

## Summary

This thesis begins with a quote from Bertolt Brecht. In an aphorism about *Mister Keuner*, “What is wise about the wise man is his stance”, Brecht discusses knowledge – not any knowledge, but embodied knowledge, a knowledge which produces a *stance*, in the Brechtian sense of the word. The quote does a good job of summarizing the discussion about the actor’s thought, goals and physical attitude found in my thesis.

In the thesis, I examine how actors in training solve the problem of embodying the role – how they, from their ideas, feelings, thoughts and knowledge create the physical actions of the role. My discussion has its basis in how the training in acrobatics can form a sort of model for the strategies needed by the actor to perform on stage. In the acrobatic vault, the actor needs devotion, awareness and control. This also signifies the demands on the actor’s work with the physical action. The line of work analyzed – and promoted – by this thesis is the interplay between the actor’s thoughts and powers of imagination, and how these thoughts become visible and embodied in action. In my discussion, I give the term *action* a broad definition: the term includes all forms of deliberate activity, the spoken word as well as the physical actions performed by the actor.

## Education

This thesis has its basis in my educational work at Malmö Theatre Academy. In my education, I accentuate the role of cognitive strategies and verbal formulation for the body to act towards an objective. The focus of the actor should not be to present or be a character, but to adjust oneself to the scenic task at hand. From this follows the creation of specific and unique actions, leading to the spectator’s experience of dramatic relations and characters. In this discussion, I mostly find support in Konstantin Stanislavsky’s Method of Physical Actions. In my work I accentuate how the role’s actions are seen as *intentional*. The emphasis of what Stanislavsky calls *given circumstances* is more on the future of the role than on the background.

To make this clearer, I wish to summarize my position in these mottos:

- The actor shall make conscious choices.
- Relate to the surrounding world, not to the ego.
- In action: focus on the objective, not on the role’s background.
- Let the body be governed by images, not by analytic terms.

## Research

In my research, I have described this process as a work founded in the actor's *cognitive strategies*.

The actor's work with the role is constantly in the transition between past and future. With body and mind, she has to relate to both of these fields. Where will the actor find her motive for the role's physical action: in the role's future or in the role's past? And where is the focus of thought in the scenic moment: on the own ego or the relation to the environment? These questions form a first starting point for this thesis.

How do the actor's imagination or conceptions affect her physical actions? Here, I examine how the verbal formulation can have a governing role. It is in the work of formulating the objective of the role's actions – the scenic task – and in the role of language in this process, that my thesis has its second starting point.

Both of these starting points can be summarized in my research question: *How are the cognitive strategies of the actor affecting the scenic actions of the role?*

A first step in answering the research question is found in the written evaluations of the students, concerning how acrobatics can function as a cognitive model for scenic action. In their stories, which describe critical moments in the practical work, one may see how the work with challenging physical actions forces the students to handle thoughts, images and emotions. The students describe how work with these *cognitive strategies* has been of use to strengthen their scenic work during their first year at the school.

The second step in answering the research question takes its starting point in the students' description of their work with scenic situations. From these testimonies, more specific qualities appear. Here, two approaches are basic: first, that the students work with their imagination to create a stimulating and sensory objective for their scenic task, and second, that the spoken line, as well as the purely physical action, is a tool to solve this task. These both approaches are summarized in the terms *goal image* and *verbal action*.

In my interpretation of the students' descriptions of their work, I have focused on two qualities. The first is how the work has lead to the students being rid of a form of negative self-awareness, having focused outward. The second is how the work has lead to increased specificity and concretion in scenic choices.

But the research question has not only been regarded through the perspective of the students. Through my references to the experiences, instruction and standpoints of several other theatre practitioners, I have shown an approach where cognitive strategies are central to the physical action. There, I have also wanted to focus on how cognitive strategies are

dependent on the verbal formulation of the scenic task. How one formulates one's task is central to the physical action.

To illuminate the work with the actor's cognitive strategies further, I have throughout the thesis referred to different theories of action and emotion. Within these I have looked for experiences that can change and strengthen the knowledge of the actor's physical actions. In this intent, I have my starting points in the needs of the pragmatist. I have also sought to formulate how my practice is a personal composition of experiences. In this way, the students' experiences as well as my own are tied together with a wider theatrical tradition.

The work of the thesis also examines what sort of *construction* my teaching is and which premises and intentions it carries. This examination has thereby also touched parts of the theatrical traditions I'm part of.

In Bertolt Brecht's stories of *Mister Keuner*, I have found a framework for the thesis: to see oneself as being unbound by a constant character is to avoid a limitation in the art of action, it is a prerequisite to the body being transformed through the scenic task.

## Chapters

The thesis is split into three parts and an appendix.

With my arrangement, I have wished to create an organic road through the practice. Here is a line from *body* to *action* and further to *scenic* work. The thesis does not describe a chronological course, and neither a road from practice to theory or the opposite. I have strived to make my arrangement of subjects contribute to an increased concretion in my discussion of the actor's strategies in work with the physical action.

In the first part of the thesis, I discuss how the actor student during her education reconsiders her own body and may find strategies to extend her physical registry. This point of view is based on the practice I've contributed to at Malmö Theatre Academy, but it also has ties to other traditions and theories. This first part strives to give an insight into the world of values and modes of thought surrounding the physical instruction of an actor student, but it also describes concrete educational situations and the students' experiences of these.

Initially, I describe how the actor works under circumstances demanding a special physical knowledge and attitude. I briefly describe how faith in the scenic fiction is dependent upon the physical competence of the actor.

In chapter 1, "Exercises and acrobatics", I discuss different approaches to the exercises and modes of practice that are part of the actor's training. I also show the problems that might be associated with the relation between exercises in movement and the scenic work. Finally, I

narrow the discussion to draw the picture of how different approaches to training in acrobatics stand in relation to scenic work. I also launch my own approach to that area. I finish by describing the instruction in acrobatics and by letting three students tell about their experiences from it.

Physical instruction also uses a language based on parables or metaphors. I discuss this in chapter 2, "About formulations". I show examples of how linguistic formulations from the practice of movement instruction can be related to a discussion of philosophy of language, concerning how the body forms a basis for our verbal concepts. In this context, I connect to the linguist Georg Lakoff and the philosopher Mark Johnson.

In the third chapter of the thesis, "Energy, space and time", I describe the premises of my own work to create a connection between movement training and the physical action in the scenic situation.

The work to evolve the actor's physical registry carries ethical dilemmas. In chapter 4, "Discipline and ethics", I discuss some hidden ideals in the view of the actor's physical schooling. I also discuss how instruction is a form of disciplinary project, legitimizing itself by considering itself liberating. The chapter can be seen as a critical approach to the instructional project described so far

In the thesis' fifth chapter, "The actor's practice: method or *lore*?", another view of what constitutes the practical method of the actor is presented. To describe the body of knowledge, experiences, traditions, methods and approaches constituting the actor's practice, I use the term *lore*. My use of this term is inspired by Stephen M. North, Professor in English and Composition. Thereafter I describe how my own experiences have formed my own *House of Lore*. Thus, this part will discuss the influences constantly changing my practice. In this way, I wish to create transparency for the entire text of the thesis.

Part two begins with an examination of the concept of action removed from the theatre, whereupon it focuses closer upon how different theatre practitioners have approached the physical actions of the actor, primarily expressed as different strategies to be able to act in a fictive situation.

As a starting point, I use a discussion of the everyday, non-fictive action. I there present how I look upon everyday actions as an adjustment to a task.

In chapter 6, "A grip on *action*", I delve deeper into this line of reasoning about social psychological views of actions and relations. My starting point is the sociologist George H. Mead's view of how the human is intentional and how she creates her self-awareness in relation to other humans. In this context, I also discuss how one may look upon intentions in

connection to unconsciously performed actions. Thereafter, I make the discussion more specific and tied to theatre by discussing the actor's physical actions in a fictive situation.

Chapter 7, "Stanislavsky and the actions of the actor", provides a presentation of Konstantin Stanislavsky's work with the actor's physical actions. I also touch upon the problems with his terminology and how he has been translated. I present criticism formulated against Stanislavsky's method of physical action. Thereafter, I approach the work with the scenic situation more concretely, discussing the actor's work with the scenic task aided by scenic examples. I also connect to points of view taken from social psychology. I discuss how the actor's awareness or knowledge might complicate work.

The most important pedagogues and directors that have influenced this thesis have their say in chapter 8, "Four voices on relation, action and goal". These are the directors and pedagogues Konstantin Stanislavsky, Michael Chekhov, Robert Cohen and Declan Donnellan. From the outside, they emphasize different starting points for the practice I until this point has described. I especially emphasize Chekhov's work with *the psychological gesture*.

In chapter 9, "Thought, body and feeling", I provide examples of different theories of the interaction between body and thought that have influenced or is connected to the practice of theatre. Among those are the *James Lange theory* and *cognitive dissonance*. A large amount of text is dedicated to the sports psychologist's discussion of *visualization* and *goals*.

The tenth chapter, "Verbal action and goal image", describes the students' and my own experiences of a specific class at Malmö Theatre Academy. From the actor students' written evaluation of this course, it is clear how the students work concretely with the modes of work discussed by the thesis.

In the second part of the thesis, the focus of my study becomes narrower, revolving around the physical action of the actor. To contrast this limitation, I increase the number of approaches to this phenomenon: I have strived to show parallels between different theatrical practices as well as their attitude to theories of action and sports psychology. My selection of practices and theories attempts to show a common vision concerning *intentional action* and *action controlled by images*.

In the third part, I summarize experiences from the research process. In chapter 11, "A stance, not a method", I return to Brecht and discuss how an attitude I find with *Herr Keuner* is applicable to the actor's relation to her work with physical actions: to see oneself as *No-one*, to thereby be able to adjust one's body to the role's solution of the scenic task.

In chapter 12, “To examine and spread knowledge”, I discuss the possibility of spreading the results of this sort of practice-based research. With my starting point in the teaching of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, I wish to create a discussion of how one looks upon artistic knowledge, and how it is possible to analyze and scrutinize it. In this, there is a strong accent on the fact that there is no neutral way to the art of good acting, but that every choice, even of a technical nature, carries with it subtle positioning as well as, ultimately, ethical and perhaps ideological attitudes.

### **Method**

My methodical grasp of the entirety of the thesis can be summarized in the function of *the reflecting practitioner*. The term has its origin with the American philosopher and city planner Donald A. Schön in his discussion of how the competent practitioner thinks in terms of practical action, and how she formulates her knowledge and intuitive understanding. Based on this description of the practitioner’s knowledge, Schön discusses how a traditional split between research and practice can be bridged with the function of *the reflective researcher*. Schön claims that the practitioner takes on this function when situations of insecurity, unique circumstances or conflicts in the activity appear. I believe this is what signifies a lot of theatrical practice: when an ensemble examines how to treat material or how an older play will serve a new function, these situations appear. These situations are not about interplay between research and practice, but instead, these situations become situations of research in practice. My instruction takes its starting point in a similar approach, but in my work with my thesis, I also take the step to stand beside this practical work, to reflect on the practice of myself and others from this perspective.

The accounts of the students and my depiction of the work is the most reliably empirical part of the thesis. But the empiricism is not limited to the experiences of the students and my interpretation of these. It is also present in the thesis as a whole: when I refer to my own experiences of practice, these are also part of the basic empiricism of the thesis.

To interpret the accounts of the students, a more specific and qualitatively focused method was required. This is explained in the appendix. However, in the presentation I’ve chosen for the thesis, the qualitative method is not central, having its primary application when analyzing the accounts of the students.