



*The Trained Experience: A Study on the Relationship between
Meditation Practices and the Actor's System of Knowledge*

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SUMMARIES

Summary

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This dissertation addresses the relationship between meditative and performative practices. It examines those meditative and spiritual techniques that have been used and explored in the work of the Theatre Reformers of the Twentieth century. The approach towards such investigation is going to open up throughout this analysis an argument for a layered system of relationships underneath the main subject under examination, i.e. the application of meditative and spiritual techniques within the actor training. The first layer concerns the relationship between the commonly named 'hard science', with a particular focus on cognitive neuroscience, and humanities. The last decades have been characterised by an increasing interest towards an interdisciplinary exchange between these disciplines. I will address this relationship questioning the extent to which such interaction can be fruitful, focusing on the specific benefits that this can provide to my research. I will argue for a methodological exchange that can contribute to the validation of a practical 'protocol', such as the actor's training. However, this academic dialogue has not been, and still is not entirely, an easy one. The main debates refer to the possible problem of reductionism, or point at a more political issue, when the use of neuroscience is seen to be done

at the expense of the main Theories that the humanities themselves have built over the centuries. The proposition of this dissertation is to provide an angle to show that such dialogue is at this point not only needed but that it can also be an extremely fruitful one for both parts. The other layer bears upon the reflection on Theory and Practice in the academic field of theatre studies. Notwithstanding the rising academic-scientific interest in the humanities towards practical approaches in the investigation of artistic phenomena, I shall claim that there is still not enough recognised 'space' in the field of theatre studies for practice-based researches. This dissertation hypothesises that it is possible to bridge Theory and Practice by putting the accent on the differences of contributions that both parts can provide to academic research. Lastly, this study aims to analyse this system of relationships as stratified by filtering them through the notion of experience: the experience of meditation, in its technical, ecstatic, as well as cognitive aspects; the experience of the training. The actor's bodily training will be addressed as that 'time' and 'space' that exists behind and beyond the performance, independently from the work on a role, character, and/or a text; that pre-performative moment that through a psychophysical practice enables the actor to have access to performative knowledge.

Aiming to investigate the relationship between meditative and performative practices, and the effects of the application of such practices within the actor's work, this dissertation will consider the religious phenomena for what concerns their spiritual and meditative experiential characteristics. It shall engage with what lies behind and beyond the theological and theistic aspect of religions, namely the meditative and spiritual principles and practices. In this perspective, this study aims to fill the gap in the research of theatre studies concerning the application of meditative and spiritual principles in theatre practice, specifically in the development of the actor's training in the Twentieth century. I shall consider the work of theatre makers like Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Grotowski, just to name a few, as representatives of this movement of interaction between different practices. Therefore, the main research questions to which I shall provide answers throughout the five chapters

are: which is the relationship between meditative and spiritual practices and the actor's training? In addition, how can the use of these techniques inform and nourish the actor's practice and knowledge?

In line with the different fields of knowledge taken under examination and in conformity with the attempt to move through a layered system of relationships, the methodological approach involves the implications of different perspectives and angles. The specific issue of meditation and spirituality combined with theatre and, specifically, acting methods will be addressed by considering pre-existing theories on the subject, developed by the theatre practitioners of the Twentieth century, re-reading them through a multidisciplinary approach. I will examine the main topic of this dissertation taking under consideration its various concepts, employing each time a different 'lens' depending on the deployed strategy of investigation, whether historical and/or theoretical. In addition to that, I shall look through the lens of cognitive neuroscience and through my personal theatrical practice to build up an empirical and experiential reflection.