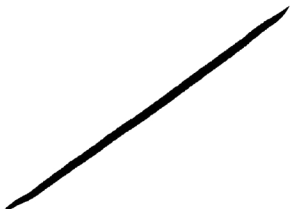


# VOCAL FREEDOM IN THE ACTOR'S ART

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**Abstract:** This article presents a part of the research undertaken by the author so far, in the Voice and Speech field and is a technical paper about vocal freedom as a necessity for the organic embodiment of the character. The need for vocal training is imperative so that the vocal performance can manifest. The voice is shaped authentically by thoughts and feelings, but for this to be possible it is necessary to prepare the voice, to train it so that it can be properly involved in the manifestation process. Starting from the idea that the actor is a “balanced quartet” that communicates the inner universe by properly using the means of expression, the article concludes that voice and speech are two important components that need careful training in order to be freed from useless tensions.

**Keywords:** specific logical mechanism, intellect, voice, emotion, harmony, character, means of expression, freeing the actor's voice, training, release tensions, actor's organicity.

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### Introduction

The connection between the actor's verbo-vocal ability and his inner processes is essential for the unfolding of the inner universe. Kristin Linklater<sup>1</sup> in her book *Freeing the Natural Voice* formulates the hypothesis underpinning this research: “Perfect communication demands from the actor a balanced quartet of emotion, intellect, body and voice” (Linklater, 2016, p. 9). Therefore, the idea of balancing these elements is necessary to be followed in order to empower the entire “mechanism” to function organically. If one instrument in the “quartet” is not functioning properly, no matter how well refined the others are, they will not have the ability to compensate the lack of precision of the poorly developed one. This concept emphasizes the importance of training the means of expression, so that the student, as future actor, can function flawlessly within the basic discipline, the Actor's Art.

The actor's training is primarily aimed at developing the skills essential for the Actor's Art: observation, attention, imagination, empathy, sensitivity, coordination, memory, intuition, spontaneity (Darie, 2015), and simultaneously the means of expression will be refined by exercise, so that the harmonization of the quartet that Kristin Linklater talks about is achieved.

When we mention the idea of refining the means of expression, we generally refer to body and vocal training, both intended to contribute substantially to the development of these two areas. Body training is covered by specific disciplines, and the vocal training will be practiced within the discipline of Vocal Technique, at the same time being completed, strengthened and directed towards achieving new reflexes in the field of voice and utter by the Scenic Speech discipline.

If the voice is studied and trained in the Voice Technique course to increase the ambitus, resistance, support, hearing, the curriculum of the Scenic Speech course is designed to support the development of these skills in order to empower the student to implement them in his/her everyday way of speaking, with the ultimate goal to obtain a free voice. Scenic Speech is therefore divided into: vocal emission and uttering. This

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<sup>1</sup> Linklater is a Scottish vocal coach, drama teacher, actress, director and author of the books: *Freeing the Natural Voice* and *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*.

article will analyse and describe the concept of vocal freedom while maintaining the strict relationship between verbo-vocal expressiveness and the Actor's Art, highlighting a manner of training.

### ***Expression and expressiveness in the Actor's Art***

An actor's ability to communicate expressively is mainly possible due to the ability to subordinate the means of expression to the inner universe and to consequently make visible the process happening inside the character while *traveling* through the scenic situations. From this point of view, this research is naturally directed towards the central element that triggers the actor's creative process specifically referred as the thinking mechanism or, in other words, the "specific logical mechanism" that professor Ion Cojar describes in *Poetics of the Actor's Art*. The mechanism of thought essentially represents the mental pattern composed "of all genetic and accumulated information", the rational grid or filter through which an individual relates to himself and everything around him (Cojar, 1999). The authentic actor "is the artist and the character, citizen X and character Y. During the authentic scenic act, the actor is his own (civil) person and also Hamlet or Richard, whose concepts, ways of thinking he has assumed" (Cojar, 1999, p. 39). In the book *Psychology and Scenic Expression*, V. Vatamanu defines the basis of this psychic mechanism as the ideal balanced relationship between cognitive and affective processes that mobilize the means of expression. But if the actor is consciously adjusting the voice, the way of speaking, or the posture he will drift away from the authentic embodiment of the character, in fact he will become an observer of the process. This is the reason why training is required, so that the means of expression sustain the life of the character by default, and not by controlled action. The actor's ability to express himself is closely related to the level of development of his or her skills. The Actor's Art is the link between "reason and feeling" (Cojar, 1999), "cognition and affect" (Vatamanu, 2010) and the inner process is made visible through the means of expression. Therefore, the Stage Speech discipline will have the responsibility to continuously pursue the training of voice and speech in order to exploit its expressive potential, but without separating it from the whole.

The connection between the actor's verbo-vocal abilities and his psychological process is essential so that the inner universe becomes visible. If the specific logical mechanism is assumed, but the means of expression are not trained, how could the character live and act authentically? If the situation assumed by the actor will lead to a scene of conflict in which the impulse will determine a powerful scream, how will the actor with a faulty emission solve this task? If the authentically haste inside the character is hindered in its manifestation by the imprecision utterance of the actor, can the scenic authenticity still be called into question? All these weaknesses actually stop the actor from being truly authentic in the situation proposed by the text. Vocal performance in the Actor's Art will only be achieved if the voice, guided by thoughts and emotions, can transmit outward what was organically born inside. The *Concept* is like a mould in which the actor pours himself into the creative process. If the means of expression are not fluid, they will not be shaped by the form of the mould, they will

have only a few points of contact with it. The actor will appear to be contained by the pattern but will not truthfully be merged with it. Therefore, the exigency of rigorous vocal training becomes a natural act for the development of the actor's verbo-vocal skills. Correcting the utterance and voice training in order to obtain a free emission that can be changed under the impulse of reason-feeling duo is the central objective of the discipline Stage Speech. It is up to the actor to prepare through physical and vocal training to give his character the chance to become a creation. In the book *Stage Speech Performance, With Small Steps from Theory to Practice* I stated the idea that speech or emission defects turn into rigid parameters that force the actor to shape the character according to his personal weaknesses. These precise limits will not allow the character to fully manifest because the actor's way of speaking is shaped by the incorrect daily use and not by a precise technique. The manner of articulating, together with the type or quality of the voice production can become suggestive elements which will place the character in a particular typology. I do not bring into question preconceptions such as "Juliet's voice vibrates in a higher register" or "Juliet has a slightly dysphonic voice", but I am referring strictly to the degree of vocal freedom needed in order to provide the voice with the capacity of being adjusted organically in the creative process. For example, if Juliet will have the utterance characterized by the Bucharest specific accent which can be recognized by the wrong construction of the phonemes "ș", "j" and consequently "ce", "ci", respectively "ge", "gi", along with the wrong production of the "s" consonant and followed by a small opening of the oral cavity with unilaterally arched lips, the character will be reconfigured completely. The depth of the process, even if it does exist, will appear considerable diminished to the spectators. The character will be led, unwittingly, into a sphere that apparently may seem comical, but if we try to imagine a classic scene, Romeo and Juliet for example, articulated in this way, we will notice that the ridiculousness of situation will actually be the element causing the hilarious effect.

That is why it is necessary for an actor to discover and release his own voice, the one that represents him, as Linklater says, and to access its expressive potential. Vocal freedom will occur over time and through training, through conscious practice, since its present form is the result of a specific logical mechanism. An individual, unfortunately, does not always have authentically generated verbo-vocal reactions, as the mental grids he has established lead to the continuous censorship of the voice, the way of speaking and even the way of breathing. Kristin Linklater (2006) provides an example in her book of how primary, natural, authentic neural impulses are replaced throughout life with secondary ones, describing how this change impacts vocal expressiveness. She describes how the baby communicates before he has the ability to articulate. The survival instinct will be activated by the hunger feeling, and his small body will emit a powerful sound that will determine the rapid fulfilment of its need. The sound emitted will have a high intensity, especially if you consider the little body that produces it. The parent will receive the message and will act as quickly as possible to resolve the baby's requirement. Once the need for food is fulfilled, the feeling of hunger disappears and the discomfort felt earlier dissolves, permitting a pleasant sensation to install. So, at this point a reflex is beginning to form, the feeling of hunger will be solved by issuing that

loud cry and consequently the body is ensured its survival. If this scenario is repeated around the age of three or five, surely the event will have another outcome. The parent will instantly penalize the high intensity in the child's voice who loudly shouts "I want to eat, NOW!". Although the form of manifestation is similar to the one previously described and it obviously has the same purpose, to ensure survival, the child will be asked for another way to formulate the message in order to obtain what he requested. At this point it turns out that listening to the primary impulse becomes an obstacle and therefore the reflex must be reformed in order to achieve the fulfilment of his need. The child will have to speak nicely, in a calm voice. Consequently, a new reflex begins to form: the need for food will find fulfilment only if the behaviour is censored, and the means of expression will not be directly influenced by thoughts and feelings, but will be voluntarily configured in a polite mode. We therefore have two ways of working to achieve the same goal. Even if in this situation the parent has no intention to influence the child's development in a negative way, but only to sculpt his behaviour, it is interesting to observe, from a technical point of view, what is happening in the mechanics of the phono-respiratory system, in the two mentioned situations, in order to understand how the logical mechanism influences dramatically the freedom of the voice and the articulation ability.

In the first situation, the baby breathes diaphragmatically (this is the natural breath that each individual has as a child), his abdominal muscles strongly support the exhaled air, his vocal cords vibrate under the pressure of the air column, and the muscles in the neck area are relaxed, so the sound can easily travel to the resonators without being stopped by unnecessary tension. Basically, we have a free emission of the sound directly moulded by the uncensored inner impulses.

In the second situation, the child around the age of three/five has exactly the same assets as described above, but he is not allowed to manifest himself without censorship, as it was permitted in the first place. Therefore, the limits set by the parent will limit the breathing process so that the air supply will no longer be as deep, and the exhaling muscles (more precisely the transvers abdominal muscle) will no longer have the same strong action, the vocal cords will vibrate but because of the muscle tension that will appear in the neck area the emitted sound will clog in the larynx, and the voice will no longer reach the resonators and will lose strength.

Throughout life similar situations will be encountered, which will reconfigure the person by setting new sets of restrictions that will be assumed and will impact the quality of the emission and utterance and with them the expressive ability. Consequently, the simple logical mechanism that the baby had, and worked properly in order to obtain the fulfilment of essential needs, will have to be transformed into one that ensures good coexistence, but which unfortunately separate the individual from his contact with the first impulse and thus his voice will become freedom deficient.

While acting, the actor will be limited by his own filter through which he relates to himself and to the everything around him. In order to be able to re-establish the contact with the inner impulse he will have to free himself of the restrictions imposed by his own thinking mechanism. Therefore, specific training in order to develop the

expressive potential of the voice is essential to be integrated into the actor's routine, so that in this way the character can be brought to life, in direct connection with the inner truth, without being limited by the weaknesses of these means of expression.

Vocal expressiveness can be defined as the ability to transmit inner processes through voice/speech. The way the voice operates gives the spectator the opportunity to gather information about the inner universe of the person speaking. The voice brings the paraverbal language to the fore, and the speech unites this type of language with the verbal one.

It is well known that the paraverbal language refers to the messages sent by the voice itself, beyond the spoken words. Elements such as speech rhythm, voice intensity, pauses in speech, voice inflections are authentically transformed by emotion/thinking and are capable of transmitting a remarkable amount of information about the speaker, sometimes even more than the verbal language does. In the everyday life, vocal/verbal reactions are often extremely censored and unfortunately for a stage professional these blockages can prove harmful in the context of reaching the truth in his creation. As professor Ion Cojar (1999) stated, self-observation during the process diverts the actor from his main purpose, which is to filter reality through the logical mechanism specific to his character. The judgment of their own actions during their realization will automatically give rise to the desire to voluntarily change the voice, position, movement, and this fact is actually "theatre" and not the Actor's Art. Through the conscious control of the means of expression, however precise it may be, we will not be able to reproduce the organicity generated by the authentic living in the situation of the text. Therefore, the point of concentration will have to be fixed outside the actor, on the objective that the character seeks to achieve and not on himself, so that the trained voice can make the invisible visible.

### ***The verbo-vocal skills of the actor***

We will divide the verbo-vocal skills of the actor into general categories according to their contribution to articulation and phonation, in order to observe how they can be trained so that the vocal potential is exploited.

### ***Support of the air column capacity***

Voice support actually refers to the ability to use the transversal abdominal muscle to obtain a solid basis for the voice producing phenomenon. The baby has this native ability. His body is an ideal support for free communication. But, as we have previously observed, this ability is gradually lost due to the limitations imposed. Exercises that ensure a return to diaphragmatic breathing are a first step to regain the strength of the voice.

The quality of the air column also proves essential for the formation of consonants, as these phonemes can be defined as: sound produced by obstructing the channel through which the air leaves the body with different parts of the tongue and also with the lips. Consequently, if the exhaled air has no support, it will travel outwards smoothly, and the tongue/lips will not encounter opposition in their action, and

consequently the quality of the consonants will be affected. For example, the specific sound for consonant “s” is altered if the support of the abdominal muscle is missing (Stan, 1972), and ensuring a strong current of air on the exhalation process is one of the methods of correcting it, because the apex will be forced by the power of the air column to position itself correctly. I am not saying that utterance defects are caused solely by a non-compliant support, but I point out that this is an element that brings a valuable contribution to the correct articulation process.

Therefore, the exercises to raise awareness of the area involved in the breathing process, such as the clogging of a nostril during inspiration, to assure the diaphragmatic breathing, will be sustained by exhalation exercises, for example the directing of the air column towards a candle, aiming to gently bend its flame without extinguishing it (Stan, 1972) can be considered a type of training for a return to proper and sustained breathing.

### ***Proper and natural emission of sounds***

When we emphasize about the correct emission concept, we refer primarily to the type of sound that can be easily formed without causing any damage in the phonatory system. Each individual has his own anatomical construction that gives him the ability to emit within certain limits. For example, people who have thicker, narrower vocal cords will have a deeper voice, while long, thin vocal cords will have a higher voice. After the *safe* tonality has been discovered, we can turn our attention to the resonators. These are areas of the body (chest, larynx, oral cavity, mask, cranial box) that resonate with the emitted sound. In order for the voice to reach the resonators it needs a path freed from unnecessary muscle strain. The accumulated muscle tension in the neck area will cause the sound to become blocked in that tissue, which is the main reason why the relaxation of this area is needed. Resonance cavities help the sound formed in the larynx to propagate. A resonator can be considered a trampoline that sound uses to leave the body. A voice settled in the resonators will be able to easily fill the space.

Exercises meant to train the voice, will be practiced aiming to activate each resonance area. For the chest voice, you can choose to sound the consonant “v” prolonging it until the sensation of vibration in the chest becomes easy to remark, and then emit vowels, aiming to keep the activation of this area. For the resonance of the oral cavity, the exercise *Mauran’s point* will be used, which involves the formation of a prolonged “m” whose vibrations are felt throughout the entire oral cavity, but especially behind the upper incisors, also followed by the emission of prolonged vowels following the strong vibration of this area. Also, the shape of the oral cavity determines the penetration of sound. Viorica Vatamanu recalls in her book, *Psychology and Scenic Expressiveness*, the exercises performed by Professor Gabriel Gheorghiu which transforms the oral cavity from a “small room” formed by an opening on the horizontal axis, with the larynx raised which generates a penetrating sound, in a “large room” determined by the wide descent of the mandible and larynx that provides optimal space for penetrating sound but also a rounded, covered one (Vatamanu, 2010). This exercise participates to the construction of a voice that has the ability to be easily heard and at the same time

relaxes the muscles of the larynx which needs to climb and descend for the creation of the two types of voice.

The vibrations specific for voice emitted in the higher register can be learned by emitting the extended “i” vowel, imagining that our voice is transformed in a train horn. These are just a few examples of exercises for discovering the resonators, which also work for voice warm-up, and contributes to the training of the voice improving its strength and penetration.

### ***Capacity to alter intensity and registers***

This category includes the exercises described above, meant to practice gymnastics of the larynx, are linked with those of adapting the intensity of sound according to the distance from an external point. For the intensity variations it is ideal to select exercises that involve turning attention to an external point, so that the mind has a real task to achieve and does not create unnecessary muscle tension that prevents the sound formed in the larynx from reaching the resonators. For the initial phase of practice, the exercises propose extending vowels at different distances, completing them with emitting in different registers depending on the body position during the exercise (standing on the tip of the toes – head voice, sitting on the heels – chest voice), thus involving the body while training the voice. It is interesting to observe the way in which the task to be achieved is stated greatly influences the entire training process. At a rational level the objective of “speaking louder” is different from the task of “making yourself heard by a person who is far away”. In the first situation the mind will tend to shape the areas involved in phonation to emit at a high intensity and unfortunately there are numerous circumstances when the result is a blocked voice, while when mentally it is intended to make yourself heard from afar the body will know which areas are responsible and will activate them so that the intensity is perfectly adapted to the desired distance.

For the training of this ability, it is still possible to choose any texts with the objective of shaping the intensity and registers according to the distance from the partner and its position.

### ***Precise uttering of the text, regardless of its degree of complexity, from the slowest to the most alert rhythm***

Utterance, like emission and breathing, is just a reflex that a person has, which has been exercised unconsciously during communication in the everyday life. In order to speak correctly, the entire articulatory mechanism must be prepared for a different effort than normal. The utterance proves to be a defining element for the character, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, being a valuable tool for the actor who will invest attention and time in practicing exercises aiming to correct any speech defects. Even in their absence, there will be situations in which the elements that compose the articulation mechanism (mandible, tongue, lips) are not suitable and will not function optimally for a performance utterance. The tongue may be lacking promptitude, or the lips will be slightly immovable, or the jaw clenched, and it is suggested that when



these sensations are decoded the actor can accomplish a specific warm-up in order to eliminate them. Therefore, even if a person doesn't have a major articulation defect is not reasonable to abandon this type of training.

The utterance will be trained by maintaining the articulatory mechanisms supported by a resonant voice produced with adequate breathing, by reading at first sight with different speech rhythms, and also by individual exercises of warm-up and diction. It is important to know at a theoretical level the places and ways in which consonants are formed, and the areas of the vowels in the Romanian language, so that through exercises the correct mechanisms of articulation are learned.

Observing the impact that the specific logical mechanism has on the verbo-vocal expression capacity, the concept of verbo-vocal training specific to performance speech becomes obvious. Otherwise, unnecessary muscle tension and reflexes that are empowered by unconscious repetition will gain ground and disturb the manifestation of the actor's skills verbally, vocally, even in the body. Consequently, in order for the voice to act freely, training is necessary for continuous awareness and active relaxation. Regaining natural breathing, optimal for the act of performance speech essentially contributes even to the relaxation of muscle tension, and good oxygenation of the brain greatly increases the ability to concentrate. A properly performed breathing will also bring with it the ability of voice support. Knowledge of the resonators, together with articulation/diction exercises that will lead over time to the correction of any individual defects of utterance complete the possible training scheme and the voice will be able to react naturally to the received impulses.

### **Conclusions**

In order to train the verbo-vocal expressiveness, after going through the theoretical material, the proposed exercises will not be performed as strictly external tasks but will be subordinating to the emotional processes activated by the imagination. Although it can easily be considered a strictly technical discipline, Scenic Speech is actually a workshop in which new reflexes are created, which mainly aim at the release of the voice out of the grip of concepts well fixed in the mind. Often the causes of clenched speech, lip immobility, upper chest breathing, defective emission, weak articulation have a psychological nature, so they are determined by a specific logical mechanism. As such, this aspect will gradually be changed through awareness and training and the verbo-vocal skills will increase their expressive potential.

Each student-actor will discover in time his own "method" of training composed of the studied notions precisely adapted to his needs.

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