

## *Imagination and Empathy: Coalescence, Transfer and Embodiment*

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**Abstract:** Empathy calls for the ability to transform another's attitudes by a perceptive, cognitive and affective transposition. By its extraordinary capacity of generating images, of vitalizing performances and of turning them into certainties and beliefs, by its distorting quality (ensuring and enabling both the selection and joining of images that belong to the subject's previous experience and the generation of new images that are not matched in actual reality), the actor's imagination creates and projects in front of the spectator fictional, fantastic realities, which go beyond the perceptible reality, which provide alternatives to reality, by defying the borders of verisimilitude and by exploring not only the possible, but also the impossible.

**Keywords:** imagination, empathy, fiction, transfer, identification, belief, quasi-emotion, acting verisimilitude

### **Imagination and psychological mechanisms: Imagination mainstay of scenic outcome**

In *The Actor between Truth and Fiction*<sup>2</sup> the actor is defined from the viewpoint of Albert Camus who would compare the actor's situation with the one of the absurd man who, "while entering deeper and deeper lives that are not his, eventually carries them in real life and shapes his being on the appearances that he transfigures"<sup>3</sup>. Thus, Camus "translates in the existential sphere a trait of the actor's performing creativity: the latter's tendency to

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2. Doina Dragnea and Andrei Bălăneanu, *Actorul între adevăr și ficțiune* [The Actor Between Truth and Fiction] (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1986).

3. *Ibid.*, 10.

make up a fictional character, by using the data of his real person. Because to be a performer is not only to be, it is first of all to create"<sup>4</sup>. This skill is owed to the actor's creative and imaginative faculties that manage to generate living characters and to paint fiction as reality, moreover creating beings that are "more alive than all the living"<sup>5</sup>. And even more real than those we can see in reality.

Therefore, in the art of the actor, imagination

becomes "a hand" held by imagination, which is continued by the little finger (sensations), the ring finger (perception), the middle finger (thought), the index (memory), and the thumb (affectivity and motivation). The personality is the power that gets the fingers together, gets them close to the imagination, clenches them into a "fist", gives them power or relaxes, weakens them, and everything that was earned could be lost. The imagination is the "clenching fist" or the "relaxed palm that lets everything slip through".<sup>6</sup>

Whether we talk about voluntary or involuntary imagination, about reproductive or creative imagination or about their techniques, about representation or the mental image, its relation with the other psychological processes, imagination is and will be a complex phenomenon that was, is and will be the object of numerous controversies, no matter the field of research or the perspectives from which this concept will be approached and defined.

Imagination has a fundamental role not only in human activity, but also and especially in the artistic effort, since it is the "clenching fist or the palm that relaxes and lets everything slip through"<sup>7</sup>; it selects and combines images picked from the previous experience, it generates and it recreates images that do not have a match in actual reality, it projects complex planes and fictional, fantastic realities beyond the perceptible reality, it foresees future by virtual realities, it provides alternatives and it defies the restrictions of reality, it approaches both the possible and the impossible, it creates hypotheses, it prepares and reveals sudden, original and innovative solutions, it creates certainties and beliefs. Imagination implants "the consciousness of alterity, of the possible."<sup>8</sup>

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4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 5.

6. Mielu Zlate, *Psihologia mecanismelor cognitive* [The Psychology of Cognitive Mechanisms] (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 511.

7. Ibid. 519.

8. Ibid.

Every actor needs to know the importance of his or her imagination and he or she needs to be able to work orderly with images, representations, memories, fantasies, desires, the subconscious, dreams; the actors needs to be an active element or participant in this process; the actor needs to acquire and develop the feeling of artistic construction, the rules of composition by a permanent imaginative modification of the past, of the present and of the future. The actor needs to be aware of the power of his or her imaginary, of his or her inner space created by hopes, creations, and fantasies, by the connection that he or she has with his or her past or future, dreams, desires, and especially with his or her imagination, which will shape his or her creative personality and, last but not least, his work of art. The connection between the imaginary and the imagination reveals, on the one hand, the importance of the creator, of the material of which he or she is made (memories, past, present, future, desires, thoughts and aspirations, since the imaginary is the material with which the imagination works), and, on the other hand, the importance of imagination (in our context, the imaginary is also the product, a new creation) that, by its techniques and forms, creates a new, actual, present and possible world, a virtual, fictional and imaginary world. Against this backdrop, the imaginary seems as important as the actor's feelings and perceptions, since it allows him or her not only the access to his or her inner self, but also the extraction of the material necessary for the creation and completion of his or her work; it is precisely the product of imagination, a parallel, particular world, an illusion, a veridical and possible fiction. The actor creates living images from his or her imaginary; they will prompt strong feelings, and the products of imagination may become an object of perception, of the imaginary as a product.

While, through memory, the actor is able to reproduce, invoke and experience sounds, images, senses, situations, spaces, circumstances and previous relationships, through representations, images and reproductive imagination, they detach from this material reality. Reproductive imagination builds and changes permanently, it uses memories not only with a reproductive value, but also with a reconstructive one, by the update, restructuring of past experiences and the continuous transformation of images and details in the form of plastic, original, higher images of the subject.

In acting, reproductive imagination has the extraordinary power of creating materials, of drafting new images without a counterpart in his or her previous experience. It provides the actor with the possibility of fitting in new, previously unknown and unperceived contexts, without limiting

knowledge to a perceived experience. Thus, the actor will manage to know a presumed and always possible reality, he or she will associate and generate new images, he or she will split in segments, in components, will recombine the representations and will create a new, interesting and unusual image, not just by the modification of an evocation, but by the compositional reconstruction of representations, of memories, of the absent object. In this case, we are talking about the power of creative imagination of transforming an event, circumstance or past perceived object, an object that otherwise does not exist in space or in time, into an unfamiliar, new, foreign and original one. Thus, imagination participates in the creation of new images that did not exist in the subject's previous consciousness or experience, by accompanying the past representations and memories with current projections; it combines, transforms, changes significations and it recreates the past. By combining real life experiences, his or her memories with the imagined world, the actor can experience a new, complex world filled with representations and interesting images. Here, reproductive imagination comes close to being mistaken for creative imagination that is concerned not only with reality, but also with unreality; it combines and uses the acquired elements in the creation of a new reality, according to the subject's needs and desires; it seeks its object not only on the field of perception, but also in the field of the imaginary; it is spontaneous and creative. Creative imagination is the most complex form of imagination and it relies on quality principles, being defined by the relation to its finality. The creative side of creative imagination is not limited, like in the case of reproductive imagination, to the manner of transformation and combination of imaging sequences, but it involves, apart novelty and originality, the connection of the product, of the idea (characterized by originality, novelty and social importance) to a specific deep and revealing sense of life. Therefore, the difference between the two types of imagination is not given by their creative manifestations, but by the element of originality. Thus, imagination is the basic ingredient of creativity, the latter being the extraordinary capacity of transforming the fruit of imagination in creation. While imagination allows us to think about absent, unreal and even fantastic things, creativity lets us do something significant with these products, with imagination itself. Creativity and creative imagination are, therefore, the human capacity of generating original ideas and solutions that are consistent with or adequate to the given problems and circumstances, being the first stage in the process of innovation.

Imagination explores mainly the unknown, the possible and the impossible, the future and the fantastic, but, without help from thinking, *the spine* of imagination, which develops mentally strategies, plans, it issues opinions and arguments, it deduces, systematizes and analyzes, it could not create logically and coherently the fiction of his or her work. These two processes are in a permanent connection and interaction: while thought (thinking) proposes solutions and provides data and ideas about a specific problem, about reality, by his or her imagination the subject develops, invents hypotheses and strategies of solving this problem by the numerous techniques with which it works (of agglutination or amalgamation, of amplification or diminution, of analogy and association, of removal or approach, of substitution or adaptation, of empathy). The power of thought is linked with imaginative power, and both of them play an important role in the actor's adaptation to the proposed performance situations. The objectivizing of the creative work, by the analysis of thought, by reflection and criticism, enables the understanding, the guessing, the knowledge and the transposition of the actor in acting situations and actions; thus, imagination becomes a back-up of logical thinking. This trait helps inventiveness, by the guessing and prefiguring of the many proposed solutions, because imagination modifies, restructures, eliminated, includes, and creates new elements, ideas and images, it analyzes, develops and recovers them. In the act of creation, the power of thinking is linked with imaginative power, but while with the help of his or her imagination the actor creates and works with fictional situations as if they were real, this analysis synthetizes, involves and issues hypotheses across its artistic approach.

Empathy calls for the ability to transform another's attitudes by a perceptive, cognitive and affective transposition. This means participatory will, an imaginative effort of prediction and transposition in the other's psychology, of emotional access to the partner's reference-framework, of partial identification with him/her, but without dropping the *as if*. Empathy, affectivity and motivation thus become, in the performing arts process, elements that act on the quality of the creation and drive affective, emotional and behavioral reactions; through them, a work of art is not only innovative, it is also valuable.

Therefore, imagination is closely linked to all the psychological mechanisms. While throughout time it was considered a "vacation of reason"<sup>9</sup> or "a sin against the soul"<sup>10</sup> that had to be kept restrained or quarantined as

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9. Ibid., 511.

10. Ibid.

explained by Mielu Zlate, it becomes “so important for the human psyche, that, without it, cognition, values would be paralyzed, the subject would become sterile, it should explore and self-explore.”<sup>11</sup> Against the backdrop of the acting art, it becomes the main pillar of artistic creation, of the creative process, it is the one that can make an object that existed once or an inexistent object become evoked and be brought back or become real for the actor or for the audience, it is the one that shapes beliefs about objects, circumstances, situations or actions, it creates fictions and imaginary worlds, expressive or revelatory works of art in relation to the meaning of human life.

### **Imagination: Projection, Believe and Identification**

An imaginary object, albeit inexistent as such, may be present in the image as real as if it were physical, the only thing that could make the difference between the two being “the different planes of existence”<sup>12</sup>. In the context of the image and of the imagination, this mechanism is called the naïve metaphysics that appears when

you divert your spirit from the pure contemplation of the image as such, as soon as you think about the image without shaping images, a drift occurs and, from the assertion of the essential identify between the image and the object, we go to the assertion of an identity of existence. From then on, the image is the object, we conclude that the image exists like the object.<sup>13</sup>

The actor works in the construction of the fictional world, on the one hand, with the superior cognitive process and with the intuition in the case of creativity and, on the other hand, with intuition, affectivity, imagination, transfer and substitution, in the case of empathy. An image, a specific situation or reaction may lead to an identification with an exterior reference system. In the case of empathy, the actor manages to identify with the fictional world by an affective knowledge, by a total contagion or fusion with the fictional. In the creative process, such knowledge operates intuitively, by imagination and its techniques, by analogies, associations, substitution and by affectivity.

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11. Ibid., 512.

12 Jean Paul Sartre, *Imaginația* [The Imagination] (Oradea: Aion, 1997), 7.

13 Ibid., 8

In his work *Transfer and acting expressiveness*,<sup>14</sup> Gheorghe Neacșu analyzes the relation between the inner creation and embodiment or “gesture-standing acting expressivity”<sup>15</sup> for the purpose of identifying the main characteristics of the acting talent. Apart from the two basic instruments of the creative process, i.e. imagination and affectivity, it introduces a new trait, “acting projection”<sup>16</sup> which relates to the actor’s empathic capacities of transposing, an important characteristic of talent. Based on the experiences performed, they state that “the cognitive side of the acting transposition is characterized by the originality of imagination and by the capacity of heralding the expressive model”<sup>17</sup>. Neacșu states that prefiguration is characterized by three specific traits

presence of the movement elements during the introjection of the role data for the development of the mental model of the character, by the actor’s self-projection instrument of dramatic performance, in the imagined model, and by the selectively anticipative function of this self-projection in the process of acting embodiment.<sup>18</sup>

Based on this traits Neacșu concludes that “acting transposition presents, as creative aptitude, like a three-parameter unit: the originality of imagination, acting prefiguration and affective experience; deeply significant correlations of the three parameters are present.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, an important component of the acting creation process and of artistic talent is in the actor’s empathic capacity, a capacity that may be found closely connected both to imagination, and to their capacity of prediction, since empathy is a form of knowing things intuitively.

In his book *Empathy and Personality*<sup>20</sup> Stroe Marcus emphasizes the significance of this phenomenon that, in his opinion, is the most important component of artistic talent. This provides a complex view of the psychological mechanism of empathy and it claims that three conditions are necessary in its triggering, analogous to those proposed by Mariana Caluschi in her paper *Empathy, Social Life Implications*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gheorghe Neacșu, *Transpunere și expresivitate scenică* [Transposition and Stage Expressivity] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1971), 34.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 51

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 144

<sup>20</sup> Stroe Marcus, *Empatie și personalitate* [Empathy and Personality] (Bucharest: Atos, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Mariana Caluschi, “Empathy, Social Life Implications”. *Social Psychology I*, Iași, VII, 165.

At Marcus, the first condition is the knowledge of the model. This knowledge is possible by imaginative associations or by assumptions in relation to the actor's experiences, thus triggering the empathic process, by introjection. The second condition is fulfilled based on the one above and it involves, by analogy, a projection of the self in the other's psychology; the third condition is obtained based on intuition and it involves the formulation of predictions in relation to the other's behavior; again, here, we are talking about the role or the acting partners, and the relation by the projection of the actor's own behavior.

The psychological transposition in another's system of reference allows, as put by Solomon Marcus, not only "an act of empirical knowledge of the partner"<sup>22</sup> but also an act of affective projection. The cognitive function involves an accurate forecast of the potential behavior and, thus, an "anticipation"<sup>23</sup> of the behavioral strategy. By emotion, by intuition, it can also generate an act of affective projection; the actor can send to the future character his or her own affective experiences.

Therefore, apart from the inner, psychological conditions of the one who empathizes (the actor) and the one that relates to projection, to the projection of the self in the other's psychology, either role or partner, of mental image, an important condition that is not necessary with creativity, is the circumstantial one, which, in the opinion of Solomon Marcus, relates to the belief based on the "acceptance of the one who empathizes"<sup>24</sup> and which is underlying the triggering of the empathic conduct and favors the appearance of this phenomenon. This tendency is also emphasized by Mariana Caluschi who says that, apart from the basic preliminary conditions, the model, the affective characteristics, an extremely important precondition is "the subject's belief in transfer (transposition) convention"<sup>25</sup>.

While in the case of creativity the control of the product, of the work of art is performed depending on its originality, in the case of empathy, the following elements or characteristics prevail: intuition, mobility and psychological flexibility, communication, affectivity, emotion and physiological reactions. Therefore, the product is the acquisition of a state of empathy, no matter if we talk about role, partner or audience,

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22. Stroe Marcus, *Empatie și personalitate*, 25.

23. *Ibid.*, 26

24. *Ibid.*, 30.

25. *Ibid.*, 165.



by which the 'I' feels identified with the other, being able to re-experience emotions, thoughts and actions of the partner. All of them may be objectivized in an original behavior that bears the mark of the one who empathizes.<sup>26</sup>

In the empathic process, no matter if we talk about the one who is expressed in the artistic art of the creative process, the finished product is the acquisition of that state whereby the actor feels identified with the other, being able to experience or re-experience emotions, thoughts and actions of the image, object or subject with which the mirroring (empathy) is performed and whose finality means a personal and original behavior.

While creative imagination is the one that generates original solutions that lead to an innovative work of art, in the case of empathy, substitutive imagination is the one that enables the triggering of the affective, emotional and behavioral reactions, and which makes that a work of art be more than innovative, but also extremely valuable, because it is the one that makes the transition from the imaginary to reality, from the idea to the material thing. The entire creative process is a long string of events mixed with memories, experiences, a flow of created, re-created or pure mental images, fictions and possible worlds that unfold in front of, in the mental plane of the actor, and empathy is the one that overlaps and identifies (without the loss of self-awareness) the actor with the playwright's work, with their own choices, or those of the director or partner.

There are, however, preconditions without which the empathic act and empathy would be impossible. They relate to the existence of a specific model, to the affective traits, to the "acceptance of the one who empathizes"<sup>27</sup> and to the "belief in the transfer (transposition) convention"<sup>28</sup>.

When we talk about the first condition, in relation to the existence of a model, Solomon Marcus emphasizes three means or possibilities of contact of the subject with the external model. The first possibility is reached by involving the partner's direct perception and it is characteristic to any interpersonal relationship; the second by the involvement of the model representation, as with the dramatic actor's transposition (transfer), and the third by the involvement of imagination, lie with the creation or

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26. *Ibid.*, 166.

27. *Ibid.*, 30.

28. Mariana Caluschi, "Empathy, Social Life Implications," 165.

“the invention of an artistic model”<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, no matter if the model is a truly perceived, represented or imagined one, it will be later transferable in his psychology as long as there is a large information range and the object or the model is found on known territory.

The second condition relates to the subject’s inner circumstances or psychological predispositions: sensitivity, a large information and affective background, emotional experience, imaginative capacities that evoke substitutive imagination, the desire of affective communication, of self-knowledge. The importance of substitutive imagination and its input in this context are extremely large, which favors empathic conduct. Solomon Marcus borrows from Ezra Stotland three specific forms of empathy that are shown, as he says, by an imaginative-affective way: “image-self condition” where the subject imagines what he would feel if he were in the place or in the circumstance of the mode, “image-him condition” whereby the individual or subject imagines the model’s state in a specific circumstance, and the last one, “watch-him condition” whereby the subject “observes the model’s movements or physical responses”.<sup>30</sup>

The last condition of belief relates to the identification and transfer of the subject in another’s psychology, while keeping the presence the awareness of his own identity. As seen above, this relates either to the belief in the convention of transposition (transfer) or to the belief based on the acceptance of the one who empathizes. Is this predisposition an essential characteristic of empathy in the performance process? Does it favor the step of incorporation (embodiment) and illumination?

By his imagination, the actor manages to create possible realities, he completes, stimulates and recovers assumptions, generates series of logic and coherent actions that will lead him implicitly to the feeling of truth and belief.<sup>31</sup> Once every element is added in a logical and coherent manner, the actor will experience a new attitude to the inexistent nothingness, an attitude of the truth of the action, of the feeling and of belief. Thus,

if a single small truth and a moment of belief may put the actor in a state of creation, an entire series of moments, in a logical and coherent order, will create a very large truth and a full, long-term period of authentic belief.<sup>32</sup>

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29. Stroe Marcus, *Empatie și personalitate*, 30.

30. *Ibid.*, 32.

31. Konstantin Stanislavski. *Munca actorului cu sine însuși*. (București: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, 1955), 181.

32. *Ibid.*, 166.

which will support and reinforce each other.

According to research conducted by Thomas Pavel<sup>33</sup> on fictional realities, “the what if” game involves two different levels of fictional activity; contrary to simple worlds, it has a “complex structure”<sup>34</sup>, by joining two or more worlds in a single structure. This complex structure may be called “dual structure”<sup>35</sup> made of two worlds, joined by correspondence. This relation means that, for example, Maria, in a game of make-believe “in the first universe will be taken as a cook in the second universe, that sand in the first universe will be taken as cakes in the second universe, and so on and so forth.”<sup>36</sup>

In the context of the performing art, an important mechanism of creation of logic and of verisimilitude of the parallel door that generates and assists the feeling of truth and belief in the simulated game is the generation of an isomorphism, of a correspondence between the world that the actor has to embody and his or her objective world. Of course, there are structures in which “the primary universe does not enter into an isomorphism with the secondary universe, because the latter includes entities and states of affairs that lack a correspondent in the former”<sup>37</sup>. In this case, imagination uses productive, creative elements, it builds not on a relation of correspondence, but on invention.

### **Imagination: Authentic or mimicked empathy? Emotion or quasi-emotion?**

We are dealing here with the originality of imagination, which generated original reactions to specific stimuli in the activity; it stirred internal and external reactions, it created a powerful relation with the fictitious object. Affective responses are the result of this relation, acquired by the feeling of truth and by the actor’s belief in the imagined world. This production resides in the actor’s identification with the framework in which he or she conducts his or her action and emphasizes the expressive capacities of imagination. Thus, just as the child’s game first involves “a

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33. Pavel, Toma. *Lumi ficționale*. (București: Ed. Minerva, 1992), 8.

34. *Ibid.*, 90.

35. *Ibid.*, 90-91.

36. *Ibid.*, 91.

37. *Ibid.*, 91.

plastic tendency, the need to translate an inner image, and the execution, as it happens always, reinforces and establishes the tendency that gives life to the performance"<sup>38</sup>, the actor's game needs a clear relation of internal creation, prefiguration and expressiveness.

But which is the feeling that explains the mechanism through which the actor, within his or her fictional game, may have the feeling of pity, love, fury, despair, as long as he or she knows that what he or she can see, say and hear is not real? How can he or she really feel sad or wasted (sometimes even involuntarily) when he or she knows that the one in front of him will never leave him or that the edge of the precipice is just the stage? How can he cry for Hecuba? Which is the explanation of this phenomenon, of the belief in a similar situation?

When we talk about a real emotion, in a fictional (acting) context, the problem of the authenticity of the subject's behavior is raised; thus, we will be introduced to one of the most controversial issues of the actor's creation, i.e. the affective experience of the role and its circumstances.

The product of the transfer (transposition) is the affective identification of the objective 'I' with the model, image, role or partner, an identification with the purpose of an authentic physiological and behavioral reaction, rather than a mimicking of it. We could talk here not about real empathy, but about the imitation of it. This statement, opposes, for instance, Sartre's ideas; when he spoke about the psychology of emotion, he said that the actor, in performing his or her role, "imitates joy, sadness, is not in fact overwhelmed by joy or sadness, because these behaviors concern a fictional universe."<sup>39</sup>

The authenticity and the experiential dimension of the emotional process, of the affective state in relation to a specific context have raised numerous questions and methodological issues. Against this backdrop, we are looking into the nature of real experience that could complete successfully the empathic process in a situational context.

Kendall Walton, in his book *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* when he speaks about the affective response of the subject to the fictional context, he denies the authenticity of emotion.

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38. Henri Delacroix, *Psihologia artei, Eseu asupra activității artistice*, trans. Victor Ivanovici și Virgil Mazilescu, (București: Meridiane, 1983), 42.

39. Jean Paul Sartre, *Psihologia emoției*, trans. Leonard Gavrilu (București: Univers enciclopedic Gold, 2010), 71.

According to him, the subject experiences “make-believably”<sup>40</sup> in the evoked situations. He offers the example of Charles who, in a fictional context, feels fear, for example. This condition is a fictional one; he is an actor and an object in their own game, an accessory that generates fictitious truths about himself. He admits, however, that characters or specific fictional situations may act on us by prompting emotions in various ways, physical, psychological, and that these feelings and sensations are strikingly similar with real sensations and feeling, but, no matter what our body or mind tells us that we experienced or felt, it is in fact a “quasi-emotion, quasi-fear.”<sup>41</sup>

Thus, this make-believe - I pretend that - in the case where there is an emotional response to characters and the presented fictional events, is nothing else but fictional belief that generates emotions, feelings or states corresponding to quasi-emotions quasi-feelings. This leads to the next example, which supports the aforementioned aspects:

if we decide to direct the Twelfth Night and I decided that I will be Viola and you will be Sebastian, then I established the convention that means that what I say and do is in fact what Viola says and does in fiction.<sup>42</sup>

Paradoxically, the actor may feel various emotions even if he or she knows that what happens to him or her, to the partner, to the mental images is not real. Therefore, the emotions he or she experiences are real in a fictional context, i.e. they are, as also claimed by Walton, fictional truths that generate quasi-emotions.

Another argument that backs up the aforementioned aspects is the frequent case where a child creates an imaginary friend, a playful witness, and claims that the latter is true. The mechanism, this make-believe, is very similar to the game in which is actor is involved. Even if he or she knows that his or her partner is not real, that they are fictitious, the child continues to believe in his or her existence. He or she may even have reactions accompanied by strong emotions to a fictitious situation in which his or her buddy is involved. He or she will experience real fear because of this belief, of the pretense that the monster is a real threat to his or her partner, i.e. a real response in a make-believe context.

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40. Walton, Kendall. *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 14.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

Thus, if the child has the instinctive skill of being caught in the game and react spontaneously to an imagined event, the actor, by his acceptance, desire and belief in the simulated act, undertakes consciously and deliberately this secondary reality and comes to believe in the authenticity of his act.

In the article *The Reality of Responses to Fiction*<sup>43</sup> it is said that

the important thing is not that an event is true or false, real or invented, but that it strikes a chord with the receiver. Some event may be true and not stir any emotional state or, on the contrary, it may be a fantastic event and the involvement and simulation may be more accentuated. Therefore, we should not define truth in relation to fact.<sup>44</sup>

In the actor's art, the acting experience, even if we consider a quasi-emotion or a "succession of typical moments, shortened and condensed"<sup>45</sup>, is an essential component of acting which means both the "condensed and essential reproduction of a suite of emotions, which, in the normal situation, would have been widely performed, and their suggestive representation"<sup>46</sup>.

Can these theories explain the actor's emotional response in an acting situation and the authenticity of the empathic process? Definitely, because the same affective structures are triggered, no matter if we speak about a fictional or a real situation, because the brain cannot distinguish between a real and an imagined activity, it is activated by the representation of a thing. In general, emotions are responses to mental representations that signal further structures, which, in their turn, lead to the occurrence of states, emotions, feelings: discontent, satisfaction, joy, fear and a series of corporeal (bodily) reactions, such as faster heart rate, butterflies in the stomach, etc.

Multiple ideas were invoked in order to explain the phenomenon of belief in relation to empathy, to affective and behavioral responses, either in a real, true context or in an imagined one. One of the driving conditions of this phenomenon is the existence of desire in relation to a specific evocation. In this sense, in the article *Cognitive theory of pretence*<sup>47</sup> Nichols and Stich defend the theory according to which our brain stores the information received by imagination and by beliefs in different mental boxes that have sets of characteristic and clear rules. They regulate the relation between behavior

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43. R.T. Allen, "The reality of Responses to fiction". *British Journal of Aesthetics* 26 (1/1986), 64-68.

44. *Ibid.*, 6.

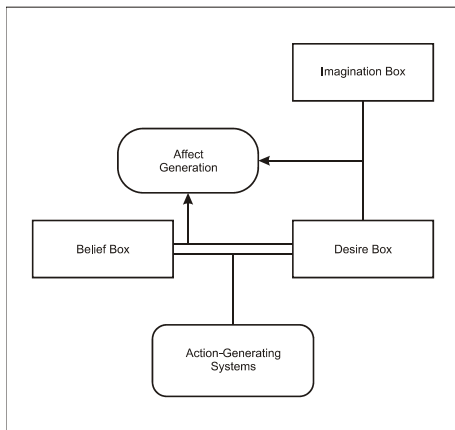
45. Miklós Bács, *Propeedeutica limbajului teatral nonverbal în arta actorului* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujană, 2012), 48.

46. *Ibid.*

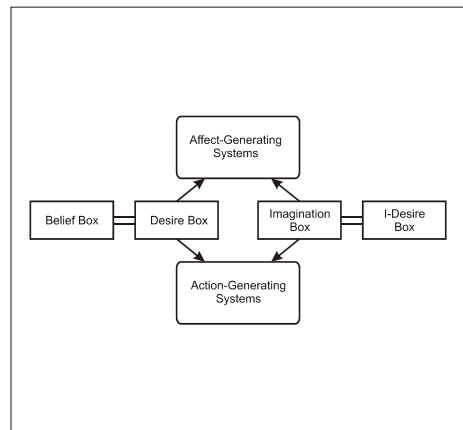
47. Stephen Stich, and Shaun Nicolas, "A cognitive theory of pretence," *Cognition* 74 (2000): 115-147.

and mental states. We have the “imagination box”, wherein there is a “possible world”, and a “belief box”, wherein there is a “world of convictions”<sup>48</sup>. No matter the background characteristic (real or created, simulated), the emotional response of those involved is caused first of all by the desire they have to behave in a manner similar to the “model’s, character’s or object’s behavior in a possible world, and of belie, as compared to this assumption”<sup>49</sup>. Subsequently, desire is a precondition of belief.

Conversely, in his article *Wanting Things You Don’t Want: The case for an Imaginative Analogue of Desire*<sup>50</sup> Andy Egan claims that, in a simulated context, desire and imagination are those that generate affective responses, rather than belief, because the subject is moved (affected) by what he imagines rather than by what he believes. This can be best seen in children. They imagine situations, roles, without truly believing in what they imagine. In the simulated act, they are guided by the action of imagination, by “what if” rather than the “make-believe”. The role of imagination and desire in the production of affective responses to imagined things is similar to the role of desire and belief in the generation of affective responses to believed things. But there is a major difference between believing in an event, as real, and imagining it. While in the former case the object is real, true and non-imagined, in the latter, the experience is imagined, but not believed to be real.



**Fig. 1:** Diagram - S. Nicolas, S. Stich<sup>51</sup>



**Fig. 2:** Diagram - Andy Egan<sup>52</sup>

48. Ibid., 122.

49. Ibid., 127.

50. Tyler, Doggett and Andy, Egan. “Wanting Things You Don’t Want: The case for an Imaginative Analogue of Desire,” *Philosophers’ Imprint*, Vol.7, (9/2007).

51. Ibid., 4.

52. Ibid.

*The theory of thinking*<sup>53</sup> supports the hypothesis according to which the emotional response to a simulated situation does not involve ineludibly the conviction or belief in the actual existence of this evocation, instead it involves the necessity of an imaginative proposal, of a mental representation and its maintenance. The representatives of this theory - Peter Lamarque<sup>54</sup>, Noel Carroll<sup>55</sup>, Murray Smith<sup>56</sup>- dismiss the necessity of real belief, when it comes to the emotional response to a simulated situation, by stating that, for an emotional response, one needs evaluative conviction on the related events.

Robert Cohen in *Acting Power*<sup>57</sup> supports the power of the actor's imagination to create and undertake an *what is* fictional context that will lead to a chain reaction of *as if* and *as though*, turning unexpectedly an acting context in a real one.

Under the principle of cognitive dissonance, he says, a relevant principle in the analysis of the actor's art, "we come to believe in our actions, irrespective of why we began them! Thus, cognitive dissonance may be defined as the power to live one's own lie the mechanism by which actors come to believe in their roles"<sup>58</sup>. Actual scientific proof in this sense was offered by professor Philip Zimbardo of Stanford University who performed the following experience: he built the world of a penitentiary in the Stanford basements and split the participants in two sides, prisoners and guards. Two days later the experience was halted because the subject who played the guards would punish, assault and even torture those in the roles of prisoners. The latter, in an advanced state of mental exhaustion, would take revenge on those identified as guilty or scape goats, "which led to severe psychosomatic disorders and anxiety syndromes."<sup>59</sup> The conclusion in relation to this experience is that illusion mixed inexplicably with reality, the created game with all the elements of actual reality with setting, costumes, actors and audience could no longer

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53. Steven Schneider, "The Paradox of fiction," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN, 2161-0002, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fict-par/>

54. Peter Lamarque, "How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 21 (4/1981): 291-304.

55. Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror; or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

56. Murray Smith, "Film Spectatorship and the Institution of Fiction," *Journal of aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (2/1995):113-127.

57. Robert, Cohen. *Puterea interpretării scenice. Introducere în Arta Actorului* trans. Anca Măniuțiu and Eugen Whol (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2007).

58. Ibid.,22.

59. Ibid., 22.



be distinguished from the actual context. Thus, Zimbardo established a context for acting, wherein the interaction between a psychological reality and a physiological one was authentic and intense. Cohen says that the presence of a context around an action will split experiences, feelings and the degree of focus on the related action, but it will also intensify them. The same thing applies to the acting context. A well-defined, structured and possible context will come to include actual circumstances in which the reality of every moment will be, both for the actor and for the involved audience, a vivid and overwhelming reality.

### **Imagination: Trigger of fictional truths**

Therefore, imagination creates a context that favors the phenomenon of belief. While in a real context, belief and desire are the basic mechanisms in the generation of affective responses, on stage imagination and desire are the instruments that support directly their appearance. The belief in the assumption appears, as seen, because of the context created by imagination and by the subject's desire of behaving similarly to the manner in which the model, the character or the object behaves in a possible world. The detailed creation of the physical context will lead to an inner context that will encourage the triggering of fictional truths, followed by physiological and behavioral reactions.

Once the context is created, and by applying his or her intuition and inner stimuli (memory, representation, imagination, affectivity) on the one hand, and creative imagination and external stimuli, physical actions, objects, setting, costumes, make-up, decor, costume, the actor will act on his or her own mental system and, thus, on his or her own perception. Through the constant configuration and rearrangement of the fictional, physical and inner world, the reality of the performance will tend to become real, authentic, which will involve the belief in the simulated act; this process will generate, eventually, the fictional truths mentioned by Walton.

The subject's belief in the simulated act will prompt the actor's behavior and response to the performing arts reality in a spontaneous *as if/as though* manner, with the help of that affective contagion and affective coalescence with the simulated model, able to generate fictional truths. By the creation, understanding and setting of the physical context in a relatively

known territory by intuitive spontaneity, analysis and conscious development, reproductive and creative imagination and by the affective knowledge of the psychological backdrop of the model's inner objectives, the performance will be construed as real by the subject. Thus, the created fictional truths will prompt physiological responses followed by affective states and emotions. Imagination does more than participate in the shaping and transformation of affective states; it is a trigger and a driver. While, by imagination, a person may simulate his or her own affective existence, in the performing arts context the actor simulates another possible world and also experiences it *as if* it were real.

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