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Tutore îndrumător:

Prof. dr. Silviu ANGELESCU

Doctorand:

Florica Daniela MOISUC

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THE ACTOR – ATHLETE OF MIND. MEMORIZE WITH ALL THE SENSE

Tutor:

Prof. dr. Silviu ANGELESCU

**PhD Candidate:
Florica Daniela MOISUC**

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ABSTRACT

Our paper sets to define a method for all kinds of stage text memorising. Our research starts from an 18-year experience as a professional actress and from the interpretation, during this period, of more than forty roles. The necessity of this approach is relatively pedagogic. During our action, we could not find an actor who had studied in school a method of text learning and memorising.

Our material is structured in five chapters.

The first chapter, “General information on memory. Psychological aspects of the memory mechanism”, describes the scope of the paper, starting from a usual aspect in the world of the theatre performance. We believe that, while in their action, the actors use themselves and all of their weapons to train their body and voice, the capacity to store and to release energy, we may state that the training of the memorising potential is a real work that needs to be accomplished on a daily basis. Thus, our study will not approach the act of memorising as sports performance. This chapter defines memory by using various specialised literature and it notes that we cannot speak of memory, as a cognitive process, as a record on a technical medium; we will define memory as a document archive written in a specific language, with a specific alphabet and specific grammar, as shown by psychologist A.S. Ciobîcă in his works; memory is not typical of man only, even if appears lacking performance in the entire animal world; the generation and the storing of ideas are specific to human action.

The second chapter describes several modalities of classification of memory. We list innate memory and acquired memory, implicit and explicit memory, explanatory and non-explanatory memory, a classification offered by Alan Baddeley. In the end, we obtain the trinomial *sensory memory*, *short-term memory* and *long-term memory*. This classification was proposed by Richard Atkinson and Richard Shiffrin, in 1968. It is also called the *modal model* or the *multi-store model*. We will choose to approach more thoroughly the modal model or the multi-store model, because we believe it is a starting point for a mnemonic matrix of the actor. This model means the information comes from the environment by various ways/parallel registers simultaneously. All the pieces of information reach together a short-term store. This store, this information room acts like a working memory.

The third chapter, “Theatre and memory”, includes two subchapters and it is meant to overview the actions of several well-known theatre professionals whose work was valuable input to the definition of the ample space of memory in theatre. In the subchapter “The disciples” we are exploring memory and the mnemonic act in theatre, starting from Jean-Louis Barrault and the

anterior memory. The image proposed by Barrault is likely to disrupt everything we know about ourselves, about life and about imagination. What could be truer than the fact that we are imagining things based on memories, and if we did not have memories prior to our birth, we would not have the ability of our act of up to the loss of childhood? We will then approach Radu Penciulescu and his singular action in the Romanian theatre; then, we will transit to Grotowski and Kantor, the Polish directors whose theatrical methods marked the 20th century. In “A Child’s Memory”, written on 13 March 1980, Kantor operates at the very beginning the difference between the painter’s activity and the director’s. He says that, at the former, the homogeneity of the form obeys only one will, while for a performance unity is considerably more painstaking. The reason is obvious. While in painting the creative action comes from one individual, in theatre the actors’ wills meet the director’s – and we are only mentioning the binomial of the most involved of the creators – and a lot of effort is required in order to keep the intended path. For this reason, Kantor believes that he needs to find some “compasses”, real vectors to keep direction and periodically correct it. Thus, the author of “Dead Class” is able to reach his childhood memories. At Grotowski, the actor is, somewhat similar with what happens at Kantor, close to the officiant of a Mass that is secularised by the stage act. The process that comes to occur in the actor’s soul, considerably pushed inside the being, will disclose it at its most intimate, which is inconceivable for a non-actor. The Polish director is close here to Penciulescu’s idea: the actor will complete the journey to the character’s truth for the non-actor. But, while at Penciulescu this transfiguration is mediated by the concrete, at Grotowski all the spiritual (memories even?) or physical (technical) powers are actuated for the purpose of trans-illumination by trance.

In the second subchapter, “The Master”, we want to reveal the source of all the aforementioned ideas: the theatrical action proposed by Stanislavski. By concluding that it is not the environment that gives the truth of the stage act, Stanislavski takes the most important leap taken by anyone for an art: he has the revelation, until then reproduced by all of those who dare reform the art of theatre, that it is not the image, nor is it the text that changes something; it is only the actor who does so; in the actor’s presence, the image and the novelty twitch of the texts. We believe that, based on the above, we may also find the mnemonic matrix we are mentioned in the title of our research. Memories, in the form proposed by Stanislavski, will provide in the route for the creation of the role a material that, essentially, will stimulate all the senses. And even if the road begins from a reminiscence found even in an altered form in memory, *its descent on the channels of all the senses to the area where everything merges under the role is the very act of memorising with all senses*. Now, it is considerably easier to memorise. The map that will be outlined will come from the sum of memories, but it will not consider them unless they can become artistic.

“Toward an existential theatre”, the fourth chapter, is also the one that gets us closest to the target of our research. The encounter with David Esrig and his actor’s training method is likely to pave the way to the memorising method we want. We are led to it by our experience with two workshops coordinated by this pedagogue, one in 2006 and the second one in 2007. Both workshops were governed by existential theatre, a notion borrowed from David Esrig. The activities in these workshops let us conclude that this training method is the closest to our intent to define a matrix for the memorising of the dramatic text with all senses. Esrig focuses on stylising the theatrical form, in obtaining an expression that does not have any point of reference in the reality of the street. In Romania, he worked several years in the television and in 1961 he was at the recently established Theatre of Comedy, managed by Radu Beligan. Until his final flight from the country, he obtained important successes with the mounted performances. E. Șvartz’s “Shadow” was triumphant at Leningrad and it establishes one of the most important names in the Romanian theatre and film: Gheorghe Dinică. Then follows Shakespeare’s “Troilus and Cressida”, a play in which Gheorghe Dinică and Marin Moraru, together with actors that are now legends, Iurie Darie, Vasilica Tastaman, Dem Rădulescu, Mihai Pălădescu, as well as with the known future professor Mircea Albulescu will obtain perhaps the greatest recognition of the Romanian theatre at that time, and of Esrig at the same time: the BITEF (Belgrade International Theatre Festival) grand prize, where the Romanian director was awarded the recognition, tie with Otomar Krejcea and Jerzy Grotowski.

In the subchapter “Conversations”, we are applying an original procedure, we think. We are commenting on two of the ten conversations we had with David Esrig within the interviews. We believe this will allow a closer look at the truth of Esrig’s method, as well as an immediate relationship with it. The conversation will work like a quote from an unwritten (yet) book. Talking about memorising, Esrig believes this processes is very complex, as also shown by us, a process removed from the sports space which only targets knowing the text until it is memorised. The text is only a verbal burst of something that Esrig calls inner film. We are emphasising this concept. It is not unknown to the actors. Frequently, it appears in their language in various forms: “the red line”, “route”, “road”, “what I feel” etc., but the notion proposed by Esrig, which is perhaps also part from the vocabulary of other theatre specialists, establishes very accurately the action the actors is to perform. Moreover, it also emphasises actual working ABCs for the actors. It follows the steps from the individual reading to the group reading and from text comprehension to text memorising. But the inner film also suggests a second idea that individualises the method. This is the reproduction of the entire material to be acted in the actor’s spiritual biography. This action is likely to alarm any modern theatre actor or director, because it could be mistaken for copying. We are drawing attention to the terms used by Esrig: reproduction and spiritual biography. As to the entire material to be acted, we believe it does not

involve in any way a naturalistic copying of any truth. Naturally, professor Esrig assigns to the process of role memorisation an accomplishment in phases. We believe Esrig's phases relate to the phases of the work for the play, implicitly for the role, to the pace at which information required for the construction of the role also dictates the pace of text auto-biographical stand, the appearance of the elements of a human profile and the elimination of parts of these, to make room to new and more useful ones. But does this phase approach also give the possibility to keep a certain distance? Aren't these phases, which also mean a repetition, likely to induce a formula of abandonment in the role?

"Conclusions", the fifth chapter, some of them partial, because the treatment of the materials obtained at the Passau "Athanol" Theatre and Film Academy is still in progress, will pave the way for the mnemonic matrix we are seeking.