

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF ARTS TÂRGU-MUREŞ  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL  
THEATRE AND PERFORMING ARTS**

**Actor's Block**  
**Techniques and Methods for Developing Creativity on Stage**  
Summary of the Doctoral Thesis

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**Târgu-Mureş**

**2023**

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## **1. Scope and Purpose of Research**

The blocks that appear during the creative process on stage are part of the arsenal of each and every actor, accompanying him or her during his/her entire artistic career. The frequency, specificity and intensity with which they manifest themselves during the creative process on stage are related to each artist in him/herself and to the diversity of contexts that they find themselves in all through their careers. My research, with its practical and open nature, follows the path of the young student actors all through their years of training. I have chosen to exclude a restricted time dimension from the title, precisely because of the intention to highlight the general and non-exclusive nature of these blocks. Their manifestations, as part of the creative process on stage, appear also after the conclusion of the training years in school, i.e. in the professional theatre environment. The focus of my research is on the early period in the formation of the actor, due to the diverse and intense ways in which these blocks manifest themselves, taking into account the major, long-term negative consequences appearing when no action is concerning them. My research follows four different paths of analysis and contextualization of the topic:

- the causal relationship between the student actors and their pre-university growth and education environment
- the relationship that ensues between the background data of the students actors and their theatre coordinators, as part of the specific education process
- the importance of developing a stable psychological structure of the actors starting with the their training years, compliant with the performance skills required by the professional theatre environment
- the development of techniques and methods for the stimulation of creativity on stage during the training process, starting from the analysis and argumentation of the other three research paths

The specificity of my research directions related to the training of student-actors is also given by the investment of my own practical experience and theoretical knowledge into the pedagogical work process with the student actors during acting classes, at graduate level. In my research, I am questioning my position in relation to the great founders, their disciples and the craftsmen of

theatre pedagogy, from an up-to-date approach of the condition of student actors connected to their growth and education environment.

More than one hundred years have passed since the appearance of Stanislavsky's system and more than two hundred years since the appearance of the first drama essay about the condition of the actor, written by Denis Diderot. With no intention of undertaking an anthropology study related to how exactly the technological revolution impacted human life and living styles, and only taking into account the time span of over two hundred years, along with the countless scientific and technological discoveries of the twentieth century, one can easily intuit the dramatical changes human society has undergone, in close connection with its environment. Nevertheless, the last twenty years have known the most accelerated technological dynamics. And, as theatre is the mirror of the times, this dynamics impacted it as well. The German theatre director Thomas Ostermeier speaks in his lectures about an accentuated Realism that manifests itself in European theatre and not only, militating at the same time for the connection of theatre to the dynamics of the society in the 21st century<sup>1</sup>. Actors are in the forefront of this new form of theatrical expression. How much has the actor's craft changed over the years and how much do older systems and methods still weigh in the overall training of the actor in the digitalization era? Are we to question the necessity to reformat the training methods used in specialized training for the new generation of actors according to the matrix of a century defined by speed, where image plays the primordial role and digitalization is dominant, as part of the whole discovery and learning process? How exactly and to what extent can we invest tradition for the benefit of the present? And, above all, how big is the generation gap that includes no more than twenty years of accelerated technical and scientific developments? Are actors the same, irrespective of the time they belong to? The elements of the Stanislavskian system were taken over, developed and interpreted in different manners and the responses were, in their turn, different themselves: Lee Strasberg developed his method starting from affective memory, Grotowski started from the action of the embodied memory and its stimuli, Stanford Meisner directed his attention towards the reaction to an external stimulus and its interpretation, Roy Hart developed a working method based on the voice of the actor, Michael Chekhov focused on body energy and the idea of the

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<sup>1</sup>Acc. to Ostermeier Thomas, *Teatrul și frica*, Collected texts selected by George Banu and Jitka Gariaux Pelechova, translated into Romanian by Vlad Russo, with a preface by George Banu, București, Editura Nemira (Nemira Publishing House), 2016

psychological gesture, Patsy Rodenburg defined an entire philosophy of life and, subsequently, a method of learning related to stage presence during the second energy circle of an actor's existence. And there were many more others, some of them well-known and validated, others less known and with ascending careers. Fundamentally, the actor remains the same, as far as the construction of his or her psychomotor system is concerned. What has changed, nevertheless, is the language used to communicate with life, his or her craft and environment. In support of the argumentation for my thesis I focused on the paradigm of overcoming recurring obstacles by re-reading and revisiting theoretical and applied writings from Stanislavski and Michael Chekhov to Meisner, Lee Strasberg and Grotowski or Declan Donellan, Katie Mitchell, Ostermeier and Kama Ginka – and the list could go on. By jotting down and extrapolating recurrent information, by proposing sets of exercises inspired from already well-known techniques, I have identified three significant categories of artists' blocks, including their nuances and specificity. I have attempted a periodization as well, following the trails of the processes of learning and discovery, without denying the fact that, sometimes, different types of blocks tend to merge and resurface as part of unforeseen challenges, but sticking to my conviction that continuous training and the acknowledgement of such blocks may offer the actors solutions to overcome them, even after graduation. This being said, the source of their training lies, nevertheless, in their drama school years. From the very beginning of their professional training, the actors come with an arsenal of blocks which keep changing their nature, dynamics and their triggers, according to the actors' stages of personal and professional growth. My personal interest originates in an intimate necessity to get to know and understand the manner in which these psychic elements influence, in a positive or in a negative way, the creativity of the actors, all through their artistic endeavours, this interests being also backed up by my own pedagogical experience with young non-actors and with student actors, accumulated during several national and international residences, where I led training workshops focused on acting and the stage presence of the actors.

In the book entitled *Șapte tratate secrete de teatru Nō (i.e. Seven Secret Treatises about the Nō Theatre)*, Zeami stresses the necessity to organize the learning process in several stages<sup>2</sup>. In our

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Zeami, *Șapte tratate secrete despre teatrul Nō*, Traducere din limba japoneză de Irina Holca, Prefață de Andrei Șerban, Postfață de Carmen Stanciu, Editura Nemira, București, 2011;

case, the actors' training begins during their teenage years. The candidates who take the admission exam carry with themselves the cognitive and emotional luggage accumulated up to that age. As a consequence of the manner in which they relate individually to the education and social interaction systems (i.e. family, school, entourage, online environment, audio-visual media etc.) they accumulate, apart from their *positive* luggage, a set of parasite features with a negative load, which lead to the creation of complexes and emotional blocks that prevent them from accessing the *flow* state of the learning process and, later on, of acting. Grotowski was partial to the idea of a „secondary education of the actor”, which should take place in anticipation of the status of apprentice-actor, ready to manifest itself at the age of the No theatre apprentice (up to fourteen years of age), an education that, with the support of practical exercises, should awaken the actor's sensitivity to the "most stimulating phenomena in world culture"<sup>3</sup>. His argumentation starts from the very idea of the negative cognitive-sensorial-behavioural luggage that the apprentice may have accumulated up to the beginning of his/her university studies. „The actor begins to learn his profession too late, when he is already psychically formed and, worse still, morally moulded and immediately begins suffering from *arriviste* tendencies, characteristic of a great number of theatre school pupils.”<sup>4</sup>

In one of the most significant reference works used for this research, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, the Hungarian psychologist and professor Mihály Csikszentmihályi defined the *flow* psychological concept as being „joy, creativity, the process of total involvement with life”<sup>5</sup>. The art of the theatre actor *par excellence* is located in this area of looking for the optimal experience: „[...] situations in which attention can be freely invested to achieve a person's goals, because there is no disorder to straighten out, no threat for the self to defend against”<sup>6</sup>. The entire professional training of the actor aims at making this flow part of his/her creative act. The end purpose of this *optimal experience* turns into a conscious process for the actor at that point when

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<sup>3</sup>Jerzy Grotowski, *Spre un teatru sărac*, seria Mari regizori ai lumii, Unitext, 1998, pp.32-33 (English translation by Jørgen Andersen and Judy Barba, in Grotowski, Jerzy, *Towards A Poor Theatre*, Routledge, New York, 2007)

<sup>4</sup> Id. (English translation by Jørgen Andersen and Judy Barba, in Grotowski, Jerzy, *Towards A Poor Theatre*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p.50)

<sup>5</sup>*Flux Psihologia fericității*, Prefață, trad.:Monica Lungu,-București:Publica, 2015, p.1 (English: Csikszentmihályi, Mihály, *Flow*, Harper Collins E-books, 2008, p. vii)

<sup>6</sup>Id., p.66 (English: Csikszentmihályi, Mihály, *Flow*, Harper Collins E-books, 2008, p. 40)

he/she feels that his/her action on stage is getting difficult and the flow is fractured by the blocks generated by subjective and/or objective factors.

As a rule, these blocks appear during the first year of study, from the very first attempt *to act*, and they sometimes stay with the actors all through their artistic careers, appearing and disappearing all the time, similar to some of the independent complexes which accompany the act of creation. Because, just as not everyone is able to learn how to be happy and how to live a high-quality life, there are actors who never get to go through this optimal experience, despite their desperate actions or, even more than that, they never get to understand what their artistic endeavours lack. What I mean by all this is the education of psychic and practical skills, like the ones mentioned in Chapter I of this paper (faith and decision, vocation and discipline etc.), which contribute to the fluidity of their act or, to put it in another way, what Grotowski called the *via negativa*, defined as „not a collection of skills, but an eradication of blocks”<sup>7</sup>.

Nevertheless, the most dangerous aspect is the spiderweb structure Stansilavski was speaking about, as well as the difficulty of casting it aside, once the actor reaches a mature age. This is why, the sooner this process of identifying and managing the blocks takes place, the higher the chances are for it to succeed. In any case, this type of awareness, even if coming at an early stage, needs a safe space of analysis and work, while the feelings of protection and safety derive first and foremost from being part of a homogenous study group, with shared interests, shared purposes and with well-trained and dedicated coordinators, specialized in the pedagogy of actors' training. That is to say, like drama schools, professional labs, should be – and sometimes are.

Therefore, to overcome blocks and get into the acting flow state, one should identify, as early as the apprenticeship years, the nature of these blocks, the causes that help them install, the methods of getting to acknowledge and manage them. In the basic training of young actors, focus is laid, first of all, on body and vocal training, character work, approaches to texts (dance courses, speech training, acting classes etc.). Nevertheless, just as necessary are the psycho-physical

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<sup>7</sup>Jerzy Grotowski, *Spre un teatru sărac*, seria Mari regizori ai lumii, Unitext, 1998, p.10 (English translation by T.K. Wiewiorowski, in Grotowski, Jerzy, *Towards A Poor Theatre*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p.17)

pedagogical techniques and intellectual training which, corroborated with all the other items in the vocational curriculum, lay the foundation for a future career in acting.

The block appears in the activity flow the moment when the interior elements of unconscious psychic life are identified with the real actions of the conscious Self. According to its nature and to the actual stimulus that triggers it, the block can appear any time during the activity (in the beginning, during or even at the end of it), the moment of its appearance also making a difference in the intensity of its manifestations. As part of this research, I considered – as theoretical support – the theories of Jung and of his followers in the research of depth psychology, mostly relying on the fact that Jung and the ones following into his footsteps approached these complexes from the point of view of the conscious-problematic human being.

The condition of the actor is a paradoxical one, from a psychological perspective as well. The person-creator duality turns the actors into bearers of perpetual conflicts between these two sides of their personality: "the ordinary man, with his aspirations to happiness, soul satisfaction and safety, on the one side, and the creative passion, which does not care about anything, on the other- side, and which, in this case, humiliates all personal desires."<sup>8</sup> Then again, there are different types of personalities and, as Jung himself points out, there were very few artists who were not devoured by their own creations. They burnt up to the point of sacrifice, with no emotional recovery of any kind. They created in the intimate space of their internal reality and, even if protected by workshops and labs, their work ended up taking over full control of their external existence. This is one of the specific risks related to actors, as they need to develop their ability to move back and forth between creation and personal life in a clear-minded and self-assumed way. By comparison to other creators, actors cannot exist by fully dissociating between the two existential realities, as they are permanently influencing each other. The actor's craft has a collective frame of creation and manifestation, but creation is their own re-embodiment, feeding itself from the same body and irrigated by the same blood. This is and remains the great paradox of the actor's craft in itself.

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<sup>8</sup>Idem, pg. 108 (English translation of the quotation by Mircea Sorin Rusu, for the purpose of this summary)

After each performance, actors need to recover and recontain themselves. Metaphorically speaking, this resembles Sisyphus escalating the same mountain again and again, every night. Once they have reached the top, actors have to return to the foot of the mountain to prepare for a new escalation, sometimes under totally different weather conditions, in totally different landscapes and with a totally different safety equipment. That which recommends them for this escalation, in relatively safe circumstances, is their training as climbers, the development of the necessary skills for any kind of escalation. Actors are professional sportsmen on the vast and abyssal territory of the human psyche. The definition given by Jung to the artist applies to actors, as well: "is a 'man' in a superior sense, a *collective man*, a bearing and shaping agent of the active conscious soul of mankind".<sup>9</sup>

But then, before belonging to everybody, actors need to learn to contain themselves. Well beyond *technical* training, the learning methodology is always focused on emotional training, as well. In his studies regarding alchemical representations<sup>10</sup>, Jung highlights the dangerous side of art. Emotional information can be dangerous for both artist and art consumer, and the risk appears at the level of understanding of the emotional content of a work of art.

By summing up ancient Greek, European and Asian philosophical treatises and alchemy works, Jung analyzes in his study, *The Dangers of the Art (as translated into English by R.F.C. Hull)*, the psychological risks involved in the relationship between man and his aiming towards an ideal that is greater than personal understanding, similar to that involved in the search for the philosopher's stone, which became the road to perdition for many alchemists who attempted to find the elixir of youth, the potion to cure all illnesses or the turning of any kind of metal into gold. According to the same principle of selection, as proven in time, (*many are called, but few are chosen*), in trying to reach their goals, many get lost on the way while searching as, without the required experience, this undertaking can prove fatal to the insufficiently trained traveller. Art may generate pleasure, and it may even be able to heal, if both generator and consumer of art have also developed their personalities by taking an education in humanities, having trust and possessing an artistic intelligence.

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<sup>9</sup>C.G.Jung, *Despre fenomenul spiritului în artă și știință, O.C. vol 15*, Editura Trei, București 2003, p.107 (English translation of the quotation by Mircea Sorin Rusu, for the purpose of this summary)

<sup>10</sup>C.G.Jung, *Studii despre reprezentările alchimice*, Editura Trei, București 2014-2017, pp 368-374

The art of stagecraft involves a process of *learning*, the education of several psychic functions of the actors, which are important, as they put them in a position of relative safety, as far as their presence on this long and difficult road is concerned.

Even if all actor training systems and methods appeal to the same psychic functions which have a contribution to the creation process, several authors of several methods highlight their significance in different manners. Stanislavski, for instance, believes that the *impelling movers of the psychic life* of the actor are mind, will and feeling. Meyerhold underlines the importance of building reflexes based on the psychic-physical stimuli that trigger imagination, as source for the development of stage composition and sees the first ones as complementary and absolutely necessary to the technical skills needed for proper execution. Grotowski focuses on the power to go beyond oneself while walking down the *via negativa*. All these and many others more are significant and, at the same time, they are cornerstones in the psychic life of the actor.

As part of this research, I also interrogate the necessity to reformat traditional, canonical working methods by reinvesting traditional values into the present and discovering new techniques, as well as learning and training games, to act on the creativity blocks of the student actor and of the actor of today. At the same time, also as part of the research process, I would also like to submit to the attention of theatre pedagogues the importance – within the training process of young actors – of age and environment in their bio-psychic development, in view of avoiding the highlighting or deterioration of psychic drives that are particular to the training and learning process.

In his book, *The Actor and the Target*, Declan Donnellan claims and demonstrates that the actor's talent, manifested in the optimal experience mentioned above, is closely connected to the frequency and intensity of the manifestations of actors' blocks. He affirms that „rather than claim that 'x' is a more talented actor than 'y', it is more accurate to say that 'x' is less blocked than 'y'.

The talent is already pumping away, like the circulation of the blood. We just have to dissolve the clot.”<sup>11</sup>

The great methodologists of the twentieth century draw the attention, as part of their own analysis of the process of moulding an actor, upon the existence of blocks and the necessity to deal with them during the first stage of his/her studies. Within a numerically small, but highly heterogeneous study group, the diversity of such blocks is also accentuated by the particulars and personalities of the participants in the study process. One cannot speak, therefore, of a single method of action in relation to these blocks, as one cannot speak of the efficiency of a certain exercise for the whole group, as well.

During its moments of intense crisis, the theatrical phenomenon identified its power of reconfiguration in the energy of its initial manifestations as an art form. Alina Nelega speaks about the tragic being recovered in dramatic texts through the grotesque and in-your-face theatre during the nineties<sup>12</sup> - it was at precisely the same moment that directors like Andrei Șerban attempted to give a certain direction to Romanian theatre by resorting to the tragism of ancient theatre as a form of purification and recovery of the actual mission of theatre, i.e. that of holding up a mirror to society. It was only that, honestly speaking, one cannot mirror oneself in tradition, although, one is willy-nilly its product. The present time requires a redefining of tradition and its perpetuation by enhancement, thus transforming it for the future generations who, in their turn, will have the duty to convert this heritage again and again. In the particular case of the actor's training, one cannot speak of totally new forms of teaching, devoid of the tradition inherited from the great methodologists and technicians of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, this heritage should be converted according to the shape of the present-day man and creator of theatre.

Drama schools have a huge responsibility in educating genuinely talented people and they should not isolate themselves from the domain they prepare these talents for. Considering today's speed

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<sup>11</sup>Declan Donnellan, *Actorul și ținta*, Editura unitext, București, 2006, p.18 (English: Donnellan, Declan, *The Actor and the Target*, Theatre Communications Group, 2011, p.5)

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Alina Nelega, *Structuri și formule de compoziție ale textului dramatic*, Editura EIKON, Cluj-Napoca, 2010

of life and the continuous and frantic search for new forms, one can say that the actor of today is situated on the threshold between tradition and novelty. Nevertheless, poorly understood traditions may turn into old brakes, while today's novelty, unless relying upon traditions, may quickly turn into a missed experiment, with no other value in time than that of the very moment it happened, without generating tradition itself.

The approaching of this phenomenon as a topic for research focuses on the student years of the actor, starting from Konstantin Stanislavki's statement, which highlights the importance of direct and immediate action being taken when blocks appear, thus avoiding a long and traumatizing acting experience. Stanislavski defines the complex psychological universe of the actor as being *the realm of interior elements* and draws the attention upon the fact that this particular realm contains „many useless tensions. It is just that we need to approach interior limitations in a different manner than muscles. The manifestations of the soul are like spiderwebs, when compared to rough muscles, which are like ropes. Isolated spiderwebs are easy to tear down but, if we tie them together into cords, strings, ropes, then we will only be able to cut them with an axe. That is to say, pay attention to them from the very beginning.”<sup>13</sup>

## **2. Methods of Research**

I used the following methods in my research:

- method of observation, analysis and assessment for the practical research;
- method of correlation for an accurate reporting of scientific data – applied to the data collected during the observation of the practical process, all through this research;
- method of association, to back up and confirm the hypotheses included in the conclusions to the paper.

The use of these research methods also involves the identification of causal relations. This process is based on establishing the causes that lead to creation blocks, while grouping them according to several categories, according to the nature of their causes and the time needed for

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<sup>13</sup>K.S. Stanislavski, *Munca actorului cu sine însuși vol.1*, Editura Nemira, București, 2013, p.580 (English translation of the quotation by Mircea Sorin Rusu, for the purpose of this summary)

the occurrence and manifestation of such blocks during the acting process on stage. The causal diversity crystallized, during my research, as part of the practical pedagogical and professional stage work process. I have realized that the overwhelming diversity of such blocks, as far as their nature and manifestations are concerned, resides in the specific features of each actor and of the environment where we work. This realization led to the selection, for exemplification purposes, of two workshops with the students, organized individually and included here as case studies.

The last stage of my scientific research consists of a synthetic approach to the paper as a whole, including the highlighting, in a clear language, of the final conclusions. This stage involves, as far as the paper is concerned, the assessment of the observations made during the practical process where blocks occur, the observations regarding the data related to the causes of such blocks, the frame in which they appear, the time it takes until they manifest themselves, the participants to the process, the techniques used during the practical teaching process, the quantifying of the data and the manner in which they are used for the purpose of this research, in the form of case studies. At the same time, I have also considered the quality of the data used during the research work focused on creativity and learning related blocks.

### **3. Structure of the Thesis**

This paper consists of four chapters. Each of them ends with short conclusions, summing up the previously analyzed topics and attempting to mark the research path chosen for the analysis of the blocks actors and student actors are confronted with.

**Chapter I** of my paper, *Of Blocks and Complexes, from Complementary Positions*, starts with the analysis of the master portrait of a famous character, to whom I attributed a certain type of syndrome, as she contains most of the blocks I noticed during the work with the students, as they begin their university studies. Therefore, starting from the „Nina Zarechnaya” syndrome, I analyzed the causes, nature and dynamics of these blocks, using the study of analytical psychology, behavioural psychology and neuroscience as support for my argumentation. As a practical, but also poetical application, I opted for Chekhov’s *Seagull* as I noticed the miraculous intuitive self-awareness embodied by the character of Nina Zarechnaya, which can be analyzed

step by step by following the psychological and behavioural paths that I subsequently outlined, following her presentation and analysis, from the point of view of an actress' blocks. Based on this master portrait, I came to the conclusion that two of the most frequent causes that lead to creativity blocks and which I must mention in this summary are lack of self-trust and the projection of a fast-tracked professional success as part of the life scenario of the student actor.

In this first chapter, I have chosen to approach the manner in which the creative blocks of the actors manifest themselves by describing some of them, identifying their sources and, at the same time, correlating this approach with scientific observations and demonstrations related to the human psyche, alongside the origins of its creativity. In my field of research, I was particularly interested in the personality traits that determine the option for an artistic profession, i.e. acting, the traits examined by Freud and Jung, as well as in the patterns identified and observed by behavioural psychology, as applied to the so-called acquired reflexes and the education structure of the future actors. Starting from the specificity of the theatre-related pedagogical process and the demands of the professional theatre environment, I have identified the bio-psychic determinants and performance skills that the actor needs to possess to make a career in the field. The psychological component of theatre pedagogy (much more accentuated than other types of psychology) compels one to consider these bio-psychic determinants as part of the student-pedagogue relationship. Besides focusing on acting methods and techniques, it is really important to assist with the development of a stable psychic apparatus of the student-actor. Critical judgement and correction need to be correlated with the development stage of the teenager's brain which, at this age, is stimulated by reward and appreciation. This is an age when a cognitive reassessment of emotion takes place and the teenager develops the tools for fine tuning.

Therefore, as Jung said, „there is only one solution for these issues: adjusting the heritage of the past to the requirements of the future”<sup>14</sup> The resistance sometimes manifested by student-actors is related to their need for self-protection, as the same Jung says, „against the broadening of

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<sup>14</sup> C.G. Jung, *Dinamica inconștientului*, București, Editura Trei, 2013, p.252 (English translation of the quotation by Mircea Sorin Rusu, for the purpose of this summary)

life”<sup>15</sup>. This is the stage when young people learn to be self-asserting and to take decisions. I therefore believe that Grotowski was right, and understand the way in which he defined the relationship between director and actor (let us not forget that he was also a pedagogue in his theatre lab) as an emotional opening of the first towards the student-actor: “A kind of warmth towards one’s fellow-men is essential – an understanding of the contradictions in man, and that he is a suffering creature but not one to be scorned. This element of warm openness is technically tangible. It alone, if reciprocal, can enable the actor to undertake the most extreme efforts without any fear of being laughed at or humiliated.”<sup>16</sup>

I referred in the beginning, starting with the bio-psychic data, to the personality types described by Jung, but also to performance skills, to the possibility to educate the psychological data related to creativity using the discoveries of Mihály Csikiszentmihály and the recent discoveries in the field of neuroscience. At the same time, I have tried to identify the causes of motivation-related mutations, but also of the specificity of this trade as a „warm” environment, as Marshall McLuhan would say about the media and their influence on the community during the digitalization and technologization era, as anticipated by the Canadian philosopher more than fifty years ago.

Regarding intelligence types, to the extent that they can be classified, I considered Howard Gardner to be a reliable resource, as he provides sensible nuances and delimitations that resonate with the patterns of creative intelligence identified by me in student-actors, and not only in them. As a counterpart to that, I have also analyzed the two ways of interpreting reality (i.e. rationally and emotionally) proposed by Daniel Goleman, the architect of emotional intelligence. Even if scientific demonstrations provided solid support for systematization, I have also identified other arguments, at least as reliable, in the writings of the great theatre pedagogues, from Stanislavski to Meyerhold and up to our contemporaries, Declan Donnellan and Thomas Ostermeier.

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<sup>15</sup> Idem. (English translation of the quotation by Mircea Sorin Rusu, for the purpose of this summary)

<sup>16</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, *Spre un teatru sărac*, București, Cheiron, 2009, p.30 (English translation by Jörgen Andersen and Judy Barba, in Grotowski, Jerzy, *Towards A Poor Theatre*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p.47)

Therefore, this introductory chapter is structured as a platform which presents complementary points of view regarding blocks, without attempting a classification and without any exhaustive intentions, as the topic is revisited, according to another paradigm, in the following chapter.

In **Chapter II**, *Types of Blocks and Their Origins*, I have tried to provide possible answers to specific questions: How do blocks manifest themselves in the actor's work? Which are the complexes that generate them? How is the dynamics of these complexes and, most of all, what is their nature? I have tried to review, in this whole chapter, some of the blocks specific to the work of an actor. Several other classifications can most surely be made, but the ones identified by me, in as simple a manner as possible, mostly manifest themselves in mixed forms, not being individually visible. Blocks, complexes or inhibitions – the elimination of the last two ones rather belonging to another type of undertaking, i.e. the therapeutic one, part of the work of professional psychologists –, obstacles explored by the pedagogue together with the students, in an attempt to manage them according to their specific means and their shared target: that of letting go when on stage, self-trust and the freedom to act and play.

The fact that we work to overcome blocks does not mean that these fears and inabilities cease to follow us, but the end purpose is to direct our attention towards a practical, concrete approach that leads to the identification of the flow, of the optimal experience through the development of imagination and bodily thinking, not to the enhancement and acknowledgement of blocks. According to their appearance, development and mechanics, and also considering several situations and contexts, I have identified and described several types of blocks in my thesis. I can, therefore, advance the hypothesis that there are three different categories of blocks students encounter during their university years: *entry blocks, retention blocks and exit blocks*. Upon managing them, I have monitored the students' training, in an attempt to create the best context for them to reach the level of optimal experience, to get to that state of grace defined by the American professor and psychologist Mihály Csikszentmihály<sup>17</sup>, according to whom the subject consumes their stage existence as part of a flow that is not interrupted by the blocks coming from within or from without.

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<sup>17</sup> Mihály Csikszentmihályi, *Flux Psihologia Fericitii*,

**Chapter III, *Techniques and Methods Used in Actor Training***, casts a retrospective glance at the working techniques and methods at the end of the twentieth century from the point of view of the present time and by filtering all that can be adapted and updated, a welcome and inspired exploration for the theatre pedagogue – not from a historical or critical perspective, not even from the perspective of a director, but from the point of view of training and preparing future stage artists for their careers in the field.

Therefore, each and every acting teacher should work out his/her own personal training method, based not only on their own experience, but also on the fact that they are familiar with the main methods that appeared during the twentieth century. I am adhering to the definition of method, as provided by Professor Ion Cojar in his book, *O poetică artei actorului (A Poetics of the Actor's Craft)*: „Method means the path or the road taken, a procedure or a set of procedures through which one can get to know their target, to discover one's own solutions to any situations and to any problems, to get to one's own truths, either subjective or objective ones, in relation to things.”<sup>18</sup>

New forms – these are the incentives that all theatre pedagogues and creators from several ages of development of a new theatre aesthetics connected to the social-political and economic reality of their times started from. Theatre, as a cultural phenomenon (be it mainstream or independent) has a much greater freedom when it comes to creativity being employed in the search for new forms and the relationship with theatre traditions. During the twentieth century, the rift between school and theatre appeared precisely due to this lack of correlation between the novelty of the theatre phenomenon as such and teaching methods deeply rooted in tradition. Theatre education is still attempting to invest tradition into the present and convert old actor training methods, inherited from Stanislavski and the ones who came after him, into training methods adjusted to future actors who will be part of an extremely dynamic, diverse and free theatre context. Older forms are much more present in theatre schools than in theatre.

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<sup>18</sup>Ion Cojar, *O poetică a artei actorului*, Ed. Unitext, București, 1996, p.10 (English translation of the quotation by Mircea Sorin Rusu, for the purpose of this summary)

Nevertheless, being aware of tradition is necessary as a foundation for innovation and adjustment to a time and a context where the master portrait of the actor is rather different from that of a century, even fifty or thirty years ago. Theatre itself changes very fast, just like life and society do, and there is an urgent need for it to rise up to immediate challenges, which also means that the adjustment of actors to several ways of working, to a diversity of methods, from character construction to devised and documentary theatre is precisely the opening that drama schools need to provide, at least at an informatory level. And, since nothing comes out of nothing, a retrospective glance at the work methods and techniques of the twentieth century from the standpoint of the present time, by filtering what can be adjusted and updated, is no less than a most welcome and inspired exploration for the theatre pedagogue. Not necessarily from a historical or critical perspective, but from that of moulding and training future actors.

I left aside several significant names of the twentieth century which are not necessarily connected to a reproducible training, to a well-structured methodology, but who have a well-defined voice in the twentieth century theatre: Edward Gordon Craig, Jacques Copeau, Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht. Their work, beyond their undertakings in the theatre, consists more of theoretical approaches than palpable, practical solutions that could be used in actor training sessions. Brecht, for instance, who revolutionized the structural discourse in theatre, is still perceived more as a playwright and poet than a practitioner. Some of his innovations still have proselytes, given his courage to contradict, on the one side, the essence of representation and the introduction of narration on stage (the epic theatre), thus breaking down the fourth wall and, on the other side, due to his didactic art, which translates into „message” and his option for the ethic, rather than for the aesthetic. The Brechtian revolution is based on the introduction of „orientalism” in the overall concept of a show and the gestures of the actors, and not on a form of special training in this direction.

Kantor, in his turn – another important name -, is certainly an avant-garde director, merging animation theatre and Dada poetry in his shows. He rather saw himself as a painter and poet, considering his actors to be his family – he worked exclusively with his own, one-dimensionally trained actors.

There are similar reasons for the absence of other notorious names from this paper. Augusto Boal or Arianne Mnouchkine, while culturally and politically extremely different, have a very specific orientation, Viola Spolin or Keith Johnston only work in a targeted way, during short lapses of time, while Katie Mitchell, Thomas Ostermeier and Declan Donnellan always have the show itself in mind, not the building of a complex actor, ready to be part of several specific types of training in an open, flexible way, with an understanding of that which actually happens on stage. Along with many others, they have not been included in the panoply of this chapter, but I either included selections of their methodologies in other chapters of this work, or, by elimination, my selection criteria were related to the extent to which the experience of the ones I analyzed in detail can be taken over, developed, and included in an as comprehensive as possible training of the student. At the same time, I believe that the triad Stanislavski – Chekhov – Meisner is the one that sets the training foundation for the student actor, a foundation which, later on, can sustain any other type of training. I searched, therefore, for the resources needed for the conceiving of identification and unblocking exercises, but also, at the same time, for a guide to be used by the pedagogue looking for ways in which he/she can help the actors of today grow. Like Patrice Pavis, I also believe that he/she should be “a productive, practical, adaptable, political actor, an artist helping the spectator to find some orientation within oneself and within the world”<sup>19</sup>.

In **Chapter IV**, *Development of Stage Creativity. The Puzzle Workshop and the Feuilleton Workshop*, without necessarily questioning the efficiency and relevance for the present of the old actor training methods within nowadays’ creative pedagogical process, I describe and motivate the necessity to reformat these methods, as part of a personal and fully assumed undertaking. I have chosen to use two types of workshops as case studies, these workshops being very different in concept, techniques employed and time of execution: *The Images of Self-Awareness* for the first year of study, and *The Chalk Door* for the third year of study – graduation level. The time span that includes these two workshops is relevant for my research.

The first one, the puzzle-workshop: surrealist paintings, is based on techniques of developing imagination (Chekhov) and psychodrama, though not going back to its foundation, as laid by

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<sup>19</sup>Patrice Pavis, *A Few Improvised and Provisory Thoughts on Acting Today*, in *Acting Reconsidered: New Approaches to Actor’s Work*, Vilnius, Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, 2014, p. 11

Moreno, but with reference to the influence of psychodrama in its practical use, as mirrored by the method of family constellations, starting from Eric Berne and Bert Hellinger. I worked with associative thinking and the in-depth searching into the affective memory, but only up to a certain point, even if the actual source of these concepts belongs to Stanislavski. I also added, when I felt the need to do it, elements of physical theatre, energy theatre and the assessment-analysis based on the three stages of the creative process defined by Arthur Koestler. I relied on the techniques developed by the masters of actor training, but also on the in-depth analysis of several techniques derived from the writings of Jung, and sometimes Freud, subsequent to getting familiar with the psychology of creation and elements of depth psychology. This exercise was thought out and built according to the pattern used for the interpretation of images provided by the professor, sociologist and psychologist Theodor Abt.<sup>20</sup>, founding analysis of the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich and co-founder of the Research and Teaching Center for Depth Psychology according to C.G. Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz.

For the *reading* of an image, the model provided by Abt correlates the two Jungian attitudes (extravert and introvert) with the four functions of consciousness (sensation, feeling, thinking, intuition) to decipher the image „in the absence of a personal context, other than the age and sex of the author. In this way, we are forced to find a way to determine the picture to reveal its hidden meaning to us, which is supposed to be possible for any visual representation that comes from the unconscious world.”<sup>21</sup> By adjusting Abt’s model to the development stages of the exercise included in the next sub-chapter, I obtained an individual work model, according to which every student-actor shapes an artistic view upon creation and life. This workshop, which uses surrealist images to access the unconscious, is a puzzle-type workshop which proved efficient for the development of the skills used to analyze acting situations, but also for getting to live the first optimal stage experience.

The actual dismantling of the workshop up to the very essence of its psychological component reveals the importance of bio-psychological determinants, of the performance skills of the actor,

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<sup>20</sup> Theodor Abt, *Introducere în interpretarea jungiană a desenelor*, Trad. din engleză Andreea Ilie, Editura Trei, București, 2019, pp 55-76

<sup>21</sup> Theodor Abt, *Introducere în interpretarea jungiană a desenelor*, trad. din engleză Andreea Ilie, Editura Trei, București, 2019, p. 55 (English translation of the quotation by Mircea Sorin Rusu, for the purpose of this summary)

as discussed in the previous chapters, along with their inclusion into a stage that is complementary to that related to the learning of the acting technique. The puzzle feature derives from its specific function of juxtaposing the pieces of information acquired during all its stages and the formulation of hypotheses and conclusions only after having an overview of the whole content thus obtained.

The second workshop, regarded as a rather long process, was almost entirely based on the techniques of Chekhov and Meisner, which I see as the most useful in the creation of a relationship between intellectual and bodily thinking, with the focus on the latter. This is because actors think with the whole body, as excessive intellectualizing leads to expression blocks. Nevertheless, without a solid intellectual foundation, the awareness of bodily release minimizes, to a certain extent, the sedimentation of the experiences encountered during the process and there might be the danger of the same blocks appearing again and again. Once a block is out of the way, the journey up to that point is already familiar and can be made once more, by necessarily complying with the two big requirements specific to the job and vocation of an actor: discipline and the superior mechanics of continuous exercise.

These two workshops, described in detail, provide fair examples of my research as a theatre pedagogue looking for her own method that can identify and explore the blocks of the students and thus put together a reliable resource for future actors. One should never imagine that these blocks, manifesting themselves in various forms, stages and combinations, will ever cease to haunt the creator. They do and will exist permanently, to a lesser or to a greater degree, and fighting them is part of the actor's job. Through these exercises (not only the simplest, usual ones, taken over from the great masters of theatre) and workshops with a clear purpose and precise targets, I tried to provide to the students some tools which they can use during their artistic careers to fight their fears, inhibitions and complexes that any human nature feels rising from the unconscious, as dealing with them may be difficult, if not impossible, in the absence of those processes which show that they can be overcome. At least for a period of time during which freedom of creation can be relied upon.

This being said, I do not think that my personal exploration has come to an end. The complexes, blocks and inhibitions do not go away, and they do not take fixed forms, they are protean in nature, manifest themselves in different ways and have their own dynamics, which can not always be anticipated (in fact, this rarely happens). In life, as on stage, it is recommended to be well-prepared, and these attempts to unveil the mechanics of blocks are meant to inspire and unleash the actors, assisting them in finding their own methods, their own resources to deal with the blocks affecting them.

#### **4. Main Conclusions of the Thesis**

In making our vocational choices, we commit ourselves to a difficult journey that is full of traps, while trying to reformat ourselves as human beings and artists. We have come to understand the harmful effects of choosing facile solutions as part of the job we have chosen for ourselves, as well as the fact that the structural elements of the art of acting cannot be reduced to an exact formula which should guarantee success. In trying to familiarize ourselves with the depths of the human universe, used as raw material in our work, we need – apart from acting techniques and methods – a stable psychic apparatus. The unequivocal conclusion to be drawn can be that there is a strong interdisciplinary connection between psychology and the creative process in theatre. Our focus lies, therefore, on the actors' training and acting.

Starting from Mihály Csikzentmihályi's *golden ratio*, I have questioned the ratio between the challenge of the pedagogical process of actor training and the skills needed to rise to the challenge. I have discovered that C.G. Jung's analytical psychology provides the frame for understanding the way these blocks occur, and the ratio between them and complexes, and I sketched a model of interpretation of the human psychic apparatus, which might help us understand the basic psychic functions involved in the creative process of a part, but also in the training process itself.

The new discoveries in neuroscience and behavioural psychology revealed the reassessment and simplification processes that young teenagers use to interpret reality. I have analyzed these

processes and used them for the development and improvement of several theatre practice exercises, verifying their efficiency in the dissolving of several types of entry blocks.

„When cultures change, so do games,”<sup>22</sup> writes the sociologist and communication expert Marshall McLuhan, the visionary who, sixty years ago, anticipated the effects of digital technology on society. The student-actor is the product of this over-digitalized time, and the accelerated dynamics of today has left its mark on theatre as well. Thus, it is absolutely necessary to question the need to reformat old methods, adjusting them to this ‘accelerated dynamics’ by investing the rich and valuable inherited tradition into the present.

By corroborating the bio-psychic features of the actor with the training techniques and methods developed by the innovators of the twentieth century, as subsequently reinterpreted by their disciples and by the two selected technicians (Sanford Meisner and Michael Chekhov), I have identified the directions and elements of their research on creative blocks to once again highlight their importance, irrespective of time and space, in the process of analysis and interpretation of a part by the actor. Stanislavski, Eugenio Barba and Grotowski encourage further research, complementary to their own, as well as the creation of methods and techniques that may improve actors’ training, by confronting the data obtained by each of them, as approved by specialists. These innovations can nonetheless occur only as part of a circulating system of information which deals precisely with this practical aspect of theatre.

Subsequent to the analysis of the case studies represented by the two workshops, one can understand the importance of organizing the creative process and pedagogical training in several stages, so as to avoid the intrusion of chaos in the process.

The overall character of creative blocks makes their analysis from a time and space perspective become no more than a subjective option, made out of pedagogical necessity, to focus on the drama school years. The particular character of these blocks, which are related to each person’s own nature, underlines their diversity as part of their single or mixed manifestations.

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<sup>22</sup>Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media, The extension of man*, Routledge, 1964, p.260

Nevertheless, the blocks identified during the analysis of the pedagogical creative process manifest themselves widely and permanently in professional theatre as well.

Drama school has the duty to assist future actors in becoming aware of the existence of this *shadow* which accompanies them all through their training years and professional lives. All current systems, methods or ways of training which are part of the actors' learning and improving process start from the premise of getting these obstacles out of the way. But these training methods are meant for all actors in general, while student actors come with the bio-psychic determinants specific to their age, environments, and personalities. General ways of approaching these matters may not always provide the appropriate pedagogical responses claimed by these determinants.

As a pedagogue, my option of working with young students by applying the elements of the working techniques developed by Meisner and Chekhov is justified by the directness with which they act on the expression blocks that come up in any kind of process (in drama school or in the theatre), by providing the cognitive and emotional understanding, as well as optimal execution of stage-related creative tasks. Several more difficult elements from other methods have also been taken over and adapted into new acting and training ways during drama school activities. The performance skills approached and analyzed from a scientific perspective are meant to help the actors get to that point where they can feel, as frequently as possible, the joy and flow of acting.

Actors always find themselves in the situation of having to take acting-related decisions. In Meyerhold's *Biomechanics*, as part of his way of dismantling any action into intermediary stages, including its beginning and its end, the decision-taking process lies between movement and its opposite. Between the dynamic fixation, *Stoika*, and *Posil* – the realization of the intended movement, there lies *Otkas* – the refusal. The decision to take the action further, as initially intended, lies in the swinging movement of this refusal.

The consequences of this decision are not important for this research. Actors take the risk of following one path or another during the rehearsal process, when they build their characters assisted by the director. Their decisions are not always the same with the decisions taken by their

characters. But any decision must be assumed. Nina Zarechnaya's self-assessment, as an actress, is always correct. Just like her, the young students need to learn to offer themselves feedback, in correlation with the feedback provided in class. And, most of the times, assuming the self-assessment is fair, self-provided feedback is the most relevant.

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