

Doctoral School of University of Theatre and Film Arts Budapest

Indirect progress in performing art. The place of repetition in the theatrical education.

Doctoral Dissertation

Kata Zsófia Wéber
Consultant: Professor Magdolna Jákfalvi PhD.

2017

The subject of the essay

The essential subject of this paper is the analysis of repetition as part of theatrical practice.

To begin with, the meaning and scope of the points at issue were to be stated. No special philosophical research work was needed by a person of great experience both on the stage and in performing art in general, i.e. myself, to be able to recognize the paradoxical essence of repetition in creative theatrical action: though in colloquial language we refer to repetition when a phenomenon is repeated without undergoing any kind of change, the idea and significance of repetition is much more complex in performing arts. Even the minutest change may result in making the performer's production more conscious and more precise, which may even bring about certain unexpected creative products.

With the attitude of a professional deeply imbued with eager curiosity, and making use of ideas of some great actors of the past, comparing certain important ideas and experience of theirs to my own impressions, I am driven to the conclusion that as the theatrical product itself is a kind of repetition of reality, and as such it is an ever changing phenomenon, the methodology of preparing performances and that of training performing artists might also be worth while to be taken for a medium of plenty natural kinds of repetition and changes.

The structure of the paper

What this paper of mine deals with, is one of the basic problems of theatrical art, i.e., the dangerous nature of repetition and how to deal with it, so I considered it of basic importance to mention and analyse it mainly in respect of actor training at the starting point, in the *Introduction* (p. 4).

The three leading chapters *Repetition as immanent contradiction*, *Repetition of the unrepeatable*, *Dimensions of repetition on the stage* (pp. 5—16) deal with a more precise determination of my topic and with outlining the scope of my research work.

I lay special emphasis on both the repetitive intention and the immanent infinitude of theatrical production.

Later on, in the historical chapters – *The notion of repetition and its history: traditions and its negation (pp. 16—74)* –, I deal with some examples of the concept and practice in the universal history of the theatre from the approach of the Antiquity to that of the twentieth century. Special emphasis is laid on the concept, attitude, and practice of Brecht, Grotowski and Meisner. I wish that this survey of the views and practices of different authors and actors, especially their ideas concerning our present topic, offer the right point of view for a contemporary attitude to dealing with several aspects of the same problem.

In the chapter titled *The paradoxical nature of perception (pp. 74—79)* the kind of perception of the above mentioned creators, just like their concepts of the actor's presence.

From the sixth chapter on – *Repetition is the stepmother of knowledge (pp. 79—91)* – I focus on personal experience of practice, i.e. personal experience in “everyday“ work in cooperation with directors, colleagues, etc. – *Federico Garcia Lorca: Yerma. (p. 80)*, *Sztrugackij-brothers/Biró Yvette: Nehéz istennek lenni (p. 82)*, *Tennessee Williams: Vágyvillamos (p. 86)*, *Institutet för Scenkonst – Summer University (p. 88)*. I am driven to the conclusion that with its illusory constancy and achronism, *repetition* connects the creative efforts of different theatrical creators, somehow creates a common denominator of theirs. This is one of the reasons why I think, this topic would be worth while being discussed in detail during the curriculum of different actor training courses.

Theses

THESIS 1

In case of a phenomenon recreated exclusively by human effort, without using any technical means, we cannot speak about repetition of the original action, for this way we never get the same result.

THESIS 2

Making conscious use of possibilities involved in repetition can help the theatrical creator avoid the trap of involuntary repetition which may pass over into unconscionable mechanical getting over with a task .

THESIS 3

Creative theatrical work naturally brings about the influence of the creator's own emotional atmosphere, sometimes directly shows his or her personal problems. This fact is to be taken into consideration even if emotional personification is not a characteristic means of the actor. Emotions are based on the spirituality of creation, not on the current state of mind.

THESIS 4

Neither formal repetitions nor the methods included by the set of psychological realism can offer any guarantee for the success of repetition, i.e. keeping the essence of the original work of art.

THESIS 5

The theatre that is actually the place of evanescence suffers from lack of time, which makes it deny its own nature. One of the basic elements of this dichotomy is the fact that rising the curtain day by day the theatre continuously pays tribute to their predecessors, and also accepts eternal change, i.e. is transforming itself all the time.

THESIS 6

The series of rehearsals just like the product by the creative actor and director, as well as the recipient are all participants and creators of the same ritual act, which as such is a kind of serial experiment based on a set of mutual agreements. As a natural consequence of this, the subject of repetition can never be objective.

THESIS 7

Stanislavski's psychological realism – contrary to the general interpretation of it – does include work based on conscious work, consequently an attitude of action can also be part and parcel of it as well. The actor's product created like this can be repeated in a non-formal sense, i.e. using the work of art as a kind of musical score.

THESIS 8

The artists of the late twentieth century gave less and less appreciation of consciousness as of any effect on the human body. Artistic expression became rather considered a continuous dialogue of body and mind. The idea of the day became more the wholistic attitude, as a result of which even the repetition of a single gesture might possibly be considered the sign of some important meaning.

THESIS 9

Purposeful repetition can include a decisive element of the narration, this way have a significance beyond itself.

THESIS 10

The creators of the second half of the twentieth century not only minimized technique and formalities, but also looked for possibilities of autonomous presence of the actor, i.e. the performer who does not simply realize the script but immediately and directly takes part in the creative process. This way it is no more the physical punctuality, rather mental preciseness that guarantees the right kind and effect of repetition.

THESIS 11

Analysing contemporary actors' work, it is not easy to find comparative elements of their methods which differ so much. Instead of looking for formal or ideological similarities, it is much more effective to focus on the phenomenon of repetition. The latter will help any actor to his or her autonomous professional attitude. Repetition is a characteristic element of every kind of theatrical action. Understanding its essence is of basic importance in any case. Repetition that connects all the theatrical genres, historical periods and attitudes is important not only because it provides a bridge between ages and ideas, but because its apparent eternity, repetition is the guarantee of both perpetuation and immortalizing even the smallest difference.

THESIS 12

Performers, as any other creator of any product, can gain freedom only by keeping or breaking rules, i.e. finding the frames that can narrow down the – sometimes numberless – choices, which in certain cases are not even set.

THESIS 13

The character is the road itself that the performer – for whom the only true reality is himself or herself – is able to go along making use of several points of reference.