



## The Five Continents of Theatre: Facts and Legends about the Material Culture of the Actor

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educational programs and studios. For the majority of contributors, scaffolding is achieved through the sequential study and rotation of the two techniques. Most begin with the repetition of the Meisner Technique as it reduces self-consciousness, develops deep listening, trains outward focus, and encourages authentic responses moment to moment. However, as the Meisner progression advances, students often exhibit 'somatic' and 'imaginative' weaknesses that prevent the embodiment of emotional preparations, characters, and action (123). Introducing the tools of Chekhov Technique at this stage –archetypal movements, qualities, gestures and characterization exercises – can aid psychophysical connections and free emotions. Both Shipman and Black provide examples of integrative exercises that build meaningful bridges for their students between the two techniques.

The penultimate section of the book, 'Part 4: Techniques in Practice' contains five essays which outline specific hybrid exercises developed in response to students' needs. Several contributors integrate Chekhov's Crossing the Threshold, Concentration, Four Brothers, and Psychological Gesture tools with Meisner's Repetition to improve the students' openness, availability and full bodied listening. Savage also integrates the Psychological Gesture with Meisner's Point of View as an emotional preparation for the Ghost exercise; a pedagogical solution for students whose 'brilliant POV statements' remain intellectual ideas rather than embodied experiences (211).

In 'Part 5: Continued Collisions and Strategies for the Future', Hutchinson's final essay investigates how Western actor training erases the cultural identity of BIPOC students and perpetuates systemic racism, then argues for decolonization of actor training pedagogy.

Overall, this book is an excellent combination of academic critique, personal narratives and practical solutions to pedagogical problems. It advocates for diversity in actor training, and addresses this diversity as a multifaceted, complex phenomenon with many ethical, philosophical, and pedagogical concerns. The editor's intention to detail the

convergences and collisions that occur when combining the Michael Chekhov and Sanford Meisner Techniques is admirably fulfilled. For readers unfamiliar with the techniques two appendices might have been helpful, a list or chart of the pedagogical sequencing –beginner to advanced –in each technique and a glossary of terms and exercises. A short introduction for each section theorizing the main arguments would also assist navigation of the individual sections.

Nonetheless, in its examination of the Michael Chekhov and Sanford Meisner techniques within one volume, this publication makes a unique and valuable contribution to the field. It highlights the concerns of contemporary actor trainers whose pedagogical focus is on character-driven work and may inspire its readers to formulate their own integrative exercises. I highly recommend this thoroughly engaging and thought provoking collection.

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**The Five Continents of Theatre: Facts and Legends about the Material Culture of the Actor, by Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese**

Brill | Sense, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2019, 411 pages

*The Five Continents of Theatre: Facts and Legends about the Material Culture of the Actor* is the latest collaboration between the founding director of Odin Teatret Eugenio Barba and theatre scholar Nicola Savarese. Described by the authors as 'two gardeners dedicated to

cultivating this book-garden' (6), the text is the culmination of twenty years of collaborative research. Furthermore, it compliments their earlier publication *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*, which has become an undergraduate stalwart classifying codified principles supported by the body of the actor and techniques of the body-mind. Following in its path almost three decades later, *The Five Continents* continues this research, but this time takes it in the direction of the transglobal material culture of the actor and is an attempt to fill the gaps created by their first publication which has been criticised for decontextualising culturally specific acting techniques.

An elaborate and exhaustive resource that features over 1400 images intertwined with text, the book can be characterized as a modern grimoire (as it is by author Tatiana Chemi in the opening Foreword), a tradition with its origins in annotating the practice and experiments of the occult. This extensive dramaturgical encyclopaedia is an attempt to compensate for the deficiencies of text-based histories of the theatre and open the reader up to the so-called *auxiliary techniques* of the actor that repeat across time and cultures. The diverse political, economic, social and cultural contexts of how theatre develops globally are extensively interrogated and brought to life by a carefully cultivated 'garden' (6) of image, anecdote, debate and fact.

The book demands an active participant, as Barba asks his reader to accept a co-constructive role and to prepare for, as Chemi puts it in her Foreword, 'poetic and serendipitous encounters, of which the pages are full' (4) – and as such it is impossible for the reader not to find themselves somewhere within the text. Structured around the main interrogative questions – When? Where? How? For Whom? and Why? – the book contextualises the nature and lineage of performance across the world, highlights the harsh reality of performance making, and spotlights material which is often side-lined, including

posters, theatre tickets, lighting, props, make-up and costume.

What follows is a *tour de force* through global theatre history, its place in society and contribution to the economy. The book brings together a vast wealth of knowledge concerning the influence of myth on the origins of theatre across different lands and continents, which when juxtaposed, underscores the connections and similarities between festivals, traditions and origins of theatre globally. There are also captivating insights into the nuts and bolts of the economic and social framework of theatre making, patronage, censorship and the changing role of women. The text features rare anecdotal treasures and images providing riveting glimpses of the resourcefulness and robust nature of the theatre industry. The global evolution of theatrical spaces and the origins of conventions such as audience boxes, curtains, backstage areas, applause, flowers and whistles are all explored in fascinating detail. The evolution of acting schools, teachers and training are also charted, as is the actor's changing relationship with the spectator.

A satirical discourse between Barba and Savarese runs throughout the book, with the authors reimagined as Flaubert's Bouvard and Pécuchet, two middle aged clerks who debate their encyclopaedic knowledge of scientific developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In *The Five Continents*, they instead peruse theatre history but remain mindful of the inability of such a dialogue to capture fully the exhaustive breadth of the material culture of the actor.

Perhaps the book's most powerful sections are to be found in the final two chapters, 'Why?' and 'Notebook'. 'Why?' features diverse profiles of, and testimonies from, theatre pioneers and focuses on their multifarious reasons for making theatre. The journey of how the technique of the actor proliferates through both the voyages of theatre groups and academic writing is also mapped.

The concluding chapter, 'Notebook', ends with powerful images from twenty-first century feminist performance art and activism.

The book's final arresting image is of performance artist Petya Pavlensky, who sewed his mouth shut outside Kazan Cathedral in St Petersburg, Russia, to protest against the jailing of the punk protest group Pussy Riot. In this way, the authors end this landmark text by decisively honouring theatre's enduring legacy of rebellion and revolution.

This carefully and meticulously curated collection of iconographical material makes great strides in filling the gaps in knowledge transfer and catalogues important intercultural evidence of the actor's work across the world that would otherwise risk being lost in the fire of history. In her opening Foreword, Tatiana Chemi quotes American actor Stephen Tobolowsky to this effect:

As actors we regularly work with props. On the sets of television shows we are shown briefcases, watches and rings for our characters to wear. I confess I never gave my choices much thought. Now I have to wonder, what is my past with this object? Is this something I would save from the fire? (2013, 19)

If you are looking to save one exhilarating and accessible book that visualises and contextualises the history of the material culture of theatre across millennia from a fire, then this, undoubtedly, is it.

## Reference

Tobolowsky, S. 2013. "The Secret Life of Things." *Back Stage* 54 (37): 18–19.

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## The Life of Training, by John Matthews

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2019, 216 pages

*The Life of Training* is John Matthews's third book investigating training from a philosophical perspective. In *Training for Performance* (2011) Matthews established his 'meta-disciplinary approach' in which 'training' is shown to be consistent across a wide array of disciplines and deserving of its own philosophical category. In his second book, *Anatomy of Performance Training* (2014), he went on to examine its interdependence with the human condition 'taking account of the necessarily embodied-ness of training and the necessarily trained-ness of having and being a body' (2019, 151). In all three books, Matthews takes Hannah Arendt's writing as a springboard for deep reflection on what training is and how it functions in our lives and in our world.

Inspired by Arendt's *The Life of the Mind* (1978), the underlying premise of *The Life of Training* is that thinking and training exhibit similar characteristics within the purview of time. As process and as practice, thinking and training both involve past knowledge or experience, an understanding of future potentiality, and a relationship with the present. In this way, 'the life of training, as with the life of the mind, is productive of time and envelopes our human experiences of it' (162).

As a philosophical work, the book requires a profound commitment to thinking and reflecting by its reader; however, the role of artistic practice in shaping the book's subject matter is clearly evident and offers more concrete points of reference. Numerous examples of well-established training practices for actors are incorporated, as are personal anecdotes from Matthews's experiences as a performer and acting teacher at the newly-established Plymouth Conservatoire. Matthews describes the book as a collaboration with Andy Parks, whose marionette illustrations offer 'up a model ... for meditating on training and its role in attenuating the strings of fate' (12). I found the illustrations particularly useful as an embodying tool as they visually encapsulate each chapter's philosophical essence.