to make an impact!”*²⁶

It is mainly child and student actors who turn to the device of “silent pointing”, “miming”, for example, when they run in place, eat, drink from a cup, sweep, enter somewhere through an imaginary door, eavesdrop, etc. They usually dumb down such actions for two reasons: one is that they only move on the surface of the action. The other – which is partly a consequence of this – is that they simply consider the precise elaboration to be incidental. But even very simple pantomime exercises can give emphasis and plasticity to the action. Mastering the basics of pantomime helps us to practice techniques of muscle relaxation-tension, muscle control, separation, balance, localisation, touch, acceptance, rejection. For example, stopping a movement abruptly with a “tok”. By this, touching something or moving an object – before it has happened – is initiated with a sudden stop, separating it from the next phase of movement. All power comes from perfect/productive stillness, this is the most dense content – how can you be still for even a moment, yet still lively and active? *“There is no force that doesn’t come from perfect stillness.”* - writes Katalin Lőrinc.²⁷ Of course, one should be careful with using a too direct pantomime technique, as it can easily become a style-mistake or excelling. This approach and practice should rather instil a mindset into our work. Maintaining balance, contrast, force-counterforce, variations, rhythm and

²⁶ In: Perényi, p. 36.

²⁷ In: Katalin Lőrincz, p. 36.

intensity thus becomes a kind of secondary conditioned reflexivity upon which the actor can build the strength and skill that grabs the viewer's attention. The result *will be* – ideally – “*a delicate balance of technique and instinct.*”²⁸

The director and the actor in physical training:

Directors are not usually seen training. It's not good for a director to show, to “pre-show” the physical exercise. It is better to ask for something verbally and leave the implementation to the actor to find the best way of doing it. But it is important to try to make them aware: react with their whole body, listening to what is working against them to do the exercise. The director can help by giving physical impulses, holding or releasing the actor, being the counter-force, the actor leaning on him, standing behind or in front of them when they lean, being ready to help his actor avoid falling, helping them to a bridge and then lifting them to a standing position. All this can, of course, be done by the acting partner as well. It all makes an incredible difference in fostering unconditional collegial trust. It is this dynamic that then forms the basis of stage relationships: varying the rhythm through real actions, creating obstacles with which the actor must constantly physically confront. This can result in embodiment, as we finally give flesh to a character, a role, a feeling, an emotion, an inner image.

II. VOICE PRODUCTION

*“Physiology distinguishes between two types of breathing: physiological breathing for life support and speech-breathing for vocalization... Speech-breathing involves deeper and faster inhalation and longer exhalation. Theatrical speech differs from ordinary speech exactly in that, although it is not ordinary speech, it gives the appearance of ordinary speech.”*²⁹

When we talk about developing voice production, the first thing an amateur acting group needs to address is the basis of all vocal expressions, the

²⁸ In: Katalin Lőrincz, p. 39.

²⁹ Montágh Imre: *Tiszta beszéd (Clear speech)*, 1976. Népművelés Propaganda Iroda, Budapest, p. 8 and 10. [hereinafter: Montágh]

technique of breathing. It is the basis of all vocal expressions, pronunciation, self-expression, the tonality, the arc of temper, the dynamics of our sentences. Correct breathing is instinctive, deep, soft and involuntary, any other form of breathing is already meaningful in the uniqueness of the expression, the emotional amplitude, the dramatic situation. The aim of breathing exercises is to create the conditions for good intonation, which is the basis for effortless pronunciation. An important aspect here is that when the emotional charge is heightened, we can also speak more forcefully without effort, so that we do not strain our throats (this will sooner or later lead to hoarseness and vocal cord inflammation), but make conscious use of resonators and ensure the free flow of air outwards. A good voice is strong without effort. *“Depending on which muscles are involved in the work of breathing [...], we distinguish between chest breathing, shoulder girdle breathing and diaphragm breathing. Inhalation initiated by the diaphragm muscle but carried out by expanding the rib cage is called combined breathing. For centuries, actors, singers and orators have been developing the automatic use of breathing based on diaphragmatic action.”*³⁰ The resonators used in the release of sound are located in the thoracic cavity, the facial, nasal and cranial cavities, the chest and the oral cavity (based on Grotowski). Three basic types of breathing are distinguished: thoracic, shoulder girdle and diaphragmatic. Actors and singers use diaphragmatic breathing the most, i.e. the middle range of the voice, so the chest voice is dominant on stage, it provides a good audible range of sound, it is this that we should aim for and practice in the first place. Always bear in mind that what is good in a room is not enough on stage. The sound is clear and strong and »up front« if we do not feel that we have strained our vocal cords even at high volumes. The first step in learning stage speech technique is to develop correct breathing, the second is to recognise and work out the middle voice range. Actors need to work constantly on expanding the range, widening the middle range and making it audible. Normal physiological exhalation is faster than when it is related to speech. Both inhalation (faster) and exhalation are much more “staggered”, as they have to be adapted to the content, emotional charge, articulation and communicative situation of the

³⁰ Imre Montágh: *NYELVMŰVESSÉG, A beszéd művészete (LANGUAGE, (The Art of Speech)*, Múzsák, 1989. p. 12-13. [hereinafter: Montágh 2]

text being said. In addition, it is necessary to remain intelligible in extreme speech situations, such as when speaking at high speed, whispering, at high volume, at different pitches and in different tones. This can be done by using different speech-altering exercises (more on this later).

In summary: the aim of breathing exercises is to develop and automatise high-capacity diaphragmatic breathing, to practise soundless inhalation, to increase awareness of air distribution, to ensure pause, to regulate exhalation for sound production, to develop a good carrying mid-range voice, effortlessness, sound production, widening the range of the voice, increasing the volume without spasms, creating a steady tone, regular rhythm of speech, careful pronunciation of the end of words, smooth, clear speech, clarifying the pronunciation of sound links. These are also self-educating concentration exercises, so that the actor no longer has to concentrate on the speech, only on the performance. [based on Imre Montágh]

The aim of stage speech pedagogy is therefore to identify and develop the so-called **middle range**, after the development of correct breathing. The acquisition of correct breathing techniques leads to correct **sound production**. “The *expression of the human voice means the type of sound, the tone of voice, the tone uniqueness that characterises every human being, by which we can recognise anyone by the sound of his voice.*”³¹

When the inhaled air leaves the lungs, it travels through the windpipe to the larynx, where it vibrates to create sound. This phenomenon is called sound production. “*What is certain is that it’s the exhalation that makes the sound. (...) It’s the air that works, not the sound-making organs, but the exhalation.*”³² But in order for speech on stage to be understood and heard in a space of a given size and acoustics, the amateur actor also needs to consciously develop and perfect his or her sound production. The aim of voice training is that “*when the actor is working with his voice, he no longer has to pay special attention to his vocal organs.*”³³ *Just as an actor must condition his body,*

³¹ Sándor Fischer, *Retorika (Rhetoric)* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1975), p. 97.

³² Jerzy Grotowski, *Színház és rituálé (Theatre and Ritual)*, trans. András Pályi (Budapest: Kalligram Publishers, 1999), 108. (Hereinafter: Grotowski, *Theatre...*)

³³ In Grotowski, *Theatre...*, p. 118.

*so must condition his voice: it must be trained as an extension of his body in order to take on the most nuanced expressive form possible, to become capable of conveying emotional content.*³⁴

In addition to the vocal cords, the resonators (thoracic, facial and cranial cavities) are also very important in sound production, as they make the sound audible and colour it. Everyday speech takes place in the midrange, which we can find by scaling up three notes above our lowest emitted tone until we feel it is not demanding to emit the notes above. The sound bar of trust and sorrow is below the middle bar, but if someone is constantly speaking on this bar, sooner or later they will hoarsen and become inaudible. Angry, declaiming, shouting speech takes place in the upper range. The lower pitch is the area of authenticity, the higher pitch is the area of falsehood. In cabaret, operetta, folk theatre and children's performances, for example, special care should be taken to ensure that actors do not get caught up in the high register. "Take it lower, take it lower!" - a warning should be used. *"The voice of a tense person is pharyngeal, the voice of a relaxed person is naso-oral, the nasal cavity is involved - slightly! - in the resonance, the overtone is richer, the voice is fuller, more pleasant, the modulation richness of the speech is greater."*³⁵ During stage voice training and speech perfection, an important and achievable goal for amateurs is to open the mouth, as many of us speak with our mouths closed and with minimal articulation effort. This is achieved through *chin-drop* exercises (Montágh's term).

Imre Montágh's advice on what to pay attention to when making some special sounds [details]:

*"There is rarely a problem with the sound **p**, you have to strive for a strong bounce to pronounce it firmly even at the end of the word.*

*The sound of the sound **b** should be strong.*

*The sound **t** is sometimes wrong, if it's formed too backwards..., then it becomes airy like in British English. The **t**-s at the end of a word are often*

³⁴ Károly Kovács: A színpadi légzés és hang szinergiája a színészi munkában (The Synergy of stage breathing and voice in the work of an actor), Theatron 14,1. (2020) [Hereinafter: Károly Kovács]

³⁵ In: Montágh 2. p. 14.

dropped [but you shouldn't overemphasize them either, because that would be finicking - R.J.]. Later he lists the "most critical" sounds. These are the **sz** (*as many pronunciations as there are speakers [...] The regular sz is neither muffled nor too thin, whistle-like. A correctly formed sz is broadly powerful, and the more rounded it is – without being s-like – the more powerfully it sounds from the stage. [...] [F]ixing it requires great patience and skill.*)” He finds the correct pronunciation of the **z** sound equally problematic, but less perceptible because of its sibilance. According to Montágh, we also need to pay attention to the sound **s** as it needs to be very deep and powerful.

One more point is made about the importance of sound training exercises. *“The activity of sound output is innervated by two brain areas. One is responsible for the deeper, instinctive vocal manifestations, the other for conscious vocal control. The former is the more ancient, related to animal vocal innervation – the vocal world of basic emotional expressions, the latter is the later evolved conscious vocal control. For actors, purely conscious, soulless acting is called **illustration**, and authentic, immersive acting is called **transference**. [...] When instinct washes consciousness away, man shows extreme forms of expression. The pure instinct is as useless on stage as it is in life, and the merely conscious is just as useless.”*³⁶ Montágh recalls here a conversation with Kálmán Nádasdy, when he complained to him as the following: ‘...if we occupy ourselves too much with the body, the soul will wither away’, to which he replied: ‘If you occupy yourselves with the soul only, the body will wither away: teach harmony!’³⁷

And now – without claiming completeness – some **text-free breathing exercises** by Imre Montágh!³⁸

In the supine position:

- relaxation-straining (relaxation) with involuntary diaphragmatic breathing, followed by deep and full inhalation with palm-controlled slow exhalation (diaphragm-chest-shoulder tip).

³⁶ In Montágh 2. p. 37.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ The following practice texts are located in Montágh 2. p. 54-66.

In standing position:

- deep inhalation (with hands on hips!), prolonged exhalation, first without sounding, then while sounding **sz**, **s**, **f** and **h**, this should last for 60 seconds; counting aloud to 100, while breathing every 20 breaths, this can be made more difficult by some physical action (throwing a ball, pushing an object, movements).

A concentration breathing exercise with a mechanical text listen to when to pause and take a breath:

- not 3, not 6, not 9, not 12, not 15, not 18, not 21, not 24, and so on.

2 breathing exercises with text:

Dezső Kosztolányi: *That night* (excerpt) – keep the given pause marks!

That night

the clocks were beating all over the place. (–)

That night

all the gardens were bathed in silver haze. (–)

That night

under our gate cars were rumbling. (–)

That night

sultry words in tears were floundering (–)

That night

candles and lamps burned in our room. (–)

That night

we were afraid of the horrible gloom. (–)

That night

our faces were scared and deathly pale. (–)

That night

my poor, grey-haired grandfather died. (–)

Jenő Dsida: *With Golden and Blue Words*

(Here you should concentrate on whether you can talk to the pause mark with one breath, and if you pause, what your breathing pattern is. This poem can also be used as a breathing warm-up, a concentration exercise.)

As well as a medieval friar
dreaming in the corner
in an arched
cobwebbed old room,
who washed off long ago
the mud of earthly desire,
and is halfway up already floating
on the clear ether,
sits at his enormous table
full of books
and between the capital letters
wedges small pictures,
He paints Madonnas forever,
with gold and sky blue,
until with a gentle smile
breathes his last air (–)
I'd like to do the same
beside my lantern's
nightly and dusky light,
to capture, with precious

gold and blue words
to paint only you,
until my fingers go dry,
like a branch of a decaying tree
and until my head will not be bowed
into the arms of
divine peace, my love,
the most beautiful flower in the world.

Voice training exercises without text:

Note: the practice of using no text does not mean that no text is used at all. In this case, the text selected and learned for practice [which can be a text similar to a foreign language or completely gibberish!] is not used according to its meaning or structure, but specifically for the purpose of sound practice.

In the first exercises, focus on the production of vowels in different contexts and variations [á, a, e, é, i, í, o, ó, ö, ő, u, ú, ü, ű]. The sounds to be produced in a sustained and strong way for a given period of time (this can be an individually chosen exhalation time, or, in a case of more participants, a time to take over the sound formation from the previous person before the end of the exhalation and thus make the sound production more continuous). Then change the pitch, bring it up and down, make it broken, change it into a melody, etc. After the individual vowels, you can then add the vowel sequences (e.g. **áae - oőé - ioü**) - these are also played continuously at a chosen pitch (a piano can help if you have one at hand).

Montágh, for bringing sound forward, suggests the sounds sequences mamama, mámámá, mememe, momomo, mimimi, mümümü, and the same starting with n, and then variations of these, such as mánámanamene, jálájalajele, bálábalabelebilí, and so on. The same can also be practised on words (málna, malom, málna, liliom, nálam, unalom, mellé, nulla [Eng. raspberry, mill,

raspberry, lily, at me, boredom, beside, zero, etc.]).

Now it's time for **group exercises**. People stand in a circle, one of them responds to a yes or a statement with a no or a refusal, and they do this with different volumes and temperamental-emotional amplitudes.

Examples:

You did this, King – No, I didn't do it

Tell him – You tell him

Listen to me – I'm not listening

Bring it in – You bring it in

Let me – I won't let you

You can also do this with longer sentence pairs.

Pay attention to the tonality of the sentence pairs, add an emotional emphasis. Vary them so that the rejection is more subtle, more sly, more permissive. For example: Tell him – Maybe you should.

Exercises from the Odin Theatre's workshop:

Eugenio Barba sees sound as an active force, he writes:

*“Sound, in its logical and sonic aspect, is a material force that is itself in motion, guiding, shaping, stopping. We can also speak of a real sound action that provokes an immediate reaction.”*³⁹

Closed space exercises based on Barba [cited work p. 75.]:

In this exercise, one of the actors using a training language of his own devising, leads his two partners and tries to control his partners with his voice: he persuades, asks, forces them to do what he wants them to do, while at the same time he reacts with his voice to what his partners do. It is best if the partners stand backwards to him. Watch out! They do not play a role, they just respond with their whole body to the vocal stimulus. E. Barba adds

³⁹ E. Barba: *Theatre, Solitude, Craft, Revolt*, Mountain Press Aberystwyth, Uk.Wales, 1999. [trans. R. J.] p. 75. [Hereinafter: Barba: *Theatre, Solitude, Craft...*]

that if the vocal stimulus is accurate, the response will be accurate, there won't be any obstacles in the execution. Throughout the exercise, try to resist the temptation to produce something original: make strange sounds, shout inarticulately, turn your vocal reactions into a kind of sonorous lava spill, which, although sounds dramatic, will be tense and artificial. That's not what this is about! Sándor Hevesi warns us regarding sound management: *'For the expression of every emotion, use only as many sounds as are absolutely necessary, because in art, anything that is unnecessary is also a mistake.'*⁴⁰

To practise sound production, you can use some fictional language, even better if this fictional language is similar to a living language that you know, but be careful not to use it as a parody. Actors say the already learned text using different resonators (occipital - the back of the skull), head, mask (face), chest and abdomen. If we imagine that the sounds are emitted by these parts of our body, our voice takes on a different timbre. Of course, this requires us to know the text we are using for the training so well that we don't have to make any effort to remember it. There is no need to observe punctuation, or to interpret the text. That's not what matters. We just go on telling it, and when we need to take a breath, we pause for a breath, just like we do in everyday speech. To find the resonators, the group leader can help by asking you to speak to his or her hands. For example, when using the mask resonator, he or she holds their hand very close to your lips, then as he or she moves away you gradually increase the volume, making sure that you continue to use the same resonator. This is also difficult because when we increase the volume, we involuntarily slide towards a higher resonator, and in the same way, when he brings his hand close to our lips again, we want to slide towards a lower timbre and thus a lower resonator. Then the director moves his hand to different parts of our body [chest, abdomen, head and occiput, asking us to use the relating resonator. The sound action always follows the hand, which changes direction, distance, slower or faster. Of course, it is not easy to change resonators at first. Another such exercise is when with your voice you have to follow an imaginary ball floating in the air. For example, the ball is on the top of our head, on our belly, on our foot, if it is further away, we make a higher sound, if it is closer, we

⁴⁰ In: Montágh 2. p.177.

make a lower sound. In an enclosed space, we can direct our practice text towards an object at different distances and heights. We can do the same with the help of an actor partner. For example, actor **A** stands with his back to actor **B**, who guides actor **A** through the space with his voice – calling him closer or directing him further away. This way, the practicing voice triggers physical impulses in the partner. To use the throat resonator, we can ask the actor to imitate Luis Armstrong or a lion. **Practice tasks outdoors:** the sound is made in different directions and locations, such as a waterfront, a field, a valley, a mountain top, a cave, a forest, etc. You can choose a point and aim the sound at it: the rising sun, birds in the sky, a partner standing further away, following the trees moving in the wind, etc. **Vocalization exercises with text:** breathing and voice production are important in these exercises, but good pronunciation is also significant, and interpretation is also not a secondary aspect. Here, too, you can choose a text to learn, which you can use as a practice/warm-up text before rehearsals/performances. Examples of texts for voice practice from Imre Montágh's book:

1. Emphasise the sounds in bold!

Sándor Weöres: *Tavaszköszöntő* (*Spring Greeting*) (excerpt)

Hungarian:

Sándor napján **m**egszakad a tél,
József **n**apján **m**egszűnik a szél,
Zsákban **B**enedek hoz **m**ajd **m**eleget
Nincs több fázás, boldog, aki él.

English:

On Alexander's Day, winter breaks,
On Joseph's Day, the wind stops
blowing,
Benedek in sackcloth **w**ill bring
warmth

No more colds, happy who lives.

2. In this text, make sure that the consonants and vowels are clearly pronounced and pause at the beginning of lines where necessary. In particular, more attention is needed for vowels. Árpád Tóth: *Láng* (*Flame*) (excerpt)

Hungarian:		English:	
Eldobtam egy gyufát, s legott		I threw a match, and there	
Hetyke lobogásba fogott,		A small perky flame flared,	
Lábhegyre állt a kis nyulánk,		It stood on tiptoe,	
Hegyes sipkájú sárga láng,		The willowy yellow flame with a	
Vígat nyújtózott, furcsa törpe,		pointy funnel,	
Izgett-mozgott, előre, körbe, lengeni,		A strange dwarf stretching merrily,	
Lengett, táncolt, a zöldbe maradt.	Ilona.	Fidgeting, moving front and back	kék-lila,
Nyilván pompás tűzvészt akart,		Swingling, dancing, in green it bit	halovány
Piros csodát, izzó leget,	Műezzin	Obviously wanted a magnificent	anillin
Égő erdőt, kigyúlt eget:	zümmög egy,	ibolya,	
	„La illah	A red wonder, a glowing air	Ilona
	il’ Allah”	A burning forest, a sky on fire:	Vigasság,
	mint ahogy	fájdalom,	
3. Here, you have to pay close attention to the well-managed breaths, the	zengem en,	Ilona,	Ilona.
tempo changes and the musicality.	Ilona,	Ottó Orbán: <i>Állatok innen-onnan</i> (Animals	El soha,
<i>from here and there</i>) (excerpt)	Ilona.	s balzsam is	
Hungarian:	***	English:	mennyei
<i>Kutyaszán</i>		<i>Doggy sled</i>	lanolin,
Csin-csini-csin,	Csupa l,	Chin-chin-chin,	Ilona.
fut a kutyaszán,	csupa i,	the doggy sled runs,	
fut a kutya, fut a kutya, vele fut a	csupa o,	the doggy runs, the doggy runs, the	Elmaio
szán.	csupa a,	sleigh runs with him.	életem
Csini-csini-csin,	csupa tej,	Chin-chin-chin,	hajnala,
csuda kutyaszán,	csupa kék,	wonder doggy sled,	one dog, two dogs, three dogs, four
egy kutya, két kutya, három kutya	csupa jaj,	dogs.	alkonyas
négy kutya.	Ilona.	Chin-chin-chin	halkuló,
Csin-csini-csin		wonder doggy sled,	wonder sled,
csuda kutyaszán, csudaszán,		wonder sled,	hallali,
csudaszán,	És nekem	wonder doggy sled.	Ilona.
csuda kutyaszán.	szín is ez,	***	
	halovány		

4. Here are two passages from one of the most famous and most frequently used sound-practice texts, Dezső Kosztolányi's poem *Ilona*.

	Myezzin	blueish-purple,
Hungarian:	buzzes like:	pale
	"La illah	anillin
	il' Allah",	violet,
Lenge lány,	as I chant,	Ilona
aki sző,	Ilona,	Joy,
holdvilág	Ilona.	Sorrow,
mosolya:	***	never go away
ezt mondja	Full of <i>l</i> ,	
a neved,	Full of <i>i</i> ,	and balm, too
Ilona,	Full of <i>o</i> ,	heavenly
Ilona.	full of <i>a</i> ,	lanolin,
	full of milk,	Ilona.
Lelkemben	Full of praise,	
hallgatag	Full of woe,	My fleeting
dalolom,	Ilona.	life's dawn
lallala,		twilight,
dajkálom	And for me	a fading,
a neved	it's a colour too	unceasing
lallázva,	pale	hallelujah,
Ilona.		Ilona.

Minthogyha		
a fülem		
szellőket		
hallana,		
sellőket,		
lelkeket		

English:

A slight girl
who weaves,
moonlight
smile:
that's what
your name

says,
Ilona,
Ilona.
I sing

silently in my soul,
lallala,
Nannyng
your name,
Ilona.

As if
my ears
hear the winds
the mermaids,
the souls
swaying,
Ilona.

You can choose any part of the whole poem to practise on.

4. Finally, another much-loved practice text from Paul Verlaine's *Autumn Song*, translated to Hungarian by Árpád Tóth (English translation here by Artur Symons) (excerpt). In this poem, all the vowels except the "Ő" are low-pitched, and the voiced consonants at the end of the lines further music the sound waves of live speech. In practising, care must be taken not to overwhelm the text with either excessive mood-painting or musicality.

Hungarian:

Ősz húrja zsong,
Jajong, busong
A tájon,
S ont monoton
Bút konokon
És fájón.

English:

When a sighing begins
In the violins
Of the autumn-song,
My heart is drowned
In the slow sound
Languorous and long.

III. SPEAKING TECHNIQUES

What E. Barba writes about everyday and stage speech is very instructive for actors:

"In everyday life, when we speak, we don't listen to the words, we don't say the words without emotion. Our speech sits on a wave of breath, which can be long or short. When the process is spontaneous, we do not pay attention to the words. There is nothing to hinder or inhibit us if we feel safe; in other words, if we are not afraid, if we are not embarrassed, if we do not have to choose our words carefully, if we are not speaking in a foreign language in which we are not really well versed. This kind of safety has to be re-created in an artificial situation, which is the theatre. It is precisely for this reason that we must avoid being constantly on the lookout to see if we remember the text, to avoid being blocked by the text itself. [...] The text must be memorized so well by heart that it flows from us without the slightest difficulty, as if it was a spontaneous process. This is what allows the actor to then extend himself in space through his actions, so that he is not paying attention to the memorized

*text at all. In fact, even if the words were written by someone else [...], they come to life as personal reactions and are present through our whole being.*⁴¹

So the actor does not create the text, the words, the expressions, but re-creates, reproduces. To do this, he must be technically equipped. Ordinary speech is productive speech – basically improvised or partially improvised stage speech are also like this, where the subject matter is predetermined –, but in stage speech reproductive speech dominates, so the actor tries to interpret the pre-recorded text of the performance as if it was not a pre-learned text, creating the illusion that the text is the result of spontaneous speech. *“Typically, the text is reproduced »by heart«, but it can also be read aloud, for example on the radio, where the speaker is not visible. The most typical form of such speech activity is stage speech.”*⁴²

*“Under equal conditions, visuals are more appealing to the viewer than auditory. [However, the latter cannot be completely excluded from the sphere of attention. R. J.] It is therefore important that the actor is able to direct the spectator’s attention from the visual to the auditory and vice versa (...) by means of clear and comprehensible changes of position and sound. If he wants to focus attention on the text, he can freeze in a certain position or slow down his movements, creating a monotony of movements. And conversely, a sound monotone or pause can help to underline the visual element you want to surprise the audience with.”*⁴³

On stage, we must always speak audibly and articulately even when we whisper, because we are not truly whispering, but we must do so in such a way, that the audience can hear what we are saying and it still sounds like a whisper. It is not easy to acquire this technique, but it is also not easy to ensure that a text spoken in a raised voice and with anger does not slip into either a babble or inarticulateness. It is no coincidence, that actor training pays a great deal of attention not only to breathing technique but also to stage speaking techniques and diction.

There exists an intellectual (logical) emphasis, which is placed on the new

⁴¹ In E. Barba: *Theatre, Solitude, Craft, Revolt* p. 75.

⁴² In: Kovács Károly, p. 14.

⁴³ István Nánay: *A színésznevelés breviáriuma (An actors' education breviary)* (Budapest: Múzsák Közművelődési Kiadó, 1983) p. 199.

element of the utterance, and an emotional emphasis, by which the speaker validates their communication according to their individual points of view, under the influence of the factors of their state of mind. Emphasis can be created by raising the pitch of the voice, by increasing the volume, but also by using a pause between words. Word, phrase and sentence stresses are the successive stages of the stress rule, where we move from smaller units to larger ones, combining different word structures to form sentences of juxtaposed words, and then determine the main and secondary stresses of our utterance by the stresses within the phrases.

Since in most cases there is not one person monologuing on stage during the performance, but alternating dialogues and scenes with several actors, it is crucial to learn the gap-free dialogue technique. In this case, we also use reproductive speech imitating productive speech, so we have to dialogue as if we were entering the speech situation there and then. There are also breathing consequences to this, i.e. you have to take a breath before your partner's 'final word' in order to 'catch up' with his speech action. The temper modulation can also be varied at this point. A common problem with amateur actors is 'leaky' dialogue, or a wave of emotion-emotional charge that breaks or 'drops' or 'overstimulates' the speech response. For practice here, we can also use a well-learned text – preferably one that everyone in the group knows, divide and break this down into elements to develop the dialogue technique.

Speech technique-sound economy: so it is worth starting with our "own" practice text already mentioned for individual and multi-actor speech technique exercises. By speaking this made-up language, the actor can discover the expressive potential of the musical means of speech (tempo, rhythm, tone). However, if distorted, strained, harsh sounds, ups and downs that spoil the natural timbre, painful, sound-destroying vocalizations, gurgles, declaiming, singing, gurgling, etc. are used, the group leader should immediately indicate that this is not the way to go.

For the voice production, articulatory and speech technique warm-up exercises, Imre Montágh says that the physiological manner of voice production in the diction of each language is similar, with little variation from language to

language, but that pronunciation varies greatly. *“The articulatory base is the specific speech-movement system that creates the acoustics of a language. It is fixed in the early childhood and is very difficult to get rid of - think of the Hungarian pronunciation of German, Russian, English.”*⁴⁴

Every actor – whether he or she feels their speech good or not – is advised to practice all the modulations of speech, from the simplest speech sound to the most complex sound combination, in order to find the “white spots” that are still present in his or her speech. This requires a lot of work and patience. Let’s start the speech technique exercises with the correct pronunciation of vowels. A common problem here is having closed-mouth, which may be related to covering up a lack of teeth. The first, more easily achieved result is to get the mouth opened. To achieve this, we use the so-called chin-drop exercises. It is important here that the chin is not lowered spasmodically, but in a relaxed position, not resting it on the breastbone. Imre Montágh [marked with M.I.] and others’ **textless pronunciation exercises** for sound training:

- lip-rounding-stretching in front of a mirror occasionally fifty times with closed dentures
- tongue twisting outside the teeth, inside the lips with the mouth open - both ways [M. I.];
- ‘Smile tube’ exercise: open your lips in a circle as wide as possible (to make it look like an unnatural smile), then quickly curl them into a kissing shape - this exercise should be done quickly, for at least a minute;
- ‘chatter’: open your mouth and speak with your tongue up, down and sideways, alternating between touching different areas - it’s important to relax your tongue and change position quickly - this exercise should be done for at least half a minute;
- mandibular tongue-tip support with mid-tongue elevation [M. I.];
- strong mouth opening, soft palate lifting in front of a mirror [M. I.];
- colouring vowels with a gentle movement of the tongue [M. I.];

⁴⁴ In: Montágh 2. p. 37.

- colouring vowels with a gentle movement of the lips [M. I.];
- vowel exercises: áaou, áeéi, áaoöüü, ééiouíá, éauea, etc. [M. I.]
- place your hands on your stomach and take as many deep breaths as you can to lift the stomach. Then, as you exhale, begin to slowly alternate the sounds ‘a’, ‘o’ and ‘i’.
- then pronounce not one sound, but several, elongatedly, for example: aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa-ooooooooooooooooo-iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii-uuuuuuuuu, etc. Each sound should be pronounced in a single exhalation - for about 3-10 seconds;
- “sound emphasis” is the next exercise - this is the rapid amplification-attenuation and acceleration-deceleration of sound, and finally ‘sending’ it towards an imaginary point. For example, pick up the ‘a’ sound in stages. Start slowly, then gradually speed up and amplify to the maximum.
- it may sound strange, but it’s worth practising good speaking technique by eating and putting more and more food in your mouth and observing how much you can still understand what you’re saying.

Imre Montágh provides some very useful **pronunciation exercises with text:**

1. Word exercises with one-syllable words (Hungarian examples): már, mar, mer, mór, mér, míg, múlt; bár, baj begy bor, bér, bór, bíz, búr; pár, pad, per pór, pék, pör, pír, pult; vár, var, varr, vun, von vér, vő, visz; fáj, faj, fen, Fót, fél, föl, fisz, fúr; zár, zab, zeng, zord, zöld, zug, zúg; szár, szab, szer, szőr, szén, szög, szív, szúr; cár, cakk, cent, comb, cél, cikk, cucc; faj, fáj, fen, fenn, fél, fönn, finn, fúj, fű; nád, nap, nem, nép, no, nő, nincs, null; TAJ, táj, tag, teng, toll, tél, tönk, tíz, túr, tör, láb, lap, len, ló, lő, lomb, liszt, lúg; zsák, zseb, Zsil, zsír, zsúr; rág, rag, rend, ront, rét, rönk, ring, rúg, rév, ri, ró; sár, sakk, seb, sor, sérv, sör, sir, ság; dán, dal, de, domb, dél, döng, dísz, dúl, dől, díj; csáp, csap csepp, csont, csép, csönd, csíp, csuk, csel, csal, cseng, csöng.

These can be practised at different rhythms and speeds, even alternating between each member of the group and each word-sequence.

2. Sándor Weöres’ poem, *Chinese Temple*, is recommended for practising careful vowel pronunciation:

Hungarian:

Szent / kert / bő / lomb / tart / zöld / szárny / fönn / lenn / tág / éj / jó / kék /
árny / négy / fém / cseng / szép / jó / hír / rang / majd / mély / csönd / leng /
mint / hűlt / hang.

English:

Saint / yard / rich / leaves / open / green / wing / up / down / wide / night /
come / blue / shade / four / ore / ring / nice / good / news / rank / then / deep /
hush / sway / like / chilled / sound.

3. For the precise consonant pronunciation, Miklós Vidor selects from his
Tounge-breakers:

Hungarian: Roppant bottal / koppantottam / szöcském csacskán / szökkent, /
papnadrágban / kappant fogtam, / macskám fecskét / hökkent.

(English: With a great stick / I knocked / my grasshopper cheekily / jumped, /
in priest-pants / I caught a capon, / my cat shocked / a swallow.)

Hungarian: Szakállas sakál / ha választ csak áll / s e nóta dacára, spenót a szakálla.

(English: Bearded jackal / just standing when he chooses / and despite this
song, he has a spinach beard.)

Hungarian:

English: Round / spins this / crooked / pear / into six pits / into blind mirrors
/ nimble ground squirrel rush in rumpus/ torment him / you rufous bullock.

Hungarian: Zabra zebra / zsebre zabra, / habra rebbents, / hebrents babra / ugra-
bugra, zsupsz a sutra, / pulyka húzta, pudva, dudva, / lukba rúgva fúlt a kútba.

4. Mihály Babits: *Fekete ország (Black country)* (excerpt) - here we should
pay attention to the fast, precise speech and the one breath, we can say it with
other colours, too.

Hungarian:

- Fekete ég és fekete tenger, /fekete fák és fekete ház / fekete állat és fekete ember, / fekete öröm, fekete gyász, / - fekete érc és fekete kő és / fekete föld és fekete fák, / - fekete férfi, fekete nő és / fekete, fekete, fekete világ.'

English:

- Black sky and black sea, /black trees and black house, /black animal and black man, /black joy, black grief, / - black ore and black stone and /black earth and black wood, / - black man, black woman and /black, black, black world.'

5. Kis Dénes: *Gyárlátogatás (Factory visit)* (excerpt) - pay attention to the long consonants.

Hungarian:

Csittog-csattog / pitteg-pattog /dibben-dobban / kippen-koppan / rippen-roppan / ez a gyár, / hol a sok gép, / a sok ember, / fúr, farag, vág, / kalapál.

English:

Click-clack/ pip-pop / bang-bang / knick-knock / rip-rop / this factory / where lots of machines / lots of people / carve, cut, drill / hammering.

Of all the consonant exercises, it is of course the SZ that gets the most attention at Montágh. He lists a lot of exercises from page 75 to page 91. Here it's not just about saying things quickly, but also accurately. Examples are where it is said together with vowels (e.g. *szi, szé sze, szá, sza szó, szö, isz, ész, esz, ász*); where there is a long **ssz** next to vowels (e.g. *isszi, esszé, ásszaá, osszo. összö*); with consonants (e.g. *ejsza, ejszá, ejszu, ekszi, eksza, ekkszá, ekszö, etysza, etyszó*); most difficult when it is pronounced with s (e.g. *s-sz, s-sz, süszü, sösze, sasza, es-szé, es-szó, es-szü, ecs-szi, ecs-sza, ecs-szá, ec-szá, ec-szó, ec-szi*).

In the next phase of practising the SZ sound, we practise using whole words (e.g. *szitakötő* (dragonfly), *szilvafa* (plum tree), *szőlőszem* (grape seed), *tavaszi szél* (spring wind)), followed by small poems (e.g. *Széket viszek/ Asztalt viszek. / Szalmát viszek. / Szénát viszek...* (I take a chair. / I carry a table. /

I carry a straw. / I carry a haystack...) OR: szil-szál szalmaszál / lengő hinta messze száll/ jön a vadász fúj a szél / nyuszi iszkol, szalad fél/ eszem-izsom dinom-dánom /szőlő szilva van a tálon (elm-thread hay-straw / swinging swings fly far away / the hunter comes, the wind blows / the bunny escapes, runs away / eating-drinking razzle-dazzle/ grapes plums on the plate). It gives numerous exercises for practising **C**, **Z**, **S**, **CS** and **ZS**. Here we choose one of each types of poem:

C: Károly Tamkó Sirató: *Óc-póc*

Óc, / póc, / fekete galambóc. // Óc, / póc, / babakóc, / fülem mellett / van egy kis póc. // Ecki becki, / tengerecki, / Tengerecki Pál!

Z: Texts by Katalin Varga:

Hungarian: Zoli vizet hoz. / Zoli mézet hoz. / Zoli hozza a vázát. / Zoli hozza az evezőt...Tíz doboz. / Tíz toboz. / Tizenkét zokni. / Tizennégy ház.

(English: Zoli brings water. / Zoli brings honey. / Zoli brings the vase. / Zoli brings the paddle...Ten boxes. / Ten cans. / Twelve socks. / Fourteen houses.)

S: Endre Ady: *Szeretném, hogyha szeretnének* (*I want to be loved*)(excerpt)

Hungarian: Sem utódja, sem boldog őse, / Sem rokona, sem ismerőse / Nem vagyok senkinek, / Nem vagyok senkinek. // Vagyok, mint minden ember: fenség, / Észak-fok, titok, idegenség / Lidérces messze fény, / Lidérces messze fény.

(English: I am no heir, no proud ancestor, / I have no friend, no brother, sister, / I have never belonged, / I have never belonged. /I am, like every human: Highness, / Iceberg, enigma, strange and timeless, / Distant will-o'-the-wisp, / Distant will-o'-the-wisp.)

CS: György Véghe: *Dalocska*

Hungarian:

Legszebb város Piripócs, / ott lakik egy medvebocs: / piripócsi medvebocs. // Ha nem volna Piripócs, / nem lenne a medvebocs / piripócsi medvebocs.

(English: The nicest town is Piripócs, / there lives a bear cub: / a bear cub

from Piripócs. // If it weren't for Piripócs, / there wouldn't be a bear cub / a bear cub from Piripócs.)

ZS: Sok zsák, Sok zsebkendő, Sok mazsola, Sok pizsama...Zöld zsombék, Zöld pázsit, Zöld Zsálya, Zöld hátizsák...

(English: Lots of bags, Lots of handkerchiefs, Lots of raisins, Lots of pyjamas... Green bushes, Green lawn, Green Sage, Green backpack...)

A very useful and popular practice text for **R**:

Hungarian:

Ritka búza, ritka árpa, ritka rozs, / Ritka kislány, aki takaros. (Népdal)

Répa, retek, mogyoró, korán reggel ritkán rikkant a rigó.

Jó nyár jár rája.

(English: Rare wheat, rare barley, rare rye, / Rare little girl who is pretty. (Folk song)

Carrot, radish, hazelnuts, early in the morning, the thrush rarely squeaks.

First-rate summer is on her.)

Finally, an **articulation** exercise-text by Károly Tamkó Sirató:

Hungarian:

Elindultunk Balátára malátáért, / Galántára palátáért, / Rabirázra paprikáért,
/ Soroksárra salátáért, / Mocsoldára kocsonyáért, / Kocsonyádra mazsoláért,
/ Cserenyécsre cseresznyéért, / Szerencsérre szerencséért, / Pécelre mézért, /
Mézeskútra pénzért.

(English: We went to Balata for malt, / To Galanta for slate, / To Rabiráz for paprika, / To Soroksár for lettuce, / To Mocsolda for jelly, / To Kocsonyád for raisins, / To Cserenyécs for cherries, / To Szerencsér for luck, / To Pécel for honey, / To Mézeskút for money.)

The techniques of **accentuation** are as important to master as the correct training of individual sounds, sound pairs and sound sequences.

Sándor Hevesi writes: “*What is good accentuation? It is impossible to put it into a rule. For correct accentuation it is necessary to make the meaning of the text self-conscious, to dissect the individual sentences, and to examine and check what our instinct tells us, and only after critical work do we approve it.*”⁴⁵ Accentuation is thus a means of interpretative speech, but whether a word is accentuated or unaccented, the speech sounds must always be perfectly formed. Very often, the ends of words - and sentences! - are mangled beyond comprehension.

There are certain basic rules of the Hungarian language related to certain sentences [the stress of a declarative sentence is downward, the intonation of an interrogative sentence is in the opposite direction, etc.]. However, the meaning of the sentence also plays a role in accentuation: the first syllable of the word that is the most important in the sentence because of its novelty or importance is given the main stress or the stress of the sentence. In this case, special stress is placed on the word or syllable that is felt to be important. But we can also highlight certain passages by adding a short pause. In Hungarian, there is a close connection between word order and stress. An example:

Peter went^ to the cinema.

Peter^ went to the cinema. (Not Lujza.)

Peter went to the cinema^. (Not to the swimming pool.)

To the cinema^ Peter^ went^. (The cinema is even more emphatic than in the previous sentence.)

A common mistake with actors is ‘stressing everything’, -over-emphasising, which makes the text unintelligible; monotonous, mumbling speech, and with schoolchildren – I call it – the ‘exam’ style, which is the transfer of the I’ve memorised and tell it attitude into acting. Add to that the wobbling, the stumbling. There are also unstressed elements in our speech. These include the article, the affix, the conjunction (except for paired conjunctions), the backed verbal prefix, the predicate at the end of a sentence, and the suffixes (a common mistake is to stress the affixes). And yet I haven’t even mentioned emotional stress, which – especially on stage – can nuance and change the

⁴⁵ In: Montágh 2. p. 177.

regular stress and pronunciation. Emotional stress can differ from logical, intellectual stress, and the stress is often not on the first syllable. Some kind of emotion, wonder, passion is the cause of this retuning. In such cases, the sounds may often be elongated. For example: *would* youuuuu? BUT! Here too, we must pay attention to stretchy speech, which is so common today, the indulging-like elongation of the *e* and *é* sounds. The ‘separation of all words’, the ‘I’ll say it again so that it is better understood’ effect is a fashionable form of emphasis today – see the speeches of politicians. Of course, this form of speech can be used by a given character in a given dramaturgical situation. It is valid for every speech action to correspond to the situation on stage, to the momentary status of the character. Montágh, using Sándor Hevesi’s notation, recommends János Arany’s poem *A fülemüle* (*The Nightingale*) as a practice text (here only the first stanza is taken as a practice text):

Hungarian:

Hajdanában/ amikor még

Így beszélt a magyar ember/:

Ha per – úgy mond – hadd legyen per!

(Ami nem volt/ éppen oly rég) -

Valahol – a Tiszaháton

Élt egy gazda / Pál barátom/,

S Péter, / annak tőszomszédja; -

Rólok szól e rövid példa.

English:

In the old days/ when

Thus spoke the Hungarian man/:

If it’s a lawsuit - say - let it be a lawsuit!

(Which was not/just so long ago) -

Somewhere - on the Tisza river

There lived /my friend Paul/, a farmer,

And Peter, / his neighbour from the east; -

That’s about what this short example is.

However, we must dispel some of the commonly held ‘golden rules’. **It’s not true,**

- that the adjective is always stressed and that the indicated word is always unstressed in the adjectival structure
- that the verb suffix should never be stressed when it is separated from the verb
- that the postposition is never stressed

- that you have to emphasise the pronoun before the conjunction in the main clause of a compound sentence, e.g.: pointed out that...
- that we emphasise the clauses of a compound sentence in the same way, because this would remove the essential element
- that it is a mistake to stress the end of a sentence.

The emotional-musical tones of speech can be made perceptible without speech through an exercise. Let's list numbers one after the other when there is a mental process going on inside us (e.g. our child won't come home, we don't know where he is, we are looking for something, we want to shake someone off) - and the partner has to guess what is happening to us.

The tempo and rhythm exercises help to deal with the aesthetic elements of speech, and thus to produce beautiful speech. The pace of speech is characteristic of people. It is the changes of tempo and pauses that create the rhythm of speech, specific to the speaker and the situation. Pace, speed and rhythm may vary from one individual to another and from one speech situation to another. Pace variation can play an important role in segmentation and emphasis within the speech as a whole. Unnecessarily slow or fast speech rates make comprehension difficult and erode attention. It is best to practice to music and movement. Here too, it is advised to choose some steady text for the actors – including both poem and prose. For classical rhythm practice I can recommend children's poems by Sándor Weöres (e.g. The poem “*Bóbita*” for time-measured text telling, Attila József's poem “*Ülni, állni, ölni, halni*” (“*To sit, to stand, to kill, to die*”), or an epic passage from Homer. And for complex practice, the speech of Antony over Caesar's corpse from Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* is an excellent rhetorical text:

„Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;/ I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. / The evil that men do lives after them;/ The good is oft interred with their bones; / So let it be with Caesar. / The noble / Brutus Hath told you Caesar was ambitious: / If it were so, it was a grievous fault, / And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it. / Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest / (For Brutus is an honourable man;/ So are they all, all honourable men) / Come I to speak in Caesar's

funeral. / He was my friend, faithful and just to me: / But Brutus says he was ambitious; / And Brutus is an honourable man. He hath brought many captives home to Rome / Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill: / Did this in Caesar seem ambitious? / When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept: / Ambition should be made of sterner stuff: / Yet Brutus says he was ambitious; / And Brutus is an honourable man. / You all did see that on the Lupercal / I thrice presented him a kingly crown, / Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition? Yet Brutus says he was ambitious; / And, sure, he is an honourable man. / I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke, / But here I am to speak what I do know. / You all did love him once, not without cause: / What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him? / O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts, / And men have lost their reason. Bear with me; / My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar, / And I must pause till it come back to me.

Finally, when dealing with stage speech technique, the contradiction that Sándor Fischer calls *the paradox of stage speech*⁴⁶ cannot be avoided. One of the basic requirements of acting is that every word spoken in the space of the play – be it frontal, passe-partout, or in a circle or amphitheatre – should be pronounced as it is in everyday life and yet be audible and intelligible. In a large space, for example, audibility is reduced, and the *actor has to make up for lost volume somehow, not by shouting*. Otherwise, if the room is small, he cannot mumble and must choose his volume accordingly. A middle ground must therefore be found, which, depending on the speech situation, amplifies the *speech only to the extent that* it is taken away by the large space and distance. The director must help the actor to decide what speech intensity is required in a given location by testing the acoustic conditions in every corner of the room. Pay particular attention to this for so-called realistic, conversational speech. Our voices should “wander” the whole room, if it is very reverberant (e.g. church interior or auditorium), we should also compose the echo-effect into the speech. Greater space and distance require not only greater body movement but also stronger articulation, but the requirement remains for a speaking technique without visible effort or spasm.

⁴⁶ Sándor Fischer: *A beszéd művészete (The Art of Speech)*, Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest 1966. p. 264-272. The italicized text excerpts below are from F. S.

Speech technique for the puppet stage

What we have said so far about speech is also true for puppet theatre actors in general. However, in addition to this, they need to improve their speaking technique and, even more so, their vocal technique, both qualitatively and quantitatively, through specific training. The technique of puppetry affects the technique of speech in two ways. On the one hand, it creates physical situations in which it is strenuous to speak for long periods of time. The puppeteer stands behind the tapestry with his puppet held high in his hands, usually with his head turned upwards towards the puppet. In this position, it is highly difficult to lower or raise the larynx and thus to change the pitch of the voice. They can of course manage the height change, but not without some sound damage. They need constant scaling so that their larynx and neck muscles do not stiffen. On the other hand, the weight and movement of the puppet requires more physical work, and this movement is not fully in harmony with simultaneous speech. When the actor performs the role with his own body, the overall musculature is a combination of both physical and vocal movement. Here, the actor himself often stands in a static position, moving the puppet in different rhythms and directions. Even when the actor tries to solve or solves the problem of joint movement completely, there is no perfect harmony. In any case, the two types of concentration require the most perfectly rehearsed vocal and speech technique. Standing behind the tapestry blunts the volume considerably, making it more difficult for the sound to break through, and if we add to this the fact that he turns his back to the screen a lot, we can truly understand the high degree of volume modulation that the puppet actor needs. The extreme mobility of the diaphragm, the extraordinary level of breathing technique, the maximum use of head resonance, require the highest technical skills. The stronger formation of consonants, especially the plosives, can facilitate intelligibility. The puppeteer's work is strongly influenced by the style, vocabulary and specificity of the many unrealistic, fairy-tale-like texts. The many animal voices, the voices of the fairy-tale heroes, require as many different tones as the characters they represent. There are many high thin and growling low voices. The larynx, which imitates noises, can quickly lose its clear functions and is hardly capable of producing a normal sound.

We consider it essential that, in addition to the normal exercises, light sound and text scales are held before and after each performance. Pre-performance exercises – even if they are only five minutes long – make the speech organs flexible for hard work. And there’s another important aspect: the puppeteer connects with the other actors by concentrating on his puppet. And he also enters into dialogue with his partner through the puppet he is moving, so he does not interact directly with him in person. Only a strong concentration on the puppet can bridge this situation.

IV. OBJECT ANIMATION

- giving life to the lifeless –

Before I delve deeper into this technique, here is a recollection of the late Ágnes Ménes⁴⁷ of Hungary’s first public object theatre performance: *‘Sometime in the early eighties, for the wedding of close friends...we performed the play “A Teremtésit!” for the first time...The setting was a shed, no light, just the moonlit night, many, many candles and a few kerosene lamps... From these, our good friend Gyula Molnár, the »Italian« actor and director, living in Italy, created and conjured theatrical lights around a table, a tub, a ladder, a dozen instruments and other props packed with clay and carried into the shed. He brought the original play and the objects from Italy (a suitcase full of rubber animals and a large quantity of plastic soldiers), with which God (Péter Éri) creates the world on the clay table with the help of a Kerub (Ágnes Ménes) and a Seraph (Béla Kása). The performance was later presented at the Szkéné “and was an undivided success... the audience had never seen an object theatre before, i.e. a play performed on a table with various everyday objects, puppets, toys, fruit, chocolate bunnies...”*

This form of theatre-making can best be compared to children’s play, when they act out imaginary events with different objects with total devotion and passion, bringing a tin can, a button, a pot or a spoon to life. And just as

⁴⁷ Ágnes Ménes: *A Teremtésit! - istállódráma*, in Szkéné50, in. Tamás Jászay: *Színház a másodikon*, Szkéné Theatre Nonprofit Kft., Budapest 2022, p. 126.

children's drawings could not be reproduced by an average adult - except by an artist blessed with talent! - so it is not easy to create object theatre, however simple (primitive) it may seem, since it requires "only" a few "found or brought" ready-made objects. The director or the actor can bring it from scrap, from home, from the attic, from anywhere. The object can then be used in its original function, metaphorically or metonymically. Among my own "objects", I well remember a teapot filled with honey to perform a "slow-motion tea pouring", or a discarded Christmas tree with empty crumpled scones wrappers on it, onto which water was dripping from a rusty gutter (*Elmúltak az ünnepek (Holidays are Gone)*, KFT Show, Szkéné Theatre, 1983). Tadeusz Kantor, the famous director, was a true object fetishist – he said somewhere that every object has a HISTORY, it is written on its appearance, its grip, its shape – how it was used, handled, worked with, or simply looked at. But it can be just as imaginative to use the material itself to play with, rather than the material already organised into an object. A good example taken from the quote above is the use of CLAY to represent the creation of the earth, the formation of man, but also the use of water, ground, a stone, pebbles or sand. Thus, object theatre defined by Edina Ellinger is "*a form of puppet theatre in which puppets are not designed and made, but objects in the everyday sense... In the creation of object animated performances, imagination, creativity and poetry are given space.*"⁴⁸ In this case, the object is not used as a prop, but is either animated as a real character or is placed in a theatrical context as an object, thus becoming a human figure (e.g. a pancake pan becomes a knight, a brush becomes a girl, a wilted flower becomes a sad woman), or retains its original character. Of course, in this case, too, applies what the basis is of all puppetry techniques: the actor-moving the action must believe that the dead material/object has an independent life, that he must enter into a personal relationship with it, because only this way will he awaken the illusion in the viewer that the object is ALIVE, and what is more, that it has an independent will. If an object is put into play, if an active, exact, physical relationship is created between the inanimate object and the player, if he believes in it,

⁴⁸ Edina Ellinger: *Szubjektív objektum, a funkcionális tárgyjáték vizsgálata és A csomótiúndér műalkotás alkotói munkafázisai (Subjective object, an investigation of functional object play and The creative work phases of the knot fairy artwork)*, PhD thesis, SZFE, 2017. manuscript! p. 17. [In further: Ellinger Edina]

then this will fascinate the living character and with him the spectator. This almost borders the occult and magic. More examples of this will be given later, mainly from the Italian's plays I have mentioned above.

The object itself can be found in several ways: it can be sought and brought to the rehearsal (e.g. pasta, vegetables –see the famous performance of Csaba Horváth and the Forte Company's performance *Nagy füzet (Big Notebook)*, a coffee bean or sugar cubes at the Italian); it can be found randomly when we dispose of rubbish (e.g. the aforementioned Christmas tree and a piece of gutter, a discarded child's toy, a torn pair of shoes). This can trigger a series of associations related to the real form and function of the object. It is important not to work on the object, not to transform it, not to think that any transformation of it would serve the performance better. A chair with a broken leg, for example, is beautiful and can evoke dramatic events if its ruin is not the result of our deliberate intervention. Fruzsina Ellinger recalls an excerpt from Ildikó Gáspár's performance of *Kivi*, an excellent and complex example of this form of theatrical object use:

“The actors take out a basket of vegetables and fruit. They don't imitate anthropomorphic movements with them, they just stack them or hold them in their hands, so they still don't arouse any aversion to illustration in the recipient. Movers treat fruits and vegetables as fruits and vegetables. There is no impersonation by the moving mechanism. They bite into them, throw, roll objects taken from nature, while consciously superimposing the text onto the situations. The climax of the performance is the slaughter of the stateless youth. The situation takes place within the framework of everyday cooking: Spiegl and Bercsényi⁴⁹ chop up all the characters, meticulously cutting them up. The simplicity with which they peel Potatoes or chop Onions with the most natural gestures is made uncanny by the way the naturalistic text and the system of material symbols constructed from the beginning of the performance collide.”⁵⁰

As we can see from this example, this technique requires a bolder imagination, but at the same time it can sometimes create a more tangible stage reality

⁴⁹ Anna Spiegl and Péter Bercsényi - actors, Budapest Puppet Theatre

⁵⁰ In: Ellinger Edina: p. 51.

than figurative puppets, and precisely by making the viewer's imagination dynamic, it expands and gives him a constant catharsis of realisation. During the sessions we can practice with paper, nails, magnets, matches, coffee beans, grinders, office supplies, scissors, etc. We can even tell tales and short stories while the actor 'is acting' with a set of objects. And this is where the role of the mover, the actor, comes into play, because without him we cannot talk about theatrical quality, at most 'just' an exhibition or an installation. The live operator gives the whole thing a real dramatic charge. And here the evocation of the Italian's classic, *Little Suicides (Piccoli Suicidi)*, is inescapable, which the writer of these lines saw live at the FINTORONTÓ festival he organised at the Szkéné Theatre in 1987. The questions we must ask in the case such performances:

What is the attitude of the live actor present in the performance? How does he or she shift the emphasis between self and subject? How can he express emotional states with an object? What happens to the object when it is not in action? How to touch it, where to hold it, how to move it? By the way, these questions should be asked in other forms of puppet theatre as well.

"It is not a question of how I move the object, but what I do together with the object. It's a common practice to endow puppets and objects with human qualities, so we reduce the objects to a dangerous and pleasing illustration. But if we reverse this hierarchy, we achieve a surprising and meaningful effect. This way, the relationship between the actor and the object will have a meaning of its own in the whole grand unity. Depending on the dramaturgical concept, it is possible to focus the viewer on either the object, the actor or the actor-object relationship. One of the main aims of object theatre is to create this unique relationship. In the course of the performance, it is important to be able to recognise the structure of the score, for it to be able to tell how it have found this language. What happens on the stage is invented by the object: revealing it is like wearing a dress with the seams still showing. As the spectator discovers and understands the signs, he becomes an insider in the secret creative process. It is a poetic intuition emerged suddenly, an extraordinary pleasure. The aim is to smuggle this joy in the details of

*theatrical communication.”*⁵¹

Which method should we work with?

Start by choosing or bringing a few items - but not too many. Put them down in front of you and observe them. What connection can there be between them? How they feel, their shape, their state of matter, their colour. Let the story come from the object, not from us thinking about it. Let's move them. Play with them first alone, then with a partner. Avoid "pre-planning, discussion". It's best if the scene develops spontaneously. You can also work by giving a title to the chosen ensemble of objects as a picture. It is best if the director himself puts the objects in front of the players so that they cannot prepare in advance.

And now, with the help of Edina Ellinger, we recall one of the Italian's most famous object theatre productions, *Kis öngyilkosságok (Little Suicides)*, an opus that I myself have seen several times at the Szkéné Theatre:

*It's a love story, in which the gruff matchstick Swedish **Jörg** consumes himself over his unrequited love for the Brazilian and exotic coffee bean **Pita**... On a tray on the table is an upturned coffee cup with a large coffee bean on top, a cigarette and three boxes of matches next to the cup. Molnár points at the coffee bean, tells me it's a Brazilian coffee bean and is called Pita, and puts it in his ear. He takes a match out of one of the match boxes and places it on the tray. (There are tiny, barely visible plasticine-like dots on some points of the tray so that the matchstick can stand on them...) The player points at the matchstick, turns his face into its personality and says, as his own name, that he is Jörg and comes from Sweden. The actor puts the coffee bean closer to the matchstick and says her name again. He also moves the matchstick and says his name. He repeats this several times, so it becomes clear that they are getting to know each other. Molnár lifts the cup, under which a pile of more coffee beans spill out on the plate. Jörg searches in vain for Pita among the many coffee beans. Molnár then grinds the coffee beans (we only hear this in sound), takes out a coffee pot full*

⁵¹ Gyula Molnár: *Objekttheater: Aufzeichnungen, Zitate, Übungen gesammelt von Gyula Molnár*. In: Ellinger, p. 56-57.: interview excerpt, translated by Altörjai Erzsébet Zsuzsanna Altörjai, Theater der Zeit, Berlin, 2011.

of ground coffee. The matchstick repeats Pita's name with increasing desperation. Molnar replaces the tray full of ground coffee with the top of the coffee pot and pours the finished coffee out onto the table. So Pita's fate is fulfilled. The player then sticks the matchstick into the coffee, lets the end soak up the liquid, and writes Pita's name on the free side of the tray with the soaked matchstick. The last Pita is not spoken verbally, but is visualised on the table using the material qualities of the black coffee and the matchstick. The actor lights the matchstick and lets it burn. He does this in complete silence, again avoiding facial expressions.”⁵²

The object-player – as we can see – is sometimes the partner or the creator of the object, sometimes a simple, peccable person in the scene, sometimes vulnerable to the personified object, sometimes winks at the spectator. Object theatre opens an extremely rich field for creativity. Object theatre requires a spirit, a kind of looseness, characteristic of children's play, “so that [the object-player] can blur in his play with the same spirit as children play, with such mad seriousness. According to Molnár, children's play is extraordinary because they experience serious drama in a situation of no stakes. However, what distinguishes Gyula Molnár's acting from children's acting is his awareness. During the performance of both his stories, we experience a precisely thought-out process and a metaphorical world. The actor's energy is key in the movement of objects. There are no unnecessary movements. His acting, on the other hand, is undoubtedly as relaxed and liberated as if we were really watching a child behind the desk.”⁵³

Unlike a living actor, an object can break, break down, fall apart, burn, melt, bite, stick together, tear apart, fall down, etc. If we look around our own desks only, we can see how much a desk paper punch, a stapler, a paper clip, a pair of scissors, for example, can ‘do’. You can create real dramas with them.

⁵² In: Ellinger p. 45.

⁵³ In Ellinger p. 61: Interview with Gyula Molnár conducted by Edina Ellinger in Budapest on 18.10.2014

V. GROUP DYNAMICS TRAINING

“Here, they have to work for each other; they have a vested interest in each other’s progress. To create a group spirit that gives strong support to its members.”⁵⁴

The composition of every start-up theatre groups is quite mixed, both in terms of age and sociology. There are people who know each other well (e.g. family members, classmates, teacher-student relationship, colleagues, etc.), others know each other more superficially, “just by sight” (because they live in the same small town), may be at different levels of the social hierarchy and status system (boss-subordinate, teacher-student), may be from different professions, have different educational backgrounds, not to mention the variety of motivations and spiritualities that come together. So, from a rather heterogeneous group, we have to build a community whose members are able to work together empathetically, listening to each other and with a focused mind. This is no small challenge for an amateur director. In order to create and maintain a kind of group cohesion, which is essential for the creation of a performance, the director must also monitor the ‘civil’ processes in the group, and it is not a bad idea to have some knowledge of group dynamics and to use some group dynamics training methods. There is a wealth of examples available in the literature. We select from these exercises and relate them to our own process analyses and experiences.

The focus of the initial group dynamics session should be on the interactions between the participants and not on the ‘external’ issues of the specific theatrical task to be performed. During the first time together, everyone will have first impressions of others at the level of external features (physical appearance, facial features, gestures, way of dressing, etc.) and first interactions, which of course include a short introduction [we will also bring exercise types for this]. First impressions are often superficial, and in such a situation everyone is acting a bit, trying to give as good an impression as possible, which may hide the real person. The purpose of the initial exercises is to help people

⁵⁴ IMPRO, Katalin Honti’s review of Keith Johnstone’s book - a teaching aid for secondary director training, Népművelési Intézet, Budapest, 1981. p. 11. [hereinafter: Katalin Honti]

learn to perceive themselves and others realistically. If we want to contrast the individual impressions of others that are formed during the exercises, we should create opportunities for these to be voiced. This is called feedback and is a fundamental tool in group dynamics training. Of course, feedback within the group does not express the absolute truth, but carries the hallmarks of subjective perception. Each group member accepts as much feedback as he needs and as much as he can bear (these feedbacks can be very unpleasant). Feedback is the tool that connects the perceiver with the other person to whom the feedback is addressed. This phase of the training gives participants the opportunity to share their own conscious and unconscious patterns of perception and response with others.

During the introductory group dynamics training, the role of the director/group leader is different from the role he/she will play during the rehearsals of the play - of course, it is good to keep some of this role in mind. The director is also a member of the group and has specific competence to manage the processes. Because of his role – since he is the one who convened the group – he is presumed to have a certain authority. The role of the director now lies somewhere between group member and non-group member. He is simultaneously “outside” and “in” the group, observing, analysing, helping, if necessary, giving advice, setting examples, catalysing. It is good if he tries to keep the latter two roles under control, so that the group does not develop the kind of compulsion to conform, or at worst fear, that leads people to unconditional obedience. It is certainly his task to establish a creative atmosphere. The director’s drill should be left to professional theatres, because there too – and there are more and more examples of this – excellent performances are being produced without the director’s arbitrary power. Obviously, the final decision is always the director’s, but it is good if he or she chooses from the alternatives offered by the actors, rather than training them. Group dynamics training is a good way to develop spontaneous, ‘unthinking’ reactivity, emotional resilience and the ability to move from role to role. It is particularly important in self-awareness and in dealing with situations – of which there are many on stage – where the actor has to move beyond his/her own everyday comfort zone and tolerance in a controlled way.

Here is straight away the director/group leader’s introduction technique.

Katalin Honti quotes Keith Johnstone, who begins his introduction with a 'status drop'. *"I pretend to be low status and more than likely, I sit down on the floor. I make it clear that if they fail, they have me to blame, because I am the expert. ... In doing so, I basically retune the group."*⁵⁵ Besides, it's very important to create a relaxed atmosphere so that no one gets tense.

The first round is obviously introductions. This carries a lot of information about the person beyond the mere mention of their name. This can be done as an end point in a short action, turning to each person individually and repeating the name, asking the person introducing themselves to list their nicknames, asking the others to chorus or individually to repeat the name with some kind of emotional charge. It can also be an exercise for the introduction phase if everyone tells a story from their life or mentions the most important items on their bucket list. You can tell a lot about someone by asking them to present a physical position.

After the introduction phase, there may be explicitly group dynamic exercises, where motor and emotional actions and reactions shape the way people 'move' among each other. In this process, people who know each other only by name and superficially, come closer together, dissolve their inhibitions and find points of connection. Here, too, it is good to follow the principle of gradualness. Therefore, first give them tasks in pairs, then in groups of two or three, and finally moving the group as a whole, and only then move on to those that lead to the theatrical exercise.

Balázs Perényi, in his book *Improvizációs gyakorlatok (Improvisation exercises)*⁵⁶ published in Zenta, asks some questions worth considering before describing the group exercises, he has tried out himself.

"How does the actor exist on stage in a group? How does it create an atmosphere? When does he step out of the chorus and when does he step back? In what ways can the backstage players direct the audience's attention, pointing out the most important moments in the action? What are the ways to make one character stand out from a group or make another almost invisible? How can we be present on the stage in a concentrated manner and not attract

⁵⁵ In: Honti Katalin p. 11.

⁵⁶ In: Perényi: p. 112.

attention?” Let’s continue the series of questions: What to do with physical touches, actions [a push, a kiss, a slap, a caress, a hug, a fight, a death and its physical occurrence, its reactions, a shared meal on stage, etc.]? What is trust in the other, in others? There is a physical side (falls, lifts, jumps, etc.) and a psychological side (e.g. communal reaction to extreme situations. A good example is the pro and con of the collective reaction to the tearing of Pentheus in the play *Bacchantes*). In which direction should certain replicas be voiced [towards the audience; towards the partner; towards the whole action community, etc.]? How should we pace ourselves on stage? Avoiding, crossing each other, making contact (with a physical gesture or look).

Issues arising from the exploration of personal relationships within the group: Can the couple be played by actors who are actually going out together, or on the contrary, if they can’t stand each other? Can any personal conflict or discord that may arise be managed within the group or the play itself? What can the production lose or gain from this? How does it affect the plot? How to deal with ‘civil’ conflicts within the group in general.

What do you do in a situation where a local notable in the group [mayor, teacher, boss, CEO, sponsor] expects to get the main role? The rotation principle: should the same person always play the lead role? What should we do with actors who are too enthusiastic or too eager [the “I want it all at once” actor]?

Let’s look at some group dynamics exercises – partly based on Perényi [I’ll note these in particular!] –, that take us in the direction of the stage:

Chair-taking 1. A fairly well-known group dynamics exercise that can be used to play around with and test certain status situations. One form of it is to have chairs scattered around the room, one less than the number of people present. We move around the room and then, at a signal, everyone quickly sits down on the chair nearest to them. One person doesn’t have a chair. This exercise can also be done in slow motion. It can be a great test of status hierarchy, resourcefulness, aggressiveness.

Chair-taking 2. (based on Perényi) Another similar type of exercise, there should be as many chairs scattered around the room as there are people.

Everyone but one player sits down. He approaches the empty chair with a steady walk to sit down. He must not accelerate or run. Meanwhile, the others can move to the seat he approaches. It is an important rule that once you have risen from your seat, you cannot sit back down even if he is approaching it. In this case, another player can help by sitting there. Now his seat remains empty. Another player can help by sitting there. Try to prevent the person from sitting down as long as possible. But no one can touch him, no one can block his way of moving. After a while you can play the same with two chairs. Perényi says it's also a very good warm-up game, it pulls the group together.

There are a number of group dynamics exercises that many people do to improve the economics of moving through space. These are the so-called **space-filling exercises**. There are several forms of this. Such exercises, which help concentration, spatial awareness and cooperation with others, involve people walking around in a space, preferably filling in all the blank spaces, taking care not to get too close or too far away from others. Here you can adjust the pace, stop occasionally for a clap and observe the space. Another variation of this is the **evasive game**, where you almost collide with the other person, but at the last moment you avoid your partner. And, of course, the third, where **we don't swerve and collide**. Of course, the aim is not to push the other person out of the way. Rather, it is to get him or her to move aside by some gesture [gentle, rude, humble, avoiding touch, etc.], and if he or she refuses to do so, we must eventually move out of the way. It can also happen that whole groups 'form' into a barrier, accepting or rejecting the one who passes by. A 'civil' example of this is when two people try to avoid each other, but they keep moving into the same direction.

An exercise to move the group together is the **Fish-school game** (based on Perényi). Here the group moves together as a school of fish, led by the one in front, very close together, body-to-body, always with someone else in front when turning, the pace can vary here, too.

Impulse transmission exercises already presuppose a certain cohesiveness of the group, a specific group dynamic self-awareness. Declan Donnellan writes: *"The actor needs to be in good condition not to feel good, but to be alert and*

receptive to stimuli from outside.”⁵⁷ One of these basic exercises is when one of the motionless people scattered around the room, starts a movement sequence, and when he stops it, someone else takes over the impulse. It’s not important that there is a continuation of the previous movement, but it’s OK if there is! It requires a very strong collective concentration for the person receiving the impulse to feel that it is his turn to take over, and for the rest of the group to ‘approve’ this by remaining still. It is a good idea to first do this exercise sitting in a circle. It is important that there are no pauses or breaks between receptions. This exercise already models the essence of actor cooperation. What else can it be than the reception, continuation and response of impulses, a kind of multi-level flow. *“When the play of the group is coordinated, a fascinating, pulsating play of almost musical organisation is created, which delights both the performer and the spectator.”*⁵⁸ But the magic can also be broken if the flow of impulse is interrupted for some reason, by someone. This is something to discuss and analyse at the end of the rehearsal. Actions in the group can be seen as an OFFER to others/partners, which they can then accept, take further or block. For example, if someone picks his nose, the others will do the same. Or they block it, don’t allow it to continue or destroy the partner’s initiative. During the dialogue, it may also happen that the partner/proposer ‘drops’ the offer, doesn’t take it up with the same heat, dynamism and energy. This creates a gap, a void, the dialogue dies, the tension is extinguished. It is important to warn the participants to react to each other’s actions NOT AS PRODUCTION, so not as an audience (encouraging signs, laughing, talking, private comments), but as involved people by maintaining attention. Perényi writes, *“that more varied, expressive, original short games are produced when they do not seek to ‘express’, because if they do, the game can turn into a kind of external, confused clowning. This can be caused by not being really concentrated and being embarrassed... It can help to emphasise the technical nature of the task: precise start/finish, different characters, different movements.”*⁵⁹

Perényi publishes the following group exercise inspired by Gábor Mezey, entitled **“Be Unnoticed”**, which can help actors to structure their presence on

⁵⁷ In Donnellan, p. 154.

⁵⁸ In: Perényi: p. 120.

⁵⁹ In: Perényi: p. 118.

stage together. The exercise takes place being divided into at least two groups, in semi-darkness and in continuous movement. Why almost dark? Because the dim hides and highlights us, helps us to become inconspicuous on stage, but also reveals how we can draw attention to ourselves. This – according to Perényi – is an extremely important skill in acting. One group starts to move around in the space in a scattered way as far away from the other group as possible, but not with the aim of attracting attention, or being ‘memorable’. After two or three minutes, the exercise is stopped and the observers are asked what they saw, who they looked at the least, most often, who attracted their attention with what, how they moved, whether they perceived any connections, who remained completely unnoticed, who used ordinary movements, who used stylized movements, etc. *“This exercise, which may seem primitive, points to the most basic laws of choral presence. At the same time, it is also useful in terms of actor presence, concentration and use of space.”*⁶⁰ The opposite of this is the exercise **“Be conspicuous”** (based on Perényi), which is also performed in at least two groups and in semi-darkness. Those in action must now strive to capture and hold the attention of the audience. They may do this by any means, but they must not touch the spectators or leave the space. After the stoppage, commentary can be given on who and why they were noticed. The exercise can be done using only movement, sounds, the learned practice text, in large and small spaces, outdoors. It is a good idea to warn the participants beforehand, that it is not only shouting and extreme actions that attract attention.

The OM⁶¹ exercise (based on The Living Theatre⁶² training)

In 1979, at the Lyon Festival of University Theatres, I took part in the Living Theatre’s training and then in the street action of *Paradise Now*. The following diary entry captures my training experience there, and I think it is worth

⁶⁰ In: Perényi: p. 121.

⁶¹ **OM: Aum**, also known as **om**, is a sacred sound and spiritual symbol used in Indian religions. It is made up of three tones, „A”, „U”, and „M”. The three tones denote many things, but probably the most important is the triple aspect of the universe, the unity of body-mind-spirit.

⁶² The Living Theatre: world-renowned American theatre company founded in New York in 1947. It is the oldest experimental theatre group. For most of its history, it was led by its founders, actress Judith Malina and painter/poet Julian Beck. After Beck’s death in 1985, company member Hanon Reznikov became Malina’s co-director; after Malina’s death in 2015, his son Garrick Maxwell Beck took over.

quoting from it here at the end of the section on group dynamics.⁶³ “Lyon 1979. For the exercise, we form a circle and wait until the sound of the OM in us merges completely with the others. At the sound of the triangle, we move slowly towards the centre of the circle. The sound vibration does not stop for a moment. In fact, as the circle becomes narrower and narrower, it intensifies and fills up, articulating into a kind of poly-dialogue. »Try to get as far inside as possible – we hear Christine, the exercise leader, say – WANT to get in the middle of the circle! All of you! Become one body, find the gap to get to the centre! Don’t give up on anyone, help those on the outside, end the dichotomy of inside and outside!« The triangle is played again, we carefully detach ourselves from each other, and everyone tries to get back to their original place. In the glances that now meet, the joy of »I’ve got to know you« is already shimmering.” I am convinced that this and similar collective actions help a company to become capable of joint action on stage. They serve as a kind of group-building concept, whereby members of a diffuse group who know each other superficially can be well-prepared, first and foremost, “about each other”. Do not, however, see this practice as a universal recipe. It is also an ‘offer’ to release inhibitions, whether physical or related to other personal dispositions.

VI. ACTING

The use of the word “acting” for amateur actors can be daunting for some, as their sole aim cannot be to perform in the full armour of the craft. Natural, ‘naive’ acting can bring a particular charm and originality to the enthusiasts’ performance, and it would be a shame to label it as some kind of over-emphasised professionalism. In addition, such an expectation imposes a lot of cramps, tension and pressure on our actors, leading them towards externalistic /mechanical/ solutions. It is a fact that there is neither the time nor the expertise to dedicate hours of mastery to a rehearsal process. And yet,

⁶³ It was supposed to be published in the journal *Kultúra és Közösség*, and the abstract was sent out, but in the end the text was not allowed to be published.

let's find the opportunity to use subtle actor pedagogical tools to navigate our actors towards professionally appreciated stage behaviour.

First of all, we have to find our way to a liberated and spontaneous existence on stage, which is not at all self-evident. Because it is not the same as the liberation of everyday life! The actor's existence on stage is an enriched mode of being, what Eugenio Barba calls extra daily behaviour. That is why he can have an effect, an "impact" beyond the spotlight. Hevesi adds to this his own definition of the "actor's paradox" when he writes: "*The paradox of acting means that the actor must maintain the most perfect serenity personally and be as sensitive as possible artistically.*"

Stanislavsky: '*One must never exaggerate the demands for the truth, because that leads to overplaying the truth, which is the worst of stage lies. Excessive fear of lying, on the other hand, leads to shy caution.*'⁶⁴

DEVELOPING AND PUTTING SPONTANEITY TO WORK:

Keith Johnstone reports on a surprising exercise in his book *IMPRO, Improvisation and Theatre*:

*"I always encouraged my actors to make faces, to insult each other, to jump before looking around, to scream, to shout and to be rude in the most inappropriate way."*⁶⁵ This practice, which seems extreme, is primarily aimed at relaxation, at achieving a base state from which there are many paths. These practices are not for each other's amusement: the "spectator" appeal to some of the actions of group members is to be avoided. Instead, encourage adequate reactions from the participants in the game, so that a specific matrix or framework is created which no one transgresses.

When doing these guiding exercises, it is important to be aware that every act on stage, be it movement, gesture, word or deed, is a manifestation of being in action, in other words, of the soul becoming body. According to Balázs Perényi, the awareness of this is one of the most effective aids to the actor, as it creates a state, feelings and a character. External actions are

⁶⁴ In: Montágh 2. p. 180.

⁶⁵ In: Johnstone, p. 86. In: Johnstone

motoric accompaniments, plastic manifestations of the inner life, they can be independent actions or simple gestures accompanying the text, such as hands, facial expressions, gestures counterpointing the text, movements, changes of space. Internal action, on the other hand, is an external form of spiritual life, of feelings, thoughts, aspirations, without exact expression, but with the evocative and visualising power and effect of speech. It is action to throw oneself off a cliff, but it is also action to reach only the point of determination. Conceptualising, imagining and executing the physical action process is the best first step in any theatrical exercise. It is possible to analyse (parse) a perfectly ordinary sequence of action, and then to reduce it to its essential elements and reassemble it into a stage action. For example: tell us about your morning. “The clock rings, I wake up, check the time, get out of bed, put on slippers” ... and so on. – but it can be further broken down: the clock rings, I wake up, sit up, pull the duvet down, sit on the edge of the bed, yawn, stretch, look at the clock, etc. Once you have this verbally, you can then do it in silent action, then edit, record, maybe add an unexpected twist (e.g. sciatica pains, a cat gets out from under the bed, I can’t find my slippers). The point is that **all action should be SPECIFIC and not GENERAL**. BUT: you should also avoid overdoing it, when the actor wants to show off his virtuosity.

LIVE SPEECH – WRITTEN WORD – LIVING WORD

Written word becomes living word on the stage. This always involves metacommunicative activity. In order to do this adequately, we need to start analysing the speech by looking at the circumstances in which the words are uttered, then look at the meanings, feelings and emotions behind the words that are uttered. If this is done with due care, the metacommunication related to speech will work naturally. The aim of text analysis is therefore to find, beyond the primary meaning and sense, the core of thought, feelings and emotions that trigger the words. A possible exercise from *Macbeth*: the witches’ prophecy and how Macbeth reacts to it (with what words, what gestures, what facial expressions, etc.) On stage, during a performance, we are not usually alone, but together with partners, dramatic actors, and everything that happens in the form of physical action – be it text or action – has an antecedent and a

consequence. Therefore, we are in a dialogue situation, and often participate in a poly-dialogue. In such cases, while we are saying our own text, we must also focus on the reactions of our partner, we must comprehend the impulses coming from him. We need to see the impact of our own speech in the light of our partner. And this is especially true for dense replicas! *“What we say is never about what we say. What we say is about who we are talking to. What we say is a mere tool to change our audience.”*⁶⁶ A very good example is the so-called “cloud dialogue” between Hamlet and Polonius (Hamlet, Act 3, Scene II)

LORD POLONIUS

My lord, the queen would speak with you, and presently.

HAMLET

Do you see yonder cloud that’s almost in shape of a camel?

LORD POLONIUS

By the mass, and ‘tis like a camel, indeed.

HAMLET

Methinks it is like a weasel.

LORD POLONIUS

It is backed like a weasel.

HAMLET

Or like a whale?

LORD POLONIUS

Very like a whale.

HAMLET

Then I will come to my mother by and by. They fool me to the top of my bent.
I will come by and by.

⁶⁶ In: Donnellan, p. 84.

LORD POLONIUS

I will say so. (*Away*)

The connection, simply stated and brushed/controlled in the partner's text, creates the liveliness and effectiveness of the text.

BASICS – THE FIRST STAGE OF WORK IN THE ROLE

When we plan a performance and announce the first rehearsal (in a stone theatre, the first time actors learn about the cast is from the rehearsal table), actors are not interested in the play, but in what they are going to play. Often, it's the amount of role/text that is crucial, some people don't want to play, say, a negative role, a woman of dubious reputation, a postman, a policeman – when in fact these are the most exciting roles. The juxtaposition of acting strengths and status within the play is inevitably present in a group. Questions and doubts about this should not be settled with platitudes (there are no small parts, you played the lead role last time, you've grown up to this role, I was thinking about you, etc.).

ABOUT IMPROVISATION:

*“In a way, even this infinitely bounded art form, the play of the Japanese no actor, must seem spontaneous, ... it is the emerging life that makes this technique invisible. The true technique is gallant: it hides in the background, and does not boast of its laurels.”*⁶⁷

The dialectic of spontaneity and consciousness. The more self-evident the act is, the more original it seems. If someone is asked to improvise something, they will definitely want to do something “original” – so they will be cranky, sweaty, do and say a lot of inappropriate things, the pursuit of originality bypasses obvious solutions. Instructions that expect or even provoke emotion are unfortunate. Such as “be sad”, “feel angry”. Emotions cannot be produced, nor can they be acted out authentically. Emotion – anger, despair, triumph – is a consequence of action, not the basis of it.

“Because in the moments of great momentum, when I was striving to

⁶⁷ In: Donnellan: p. 17.

*experience, I was not in control of my body, my body was in control of me. But in dramatic creation, what can the body do where the work of the spirit is indispensable... At that time, I understood the word 'self-control' in a quite outward way. I tried to repress all unnecessary gestures and movements, and as a result I learned to remain still on stage... I managed to acquire a semblance of calmness and to remain still without bouncing and unnecessary movement.”*⁶⁸

We will now look at some of the practical concepts involved in the basics of acting:

What is improvisation?

According to Balázs Perényi, *“Improvisation is a key activity of every actor training, not only at the beginning of the work together, before we start preparing a performance, before the group is ready to prepare the production, but throughout the rehearsals, because improvisations allow us to discover new aspects of the role or situation and deepen the performance. The continuous practice of improvisation develops a focused acting presence.”*⁶⁹

What is a situational exercise?

*“It provides an opportunity for collective reflection and analysis, for a nuanced, more or less in-depth approach, much like a well-rehearsed scene. In an improvisation, we act immediately. An unexpected, spontaneous, sometimes very intense acting action-reaction can emerge. The simultaneity of creation and performance requires a sudden (unthinking) and flexible actor response. In fact, one of the most important goals of actor training is the ability to respond suddenly and honestly, and the courage and confidence to do so.”*⁷⁰ Perényi encourages us to “Don’t talk, act!” in rehearsal, both in extemporization and improvisation, keeping verbal analysis, cues and discussion as brief as possible. After all, acting is – action, and rehearsing is only worth when implementing actions.

⁶⁸ In Stanislavsky, p. 70/71.

⁶⁹ In: Perényi, p. 13.

⁷⁰ In: Perényi, p. 14.

THE TAKE-OVER

The method of deprivation, where the actor was deprived of certain means of expression (voice, movement, etc.), was a defining element of the methods of all the great actor-educators (Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Brook, Grotowski, E. Barba), thus strengthening the actor's other means of expression. These are basic exercises for training beginner actors, but it is also worthwhile to recall from time to time these loud but articulate plays without speech, even in rehearsals of a scene, a particular sequence of sounds, numbers or gibberish can replace the real text.

When preparing a performance, the actor is faced with a challenging situation, in which all his creative energy is needed, and he has to place himself in the matrix of a community. Let's look at the basic parameters of this situation.

WHO, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, DOES WHAT? – and variants of these. The necessary training and rehearsal techniques /based on Perényi/ are: **WHO?** The status of the characters, office, rank, what character, what state (sick, sleepy, cheerful, etc.); **WHERE?** The location; **WHEN?** Time, period, month, day, occasion (holiday)? **For how long?** Duration of the scene; **WHEN?** Antecedent-consequence, cause-reason of action; **WHAT DOES HE DO?** Plot, main storyline, action; and finally **HOW**, i.e. the style, the method of play, the presentation, technical instructions, the overall plan of the objective.⁷¹ Of course, it is not always necessary to give all the parameters for a situational exercise. Too many parameters can be paralysing for the actor and too few – especially for beginners – can create a need for productivity and thus uncertainty in the actor.

Let's now work with a text based on the following parameters (based on Perényi):

Not looking at the other; looking into the other's eye the whole time; very close to the other; entering the other's personal space; touching the other's hand, face; very far from the other, talking over the distance; now with constant excited movement; at an accelerated pace; watching the other without

⁷¹ Based on Perényi, p. 17.

moving; always talking over the other, speaking louder, more forcefully (intensification); forceful, real and not imitated, in action, etc.

Now change the space of communication: up on the big stage, in a large space; in an intimate space, confined to one or two square metres (e.g. toilet, under a table, human-tent); in a space of peers sitting in a circle; using the space of a found space (e.g. stairs, down/up from a terrace, in an armchair, under the cover of classroom benches, through a wall, behind a plant, from inside a cupboard, etc.), or simply in a completely empty space, now in an echoing place, out in nature, e.g. shouting to each other from two nearby hills, in the dark of the night. As we can see, there are countless variations of situations in which it is possible to prepare for on-stage communication. It is essential to discuss the experiences after each of these exercises, how the different situations and spaces have affected them, what challenges they've had to face.

THE REHEARSAL

We have to ask the question, which at first sight seems trivial, what **rehearsal is, what the purpose of rehearsal is**. The word of course includes TRYING, trying something out, which means that we are not simply mechanically repeating the sequences of action and gestures, texts, and not simply inserting new elements into the score we have worked out, but it is a CREATIVE process all the way through! The whole must always be found in the individual details, the partial rehearsals must always show vectors towards and away from the whole. But the rehearsal is not a puzzle to be put together, neither in terms of the individual roles nor in terms of the plot. There are many different ways of rehearsing, but one thing is certain, based on my own experience: the straight path is not always the one that gets you closer to the goal. There are many things to "try out", even things that seem to have nothing to do with the play, and let the actors take paths that take them away from the goal, so that they can find their way back and incorporate new inspirations into the performance. When you have travelled many paths with improvisations, extemporizations with situational exercises, then you can begin to work more purposefully on the performance.

The usual sequence of building a role starts with the so-called table rehearsal. The director reads out the play, text, or, according to the prospective cast, the participants read it. If the text of the performance is developed during the rehearsals, the director presents his/her vision of the performance. After the reading, the director talks about everything important to know about the play, the period (if it is not set in the present!), the writer, his or her ideas, and show drawings or models of the set, space, and possibly costumes. Based on this, the actors create a kind of sketch of their role. It is important here to describe the stylistic features. *“For the actor, the style of playing is not merely a matter of formal elements, but of the dimensions of the play, i.e. the characteristics of the relationships...The style of the play is in fact determined by the relationship with the auditorium, which is not a matter of form, but very much a matter of creating an »atmosphere« that seeks to express the essence of the content. Atmosphere – in the relationship between the stage and the auditorium – is the psychology of the stage space.”*⁷²

In the case of amateurs, there may be a casting only after the reading. It is better if the director reads out, as this can give some indication of directions. Then – and during – the director gives information about the play, period, the author, and, in the case of an adaptation, what the emphasis was, for example, in the case of a long prose adaptation. He or she talks about the stylistic features of the production, the layout of the auditorium and the playing space, and shows the set and costume designs, if there are any.

You can stop and ask questions. This is called **the analysis stage**. This is when you put the elements of each role in context with the other roles and the play as a whole. Each role has a main task, i.e. a main line, and peripeteia (twists of fate) and detours which for some reason deviate from the main line.

E.g.: Hamlet: main task: to avenge the violent death of his father. The monologues are detours: how he relates to his main task. The difference between the main task and the main goal, e.g. in Kurázs mama: Kurázs's main task is to make good deals. Opposing main goal: to expose that this is pointless, because war is inhuman and destructive. We pay attention to the actor who cares about the

⁷² In: Ruszt, p. 21.

main task, not the effect he has on the audience. This also applies to each scene. Then comes the **operational phase**: the period of organising the performance spatially. This is called the **rehearsal of order** or the **rehearsal of memory**. This is when the basic spatial relations are established (entrances and exits, walks, directions in space; sets, objects, props are only indicated; the actors rehearse with a script in their hands. Actually, a kind of first draft of the performance is being made. At this stage, the aim is to achieve a purposeful and logical sequence of physical processes within the plot, to create, albeit sketchily, an outline of the composition of the performance. It is at this stage when the director is confronted with the different ‘readiness’ and ‘role-forming’ capacities of the actors, which he must treat with great empathy. For there are some actors who ‘catch the role’ immediately, either by using clichés or because they want to prove their ability. They want to show something straight away. In their case, the via negative is the way to go, i.e. you have to gently lead them back to the basics of the role by analysing and breaking it down. The other extreme is the ‘hard roe to hoe’ – it’s the easier pedagogical task for the director. Here, patience and empathy are needed, to guide the actor away from the cramps, to break down the barriers, whether mental or physical. It is important to be aware and make the actor aware that he has to find something that is common in him and the character. This will be the basis for shaping the role. It could be a similar grandmother, a love of birds, being ashamed of a physical flaw, a smell of sweat, claustrophobia, or it could be that this common ground is simply a characteristic gesture or grimace. How does the character come close to us, how does it feel to have him or her close to us? How do we suddenly begin to talk inside of him? How do we capture the figure? What brings it to life? What is his voice, his style of speaking like? What does he look like? How does he walk or sit? What are the proxemics?⁷³ These are the fundamental questions of acting, and mostly we can help the actor to find the answers, manifested in action, not through words, but through guiding exercises. So we lead the actor to the role through “analysis in action”. *“It’s also an action when someone kills themselves, but it is also acting if one only gets as far as making a decision. And action is also the*

⁷³ Proxemics: the distance maintained between people in communication and everyday activities, the human use of space, is a distinctive manifestation of culture. At its core is the problem of social and personal space and the perception of it.

*delimited physical series of movements when the actor picks up the dagger and stabs it into his chest.”*⁷⁴ But worlds separate and yet unite Tisbe’s suicide in the scene of the craftsmen in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and Juliet’s in *Romeo and Juliet*. *“To formulate, conceive and execute a physically definable course of action is certainly the best first step in the implementation of a stage task.”*⁷⁵

It must be made clear that whatever role it plays, you MUST BE SOLIDARITY WITH THE SUBJECT, you must agree with it, no matter how ‘evil’ it is, otherwise you can never get close to it. Experiencing emotions can be especially dangerous for technically unskilled, instinctive talents and amateur actors. Controlled consciousness must retain a secret place in the actor’s brain. They know what is going to happen in advance, yet the spectator must feel that he or she is hearing and seeing unexpected and momentary text and action. This is the famous actor’s paradox! According to Mari Jászai, *“The role must emerge and grow from within. The imitator looks at the outside, the god-given actor searches for the soul, he starts from the inside and puts his human appearance on the soul as the only essence. As I know, during a performance the soul of the person I am personifying always lives in me, because my own soul is on guard outside. Or does mine split in two? Because there are two, there is no doubt. While one is living inside, acts, laughs or cries, rages or plots, I know that the other is watching from outside and calmly taking care. He watches and checks the work he has already entrusted to his executive half.”*

József Ruszt distinguishes between external action and internal action. The former is *“describable according to their physical nature”*, the latter is the figure’s *“spiritual life, feelings, thoughts, which are not expressed in any independent physical act or action”*⁷⁶ Sándor Hevesi called the text of the role *“the verbal extract of the figure”*. The text itself is lifeless, a bit more multi-leveled than if we just read it out loud, but in order to have an effect, to ‘pass’ it to the audience, we make it alive with our physical presence [the actor’s bios, Eugenio Barba’s term].

⁷⁴ In Ruszt, p. 57-58.

⁷⁵ In: Ruszt, p. 31.

⁷⁶ In: Ruszt, p. 16.

The third is the **synthetic stage**: the role becomes a coherent whole, a life-stream within the play, the actor now sees himself from the role and the role from himself; his emotional world is subtly re-tuned as a result. It is very important for the director to feel what the actor wants to play, and to help him to do so with constant and sensitive attention. In a sense, the director is ‘playing along’ with the actor. No misunderstanding, we do not mean pre-acting! There are, and have been, directors who have been famous for this and have been able to handle such situations well (I mean Zoltán Várkonyi, József Ruszt, Tamás Ascher), but for amateur actors, it tends to cause anxiety if we show them how we think about playing the role.

DIRECTOR: empathise with the actor’s intentions, what they want to play, and it is important that their first steps are acceptable for both of them. The director guides and helps the actor in the development of the experience.

If we are now looking for cues for the shaping of each role, the first important task is to define the main task and the main purpose of the role. For example, the difference between the main task and the main goal in the case of *Kurázs mama és gyermekei*. The main task of the main character: to get as good deals as possible. In contrast, the main purpose of the play is to expose that it is pointless, because war is inhuman and destructive, and destroys her own children. This dichotomy is also true of the individual scenes and situations in each role, along with the ‘detours’ that deviate from the main line of the role. In the case of Hamlet, for example, the main task is already given: to avenge the violent death of his father. But a detour in comparison is, when after the ghost scene, he addresses himself these words: *The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right!* [Act 1, Scene 5]. Hamlet’s monologue is mostly detours, but it is important to determine how they relate to the main task.

TEXT AND PHYSICAL ACTION: In order to turn spoken words into individual messages on stage, a specific concentration is needed. In fact, we may not concentrate on our own speech, but on the rational impulses of the partner/partners towards us or towards each other and beyond. “*We have to see the impact of our own speech in the »mirror« of the partner. And it is good*

because the partner is doing the same thing”⁷⁷ This is what makes a dialogue come alive.

ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF TEXTS: There are directors who demand ‘full knowledge of text’ for the first rehearsal, and there are actors who comply. It is better if the text is slowly, as the rehearsal process unfolds, settles into the actor’s memory and becomes nuanced, evolves, instinctive and becomes filled up by the soul. Here this means that the text has become so much the actor’s own that the ‘outward-looking’ concentration of speech just mentioned is made possible. Once the actor arrives at rehearsal with a ready text, the Sisyphean work of ‘pruning’ and rebuilding begins, to create the character’s psychological dynamics. And here’s the problem of the prompter: should I? Shouldn’t I? Anyone who relies on the prompter to play the role will not get anywhere. It is best if there is no prompter at all, if all the characters reach such a stage that the action score of the role calls up the text as a kind of conditional reflex. Be present at rehearsals, and it doesn’t hurt to sit behind the covers during performances and follow the performance with a script in hand. Of course, this is rarely possible in the case of amateurs; usually during rehearsals, one of the actors takes on the role of the prompter, and in live performances, usually they are not present.

But what happens if the “blinds go down” during the performance and we can’t remember the text. If you stay in the present, it’s very rare that you forget the lines - if you get stuck thinking ‘Oh my God, I’m not going to remember the next line,’ then the actor is very likely to block. But it doesn’t do any good either to encourage myself like this: what I just did was awful, but I’ll really give it my best in the next scene. During the performance, let’s not think about the past or the future! Exclusively the here-and-now! What’s the antidote? To exclude all ‘civil’ thoughts and opinions, to look outwards, to look in a neutral way, ‘not at the audience and not at ourselves as we play’ “*The musician should not look around but concentrate on the sounds*” – writes Szabolcs Szőke in his book *A bácsi zenél (The uncle plays music)*.⁷⁸ And how true it is for the actor also! Eugenio Barba talks about dynamic

⁷⁷ In: Ruszt, p. 38.

⁷⁸ Szabolcs Szőke: *A bácsi zenél, Van lába a bácsinak?* p. 48, Dr. Kotács Könyvkiadó, Piliscsaba, 2021.

immobility, which is the physical side of the same thing. Although I don't look at them, I don't choose any of them, but I have to know where the spectator is looking at every moment. This is an extremely important acting skill. I'm not just concerned with myself, my own state, my own playing, but I sense my place in the whole, in the whole composition. This knowledge heightens the actor's presence, gives a valuable experience of the ways in which one can be present in a concentrated way even when not taking action, what action lurks in inaction.

The rehearsal is not an opportunity to memorise the text. Otherwise, many contingencies, solutions resulting from the uncertainty of the text (speech tempo, pauses, forced hand gestures) are petrified in the performance. If someone has great difficulty in memorising, let's break the scene into parts and rehearse them separately. This method can seem worryingly long and time-consuming, but it is not a waste of time. It's often quicker to achieve beautiful and true performances. But how should we memorise? It is more effective to repeat the text aloud and not to repeat it to oneself, it is worthwhile to memorise it as a dialogue, in fragments, thus also taking in the partner's utterances, and be sure to record the final words. The text should be memorised with them. It is a good way to study with a fellow actor or a friend, it is possible to use some technique to record the partner's/partners' lines, leaving out our place, it is best to practise with the partner and to go over the main dual dialogues before the performance.

The direction of the rehearsal process is not to put together a performance from the details, but to find in each detail the thread that connects to the whole. *“What is essential in the »iteratively progressive« method of the rehearsal process is precisely the composing process, in which each solved [felt solved - R.J.] detail belongs to an artistic whole. The actor needs periodic repetitions in order to make each moment flow logically and consistently from the others during his time on stage, from the past to the present moment in which we feel the birth of the next moment, and thus to concentrate the time he has to spend on stage into a life-stream.”*⁷⁹ But this same sequentiality also makes the replicas dynamic and alive, that is, the fact that the partner's reaction to it

⁷⁹ In: Ruszt, p. 42-43

is already at work in us at the moment of its utterance. And our responses are “ready” sooner than our interlocutor’s silence, also called impulse reception.

The technique of memorisation is very similar in “small” ways to memorising a poem and then working it out. During the memorization, we go from line to line, from section to section, but always returning to the previous section, to the preceding text, or to the very beginning, to “rebuild” the poem in our minds. We do not simply learn the poem, but – for want of a better word – we make it our own, filling it with our instincts and senses rather than with reasoned analysis and interpretation.

ABOUT COSTUMES, MASKS, MAKE-UP, PROPS

That’s not the point, although there are performances and plays that cannot work without them. And yet... I once saw an Indian Kathakali performance without make-up, headdresses and costumes. You have to know that the male performers of this genre [now there are also female performers] learn the technique from childhood, spend hours on their make-up, tint the whites of their eyes red, use towering headdresses and dance in spectacular costumes. Since the timeframe of European theatre festivals doesn’t really allow for such a long preparation, and they didn’t have the money to transport their props, they danced in simple rehearsal costumes and still had an impressive performance.

*“The actor may wear a costume, he may make a mask, he may change his voice and his posture, he may hide or transform his most personal and everyday expressions, but the outward appearance of the role does not replace the face of a real person... And perhaps, despite all the outward appearances, behind all the external things he puts on, the actor remains himself. On the stage, all external aids are there only to facilitate the actor’s metamorphosis, to serve the wholeness of the representation.”*⁸⁰

But let’s not try to equate the actor/objective tools of this unique wonder of Indian theatre art with European forms, although in essence – as József Ruszt’s lines say – the underlying material tools, i.e. the biological/spiritual presence of the actor is the most important behind all ‘masks’. The make-up,

⁸⁰ In: Ruszt, p. 45.

the hairstyle, the wig, the beard and the moustache, in fact everything that is used to change or transform the face, can only help in this. The human face loses all its plasticity in the bright light of the spotlight, it becomes flat, and it is perhaps advantageous for the actor to use make-up to enhance his own features and emphasise his natural characteristics. Mask and make-up, as well as helping the actor to perform, also give him confidence: proof that another personality exists on stage. A mask cannot be just an exact object that is physically taken on. Everything we put on ourselves functions as a mask: headgear, make-up, costume, shoes, bag, flower, umbrella, etc. Think of Chaplin's rich set of mask-like attributes (bowler hat, jacket, short trousers, moustache, large shoes, walking stick, etc.!) *"Any exact object that the performer puts on himself acts as a mask, as long as the performer wears it exclusively during the play."*⁸¹

It's worth recalling the illuminating recollection of Roberta Carreri, an actress at the Odin Theatre, of how the costume and props for her street theatre character Geromino came to be:

"In my backpack, apart from some summer stuff, I had a top-hat I bought months before in a second-hand shop.... Jan and Silvia⁸² [they had invited me to a clown festival] were delighted by my arrival and just asked me to join in their comic street interlude... Silvia had an accordion and Jan's character was wearing a black tuxedo and a bowler hat. I had the top-hat with me. Jan then lent me one of her costumes. He was 195cm tall and weighed a hundred kilograms, so when I put on his pants, shirt and shoes, the effect was quite comical. I looked like a kid putting on his father's clothes. To keep Jan's trousers from falling down, he lent me a pair of old-fashioned red suspenders. The trouser leg was rolled up so I wouldn't step on it... I wore the shoes without socks. My bare, thin ankles formed a kind of break between the shoes and the trousers. For a tie, I used a black silk ribbon that normally served as my hair, tied as a butterfly. Finally, I put the hat on my head. Three months before, in the heart of the Amazon jungle, a Yanomami Indian had cut my hair /so short/ for their own kind of style... I named the character Geronimo. I found straw

⁸¹ In.: Donnellan, p. 125.

⁸² Jan Ferslev and Silvia Ricciardelli - actors in Odin Teatret

in the freshly harvested wheat fields /around the place of the performance/. Putting a straw in my mouth, I decided that this entitled me to remain silent. Later, when we started to use the bird-calling sound techniques during our street parades, I got the duck sound and it took the place of the straw and became Geronimo's voice... I think wearing Jan's shoes, which were so big on me, awakened the childlike spirit in me. It was as if the figure of Geronimo had grown up from my feet, through my body, up to my eyes.”⁸³

The actor must also build up a type when shaping the role, and the type is a generalized image of various personality traits, still it must be individualized, adapted to the figure hidden in his own personality and corresponding to it, i.e. to his self-image. The essence of this creative process is TRANSUBSTANTIATION. In the words of József Ruszt: *“In transubstantiation, the actor recreates himself in such a way that he transfers the essential aspirations of his personality, his emotional attitude, into the circumstances in which the hero lives. Thus, he experiences the circumstances and the hero through his own personality. But because the hero's life and aspirations are determined, the actor is fighting against himself to accept the character.”*⁸⁴ The actor then looks at himself from the perspective of the role and sees the role from himself. During this process, his personality undergoes a kind of temporary re-tuning. It is already a technique to achieve this at each performance, through a complex ‘connection’, that, at the moment of entering the stage, is embodied in the inseparability of self and role, coexisting with the other characters and the dramatic space he enters. Ruszt is very much concerned with the analysis of the role, which must include both the emotional and spiritual nature of the role and, of course, the definition of its external characteristics. In the improvisation phase of rehearsals – because such a phase is almost inevitable for amateur actors – special exercises can be done to guide the search for voice and speech style, to ‘carve’ and move the character with the help of acting partners.

A bypass:

⁸³ „*Geronimo was the key figure*”, excerpt from Tatiana Cheminek's interview with Roberta Carreri (translation in the Hungarian version by János Regős) Szcenárium, April 2019

⁸⁴ In: Ruszt, p. 48.

On the existence of the group actor

The actor in the space – is not only surrounded by objects, but also by partners. How does the actor exist in a group? How does it create an atmosphere? When does he step out of the ‘crowd’ and when does he step back in? In what ways can the background players direct the audience’s attention, pointing out the most important moments in the action? What are the ways to make one character stand out from a group or make another almost invisible? How can you be a concentrated presence on the stage and still not draw attention to yourself?

Movement and location in space.

In their home, too, people place objects and furniture in such a way as to create the freest possible movement and use of space. The more objects are in a home, the more difficult it is to move freely. Overcrowding forces the occupant of the space to develop and get used to walking around the home. The spatial conditions of the stage have a serious impact on the actor’s behaviour, and not only at the level of walking. Therefore, it is good to imitate the future rehearsal space with some kind of furniture, space delimiters and walk-in rehearsals at the first stage rehearsal. *“If the actor cannot enter well or cannot leave well, the actor is not only restricted in his movement, but also in the free development of the pantomimic elements of the character.”*⁸⁵ If the furniture and props are badly placed in the space, and it is difficult to get on or off the platforms, this can paralyse the actor. Particular attention should be paid to the practice of shifting in spaces where there is a deliberate and conscious transformation of space into an ‘obstacle course’. Think of Winnie in Beckett’s *Winnie in the Hills* in *Happy Days*, or the steeply sloping stages, bridges and pivots. To overcome and master such ‘spatial obstacles’, special rehearsal opportunities should be provided, even outdoors in nature.

⁸⁵ In: Ruszt, p. 65.

VII. COMPOSING A PERFORMANCE

To present this, we need to return to the basic questions:

WHAT? – WITH WHOM? – WHERE – FOR WHOM? WHAT?

It's always a very important moment in the life of a group when the director, often with the group's involvement, decides to present a theatrical piece or to implement an idea that has been shared but is still in the development stage. If you want to present a classical or contemporary play and you are not 100% informed, it is worth finding a theatre dramaturg, a critic or someone who is well informed in this field and asking for their advice. The internet can also help you choose a play. For this purpose, you can visit the collection of plays on the website of the Federation of Hungarian Amateur Theatres and Players (Magyar Szín-Játékos Szövetség) www.szinjatekos.org, but the website of the Hungarian Contemporary Playwrights' Association www.dramairok.hu, and the Hungarian Electronic Library www.mek.oszk.hu can also give you some good ideas if you type in the word theatrical play. It is important to note that if the play is by a contemporary playwright or an author who has died within seventy years, it is crucial to check the royalty situation of the text, as this needs to be taken care of even in the case of amateur theatre. You can typically do this through the ARTISJUS Association www.artisjus.hu/. Their email address is info@artisjus.com. And don't forget the translator of the play! However, if you turn to the internet for a play, be considerate! Unfortunately, it is quite common for amateur actors to catch dubious texts and scenes off the Internet. They type in "comedy, farce, cabaret scene, contemporary play, etc." – and what the network "throws" is put to work without control. Besides, it is not easy to recognise the theatrical relevance of a dramatic text by reading it. György Spiró said somewhere that a play which is outstanding from a literary-poetic point of view may not work on stage. A dramatic text is known for being made up of simpler, more direct, more ordinary and well-to-be-spoken texts, but also – and this is the crucial point – for the action-value of every word, sentence and relation. I would add that every textual manifestation is rich and varied in background, meaning and attitude, which we will have to go through in the tests of analysis and memory. Of course, the exception here also proves the rule, a Shakespearean or Sándor Weöres drama, though rich

in poetic virtues, is a proven stage text. But it is quite another thing to take a classic that has already been proven on stage than a classic by an author that no one else has dared to stage yet. Here again, we can only advise that if there is a strong and deep directorial vision and inspiration behind this bold choice of play, and a strong company to make it happen, then it is worth taking the plunge.

In her methodological book for amateurs, Rozália Brestyánszki Boros addresses the case of presenting a text by a home author. *“If these dramas meet the above requirements [every word, sentence and relationship in them has an action-value R.J.], and we can verify this in professional consultations, we should not only present them, but also encourage the authors to write new stage works. With in-house writers, of course, we can’t have the same expectations as with a classical dramatic work, but if the writer is talented, then thanks to stage experience, an incredibly exciting workshop may emerge in the company. This can give the ensemble’s performances a special flavour, and produce unique and unrepeatabe theatre that is unique to them. Such creative work can be of exceptional value.”*⁸⁶ A similarly productive method can be to develop a script from an idea, from a problem that is a source of tension, through improvisation, almost in parallel with the performance. Here, the principle of ‘everyone is listened to, but the director’s word is final’ should be followed, as well as not letting the rush of instructions and ideas flow out of control. In such cases, the exhortation ‘Let’s try it out’, ‘Don’t talk, let’s do it!’, can steer the rehearsal process in the right direction. It is not uncommon to want to write a script **based on an epic work**. I can tell you from personal experience that this, while very tempting, is perhaps the riskiest and demands the most ‘self-restraint’ of all undertakings. For although an epic work may seem rich in dialogue and dramatic turns at first reading, this does not determine whether it will stand up on stage (see novel by Dostoevsky or Rejtő). In the case of a longer, plot-driven novel with several threads, we must decide where and what to focus on, and structure the script strictly along these lines. It can be an important scene in the novel, and from there you

⁸⁶ Rozália Brestyánszki Boros, *Színházi alapok amatőröknek (Theatre Basics for Amateurs)*, Hungarian Cultural Institute of Vojvodina, 2009. p. 20. [Hereinafter: Brestyánszki]; Internet: <http://adattar.vmmi.org/index.php?ShowObject=konyv&id=189>

can use a kind of flashback technique to unravel the plot /this is what Polish director Andrzej Wajda did to Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot* when, as the basis for his adaptation, he chose the scene where Prince Myshkin and Rogozhin meet over the corpse of Nastasia Filippovna, who was killed by Rogozhin/. The more a novel adaptor tries to fit into the play, the harder it is to get the experiment right.

Two adaptations of my own that might be instructive:

In the case of the adaptation of *The Fourteen Carat Car* – which I was asked to do, and not of my own volition – I was sure of the narrative and selection technique: I dispensed with the weaving of the novel's plot, which is disparate in time and space, and – as is customary in cabaret, I entrusted this task to a skilful narrator/conversationalist. The really humorous material lies in the dialogue of Rejtő. But what should the message be that emerges from the performance, the idea that holds the plot together? It is that Mr. Vanek, who embodies natural and self-identical behaviour, 'outwits' everyone and ends up destroying and catatonising a society of order and discipline, such as the military officers. Therefore, instead of Ivan Gorchev, I have placed Mr. Vanek at the centre of the performance and drawn everyone else into his magnetic field.

In the case of the novel adaptation of *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, which is 1500 pages long, but in my case has six characters, the first step was to narrow down the many characters to six types: in addition to the two protagonists (Don Quixote and Sancho Panza), there were two female characters (the homely Dulcinea and the free-spirited Oriana), the Correspondent (Paparazzo), who follows Don Quixote as a stalking-photographer, and finally a sober smart aleck, Baccalareus, who is determined to force him back into the "normal" world. The whole intellectual arc is based on the idea – not alien to the episodic order of the novel – that Don Quixote, who is initially one hundred percent self-identical in his adventures, is increasingly sought by the world as a celebrity for its own entertainment. When he realises this, he takes his own revenge and destroys Master Pedro's puppet theatre. I am publishing these two examples of my own in the hope that they may help to avoid certain pitfalls when adapting a novel for the stage.

Further work with the text:

Crossing out-rewriting-expansion

This arises mainly in the case of classical or contemporary drama texts. In the case of texts, which were developed by ourselves or through improvisation, only those text parts are retained that are relevant and meaningful to the performance and its characters. There are several reasons for crossing out: **the merging of certain roles** depending on the number of company members and the number of roles that can be assigned. In such cases, we should try to work in a way that the character framework of the role in question is enriched by the texts taken from the other role. The **sheer length of the play can also justify** an erasure, since in most cases the performance is planned for an hour and a half, or 2 x 1 hour is ideal if it is performed with a pause. In the case of erasures and combining roles, care should be taken to ensure that important information essential to the plot is not left out. The third and most important type of erasure is when it becomes clear during rehearsals that a line is ‘unsayable, the stage throws it away’. But it can also happen that an entire scene ends up like this, because it misdirects the main plot line or is simply unnecessary for our concept. But the reverse can also happen: a previously deleted passage or text turns out to be essential to make the play work. In such cases, the director’s ALERTNESS is indispensable: he or she must be able to let go of anything with courage and determination that might impede the flow of dramatic events. Whether I was working with amateurs or professionals, I always insisted on having a sort of all-round assistant, and if there was no one to do the job, I would take one of the company’s less-busy actors. You have to be very careful with your own rewriting and updating! It’s tempting, especially with plays set in an older era, to make the text a little more contemporary. If it’s a classic, straining is pointless, the text will only be worse, more artificial, and will flop around on the actors. Theatre is an art of being present, of being just-here-and-now, so we can trust that if the play is strong, it will ‘by itself’ become contemporary, current in the performance. My unforgettable and here relevant experience was the performance of the student actors of the Kecskemét Theatre Workshop in 2019, who brought the ancient text of József Katona’s *Jeruzsálem pusztulása (Destruction of Jerusalem)* to

the stage with glowing contemporary energy, adapted by György Spiró. It's easier when there are more than one translations of a classic. It depends on our conceptions and our choice of style whether we choose a translation of Molière, Shakespeare or Brecht play, for example, by János Arany, Ádám Nádosdy, Parti Nagy, Petri or János Térey. In the case of a novel adaptation, the updating can also be done by combing the characters' improvisations with the text-body of the original work's scenes. This is the method I used for my production of *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, mentioned above. The narrator's lines for *The Fourteen Carat Car* were also elaborated on with the actor during rehearsals.

I won't discuss it separately, but the text of a performance can be just a canvas, a sketch that the actors fill in with text in a live performance. This is what happened in the case of *commedia dell'arte*, where, besides the theme, the story and the rules of the game, the most important thing is to listen to each other, to create a »circuit«.

WITH WHOM?

*“The actor is the soul of the theatre performance. Who is the actor? Perhaps the most complicated of all artists. He himself is the creator (for he shapes his role), he is also the instrument with which he creates (his own body and soul), and he is also the creation (the figure on stage participating in the performance).”*⁸⁷

Yes, now we have to talk about our actors again. With amateur actors, it is usually not easy to “cast” a prospective performance. Either there are too many of us and we want to give everyone a role, or there are too few of us and we are forced to make role combinations or other compromises. And then there is the difficulty of the diversity of personalities and professional competences. It is rare to find a company in which the roles are perfectly distributed, and no one is dissatisfied. It is good to have an idea of who is going to play what when the text for the performance is being chosen or written. But it may also happen, that with a ready-made script in hand, you have to decide as the invited director. In such cases, it is very important to get to know the

⁸⁷ In: Brestyánszky, p. 52.

stage background of the company members, preferably by watching other live performances, or if there is no other way, from video recordings. It doesn't hurt to have a little trust in advance.

But let's take a look at the issues one-by-one to consider when casting:

- The physical capacity of our company's actors: physicality, personality and group dynamics (discussed earlier), mental capacity, text-learning ability;

- Being amateurs, it should be considered that if someone was to be cast as a massive lead – although they would be the best person for the role – but for family or other reasons would not be able to attend rehearsals regularly and on time. In this case, we should try boldly to find someone else for the lead role.

- Age and gender distribution and the play: the age issue is certainly more difficult to resolve for children's and student performances. Who plays the teacher, who plays the parent? Usually, either someone from the upper classes is invited or a more mature student is cast. But in the case of gender also, it is mainly in the case of the young teenager actors that we see the moustaches, wrinkles painted on with eyeliner, men's hats and trousers. I have seen similar arrangements in groups of older women. Here, the key is to curb the overcompensation of their gender, their age, to reinforce their confidence in their own identity, and not to let the opinion about other genders determine the character's performance. When in my own play, *Little Red Riding Hood, Family Hysteria*, I assigned the female roles to male actors, my first instruction and rule of the game was that they should not try to play women, that they should build from within themselves.

- Personal relationships within the company can also play a role in casting. This has already been briefly mentioned [see p. 67], now some particular examples: when I was doing my *Don Quixote*, the original request came from Gábor Dióssi and Szabolcs Thuróczy, who wanted to play the roles of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza as good friends, as a reflection of their personal relationship. But the casting of Pintér's early plays – and I can say this as a close witness – was also influenced by relations within the company. Rozália Brestyánszki Boros also touches on other personal relationships. *Can a couple be played by actors if they can't stand each other? Can any personal*

*conflict or discord that may arise be managed within the group? What can the production lose or gain from this? How does it affect the plot??"*⁸⁸

- This has been mentioned elsewhere, but the presence of external relationships and hierarchies in the company can be a problem, and in some cases an advantage: for example, if the mayor, the head of a local sponsoring company, or a relative is taking part in the play. It is good if the 'important person' is not involved in the performance because of his or her status, and has no expectation of a privileged role. I have mostly encountered this situation in village and small town theatre groups, and it mostly had a positive effect on the work of the group.

- It may seem small, but we also have to deal with the actor's reluctance to take on the role because he finds it small, unworthy. The remedy is to take care, according to the possibilities, to give members a variety of role options, to have convincing reasons for why we have chosen the person for the role in question.

- If there are more of us than there are roles in the play, we have to split a role. This can lead to inconvenient situations (who is better, who can play more, first, second cast, etc.). Such situations require special drama pedagogical attention. It is best to work parallelly and to have both actors present during rehearsals. Obviously, we do not expect "copy-space" from the rehearsal of the doubled actors, but we allow their individuality to be expressed within the limits of the role. It is possible to take a risk, and to use a counter-cast as a bold gesture (but this can only be the result of a solid directorial concept, and never out of necessity or for the sake of a joke). In such cases, we give the actor a role that of which his usual roles and his character is completely different from, or perhaps contrary to that. If counter-casting is purely a matter of compulsion (because, say, there is no one else left for the role), it can almost certainly result in embarrassment and ultimately a failure – both for the performance and the actor.

- Finally, one more case is worth mentioning, and that is the jump-in. We won't go into how many different situations we have to make a quick decision

⁸⁸ In: Brestyánszky, p. 53.

in, to save the next performance. If it turns out in time, say before noon on the day of the performance, it can be solved with a jump-in rehearsal for an episode-role. For a more massive role – if there is an actor available – you will certainly need to call a separate rehearsal. Two important factors that the jump-in actor can expect: in a good performance, he or she will jump into a production with a secure structure and a well-planned play, with more attention than usual by his or her fellow actors and actresses around him or her, they so-to-say “play along him” sometimes even helping with the lines.

WHERE?

The answer to this question seems simple, since the majority of amateur actors are “hosted” by a cultural or educational institution, be it a community centre or a school. This usually means that the performance is rehearsed under set design markers at all times. If the original set is very different from the markings, and the actors are too late to get to grips with the original conditions, they will not be able to move naturally and habitually in it, and will not be able to use the set elements and props as intended, or at all, because they have not been integrated into their performance during rehearsals. It is better to devise technical conditions that will serve the interests of the performance surely and purposefully, and can form an integral whole with it.

Let us now look beyond the broader question of WHERE?, i.e. the geographical, sociological context in which the group works and the location of the institution hosting the ensemble within a municipality, and let us just stick to the building-like rehearsal and performance venue. It may seem trivial, but the company has to adapt to the organisational and operational arrangements of the host institution, for example, the fact that they can only get a rehearsal room or a time slot by arrangement, that they have to unpack after rehearsals, that the institution closes at x time, that other people rehearse in parallel with us, etc. Since I myself had to adapt the very different working schedule of the Szkéné Theatre to the life of a higher education institution, the Central Building of the Budapest University of Technology, for 31 years, it is perhaps worth sharing some of my experiences. The most important thing here is **diplomacy**, which means developing a living relationship with the people who work there, from the doorman, the cleaner, the janitor, right up to

the director of the institution, respecting everyone's position, work, expertise and responsibilities. In the event of conflict or tension, find a compromise and a way out that is acceptable to both parties. Late rehearsals, noise, rearranging the space, storage of sets, opening and closing, on-call, extra cleaning, other programs on stage, in the hall, can all be sources of tension. The director, the group leader, may not always be the best person to deal with conflicts. It requires composure, patience and empathy. Have such a person in the group!

Rehearsals in a public education institution:

In schools, we can rehearse in classrooms or gyms in most cases, spreading out the equipment in a tight space in preparation for a performance that we might then present on a big stage. In addition, children are expansive, they need to move around a lot, which is a natural part of making a play. It is almost impossible to rehearse scenes that move everyone. If we don't want to have a precarious staggering around the stage, we should go out into the school corridors, or if possible, into the courtyard. Organising a summer camp can make a big difference. Here too, creating a supportive human environment can be an important help. We are luckier if the local cultural institution hosts the student drama group. This allows for a healthy mix of ages and schools, but also provides a better infrastructure for the work. It also means that the "acting" is removed from the daily routine of school life.

Rehearsals and performances in cultural institutions and theatres:

Larger community centres usually provide some kind of rehearsal room for the group. Here – ideally – you can settle for the whole period. If not, every rehearsal starts and ends with packing. We are usually not allowed on stage until the last week before the show. It is a time when everything gets congested: getting the props, walk paths, covers, setting up the set, lighting, etc. This is a real test of cooperation and patience for the company. During this "staging", attention must also be paid to the relationship between the stage and the auditorium: compared to the stage they are positioned from upwards to downwards or from downwards to upwards, perhaps from the sides or in a circle; the extent to which the action on stage can be seen; and the visibility and audibility of everything. If necessary, modify the already set

up scenes depending on the above. The director will then try to reach every corner of the auditorium and observe the rehearsal from there.

Outdoors:

This has a serious theatrical literature. Now just a few useful points: If your performance is for a carpented stage/podium, the set should be easy to handle, move and be lightweight, and able to withstand the weather and transport. It also matters if we can choose where we want our stage to be, whether it's a stage we build ourselves or a stage that was set up in advance. Either way, our performances will certainly require a louder, richer motion-elements and frontal set-up. It also matters whether we're performing in the hustle and bustle of a folk festival and trying to attract attention, or whether we're invited to a built outdoor theatre. In the latter case, the situation is not very different from that of an indoor performance. If we are planning a street performance, we will mix improvisation, staged, acrobatic and musical elements in good proportions, and the order of actions may vary depending on the situation and the space. The point is to use spectacular and "noisy" elements, brightly coloured costumes and props to keep the audience on our side and engaged. [see Roberta Carreri's memoir! p.86]

Special site:

Performances are now being made for a number of special venues. People from psychiatric institutions, disabled people, prisoners and those in homeless shelters come together to make or host performances on site. For such undertakings, it is very important that a professional with a good knowledge of these different types of deviance guides our work, so that everyone is assigned a task according to their condition and situation. When we deliver a performance, we should not rush in without notice. We should always be aware of the specific needs of our audience and consult with people who know the institution or the profession during rehearsals.

FOR WHOM?

Yes, we also need to talk about the audience, the intended recipient of our performance. It is good to always keep in mind – although we are strongly tempted to do so after a coldly received performance – that the hydra-headed

“audience can do nothing”, that we have ourselves to blame for everything in the first place.

No one has been more specific about this situation than Peter Brook:

*“So it should never be said that...the audience is bad. It is true that we sometimes meet with very bad audiences, but we have no right to say so; for the simple reason that we should not expect audiences to be good. We must simply recognise that there are easy audiences and less easy audiences. If the audience is easy, it is a grace from heaven, a gift from heaven, but a difficult audience is not the enemy. It is not abnormal. On the contrary, audiences are resistant in their natural state, so we must constantly seek what excites them, without losing the intimate relationship with the content and the other. All this without any kind of showiness, without any desire to please at all costs.”*⁸⁹

At our rehearsals, we should always have the “viewer’s point of view” in mind, who will usually be encountering our performance for the first time. And this includes avoiding the danger of the other audience, and that is **boredom**, which Peter Brook considers to be the greatest enemy of performance. During rehearsals, especially when the performance is coming together, when you have a view of the whole composition, make sure that there are always enough unresolved secrets, unfired patrons, surprises, unexpected twists that distract/ reverse the plot, to keep the audience’s attention. Brook sees this source of danger as an almost demonic creature when he writes: *“Boredom is the best tour guide I know in this work and the one I always keep an eye on. Boredom, like the devil, can appear at any moment in the theatre... A little nothing is enough, it lurks, it leaps at us, and it is insatiable. It watches the moment to slip unnoticed into an action, a gesture, a sentence.”* Peter Brook has tested the boredom quotient of a performance he is preparing in schools: *“We go there without props, without costumes, without directing ... as soon as we’ve done half or a third of the work, we test what we’ve discovered to see what gets people interested and what gets them bored ... Children have no preconceptions, they are interested or bored, they are sympathetic to the*

⁸⁹ Peter Brook: *Slyness of Boredom* (Le diable c’est l’ennui), transcript of a lecture by P. Brook (*Atelier du Chaudron, Cartoucherie de Vincennes, 1991*) Hungarian translation by Mária Harangi, https://www.literatura.hu/szinhas/unalom_a_veg.htm (hereafter: Brook)

actors or impatient.”⁹⁰ The viewer must hear, see and, in short, understand and feel what is happening on stage, because the performance is for them. If he cannot perceive it in the right way, it will not affect him, even though the primary purpose of the performance is to make an impact. The only way to achieve this is to “cheat” a little. There is a certain kind of naivety in self-assessment, especially in rural and small-town groups, which have played primarily for local, familiar, “fan” audiences and then received the sobering criticism of a festival audience and jury with dismay. We must prepare for this too, prepare the group first and foremost mentally. An amateur company must above all serve their own narrow/broad local audience – not chasing success! – and if they do this well, they will certainly not be ashamed when leave this small circle. I’ve seen a lot of children’s and adult productions originally produced for locals, and they can be a real theatrical experience in a foreign land as well. I should also mention some things to consider about audience involvement. To be brief, I would say: not recommended. Not only because the consequences are unpredictable, but also because – strange as it may sound – it only works if it is well prepared and planned, like the rest of the performance. Otherwise, “[C]ommonly a half-hearted, confused action will result, at worst an angry resistance, but there have been instances where the pulled-up spectator has begun to “act” in an intense and inexorable way... The comedy of such situations is contingent, uncertain, its value is questionable.”⁹¹ Interactivity in the theatre is always very risky and should only be used when it is unavoidable and integral to the performance: performances, action, street theatre, cabaret, stand-up are genres where it can be a natural element. But we must be aware that our performance, the stage is separated from the audience by a world. If we go out among them, call out or invite someone on stage, there will be consequences. The former can wreck our performance (an alarming example of this is the fake “invitations to engage” in inferior children’s performances - where is the fox?, have you seen the princess?, etc.), the latter can result in a ‘Cipolla effect’: embarrassing the chosen audience member, causing them to fake play-pretend or resist – one is worse than the other! But here again, I should note that if the general atmosphere of your

⁹⁰ In: Brook, p. 11.

⁹¹ In: Brestyánszky, p. 124.

performance is such that there is a capable actor in the group, who can tune in and interact with the invited spectator without the inevitable status game [see the already cited Keith Johnstone book, Chapter called *Status!* p. 37-84] being tipped over to the detriment of the spectator, then it is worth trying.

TECHNOLOGY – BEHIND THE SCENES

“In a theatre performance – if there is an opportunity – there is a whole “apparatus” behind the actors. The audience often doesn’t know about these invisible hands, but a performance depends on them a lot. These people are often members of the company, actors who are not participating in the production or who are playing a small part, and they also organise, prompt, manage, do make-up or do the actors’ hair.”⁹²

I have left the discussion of this area of multiple conditions and effects to the end, although it is my experience that attention to it permeates the whole rehearsal process. In amateur rehearsals, everyone does everything, the actors share the workload proportionally, but this only works smoothly where there is a humble and respectful attitude without arrogance towards each other and the theatre. In this way, the performance will be the result of a smooth and cohesive teamwork. An amateur company seldom has a qualified lighting and sound technician, usually a “nonspecialist” with technical expertise takes on the task. The same way, a person voluntarily gets the costumes, sews them, alters them, shows them to the cast, brings them to the stage - ***the assistant!!!*** The props are usually the result of a joint collection. In the latter case, try to get them “permanently”, if possible, or at least for the time period we perform the play. I have had the unpleasant experience of lugging a suitcase full of items to a performance, when the rifle had to be taken from here and the military uniform from there. Of course, if there is no other solution, “Poor man’s process”. Anyway, whatever is ours – and not to be washed or repaired – we store it in one place, preferably out of the way of everyday local traffic. If we are working with the technician of the host institution, we have to adapt to his or her work schedule, to the fact that his or her commitment to the group is usually not the same as ours, especially in the case of a guest

⁹² In: Brestyánszky, p. 124.

performance. Local technicians generally don't like, or even hate, having to handle lighting and sound effects. We should always prepare and have a script for the technicians with sound and light cues and – if there are light changes and effects in the play – a so-called **rider**, which includes the layout of the stage set up and, the location, orientation and type of spotlights.

THE LIGHT

It is the means by which we direct the viewer's attention, because they will look where it is bright. The angle of illumination should allow the faces to be seen in their entirety. If the light is cast on the actors at a steep angle, the actors' eyes will be in shadow and their noses will be in shadow. In the light composition, the strength, direction and colour of the light, its saturation [it makes a difference whether one spotlight or several spotlights illuminate a point] must be established. Strong light is accompanied by strong shadows, so the figures will be very expressive. It is advisable to have the light projectors (reflectors) cast light on the stage diagonally. If possible, and if you have a dedicated person, show the lighting designer the thing before the rehearsal week. In practice, this is usually done by having the lighting master make a basic set-up based on what he has seen, which is then refined from scene to scene, putting/adding new lights if necessary, determining the brightness, etc. Setting up the lights is a very complicated and lengthy job, and even in the case of a guest performance it is usually done without actors, but we can call on the help of a patient actor (or the assistant!) to make sure that the light falls where and whom it needs to (head, whole figure, group). The presence of the whole company leads to nervousness, because this is a sloppy, very meticulous and tedious job. Especially for guest performances, avoid the two extremes! If you get into a professionally equipped theatre, the director often "goes nuts" and comes up with a lighting dramaturgy that he would never have dreamed of at home, and if it is poorer, he feels blocked and is unable to think through the lighting that can be achieved with the apparatus at hand. An amateur performance must be staged in such a way that it is technically as adaptable as possible to changing circumstances.

SOUND AND MUSICAL ELEMENTS

Sound effects and music input are now mostly done on a computer. It's good to have a dedicated person for this. However, it is not a good idea to leave it until the end. As with the other things that need to be collected, people need to be mobilised. They should bring in, show music and effects, of course on the basis of the director's instructions, and at the end of the day, a play-in programme should be prepared for the technician. The sound technician, together with the director, marks the playback cues in his script on which to start the recording (he also writes down the volume level). In a musical performance, the sound recording includes the instrumental (orchestral) recording of the insert songs, this *musical basis* here the setting up of the set-up (microports, microphones, amplifier, speakers) is a very skilled task. The most complicated is when we are talking about live musical performances, where the orchestra and the actors have to be set up individually or as a group. We are very lucky if we have instrumentalists in the company. Let's tap them and make use of their skills – with moderation and taste, of course! If you are rehearsing a musical piece or if there are serious vocal parts in the piece – which is very common today – have a chorus teacher at rehearsals, preferably with a piano. In fact, have separate rehearsals with him! Get the authentic musical basis of the piece. If the composer is contemporary – also because of the royalties – find him or her and ask him or her for the material, or if it has already been performed in a theatre, ask the theatre. Avoid full playback, it's a big deal if your actors are singing live and only the music is coming from a machine. And before musical/singing performances, never forget to SING IN! – Preferably in the presence of the chorus teacher or a member with absolute hearing. There is no more disappointing and inferior solution than full machine singing and accompaniment. Unfortunately, I have encountered this solution at musical performances for children and young adults with the explanation that 'the children were so keen to learn a musical with music and dance'.

A separate script for the technicians (sound/light) should be prepared, with a floor plan and a precise indication when to give light and sound in and out.

CLOSURE

We have come a long way in introducing creating methods related to acting. Of course, there is no universal recipe for creating a true and effective performance that applies to everyone and everything. The most important thing is to never copy ready-made patterns, but to always draw inspiration from the members of the community and to find the way to a given play or theatrical task together with them. I hope I have been able to provide useful help in this.

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János Regős

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