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Auditions and...

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Stanislavski Studies

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summary

This is a four-part series of interrelated articles discussing the pedagogical, ideological and sociological functions of the audition process in drama school training.

- I. 'Auditions and stress' (3,000-4,000-5,000 words)
- II. 'Auditions and self-identity' (3,000-4,000-5,000 words)
- III. 'Auditions and role-modelling' (3,000-4,000-5,000 words)
- IV. 'some notes on auditioning for drama school' (1,500-2,000-3,000 words)

The canonical techniques of actor training associated with Stanislavski's own practice and writings have resulted in a dominant, as well as with the 'Stanislavskian' paradigm in UK and US more broadly, which, arguably, predominate within UK drama school training. This series of papers investigates this paradigm of techniques of actor training by analysing the events of the audition process for the undergraduate Acting programme at the newly formed Plymouth Conservatoire – a Drama School run by Theatre Royal Plymouth and Plymouth University. These papers also draw from the authors' own experience auditioning candidates for other Drama Schools in both the UK and abroad to uncover the various pedagogic, ideological and sociological functions of auditioning for training, as opposed to auditioning for an acting job. Looking at the audition process in chronological order, from first-call to call-back, these papers will employ Stanislavski's own writings and practice as a meta-textual tool of analysis aiming to shed light into some of the pedagogic, aesthetic and institutional assumptions underpinning these processes. in reverse order, aligning Stanislavski's later theorisation with the initial experiences of audition.

Methodology

The paper takes an anthropological (auto-ethnographic?) approach, working from structured interviews with drama school applicants as well as unstructured conversations. At the core of this paper there is a focus on describing, events and comparing and contrasting these with the recollections of both successful and unsuccessful applicants to the Acting programme at Plymouth Conservatoire. The resulting material is then read through both sociological and anthropological frames of analysis, and positioned alongside some of Stanislavski's key writings. Using comparative accounts from applicants at other institutions, this series treats the Plymouth Conservatoire audition process as allegorical of audition processes for actor training more generally.

In more detail

'Auditions and Stress'

The anthropologist Frank observed nearly four decades ago that stress, and experiencing stress is a crucial and indeed valuable aspect of the learning experience. This paper describes the initial 'first call' audition experience in detail, to identify and describe the stress-inducing aspects of the experience's design, and to chart how these aspects influence auditionees positively, preparing them for study and training. This phase of 'first contact' between auditionee and institution can be understood via the dramaturgical exemplar offered in Stanislavski's *latest writing pedagogic discourse surrounding the work of the actor on herself* (usually associated with *An Actor's Work Creating a Role*)–

(I know that in here I am going against your suggested reversed-chronological order. Also, I am favouring Benedetti's latest re-editions of Stanislavski's book over their traditional compilations. However, I feel that for the argument that we are trying to do, it might be better to associate this stage with the work -or the potential- that actor's have on themselves. That is, when we accept someone during their first audition, is because they do not have to 'convince' us of anything else. Their capabilities and skills are good enough to accept them into the programme. In a call back situation, they are beginning to engage in the process of creating a character in a much clearer way - even though that character is 'themselves'. Hence, why I a, suggesting to re-jig this around)

'Auditions and self-identity'

Developing the descriptions and analysis from the first paper, this paper investigates how the interconnection between character and self-identity – encountered by auditionees in ~~the~~ prior training and study – provide the *potential* basis for self-identification *between* the auditionee with the auditioners (and by proxy, *with* the institution) (a process which may also result on a ~~and/or~~ self-dissociation by/for the auditionee).

Looking at the 'call-back' audition, this paper redraws the 'second contact' encounter between auditionee and institution in relation to Stanislavski's writings in *An Actor's Work on a Role Building a Character*.

'Auditions and role-modelling'

Surveying the entire 'applicant journey', from application through preparation, visiting, auditioning, interviewing and other informal encounters along the way, this paper utilises the writings in *An Actor Prepares* to provide loci for descriptions of processes whereby auditionees come to model themselves upon their auditioners. The auditions stands as archetype for an experience of self-adjustment whereby actors align (and misalign) themselves with commercial and ideological values, and the ways by which institutions cause these alignments and misalignments, both knowingly and unknowingly.

(I am wondering. Should the focus of this third chapter should be the institution -us as the ones who audition- and not the auditionees? Otherwise, this feels like something that will be rather difficult to observe/argue suggest in the bodies of those others who

have had such a fleeting contact with us. In the previous article we are already talking about the way the applicants are modifying themselves, and we could include a brief paragraph indicating how that process of 'mirroring' contains within itself a number of ideological and economic consequences. What we could do here is to turn the focus of analysis into ourselves and 'reveal' the assumptions and expectations that are at play during the audition process, from the institutional side. Also, that will mean that employing *An Actor Prepares* as a meta text makes a lot of sense as Stanislavsky wrote this book predominantly as a marketing ploy during his tour to the USA).

'some notes on auditioning for drama school'

This paper comes in the form of an epilogue (~~1,500~~-2,000-3,000 words), and considers how the processes and experiences described and analysed in the preceding articles lead to towards positive and negative outcomes for training institutions as well as participants in training. This paper is not concerned with the well-being of individual applicants per se; it is concerned with the health of institutions – their successful development and social-reproduction - and best practice for trainees and students – ways to provide the most effective pedagogic encounters between individuals and commercial and ideological values.