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Liviu Lucaci

THE BECOMING OF THE ACTOR

Second edition

Foreword by Sanda Manu

Translated by Maria Alexe

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The Becoming of the Actor

(Second edition)

Liviu Lucaci

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*“It is better to be despised for simplicity than torment
ourselves in perpetual pretence.”*

Seneca

A Personality in a Major Key

Mr. Liviu Lucaci is an artist in the true and beautiful sense of the word. A prolific and multiple artist – actor, director, playwright, and a professor and doctor of Actor’s Art. He is active in all theatrical fields, serving Thalia with passion and talent... or, better said, with passion and grace. He has an extremely rich activity, in a multitude of artistic fields, each valuable in itself and in strengthening others.

Mr. Liviu Lucaci is a major personality. His career began under fortunate auspices. His first initiation in theatre was under the wand of “the wizard” Cătălin Naum. He then became a student of the great director and pedagogue Ion Cojar. He completed various stages, workshops, and shows with the masters of Romanian theatre - Liviu Ciulei, Radu Penciulescu, Andrei Şerban, Alexandru Tocilescu, Victor Ioan Frunză, Mihai Măniuşiu, Gelu Colceag, Lucian Giurchescu, Alexander Hausvater, Felix Alexa.

His theatre roles have been extremely diverse, in terms of characters and research. The directorial personalities that he worked with opened his appetite for tirelessly researching not only the means of acting, but also concepts. Both an intellectual and an artist, he soon became a notorious actor of the Bucharest National Theatre.

An active, restless, chameleonic researcher with an innovative side, he attained notable success in teaching. Working as a director, he becomes a director, producing shows with actors and students. The repertoire that he takes on is, at the same time, classical and innovative; he believes in the value of the classics as well as that of tradition, having always had a feel for the benefits of the new. After many years’ absence of ancient theatre, both in professional theatre and in acting schools, he stages the *Oresteia* in Victor Eftimiu’s version, written in a noble and rich Romanian language. An

entirely remarkable act. I particularly insist on mentioning his enduring concern, while working with the students, for the *thinking* and the *articulating* of the Romanian language, the Romanian language he respects, loves, and honours as a cherished and awarded playwright.

His very contradictory way of approaching reality is a permanent seeking of meaning: “Why do people come to the theatre?” Liviu Lucaci wonders. He is also the one to give us the answer: “people see a story on stage, they see characters looking for a meaning. And they find it. Not because they are offered a conclusion. Today, people have lives they can no longer recount. When they can recount them... it is good. Life does not need to be beautiful or ugly. It needs to have a meaning. It gets a meaning if they can tell it to one another. And that’s when they understand. Both the good... and the bad...”

I do not want to end without mentioning my first encounter with the one that was to become the important actor that he is today. As it happens, I met Mr. Liviu Lucaci as he was taking his first step into theatre. His first! His very first step. Literally, not figuratively. Around the end of the 80s, I was climbing the four floors of the Attic Theatre, towards Cătălin Naum’s workshop... I was going to see “Master Leonidas Faces the Reactionary Movement” ... all of a sudden, I heard loud boots behind me climbing the steps four at a time... a tall and thin little soldier passed me by... I would discover that he was playing... Mrs. Eftimița!!! And the revelation came with no delay. He was an incredibly credible Eftimița... in a long nightgown... walking all along the length of the stage in his bare size 44 feet. He was running... stopping... skipping about... making for the door... stopping again... starting again... hugging one of his own legs... jumping on one leg in all directions... trying to hug his other leg as well... failing... but not falling! Skipping whilst pirouetting... his head seemed slightly unscrewed on his thin neck. It felt like he was twisting on all sides at the same time. It was almost unreal. There was a cosmic fear in his eyes. It was grotesque... It was comical... it was tragical. It was almost

impossible for it to be true, but it was... it was a sort of expression I had only ever seen in... Pina Bausch! Like a dance... Pina Bausch... Tragi-comical.

An important actor was being born right then.

In another premiere, as it were, I witnessed a conference held by Mr. Lucaci, before he became a pertinent teacher at UNATC. After an initiation stage within the Nō, Kabuki and Kyōgen theatre spent in Japan, he held a series of conferences with ample and practical uses. I observed a special theatre lesson that he taught with academical clarity, with electrical energy, contaminating through the passion and love he put in everything that he did. That is, the main gift of the teacher. He made me understand what I had just admired when I happened to see Kabuki shows.

That was also when a professor was born.

Mr. Liviu Lucaci is a passionate teacher, because PASSION is the air that he breathes, it is the combustion that makes him exist.

The current book, *The Becoming of the Actor*, is for me the explosion of his self. The present book is not a manual, a story, or a testimony. “This is what the actor is like”, this is what they are like, and perhaps whilst going through it you, the reader, will discover that this is what you are like as well. Even though you do not have the talent in question. This is what humans are like, this is what we are all like.

You will discover that this is not only a book about the actor, but about yourself, when you read, for instance, about the complex inner process that Agamemnon undergoes when forced to kill his daughter Iphigenia.

Read about yourself, reader. Read.

Sanda Manu

Foreword

We love actors because they do things from the beginning. They live, talk, walk, sing, become outraged and love as if for the first time. There is no listlessness for them. This is what fascinates us: the fact that actors are permanently and ardently in love with life. Passion, gossip, thirst for power, doubt, fright, everything moves them. The trite daily routine of a life trailed by resignation and polished by countless defeats does not exist. Actors recreate the world, always, with the beginner's enthusiasm. They leave nothing out. They walk, yawn, dance, frown, and point their finger as if all of this had been invented by them there and then, as we watch. Even boredom is a performance, when embodied by an actor. Actors take life from the beginning. With the good and the bad. With the innocence, the cruelty, and the curiosity of children. They first dissect it in their artistic kitchen, in the backstage where the profane eye is not allowed to permeate, and they sew it back together in front of the spectators who are awed by their craft, with the craft of someone weaving the world like an illusion, like a veil perfect for covering the truth with. A child that sees things as if for the first time and a master of illusion at the same time, a lie told truthfully and a truth spoken deceitfully – behold the actor.

In the following pages I will talk about a possible road toward discovering the actor within us. Because on life's stage, we each act several parts (father, son, driver, neighbour, football fan, lover, husband, creditor etc.). But it's only some who decide to turn mask-changing into a profession. From my experience as a professor of Actor's Art, theatre director, an actor myself and a playwright, I have collected a few thoughts which could prove useful to those daring to enter the theatre gate as bearers of destinies. You are not holding a manual, but a kind of subjective guideline collection gathering and pointing out issues, difficulties, misunderstandings which I have faced myself. Along with experiences and thoughts

received from my masters or colleagues of all generations that I worked with in professional theatre and within the Theatre department of the “I. L. Caragiale” National University of Theatre and Cinematography of Bucharest. The present volume comprises course notes, fragments of conferences held over the years, articles which were waiting to appear in relevant magazines, tying together a method for the birth of the creative actor, equally addressing theatre novices, the professionals wishing to refresh their craft, and all people drawn to this strange phenomenon which is the performing art of the actor.

For me, the chapters of the book are linked together in a coherent path, marked in clear stages, but they can be explored in any way, just like the road towards acting has thousands of possible paths, each person daring to take that road has only one that is suited to them.

**BEGINNINGS –
FIRST STEPS**

“All characters are within us” - the first sentence that a theatre disciple should hear within the first hour of learning. Once spoken, this “sentence” throws the student on the road to self – knowledge. They, the disciples, are the ones in possession of the truth about the characters that they will bring to life on stage. They are the creators, nobody else. And that means that the path opening before them is theirs, personal and unrepeatably, a path belonging to one wishing to become initiated in the art of theatre.

Along with the above sentence comes the responsibility for the trajectory that they will have in theatre. He/she is the one who must discover the road that they will take. He/she must dig deep in order to release the various hidden alterities, necessary to the various roles that they will work on during their artistic career. Characters are in us – in other words, we mustn’t seek without, but within, in order to reach the truth of the role. And this means self-knowledge. Deep, practised at length, sometimes painful, worth any risk. Because it is only self-knowledge that can lead us to discovering that which lies within us, the dark or light areas, the well-locked secrets, the habits of all sorts which inform our actions and generate our motivations. That would be the first stage. To understand and then take on the fact that the work that must be done is with ourselves. The actors’ work with themselves – after the famous phrase launched by Stanislavsky in the world of actors. That it is ourselves who must act with determination, curiosity, and a maximum of understanding. This is because valuable things are not easy to sight, thus secrets are called “secrets” because they gather underneath themselves, like under enormous boulders, riches and hazards, treasures and the monsters that guard them. Self-knowledge, without reserve or inhibition, truthful, however painful this may render it, to the end.

A lot has been written about self-knowledge as a compulsory step in the actor’s education, I do not want to impractically repeat things that have already been said. But I do wish to clarify the various uses of different kinds of

exercises, multiple and diverse, particularly the ones used by theatre pedagogues. And I will first emphasize the relationship between games and self-knowledge.

For a good few decades now, games have been the theatre pedagogue's secret weapon. They are used to help the new students fit in with the collective, to relax in the new environment they have just entered, to create bonds with their new partners, their classmates. Why are games considered good training for theatre? And why can't we even imagine a serious acting school without the game segment nowadays? What do games have that is so efficient and why are they seen as indispensable, as some sort of magical instruments without which we cannot start the journey?

Games

Along with everything listed above, group cohesion, involvement, relaxing during effort, invigoration, amusement, games prepare the stage acting that the students will practise later, in another phase, through a few precious characteristics. One of those would be that a game has its own world. It is a trait of each game, highlighted by all specialists studying the phenomenon called "game". A game creates its own world, unique, detached from the surrounding reality, a world with its own laws, which lasts as long as the players play the game in question. What does this mean? It's simple. Look at a group of children playing basketball. They all take on the few simple rules of basketball: you can only handle the ball with your hand, you cannot take the ball outside a certain boundary, kicking is penalized, you only score a point when the ball has gone through the hoop, etc. None of the players doubt the game of basketball, once they begin to practise it. They are engrossed in the world of their game, detached from us, the ones watching, up to the final whistle. None of the players stops the game in order to wonder whether they are *really* playing basketball at that moment. None of them has doubts

about the reality of the basketball game that they are involved in.

And here is where an extraordinary resemblance to theatre acting appears. When one plays truthfully, correctly, when the rules imposed by the situation are taken on by the players/actors, the game, now called theatre, creates its own truth, its own universe, unquestionable for those playing and, ultimately, for those watching. No spectator of a basketball game will shout from the stalls that they don't believe that the players are truly playing basketball, as long as they stick to the rules. The spectator can be dissatisfied by the performance of some player or other, but they will never question whether they are really playing basketball. The same happens in theatre. No spectator will shout that the performing is fake as long as the players/actors stick to the rules imposed by the situation/text. The similarity is clear and valuable. If the actors behave like honest players on stage/the performing space, the acting is credible and engrossing. And those watching can no longer take their eyes off the ones involved in acting on stage, satisfied that they are witnessing something unique and unrepeatable. Because any game, whether we are talking about football, basketball or table tennis, is unrepeatable. The rules remain the same, but the unravelling is unpredictable. This is why we go to see more than one basketball game, without considering the experience completed once we've only seen one of them. Why would theatre be any different?

Another characteristic that any game has in common with theatre is the one that relates to time. There is a specific time for each game, a time that belongs to it only. When starting the game, the basketball players are guided by a different time. The time that passes outside of the game, the time of the people in the stalls, of the witnesses, passes just like before, because they are not caught up in the game the same way the players are. The spectators can glance at their wristwatch when they get bored or when they need to run to work. Those involved in the game, however, forget the "profane" time they knew before the moment when they

decided to play basketball, and live by a different timespan. They perceive a different time. The seconds in the final of a match seem to fly by for those on the losing team, as they hope to make up the lost points, while for the leading team they seem longer and longer, as they wait for the end whistle to seal their victory. There is a different time of the game for the player.

This is what the actor feels when they are involved in the role and the situation on stage, just like the basketball player on the field in the schoolyard. The player/actor lives a different reality, with a time and a space of their own – this is what many actors confess in interviews given after a successful performance. They all say that they felt as if they belonged to a different time and a different space. Which is certainly true. And this truth is recognised by any participant in any game. From the childish ones, such as throwing a stone on the surface of the water, to the Formula 1 rallies involving life or death stakes. In other words, a game has its own subjective time, and the player only takes this time into account, forgetting the one prior to entering the game. Up to the moment when the game ends and the player leaves the game, returning to the profane time.

There is nothing more important for the actor than the discovery that what they are doing on stage or in a mere exercise in the classroom pushes them to create their own time, in which they will live until the curtain drops or until the teacher announces that the exercise has come to an end. The magic of living in a time of the game is a fact. And the actor must take this on as a responsibility and an opportunity.

A similar thing happens with space. Just like with time, the playing space, once set, acquires different parameters. A simple yard, once it has become a football field for the kids on the block, is seen as having a different value. Each patch of land gets a significance. That which before was barren land, now becomes the penalty area, the touch line, the halfway line. The space of the game is sacralised. In other words, it acquires meaning. And the kids turned football