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Voice Modulation through Imaginative Exercises

Abstract: The present article proposes an analytical cartography of voice exercises from the perspective of the material force through which they act at the psychosomatic level. The analyzed exercises are identified in the most known and used training methods developed throughout the 20th century. The analysis of exercises follows the effect of imagination in the development of qualities such as: flow, lightness, efficiency. The maximization of vocal qualities requires awareness of the interdependencies between body-voice-imaginary stimulus through training. The types of training and their applicability will produce results, being correlated with the specific disciplines of the actor's art that integrate processes such as body awareness and the influence of the imaginal stimulus in the creative act. The various methods of learning and assimilating vocal expression techniques are recommended to be practiced in an individual system. The aim is to concretely and systematically follow the progress made by the practitioner under the assistance of the vocal coach.

Keywords: Voice; Imagination; Vocal Training; Vocal Technique; Breathing.

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Introduction

The 20th century represented an extremely prolific period in the dynamics of theatrical pedagogy. Starting from the pioneering work of Constantin Stanislawski and continuing with the great reformers of the sixth decade, numerous acting schools were founded in Europe and America, which developed various methods of theatrical pedagogy. Today we find in the educational offers of university programs or theater studios references to the methods of Constantin Stanislavski, Vsevolod Mayerhold, Michael Chekov, Jerzy Grotowski, Viola Spolin, Augusto Boal, Eugenio Barba, Jaques Lecoq, Tadashi Suzuki, etc. In his studies of theatrical anthropology, Eugenio Barba observes the convergence of these methods in the sense of reworking spontaneity in stage behavior, that is "the ability to decisively execute actions that prove organic and effective, convincing in relation to the senses of the spectator."[1] The training exercises found in these methods are built around the principle of the materiality of the body, *body-mind*,[2] including the voice as an invisible extension of the body.[3]

Actor-specific vocal training follows three distinct directions: breathing, voice, and speech. On the one hand, all beings

are born with the physiological potential of voice production, on the other hand, speaking is an act determined by cultural and linguistic constraints. Voice can communicate emotions without using articulate speech, but speech cannot exist without voice. Physiologically, voice is produced with the help of the column of air hitting the vocal cords. The process of voice production can be described by following the path of air that crosses the phonatory apparatus from nasal or oral inspiration, then descends through the trachea into the lungs to then return to the larynx where the strings vibrate and produce the sound. The sound travels to the resonance box formed in the oral cavity. Thus formed, the sound is shaped according to the place where it is formed, the area where it resonates and the position of the obstacles encountered, i.e., the teeth, tongue, and lips.

Context

The essence of the actor's work lies in the process of transformation. Every technique or theatrical poetics is based on a principle regarding the transformation of the actor or the degree to which he transforms into the character they are impersonating. The ideal training incorporates diverse techniques, based on complementary principles, because as Eugenio Barba observes in his work *A Paper Canoe,* the techniques are not mutually exclusive, they complement and enhance each other.[4] The actor's training aims at acquiring an acting technique, and this technique involves the performative, extra-daily use of the body, voice and mind, maximizing the effect of stage presence that captures the attention and imagination of the viewer.

According to the principles on which they are based, three large categories of acting techniques can be distinguished: extra-daily techniques, psycho-technique and psycho-physical technique.

The extra-daily techniques of the body contain physical procedures that operate through a process of reduction and substitution. It highlights the essential, codified character of actions by creating a tension and a change in the energy potential of the body. For example, the actor is modifying their walk using a technique which will trigger an imbalance of their body, thus increasing their presence on the scene, which in turn attracts and captivates the attention of the spectator. This category includes the techniques of Oriental theater, Meyerhold's Biomechanics, Jacques Lecoq's technique, and Tadashi Suzuki's technique.

The psycho-technique is based on the principle of dramatizing each action with the aim of influencing the actor's physical dynamism by breaking the automatisms of everyday behavior. The actor imagines that he is in a real situation defined by concrete parameters that answer the fundamental questions: Who? Where? When? Why? With whom? How? The actor is trained to act by imagining what if ... . The Stanislavskian technique is the matrix of this type of acting technique. From Stanislavski it was taken over, developed and improved, then adapted to the different performative forms that evolved later, such as cinema and television.

The third category of techniques, the psycho-physical techniques, are based on the principle of integrating the performer's voice and body in order to achieve the body-mind complex. According to this, the actor's mind imagines and their body

incorporates and enacts the imaginary stimulus on scene. For example, the actor's body will enact being cold, as a response to the respective imaginary stimulus. In this category fall the systems developed by Grotowski, David Zinder, Mickael Chekhov, and Tehnica Viewpoints.

Acting technique is the tool that allows the actor to operate at the stage level and, as Robert Cohen observes, "Stage play is communication".[5] In performing arts, communication has two fundamental levels, interaction and performance, and is the result of the use of tactics. Tactics are conscious and unconscious strategies by which we seek to achieve our goals or target. In his method, presented in the work *The Actor and the Target*, director Declan Donnellan states that the actor cannot transform, only the target is constantly transforming: "There are as many methods as there are actors (...). There is no such thing as a failsafe system. Many actors are grateful for any spark of imagination that ignites life and confidence in them".[6] We thus understand that there are psycho-physical mechanisms with which we can operate concretely, operationalize them, thus achieving the transformation process from the daily self into the enacted character.

Tactics are psycho-physical mechanisms of communication that combine verbal forms with paraverbal forms. Paraverbal is complementary to verbal language and manifests itself through the ways of vocal expression that give meaning and meaning to words: tone, rhythm, volume. Paraverbal language contains meta-information that defines an inter-human relationship. The communication of the interhuman relationship, the *RELACOM[7],* will suggest the decoding of the content of the verbal

communication. The paraverbal forms are: progressively increasing the intensity of the lines; the reduction in intensity, which follows a moment of climax; sudden decrease in volume, tone, dilation of the rhythm; the interruption that illustrates the transition from one thought to another, variations in tempo and speed of response and reaction; the pause that marks the thresholds.

Robert Cohen[8] classifies extreme communication tactics between two characters into two broad categories: Intimidation or Threat Tactics and Persuasion or Induction Tactics. Intimidation or threat tactics are tactics that generate power to the actor by communicating status. In the process of incorporating the character, the actor can concretely use these tactics through the process of taking over the leadership through a verbal action, an order, a command accompanied by sudden, unexpected and determined physical actions. Domination can be achieved by increasing the volume of the voice, accompanied by a universe of sound built with the help of puffs and whirring of the nostrils. Bodily dominance is built through muscle tension: directional precision of the gaze, clenching the jaw, changing the posture, pulling the chin forward and swelling the chest. The intimidation effect can be created by carefully observing the partner by being able to investigate. Silence can be a means of escalating the situation. Using an appropriate tone of voice, by speaking the cues as final cues, requires attentive silence, respect, and adherence from playing partners. Attack is a singing and speaking technique that involves the use of a strong, commanding vocal tone with emphasis on the first syllable of the word. The use of monosyllabic words is effective in the construction of the attack

technique. It ensures the right to speak and to continue, especially by close monitoring the response reaction by observing the partner manifested concretely by maintaining the intensity of the utterance at the end of the sentence. In the stage game, the effect of intimidation can be achieved by suggesting a hidden arsenal. Specifically, it involves the threat of possession of a concealed physical, psychological, or vocal weapon. Yelling accompanied by tantrums, thoughtless attitude or violent, paradoxical gestures are powerful intimidation tactics.

Tactics of persuasion or induction involve projecting on the other person a behavior identical to the one we want them to adopt. The actor can use approval in his game, manifested by shaking his head, smiles, loud laughter and sounds of approval: "îhî" … . Equally effective is the disarmament tactic presented by bowing the head, kneeling, shrugging, declaring love or peace. Calming the other is achieved with the help of warm voice, euphonic sounds and tender cooing, gentle movements, kisses, and hugs. Another disarming tactic is to entertain with witticisms and jokes. Adherence of stage partners to the goals of the embodied character can be achieved by enlivening the speech and by reflecting dedication to values, ideals, causes, creating an atmosphere full of enthusiasm, calling to arms, using an energetic, magnetizing, and persuasive tone. A powerful effect is achieved by flattery with praise. Frankness is achieved by validating the maturity of the other. And the seduction is achieved through the projection of the physical self in the other, accompanied by the verbal action that uses the specific modulation of the voice.

We note that the tools required to implement these tactics demand a complex approach to the vocal training techniques of the actor. From this perspective, the vocal pedagogue or more recently the so-called voice coach must diversify and adjust the didactic methods proposed in the specific instructional-educational process.

Conceptual Boundaries

We attempt to define the actor's vocal training as the process of learning a technique by practicing. The purpose is to optimally use all mechanisms that contribute to the verbo-vocal emission. It allows to obtain a maximum vocal performance by fulfilling the requirements of frequency, intensity, timbre, diction, expressiveness, and resistance.

The skills developed in the actor's vocal training must meet the demands imposed by the practice of communication tactics. The actor must have the ability to critically analyze vocal training exercises and use the ones effective for their own development. They must set goals and strategic plans for their individual vocal training, so that they are motivated to practice consistently. They will develop a vocal technique appropriate to the demands of the stage and adapted to their psycho-physical qualities. To achieve this, they will use the notions of anatomy and physiology of the respiratory and vocal apparatus. A well-trained vocal actor will develop a plan for furthering their artistic career, aimed at harmonizing their own profile with the various professional opportunities.

Voice Shaping through Imagination

Voice is an instrument with infinite possibilities of exploitation. Vocal training must encompass, beyond the

established techniques of breathing and articulation or diction, an esoteric field[9] of creative exploration. For the imaginative exploration of the voice, Grotowski proposes a series of exercises that involve imitating the sounds of nature and of the environment. In the next step, the already practiced sounds are introduced into a text, following the association between meaning and sound. Another proposed exercise is to explore the unnatural registers of the voice by parodying the voices of a child, a woman, a man, and an old man. The purpose of the training is to facilitate the imaginative mechanism of voice incorporation, shaping the voice through imagination. The Polish researcher believed that "We are creators only when we undertake research".[10] Thus he proposed training the voice through organic and imaginative exercises, renewing the technique by importing oriental methods such as yoga, medicine, or oriental theater. In his view, the actor must act following the natural psychological process of connecting the voice with breathing and movement.

For his part, Yoshi Oida approaches vocal training by distinguishing between three major components: breathing, sound and text. In order to understand and manipulate the fine mechanism of vocal expressiveness, it demonstrates the indissoluble link between the activity of the phonatory apparatus and the psychic activity, which consequently determines a process of emotional communication with the outside, therefore implicitly a process of aesthetic communication. The basic principle of the proposed training is the use of imagination: "Now, we turn to the imagination. (...) it is our imagination that works. Physical strength is limited, so it

is better to use your will and imagination, which know no limits".[11]

The master encourages a series of exercises based on the imaginative modulation of inspiration in order to enhance breathing practices. For example, he suggests imagining that we inhale air through the soles, from the ground. By studying the effect of sound on subconscious sensations, Oida sketches a diagram of the unbreakable link between sound and concrete physical movement. Thus, each sound is associated with a direction in space. For example, the direction earth-to-sky corresponds to the sound "eeeeya," where "aaa" forces the body to perform upward movements. To demonstrate this principle, he invites us to practice the movement of lifting a weight with the help of a song.

In addition, Jaques Lecoq[12] advances a vocal technique integrated to physical training that involves the elimination of the word. This series of non-verbal improvisations promotes a thorough understanding of the vocal dimension of bodily expressiveness. Each gesture corresponds to a sound or even a larger sound spectrum. Each movement triggers a sound image. The voice must be imaginatively explored as if it had the concrete effect of a precise gesture in space. Breathing, modulated by the imaginary stimulus, is the foundation of the body-vocal technique.

Michael Chekhov integrates the voice into the body unit in the description of the mechanism underlying the construction of the psychological gesture. He suggests the inclusion of the voice, naturally, in solving imaginative exercises: "I feel my body and speech as a direct communication of my psychology. I feel them as parts of my soul that I can see and hear. (...)Every body

movement or position invokes a certain psychological state and determines how you say the sentence, with what intensity, quality and at what tempo."[13]

Chekov's principle was later taken up and developed by David Zinder, who defines the voice as the direct resultant of the body in motion. From this perspective, he believes that the body must be trained first, so that the voice can then be integrated into the training. And the system involves body training by constantly practicing the response to the imaginary stimulus, so that the voice can then be organically integrated. The principles on which he bases his vocal exercises from the *Body, Mind, Imagination Technique*[14] aim at three premises: 1. The expressiveness of the voice is determined by its connection with the body; 2. During the performative act, the movement of the body shapes the voice, but the voice can also shape the movement of the body; 3. Exploring the organic connection of the voice-body requires time and perseverance, as well as a disciplined individual approach.

Eugenio Barba transfers to the spectator the mechanism of the imaginative exploration of the voice and demonstrates that his perception is shaped by the imagination: "Each language has a specific sound nature and occupies a place in the spectator's imagination".[15] The importance he gives to the sound universe is reflected in the terminology he invents to define it. Eugenio Barba introduces the notion of vocal dramaturgy that comes to complement the dramaturgy of the actions. They complete together the overall picture of the acting performance. The exercises described are aimed at imitating beings, objects, and songs in order to explore resonators. Voice training exercises are performed by imagining the vocal action as a physical action.

Conclusions

The education of vocal expression is a field that requires exploration from an interdisciplinary perspective. Thus, the paradigm of the whole body-voice-mind must also be reflected in the methods and means of vocal training. Mind and body shape the voice equally. The voice is the product of the body in motion and must be trained together with the body, in an unbreakable unity. Incorporating the imagination must underpin the construct of exploratory voice training. The actor's vocal performance requires the special expression of the voice, and the actor must be educated to train in order to increase the vocal expressive scope. Vocal expressivity stimulated by the imaginary and psycho-corporeal stimuli requires a correct phasing of the teaching process and the establishment of vocal training focused on individual skills. The individual skills initially assessed by the voice instructor will be trained in a customized system, in relation to the psycho-physical evolution of the actor.

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Notes

1. Eugenio Barba, *Cele cinci continente ale teatrului: fapte și legende din cultura materială a actorului*, translated by Vlad Russo, București, Nemira Publishing House, 2018, p. 160.

2. "Mind-body complex" refers to the integration of body and voice into a training routine that enhances immediate response to stimulus through action. The notion is introduced by Phillip Zarrilli in his work *Acting (Re)Considered: Theories and Practice* (2nd ed.), London, Routledge. The author is recognized for his research in the field of oriental theater, he developed an original method of pre-performance training in which he combined elements of Yoga kalarippayattu from Kerala, India and Wu taiqiquan martial arts from China.

3. Eugenio Barba, *Casa în flăcări: despre regie și dramaturgie*, translated by Diana Cozma, București, Nemira, 2013, p. 92.

4. *Idem*, *O canoe de hârtie: tratat de antropologie teatrală*, translated by Liliana Alexandrescu. București, UNITEXT, 2003, p. 95.

5. Robert Cohen, *Puterea interpretării scenice: introducere în arta actorului*, translated by Eugen Wohl and Măniuțiu Anca, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2007, p. 28.

6. Declan Donnellan, *Actorul și ținta: reguli și instrumente pentru jocul teatral*, translated by Saviana Stănescu and Ieronim Ioana, București, UNITEXT, 2006, p. 44.

7. Robert Cohen, *op. cit.* p. 97.

8. *Ibidem*, p. 120.

9. A term used with the meaning proposed by Rudolf Steiner and Marie Steiner-von Sivers in *The Modeling of Speech and the Dramatic Art 282*, Part III. *The Art of the Actor and the Rest of Mankind*. XV Conference. *The Esotericism of the Performer on the Stage*, presented in Dornach on September 19, 1924.

10. Jerzy Grotowsky, *Spre un teatru sărac*, translated by George Banu and Mirela Nedelcu-Patureanu, București, UNITEXT, 1998, p. 73.

11. Yoshi Oida, *Actorul invizibil*, translated by Maia Teszler, Oradea, Artspect, 2009, p. 113.

12. Jaques Lecoq, *Corpul poetic: o pedagogie a creației teatrale*, translated by Raluca Vida, Oradea, Artspect, 2009, p. 81.

13. Michael Chekhov, *Gânduri pentru actor: despre tehnica actoriei*, translated by Oana Bogzaru and Crista Bilciu, București, Nemira, 2017, p. 103.

14. David Zinder, *Body voice imagination*, 2nd edition, New York, Routledge, 2009, p. 157.

15. Eugenio Barba, *op. cit.*, p. 96.