

Application of the Método Schinca® in the Pedagogy of the Text-Based Theatre Actor

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English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

The article seeks to explore the Método Schinca® not from the viewpoint of body expression, which is its original nature, but in its possible application to the training of text-based theatre actors, specifically in the subjects related to acting. In this article the author describes the method, which she is familiar with in her personal practice but which she analyses through the publications of Schinca herself and her collaborators, Helena Ferrari and Rafael Ruiz; highlighting the revisions made by them and complementing it with direct interviews with Marta Schinca. This method is framed within the pedagogy of the actor, which establishes a training approach based on exercises, where Schinca innovates in terms of the sequencing of the contents and the protocol of each class. The inclusion of sound and voice in the method itself and the possibilities that this offers to text-based theatre actors are emphasised. A possible application is described through an example of the work of matter in transformation, which connects technical elements with emotional aspects. The conclusion is that the method can provide a valid path in the learning process of text-based theatre acting but also in its subsequent application in a possible staging.

Keywords: Método Schinca®, pedagogy of the actor, technique and expression, qualities of movement, process versus training, exercise as a pedagogical fiction, bridging exercise, resonance

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This article focuses on actor training. Within this field, for more than five decades Marta Schinca has developed a practical theoretical corpus and has also produced an artistic educational system. Both aspects form part of the Método Schinca®.

Seeking out new forms of access to actor training and consistent methodologies, as a teacher of Acting at the Escuela Municipal de Teatro de Zaragoza (EMTZ), I encountered the Estudio Schinca in 2006, where I trained for seven years. From that moment my interest in the didactics of acting intensified. Schinca's coherence and rigour have led me to research this area in more depth and to consider testing the validity of her method in the rigorous path of learning to act.

The reflection presented in this article develops both a theoretical and practical viewpoint and concludes with an example applied to a group of students in the EMTZ¹ where I have been able to observe the possible validity of the Método Schinca® in situ, specifically in the subject of Acting Exercises.

Context of the Método Schinca®

Marta Schinca is Uruguayan by birth and is involved in the world of theatre as she is the daughter and sister of theatre directors. She was a student of Inge Bayerthal, who was taught by Dalcroze, Bode and Laban. Bayerthal arrived in Uruguay fleeing Nazism in 1936. She founded the Instituto Bayerthal in Montevideo and it was there that Schinca received the foundations of her methodology. In 1958 she graduated in Conscious Gymnastics, Body Expression, and Rhythm and Psychomotricity. (Ferrari, 2017: 48-49)

In 1969 Schinca moved to Spain and settled in Madrid, where she combined teaching with theatre direction. In 1977, together with her daughter

1. The Escuela Municipal de Teatro de Zaragoza (EMTZ) currently offers professional acting studies.

Helena Ferrari, she founded the Grupo Schinca, which in 1982 became Schinca, Teatro de Movimiento. She has directed and premiered twelve plays; one of them, *Nightmare, yegua de la noche*, received the 2nd award in the 5th Competition of Female Theatre Directors in 2002.

Focusing on her important educational work, Schinca contributed to formalising Body Expression in Spain and began to carry out her own systematisation of the knowledge inherited from Bayerthal, also related to the world of psychomotricity. In 1974 she was appointed director of the Department of Psychomotricity at the Centro de Investigación y Orientación Psicológica while teaching at the Escuela Internacional de Psicomotricidad Aucoutourier (Ferrari, 2014: 5). She designed the body expression curriculum for the Ministry of Education and Culture with the reform of the education act (LOGSE). She has written several books including: *Psicomotricidad, Ritmo y Expresión Corporal*, first published in 2003, and *Expresión corporal: técnica y expresión del movimiento*, written in 1988 with its fourth edition published in 2010. She was Full Professor of Technique and Expression of Movement at the Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático (RESAD) from 1978 to 2004; and has been emeritus professor since then. She creates and applies her method to the pedagogy of the actor, both at RESAD and at the Estudio Schinca, founded in 1980, with several experts such as Beatriz Peña, a voice specialist, and Rafael Ruiz, theatre director and professor of Gestural Performance at RESAD.

The Estudio Schinca is currently a centre specialising in pedagogy of and research into the language of movement that provides training courses in the Método Schinca® and courses in didactics and theatre of movement, among others.²

Influences

The direct influences through Inge Bayerthal were Laban, Bode and Dalcroze (Ferrari, 2017: 29, 47).

First, Rudolf von Laban (Bratislava, 1879–Great Britain, 1958) is the most important influence concerning the Schinca methodology. From him she takes the laws of movement, especially choreutics, the study of the possibilities of the body in space and eukinetics, which defines the ranges of effort in the combination of four motion factors: space, time, weight and flow. The basic actions of effort come from this combination (Ferrari, 2017: 40, 47).

Rudolf Bode (Kiel, 1881–Munich, 1971), a contemporary of Laban, adapted Delsarte's ideas and is considered the creator of expression-gymnastics; she maintains his concept of organic movement, in its turn based on the principles of totality, rhythmic change and economy (Ferrari, 2017: 47).

Lastly, Jaques-Dalcroze (Vienna, 1865–Geneva, 1950), creator of rhythmic based on the importance of body movement to learn music. For Dalcroze, all the dynamic and rhythmic nuances of movement, with its degrees of intensity and different durations, form part of the musical universe. He established three fundamental factors: space, time and energy. We see the

2. <<https://estudioschinca.com>>.

application of his concepts in the idea of musicality of the scene, words and movement (Ferrari, 2017: 34).

However, the Método Schinca® also has other types of indirect influences, notably from Delsarte and Mary Wigman.

The first of them, François Delsarte (Solesmes, 1811–Paris, 1871) was Bode's teacher and developed the laws of harmonic movement: namely, the law of correspondence, the principle of opposition and the principle of succession. In particular, the latter has a direct relationship with the concept of organic movement developed by Bode and imported by Schinca (Ferrari, 2017: 31-32). Lastly, Mary Wigman (Hanover, 1886–Berlin, 1973), dancer of the expressionist movement and disciple of Dalcroze who researched free movement with Laban (Pérez i Tresor, 2008: 32). It is from Wigman that Schinca extracts the relationship between muscular effort and emotion, as well as the idea that there are two motor centres of undulation: the pelvis and the thorax. (Ferrari, 2017: 47).

Método Schinca® in the Pedagogy of the Actor

Origen of the pedagogy of the actor

It was in the early 20th century when the great directors-pedagogues such as Stanislavski and Meyerhold began to ask themselves: How is an actor prepared? What processes, techniques or principles does he have to employ to bring effectiveness to his action when confronting the audience? Can it be learned? How? (Barba, 2000b: 84).

Exercises included in the actor's training that are not directly related to the show begin to be created. Barba tells us about "The invisible revolution that the era of exercises marked in theatre" (Barba in the annex of Pezin, 2002: 357).

The pedagogy of the actor was born as an element separated from the show and this birth was marked by several significant and interrelated events. In the first place, the end of the mind/body dualism: the holistic vision of the human being led to introducing body training not separated from the psychic, from Stanislavski to Barba:

- Stanislavski, through his practical experience, evolves his theory and becomes convinced that in the artist there is "an indissoluble organic unity of the psychic and physical elements in creation, in which some awaken and condition the others" (Stanislavski, ed. 1983: 12).
- For his part, Barba speaks of "body-mind materiality" (Barba, 1997: 109) and considers it a "(...) sacrilege to talk about the body. I cannot imagine that the actor becomes a body but rather the soul and spirit and the question of their unity" (Barba cited by Pradier, 2000: 73).

Second, apprenticeship begins to be understood as separate from performance with two different levels of organisation:

- The logic of training, which could correspond to what Stanislavski calls “the external and internal work of the artist on himself (experience and embodiment)” (Stanislavski, ed. 1983: 12).
- The logic of character creation and staging: “interior and exterior work on their role” (Stanislavski, foreword ed. 1983: 12).

For her part, Béatrice Picon-Vallin understands this division as the result of a need regarding the technique that arises in the theatrical environment and that already existed in other arts.

(...) to possess authentic technical knowledge, to train oneself, as a musician, a singer, a painter, an athlete, and to take into account the laws of one’s art and instrument – the body – in order to be able to transgress them knowingly and effectively on the plane of the impact to be achieved (Béatrice Picon-Vallin, 2000: 54).

Michael Chejov had already spoken of the lack of technique in very similar terms: “Sometimes we realise that our profession is the only one that does not have a technique. A painter, a musician, a dancer, every artist has to develop a technique (...)” (Chejov, 2006: 40).

The most interesting aspect in these assessments is the logic of training, that prior artificial process, which Ruffini describes as “(...) the artificial process through which the actor adapts to the stage environment (...) a continuous and prolonged exercise, coherent and independent (in principle) of the shows” (Ruffini cited by Picon-Vallin, 2000: 35-36).

The determining question then brings us closer to how it is carried out, and the answer is through the pedagogical fiction of the exercises (Barba, 2000b: 85) and the methodology that contains them. This is where the Método Schinca® is a particularly interesting path to explore within the didactics of acting. That is why Pradier wonders: “Isn’t the technical exercise a pedagogical fiction that distances you from the dramatic fiction in order, ultimately, to serve it better?” (Pradier, 2000: 78).

The Método Schinca®

Schinca’s methodology has evolved from the late 1970s to the present. Through its creator and the contributions of her collaborators, the open and permeable spirit of this method can be seen, in a continuous process of self-reflection and purification, based on research in practice.

The first structuring of the method dates from the 1970s and was developed in her book *Expresión corporal, técnica y expresión del movimiento*. This is based on three fundamental pillars:

- 1.- Awareness of the body, divided into five aspects:
 - 1.1.- Physical bases
 - 1.2.- Expressive bases
 - 1.3.- Qualities of movement
 - 1.4.- Antagonism
 - 1.5.- Gravity

2.- Awareness of the space, which encompasses:

- 2.1.- The kinesphere
- 2.2.- The interbody space
- 2.3.- The total space
- 2.4.- Three-dimensionality (spatial rhythm)

3.- Awareness of time, including:

- 3.1.- Tempo
- 3.2.- Rhythm
- 3.3.- Musical forms
- 3.4.- And the relationship between movement and sound is introduced.

In this first structuring, the difference between technique and expressiveness is only made explicit in the first section on body awareness. However, Schinca already differentiates between technique and expression, establishing that in order to reach the latter there must be a “slow and gradual path... of mastery of the body and the technique of movement” (Schinca, 2002: 10). Thus, she argues:

Body-space-time: these are three coordinates that make up the field of action of this discipline (body expression). The development of each theme in itself and the interrelation of the three establish the elements of work to find the expressiveness of movement. The study of the three fields is carried out in two ways that are related and complement each other: a rational point of view, of awareness, and an emotional point of view, of experience (Schinca, 2002: 10).

In 2011, her collaborators Ferrari and Ruiz participated in a revision that enabled, among other reforms, for a clear differentiation between technique and expression at a more global level that affects the organisation of all the contents of the method. This new structure is, from an educational point of view, much more coherent, and allows for a didactic path in terms of organisation in the classroom.

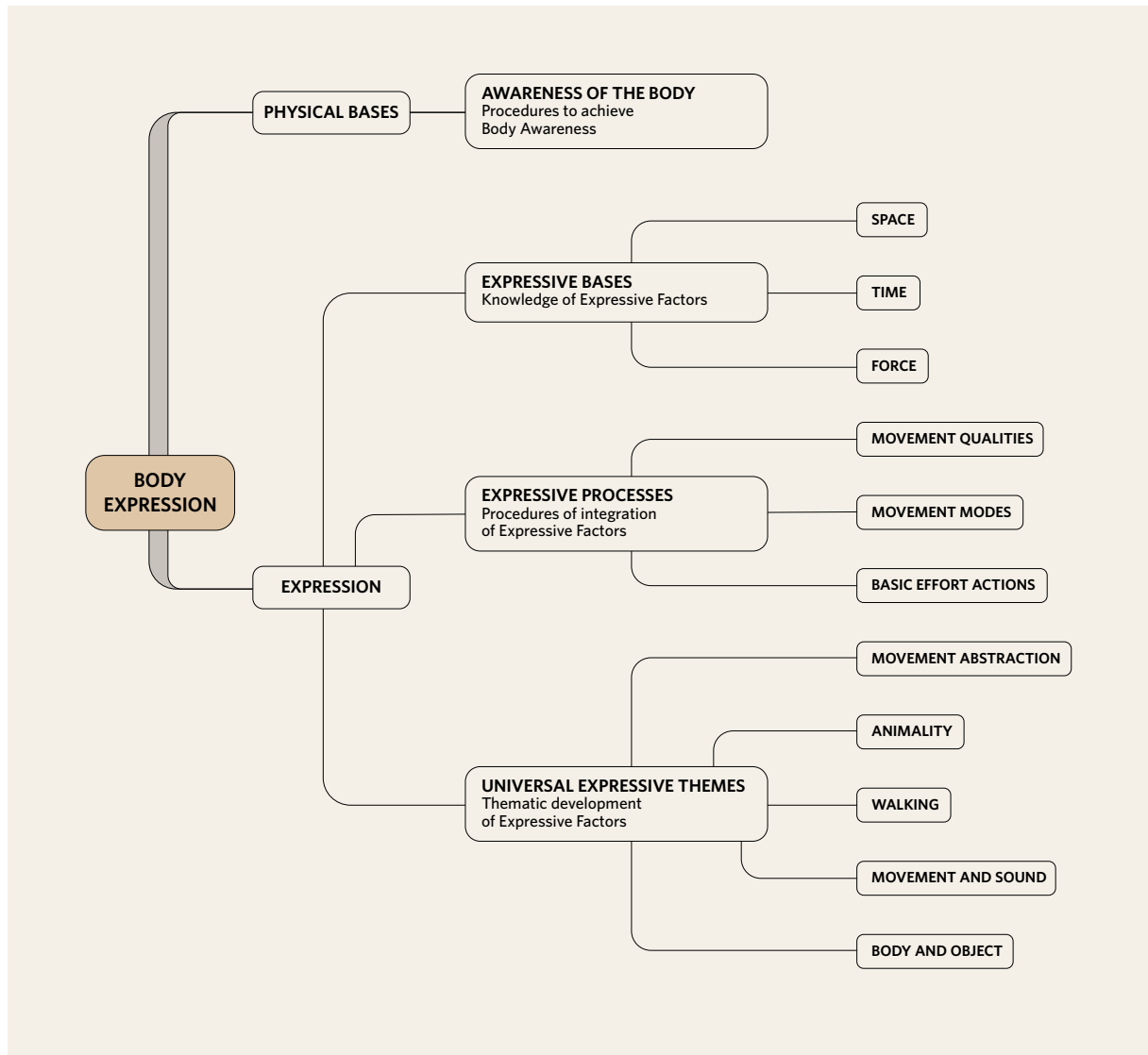
The fundamental aspect is that the structure of the method is divided into two large blocks, the physical bases and expression, where the specific object of study of each one is differentiated, as can be seen in the first graph (Fig. 1), and as Ruiz explains:

Physical bases: Study of the tools and procedures for acquiring body awareness.

Expression: Study of the expressive tools and procedures for the spatial, temporal and dynamic modulation of movement (...) Considering Space, Tempo and Force, the fundamental expressive factors (Ruiz, 2011a: 29).

In the section on physical bases, the processes for the acquisition of body awareness are conscious gymnastics, organic movement, proprioception and body design. These processes can lead to increasingly complex degrees of organisation that move away from organic movement and enter the field of extra-quotidian movement (Ferrari, 2015: 127).

Figure 1. Organisation of the matter: revision (Ferrari, 2015: 122).



The expressive part is organised, in turn, around two large blocks:

- 1.- Expressive bases that define the three great factors of movement defined by Laban:³ space, time and force.
- 2.- Expression, which encompasses two differentiated sections:
 - 2.1. Expressive processes, which include the combination of expressive factors: elementary qualities of movement, modes of movement and basic effort actions.
 - 2.2. Universal themes, which constitute themes dealt with in the history of the pedagogy of movement, such as the abstraction of movement, the dynamics of nature, animality, walking, movement and sound, and the body/object relationship.

3. Although revised by Schinca and her collaborators (Ferrari and Ruiz), who eliminate the “flow” factor and replace the “weight” factor with “force”. This revision is developed and assessed in the journal *Cuadernos Estudio Schinca* (No. 0, October 2011: 16-27 and No. 1, December 2016: 48-53).

For Schinca, the technique is not only considered as the acquisition of skills, but also paves the path to master the language of movement and performance creation. Following her plan, she starts from the physical bases, through conscious gymnastics and organic movement, to reach the development of expressive processes and universal themes that include movement factors (space-time-force). The ultimate goal is to achieve autonomy and creative versatility, so that students get to create characters, in a staging, from an adhered and integrated technique that allows for performance creation.

Application to sound and words

An interesting aspect of the Método Schinca® is that it includes, within the section of universal themes, work with sound and voice.

In her book *Expresión corporal. Técnica y expresión de movimiento* (2002), Schinca reflects on how the two fields feed each other, explaining that, if the technique of movement is properly acquired and the orthophony technique is mastered – that is, if the resonators are known and used correctly – a world of expressive possibilities opens up. From the technical part, we would have to look for “how movement modulates sound and how it acts on the former” (Schinca, 2002: 113) in order to move ahead later, in the expressive part, in research into sound and words from the tonic modulations that are linked to emotional modulations.⁴

Here we can ask some questions that will have to be solved through practice:

- How is the sound and then the words soaked in the factors derived from movement (tonicity, rhythm, spatiality)? How do the body elements, parallel to the vocal elements, lead us to the body/voice connection?
- Can we shape, through the qualities of movement and the basic actions of effort, the words and then the texts? How is the text enriched by working through this shaping? How does this work affect the organic composition of the character and the composition of the dramaturgy of the scene? As Schinca suggests,

Figure 2. Class on the application of words. Source: Estudio Schinca



4. The theme of sound and voice in the Método Schinca® is developed in chapter 6.5. of the book by Helena Ferrari (2017: 139-143,146).

(...) Words or phrases can be used with their conceptual value or stripped of it, only considering their sound and rhythmic value. Thus language is recreated; the intonations and inflections produced by the movement transform the meaning and lend it a new expressiveness that reinforces or cancels its conceptual value (...) if we make use of it, it is to find sound elements and intonations that reinforce the verbal meaning (...) it is possible to vary the content of a text without changing the text itself: only through the qualities used (Schinca, 2002: 113-114).

How Does the Transition from Technique to Expression Take Place? Process or Training

The concept of training is somewhat controversial for Schinca herself if by that we understand a physical training that is separated from the expressive; training understood as a series of exercises that are carried out independently of the educational objective or the theatrical production. Schinca prefers to speak of “process-based education,”⁵ because she understands that the apprentice must be supported, through the acquisition of the physical bases (awareness of physiological organisation, sensoperception, management of the principles of succession, opposition, rhythmic change) to the extra-quotidian, creative expressiveness.

Ferrari starts from the idea of process as an “organised whole that is structured in phases with a temporal sequence” (Ferrari, 2015: 124). Here we find ourselves again with the idea of “artificial operation”, as Ruffini pointed out, which links each educational activity in a coherent manner, inducing learning by discovery, encouraging the attitude of searching (Ruffini cited by Picon-Vallin, 2000: 35).

Schinca refers to the ideas of Anne Dennis set out in her book *The Articulate Body: The Physical Training of the Actor*, with which she agrees:

An actor’s training must reflect the need for the physically articulate actor (...) Rather [the specific physical skill] is a process through which the actor can achieve a vocabulary, a “grammar”, a language that will provide the physical confidence to perform with clarity, no matter what the theatrical demand (Dennis, 2002: 17).

These ideas suggest relationships with some of the great reformers of theatre pedagogy such as Michael Chejov, who suggests the need for the technique that raises the level of performance (Chejov, 2006: 39-40), Grotowski’s concept of “disciplined sincerity” (2009: 191) or Lecoq’s idea that technique is like planting roots and fertilising the land (2003:145).

Thus, we will conclude with Schinca’s words in relation to these ideas: “Our methodology is creative because working from body awareness is the springboard towards creativity. The actor is the instrument, before playing the instrument you have to understand it” (Schinca, 2020).⁶

5. In the interview with Marta Schinca on 17 January 2020, we focused on two controversial terms for her, those of *training* and *coaching*. Schinca prefers to replace them with *process*. In an article by Helena Ferrari (2015) the author explains in detail this concept applied to the teaching of the movement expression technique.

6. Interview with Marta Schinca on 17 January 2020.

Structure of the Didactic Sessions

All of the foregoing is specified in the classroom, where again it is the concept of process that supports the entire protocol of a didactic session.⁷ The Método Schinca® proposes the following sequencing (Ferrari, 2015: 125):

1st part: Awareness raising, conscious gymnastics.

2nd part: Linking exercise, also called “release of a conscious gymnastics exercise”.

3rd part: Expressive theme.

Here, and above all through the originality of the bridging exercise, the idea of continuity and passage between the technical part and the more intuitive, spontaneous and subjective part materialises.

The bridging exercise “consists of the transition between working on a pure element of movement and the encounter with the *resonances* or *images* that it provokes in the student/performer, turning it into a tool with which to discover various expressive possibilities” (Ferrari, 2015: 132). It is the moment when students can “throw themselves into the void of action without the net of technical rational awareness” (Ferrari, 2015: 134).

Resonance, another original element of the Método Schinca®, connects the imaginary with physical action (Ferrari, 2015: 118) and “is made up of all the associations that appear while the movement is taking place. These associations can be imaginary, emotional or conceptual” (Ruiz, 2011b: 59).

This associative process implies precise guidance in the classroom. It is the teacher who has to find and plan this sequence depending on the work topic. He will make decisions about the elements he chooses to work on from conscious gymnastics and from there he will guide, through more associative elements, towards the world of emotional resonances that connect with the expressive part, gradually getting the students to free themselves from the technique, but depending on it. The “body thinks”.⁸ By strengthening the technique, the body learns, and that is when it is unconcerned about the technique to deal with the creative (Ferrari, 2015: 134).

Barba also refers to this guiding role of the teacher who must “create a context and necessary conditions for the student to learn,” understanding learning as the “process by which the environmental factors enable the student to turn explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge” (Barba, 2000a).

An Example: The Work on Nature in Transformation

Nature in transformation and the elementary qualities of movement

The theme of the dynamics of nature is a universal theme, practised by various pedagogues (Chejov, Copeau, Lecoq...). Since her beginnings, Schinca has used stimuli inspired by the “transformation of the matter” (Ferrari, 2015: 143).

7. This sequence was worked on in the didactic classes received by the Schinca Study team between 2007 and 2008; later they are explained in detail in Ferrari (2015; 2017).

8. Expression that Ferrari (2017) attributes to Inge Bayerthal.

In this case, matters in transformation allow us to explore the elementary qualities of movement until we reach its expressive component. It is then that the work with sound can be incorporated and, later, applied to a text with a dramatic dimension. As Schinca explains,

The dramatic possibilities are multiplied if, through this task, the voice (the previously educated voice) is integrated, since the qualities of movement can also be expressed vocally through the different intonations, modulations and the general meaning of what is sought to be transmitted, in a complete symbiosis (Schinca, 2002: 80).

The elementary qualities are a very important original element of the Método Schinca® (Ferrari, 2015: 141-143), since it differentiates two aspects not differentiated until then: muscular force (muscular antagonism) and force of gravity (weight) (Ferrari, 2017: 112).⁹

The four elementary qualities arise from the combination of two aspects of a single effort factor, that of “force”. The “force of gravity”, which ranges from the heavy – in favour of gravity – to the light – against gravity – and the “muscular force”, which embraces action with muscular antagonism and all its tonic range and action without muscular antagonism. We can see this combination in the second graph (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. The four elementary qualities of movement.

| | HEAVY | LIGHT |
|--------|--|---|
| SOFT | In favour of gravity, without muscular antagonism. (We give in to the attraction of gravity with muscular relaxation.) | Against gravity, without muscular antagonism. (Floating movement, which exceeds any muscular effect; as if hanging in space, with a feeling of weightlessness.) |
| STRONG | In favour of gravity, with muscular antagonism. (Effort in favour of the force of attraction with muscular energy.) | Against gravity, with antagonism. (Effort against the force of attraction with muscular energy.) |

Source: Compiled by the author based on direct information from Marta Schinca.

The importance of the expressive element has been clear in Schinca since her first approaches. Schinca relates the gradation of muscle tone with affective and emotional states (Schinca, 2002: 63). The body expresses itself when there is an emotion, which is called the “psychosomatic phenomenon par excellence” (Schinca, 2002: 64). Emotion as a reaction to a stimulus is an activator of somatic functions: at a physiological level it acts on muscle tone and the autonomic nervous system; at a cognitive level, through the

9. Even Laban used them indistinctly and sometimes confusingly (Ruiz, 2011a: 22-27).

attributions we make regarding this physiological activation, and at a conduct level, through manifest behaviours; all this constitutes an expressive-social-adaptive component. Schinca picks up the concept of unit of behaviour from the neurophysiologist Wallon: “(...) When an emotion is produced there is a series of somatic alterations, including muscular tone. Emotion acts on the tone and the latter determines the postural attitude or gesture, as a unit of behaviour” (Wallon cited by Le Boulch, 1992: 49).

Application of Matters in Transformation

At the classroom level, we would start from raising awareness about the basic elements separately in their entire range: force (muscular antagonism: from strong to soft) and weight (from light to heavy) and, later, in conjunction. It is important that, throughout the technical part, students carry out a prior integration of the elements, step by step and in all their nuances; it is important to check that they are being understood correctly.

Upon reaching the subject of the dynamics of nature, the teacher guides the exercise by proposing changes in the “properties of density, hardness, malleability” (Ferrari, 2015: 143) that affect the basic elements of the language of movement that have been previously integrated; the teacher invites them to perceive the tonic, spatial and temporal changes underpinning the emotional states (Ruiz, 2011b: 63). Through images of transformation of physical-chemical processes of nature, the connection of qualities is enabled, with transformations or emotional changes that determine atmospheres.

As an example, we could go from the mud that liquefies, the water that heats up to a boil, the passage to the steam that floats, the condensation into the cloud, clouds that discharge lightning, from the first drops of rain to a storm, from the end of the storm to the puddle that freezes, from the ice that cracks to the crystal clear water.

After this work guided by the teacher, and once it has been checked that the integration process is correct, each student chooses a transformation process and creates a first more abstract, physical score that reproduces that natural process.

Subsequently, this score connects with a process of human transformation, a change from one state to another. This is where we work on the dramatic dimension, so that the students encounter the conflict. Students transform their first score, adapting it to a parallel one: that of the emotional process in transit, where we can finally involve the text.

The same text, used as a pretext, acquires different atmospheres depending on the transformation process chosen.

Conclusion

The richness of the path and the reflection on the didactics that is at the base of the Método Schinca® is a challenge for the text-based theatre actor. New developments may arise here regarding its application, organisation and choice of exercises within the didactic structure, whose ultimate goal will be the incorporation of the text and not the work on movement in which

the method is included. The contributions to the development of organicity that are fed by the relationships that Schinca establishes between the most technical aspects of body awareness and expressive aspects and that can lead us to the composition of complex characters are highlighted.

If the process has been well integrated and incorporated, if the technique is adhered to in the training phase, in some way it can be transferred to other contexts of composition and creation.

The work of the student/actor would go from a dynamic-corporeal organisational level, in which the voice is involved, to a more narrative level, which, ultimately, adapts to the demands of the text in a staging.

This article has enabled me to develop a theoretical path through the Método Schinca®, place it in the field of the pedagogy of the actor and propose the possible validity of its methodological incorporation into text-based theatre acting.

A deeper investigation would involve analysing the potentialities of the application of this method and its effectiveness with respect to other methodologies.



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