



KONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKY'S ARTISTIC CONCEPT IN THE CREATIVE ACTIVITY OF THE ARTIST VYACHESLAV AKSENOV

*CONCEPTUL ARTISTIC
AL LUI KONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKY ÎN ACTIVITATEA
DE CREAȚIE A OMULUI DE ARTĂ VEACESLAV AXENOV*

Nadejda AXIONOVA,

doctorandă,

Academia de Muzică, Teatru și Arte plastice, Chișinău

Principiile artistice și estetice ale lui Stanislavsky au fost traduse în practică de către mulți dintre discipolii săi, inclusiv de către reputatul regizor Veaceslav Axionov, care le-a aplicat în activitatea sa de creație de la mijlocul secolului al XX-lea. În pofida faptului că complexitatea artei este bine cunoscută și că actorii, în general, înțeleg ce trebuie de realizat în scenă, ei se confruntă cu mai multe dificultăți și obstacole vizând detaliile procesului de devenire a spectacolului. Regizorul V. Axionov a propus modalități originale de valorificare a mesajului operei dramatice în acțiunea scenică.

Vyacheslav Aksenov in his activities as director of the drama theater always relied on the artistic principles of Konstantin Sergeyevich Stanislavsky, with whose name is directly related the period of his formation as a theatre artist. In 1925, Aksenov received a certificate that he completed a course in the Theatre and Drama School at the Moscow Art Theatre under the direction of K. Stanislavsky. As his disciple and follower, V. Aksenov put into practice the principles of his artistic and aesthetic system, according to which, as it is well-known, the problem of the actor's embodiment is solved step by step in a reasoned way and is defined as a conscious creative process, consisting in the best possible approximation to the performed character, as if "snatched" from life itself.

Following his mentor Vyacheslav Aksenov was convinced that acting, in its core, could be divided into three technologies: craft, emotional experience and performance. He strongly warned the actors against the desire

to immediately, instantly, "play the result", that is, to try to master the character, the feeling, at once, without adequate preparatory work on their own inner spiritual world, looking for the director's techniques for identifying the spiritual essence of the whole work, and each character individually. He maintained that all primary, a priori imposition of the result meant an inevitable run through a tune, a cliché and it distorted the author's conception.

In his lectures and discussions with students-actors, while working with young actors on plays by world classics, as well as by authors from Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine, Estonia, Armenia. V. Aksenov revealed a well-balanced, scientifically grounded theory of dramatic art and the method of acting technique, which he strictly adhered to. He said repeatedly that the Stanislavsky System, to which he was committed all his life, opened up a true path to creating a play as a unified artistic whole, to educating a true artist, actor and director.

V. Aksenov was convinced that the Stanislavsky system, being theoretically grounded and tested in practice, was not invented, not made up but it was formed in the process of artistic creation. It gradually evolved during the centuries-old theatrical activity that existed prior to the opening of its laws, regardless of the completeness and accuracy of the awareness of these laws, irrespective of the subjective attitude toward them and their "taste" assessment of the type "I like it or not".

In his memoirs, V. Aksenov quoted one of Stanislavsky's memorable statements, an accidental witness to which he was: "Stanislavsky, returning either from an "abstruse", play or from an unsuccessful exhibition of fine art, claiming "revelations" of radical innovation, irritably said: "There are stupid people who breathe fresh air, drink real wine, live in this real life but in their art they do just the opposite" [1]. K. Stanislavsky said: "Our artistic nature has its own creative laws. They are compulsory for all people of all countries, ages and nations. The essence of these laws must be comprehended. All great artists, without knowing it, subconsciously followed this way in their creative activity" [3, IV, p. 213]. He went on to say: "There is only one system – organic creative nature. Another system does not exist [...] The law of creative nature can not be changed" [4, p. 653].

Indeed, the creative ideas, which after K. Stanislavsky were expounded by V. Aksenov, were born out of the natural needs for the development of theatre art. Therefore, their main goal and purpose is to improve the practice of theatre activity. The test of the authenticity of some aspects of theatre work, according to the adherents of this system, is implemented in creative and educational practice.

Working with actors V. Aksenov attached great importance to developing the talent of the creative personality and he considered the existence of talent a necessary condition for choosing the profession of an actor or director. He said that without artistic abilities it was impossible to master a profession, the way agriculture is impossible without land, sailing without sea or aircraft without air. K. Stanislavsky believed in the limitlessness of human possibilities. He could, not without paltering, say: "There is no ordinary man, who in the bud would not be a genius". K. Stanislavsky was sure that the artist could show on the stage Hamlet or doctor Astrov, after having grown and "built" his image in his soul. He taught that for the theatre actor and director, there must be a creative application of the knowledge and skills acquired through life experience in the process of artistic activity, and development and improvement of skills. Indeed, nothing in nature is static. Consequently, talent, no matter how to determine the content of this concept, and to what extent this or that man possesses it, in all cases and always, it is either in the process of growth and development, or in the process of degradation and destruction.

He further developed this idea. He said that artistic talent was not a "thing in itself", its presence or absence could not be determined a priori, it could show itself (or not) only in the process of artistic activity. Talent, as any innate ability, grows and develops in the process of its correct application and dies away when it is not applied or it is used in an ugly way. This concerns any talent – from the greatest to the most insignificant. The only difference is that the great talents display their inherent qualities

in a stronger, more energetic way and reveal themselves fully.

Teaching students acting art, V. Aksenov repeatedly emphasized that since any talent included both innate instincts and abilities as well as acquired qualities, inasmuch as the process of improvement and self-cultivation of talent, presupposed the multiplication of the acquired qualities, which, in their turn, affect significantly the development of the innate abilities. He was convinced that the most average capacity could grow into talent and the brightest (again, supposedly) talent might be lost, but could become even brighter and richer. It depends largely on how it is implemented in creative practice. It is known that in a highly creative school even not very talented people can achieve great professional results. And in a methodologically flawed and backward environment even a man of genius will work in vain.

So, if talent is defined not as a mysterious "thing in itself", not as some kind of hidden and not showing itself possibility, but as a system of personal qualities revealing and manifesting itself outwardly, in practice that is able to evolve and develop then the concept of talent includes the ability to work and great will. Therefore, V. Aksenov, like K. Stanislavsky, determined the talent as "a happy combination of many creative abilities combined with creative will" [3, V, p. 324]. Veacheslav Aksenov was convinced that the Stanislavsky System was the science teaching how to grow, develop and enrich acting abilities and talent on the basis of objective laws. It is some kind of means of improving the "efficiency" of any individual talent.

Explaining the necessity for studying and applying the Stanislavsky System, V. Aksenov told his disciples

the following: "If you have abilities for acting art, then the system can help you to implement them fully and tomorrow you will have more of these abilities than you had yesterday, and this prospect has virtually no limits. If you have the same abilities and ignore the system – you risk not to realize your talents fully, and then tomorrow you will have fewer than yesterday. So it can be repeated day after day, year after year, until your abilities or even talent turn into memories of talent. The audience will not notice it right away, and when it becomes clear to you and the public, it will be too late" [1]. Vyacheslav Aksenov insisted on the conviction that the Stanislavsky System was not just the science of stage art, but some kind of theater philosophy, determining its high purposes and objectives.

V. Aksenov's most important requirement to the actor can be formulated as the "birth" of the image on the stage, which he is like his teacher and this is called the art of emotional experience. This is a complex psychological process in the artist's soul. The actor should not present an image on the stage but he should become the character himself and make his emotional experience, feelings and thoughts his personal ones and live the life of the performed character like his own. Only the artist's true feeling really attracts the viewer, forcing him to understand and experience what is happening on the stage. To achieve this, the actor and the director have to work hard, to penetrate deep in the essence of the production, to identify and examine the smallest details of the role, the character's special features and behavior. An actor has to become aware of the authenticity of the performed act, and this

asks for constantly improving his skills.

V. Aksenov was never tired of repeating that the actor's daily work on cultivating his abilities should become the artist's internal need to improve his acting technique. Speaking about the principles of the actor's work on a role, he emphasized that a live stage image was born when the actor merged with the role, deeply and accurately understanding both the general idea of the work, and all its details and nuances. The director should help him to do it, and stage direction, in its turn, as the art of planning and implementing the production, is based on the co-acting of all the creators of the play, united by a common conception. The purpose of the director's work is to help the actor identify himself with the played part. In addition, the artist must understand his place and role in the trajectories of the drama development.

V. Aksenov constantly stressed the absolute truth that a true understanding of the nature of any dramatic performance contributed to the most convincing implementation of the performance as a whole. It helps very accurately, deeply and truly to convey the ideological content of the stage work. This purpose should be the subject of all the efforts of the actors and the director.

The depth and the accuracy of comprehension of the role is largely dependent on the personality of the actor, the breadth of his outlook, life and civic principles, ideological conviction. V. Aksenov retold his companions and disciples Stanislavsky's instructive story about why he became an actor: "Do you know why I gave up my personal affairs and took up the theater? Because the theater is the most powerful rostrum even more powerful in its influence than the book and the press.

This department has got into the hands of the rabble of mankind, and they made it a place of debauchery. My task is to clean the family of artists from the ignorant, half-educated and exploiters. My task, as much as I am able, is to explain to the contemporary generation that the actor is an exponent of truth and beauty" [3, II, p. 43].

This story, in some ways, echoes the life situation of V. Aksenov himself. Approximately in the same way, he acted in his early youth. Giving up his studies at the Moscow Commercial Institute, he plunged into the artistic environment of the Art Theatre, in order to be able to learn to influence the audience by the power of acting talent. He made every effort to master this difficult profession. The words of encouragement and support of his revered teacher – Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavsky were very important.

V. Aksenov sometimes recalled one case, which is known from Stanislavsky's open letter of gratitude addressed to him. K. Stanislavsky wrote: "Dear Vyacheslav, On March 28 you saved the performance „The Pickwick Papers” on the second stage of the theatre by playing impromptu the role of Snotgras instead of the retired fellow. I sincerely thank you for having sacrificed your general condition as an actor that must have been very difficult in such an emergency entry into the play, completely responding to the interests of the theater. I shake your hand firmly. K. Stanislavsky". This letter printed on yellowed with age paper, is still preserved in the archives of the Aksenov family.

V. Aksenov repeatedly said that the difficulty and the complexity of theatrical art were well-known: everyone understands what is right, what is

necessary, what idea must sound from the stage. But it is not always clear how to embody it into a scenic image, to include it into the plot and the stage action, to express it in the character and behavior of the hero. He further developed this idea as follows.

There is a vast distance between the idea and its implementation. In order to reduce it, you need to work a lot on the technique of performing art. In his understanding a special role belongs to such concepts introduced and defined by K. Stanislavsky as the *super-task*, and *through-action*. V. Aksenov said that these most common and most concise definitions (the super-task and through-action) already gave an answer to many questions that arise in the work of any actor on his theatrical role. Explaining the content of the Stanislavsky Theory in the classes on acting art, he emphasized that the theory of the super-task and the through action – constituted the essence, the core of the whole theater science. This is the principle that, in one way or another, is objectified, determined and developed in each section or chapter of the Stanislavsky System in each of its rules; that, at a closer look, "comes out" in the system, from whatever side one may look at it.

V. Aksenov was never tired of repeating that the super-task was one of the most difficult methodological concepts proposed by Stanislavsky. The difficulty lies in the very term, the addition of "super" as regards the word "task" because it is not just about the main effective task of the role, but about its main emotional – effective aspiration. Explaining the essence of the super-task, V. Aksenov formulated it in the form of

questions: What is the ultimate goal of the play and its performers? For the sake of what everything takes place on the stage and what to aspire to? To answer these questions, it means to find the super-task, which brings together all the elements of the play and gives them movement directed to the final result.

V. Aksenov drew attention to the fact that Stanislavsky wrote about different super-tasks in different places: one is characteristic of the author of the dramatic work, and is embodied in it, the other is realized by the director and the actors on the stage. V. Aksenov insisted on the fact that the theatrical "staging" super-task should maximally approach the super-task set by the playwright.

Another detail makes the difference between the concepts "the super-task of the performance" and "the super-task of the role." The first concept includes the idea what the creators want to tell the audience by their production, the second shows the character's purposefulness, not specifically in a particular scene or in some scenes, but, in general, in every minute of his stage life. The last bears the stamp of the individual protagonist. In this regard, V. Aksenov, relying on Stanislavsky's ideas, argued that the super-task should be looked for not only in the role, but in the soul of the artist himself. The super-task of the same role played by two actors must find in the soul of each of them, its own emotional response, whether it is the desire to "preserve love," "gain power", "find faith", etc. The actor must put his personal emotions in all these endeavors; his life experience and observations fill them with his imaginative associations. Only then he can make the super-task his

own, and feel it emotionally. (There is no doubt that the love of Romeo and Juliet and the desire to preserve it must be felt by different actors with their own emotional nuances.) Only such a super-task that has become personal creates the actor's emotional motivations for the actions necessary for its implementation.

K. Stanislavsky called this effective way of implementing the super-task "the through action of performing the role." Explaining the essence of the "through action," V. Akse-
nov recalled such statements made by K. Stanislavsky: a line of the through-action connects together, penetrates like a thread the isolated beads, all the elements and directs them to the general super-task... Let's imagine, that an actor playing the part of Chatsky will say to himself: "I have many desires. I long to relax in my native land after my wanderings, I want to make fun of all sorts of queer people, I want to marry Sophie, I want to pull out my old friend Platon Mikhailovich from the influence of his wife, etc". What will happen? The role will break into separate small acts and, no matter how well they may be played; nothing will remain of the super-task set by the author in his work. Struggling against this quite frequent phenomenon in the theater, Stanislavsky wrote: "That is why the beautiful pieces of your role taken separately do not impress and do not give general satisfaction. Break the statue of Apollo into small pieces and show each of them separately. The fragments can hardly capture the beholder" [4, p. 211].

V. Akse-
nov paid particular attention to the counter action or the counter through the action, stressing that through the action of the role is ne-

cessarily to face with a counter action that prevents it by a counter through the action (such as the love between Romeo and Juliet is faced with the mutual hatred of their families). This conflicting clash causes even more activity of the stage process, making it possible to express the idea of the role and performance as a whole more brightly and more emotionally.

Vyacheslav Akse-
nov attached extraordinary importance to the development of creative imagination while training the actors for their professional activities. He said that imagination was always based on knowledge and cited, in this context, A. Pushkin's words: "Real imagination requires brilliant knowledge". V. Akse-
nov called upon the future actors to read as much as possible, to listen to music, to visit art galleries, to get to know nature, etc. He was convinced that such spiritual enrichment contributed to the development of creative imagination.

In addition, V. Akse-
nov pointed out the logic, the sequence of actions and the feelings as the elements of creative activity. On concrete examples he was demonstrating how one feeling or emotional state may be enhanced, die away or grow into a different feeling. At the same time he advised the actor to seek the motivation of the emotional development in the text of the dramatic works themselves, as well as in those life situations they were generated by.

V. Akse-
nov regarded the memory of sensations an important component of the acting creativity. In his opinion, the given quality can "inspire" many complexes, in the imagery and emotional respects, fragments of the stage productions. Recollection of an event experienced in the past, "the emotional aesthetic

aftertaste" aroused by the given memories, can give color to the acting with the necessary "tones" at the right time and make it convincing and truthful.

Separately, V. Aksenov worked on such aspects of acting technique as scenic charm, the sense of action perspective, muscular freedom, flexibility, mastering the voice, the sense of the phrase, the sense of specificities, the ability to influence by word, the perception of the partner and the relationship with him, etc. He was constantly repeating that the improvement of these elements constituted the content "of the actor's work on himself" involving daily training and "drilling", aimed at improving acting techniques. Mastering his "tool" – psychophysics – allows the actor to work on the stage fully and professionally, regardless of the inspiration, or rather – to enter the needed creative state exactly when this is necessary, with an effort of will to achieve the correct creative general condition. Only through constant training of the basic acting techniques the successful "work of

the actor on the role" becomes possible.

V. Aksenov demanded from his students that they should not live according to ready-made formulae; they should independently search, try, and experiment. He acknowledged even the usefulness of the temporary deviations, the errors and the failures, if they could help them make the right conclusions. He directed the young people to the theater of quests, experiments, the theater laboratory; he could support and guide in the right direction the source of "creative enthusiasm."

With his "explosive" temperament, V. Aksenov could control his emotions, subjecting them to the logic of the through and counter-through action. This is evidenced by dozens of performances staged by him in Chisinau and other cities. Combining a director's work with training and teaching, he based himself on the traditions of his great teacher and tried to develop them in the historical and cultural context of his time (the 30s – 60s of the twentieth century).

Referințe bibliografice

1. Аксенов, В. *Мемуары*. Рукопись. Arhiva personală a familiei Axionov.
2. Ершов, П. *Технология актерского искусства*. Москва, 1992.
3. Станиславский, К. *Собрание сочинений*. ТТ. I – VIII. Москва, 1954–1961.
4. Станиславский, К. *Работа актера над собой в творческом процессе переживания*. Т. II. Москва, 1954.