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DEVISING METHODOLOGY FOR APPROACHING THE DIRECTION OF STUDENT PRODUCTIONS

Anastazie TOROS

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5945-7088>

*University in the United Kingdom,
Doctoral Researcher at Loughborough,
3 Lesney Avenue, The Broadcast Centre, Here East,
Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London, E20 3BS
email.: A.Toros@lboro.ac.uk*

One of the main trends in the theater industry of the 19 th century was the focus on stories about men. Women faced restrictions regarding the types of roles they could perform on stage. However, with the emergence of “new drama”, social and political issues were incorporated into some plays, allowing for a more comprehensive portrayal of women and their place in society.

Among the relevant aspects of contemporary theater is the process of adapting 19 th and 20 th-century dramaturgy. One of the leading methods in this direction is devised theatre.

The purpose of the article is to demonstrate how this methodology can be used in play production. It has been established that devised theatre technique includes a series of methodological exercises that prepare actors for collaborative work during rehearsals. These include warm-up games, body exercises, and acting techniques.

The research also analyzed the rehearsal process of the play “The Law” (based on the play by Volodymyr Vynnychenko) with master’s students of the acting course at the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, during which the devised theatre method was utilized. Students wrote internal monologues that were integrated into the play’s text, contributing to the creation of its final script. They also directed the physicality characteristic of the characters’ behavior. Various objects with symbolic undertones were also used during rehearsals. All of this indicates the collaborative effort of the theatrical team in developing the final product, highlighting the use of devised theatre methodology.

Keywords: devised theatre methodology, warm-up games, student productions, adaptation of dramaturgy, role of female on stage.

The problem formulation. The choice of staged material is a challenging task in itself. The directors must consider the context in which it is set and the main message that will be delivered to the audience. With this in mind, directors also have to think about

showcasing the exceptional acting qualities of their students which have been gained throughout the course of BA or MA studies. Furthermore, directors need to concentrate on their own artistic approach to the material and what valuable lessons students can learn from this experience. The choice of material must align with the curriculum for each year of the actor study program, which often requires staging dramas from a certain period, which poses a limitation on freedom of the devising performances. Directors might want to adapt certain things that don't work for them in the play or adapt it with current problematics.

The research analysis. This article will illustrate how to use the devised theatre methodology in order to adapt the play for student production on the example of the rehearsal process with MA Actor-students from Ivan Franko National University of Lviv for the performance "The Law", based on the play by Volodymyr Vynnychenko.

The purpose of this research is to demonstrate the significance of creating an ensemble work in student productions. In dramaturgy, there are typically only a few central roles, and directors have to choose the leading roles without overlooking the rest of the group. Hence, this research illustrates the application of devising methods for identifying equal roles for all members within the ensemble.

The context. The importance of building an ensemble. Firstly, let us understand that devised theatre is "an alternative to the literary theatre tradition, which is the conventionally accepted form of theatre dominated by the often patriarchal, hierarchical relationship of playwright and director" [10, p. 5]. It is also important to acknowledge that "devising" or "devised" work may look diverse with different practitioners or theatre companies. Scott Graham and Steven Hogget, co-founders of Frantic Assembly, gave a detailed description of their devising processes [5]. The process of devising enables participants to make sense of themselves within their own cultural and social context, investigating, integrating, and transforming their personal experiences, dreams, research, improvisation, and experimentation. Devising is about inventing, adapting, and creating what you do as a group [10, p. 3].

Directors often build a set of techniques which they use when working on the roles with actors, while staging the production. Those techniques are unique to the individual director and are based on years of practising their profession. Following practical exercises serve as the foundation of the following methodology (based on the last ten years of directing, performing and teaching).

During the first days of rehearsals it is vital to work on warm-up games, Lecoq's seven levels of body tension and chosen acting exercises.

Warm-up games are not just some games, they are aimed to form the foundation of understanding within the group. One may argue that warm up games are for children, but for them they work for their need to move around, as children have a lot of energy. For adults, the same set of games aims to evoke playfulness and a willingness to explore. Concentration, trust and – ensemble building games when used with actors help them to connect with each other [2, p. 47]. Those same trust-building games help to move physical and emotional barriers within the group; with their help, the limitations on self-expression can be avoided.

One may begin with the ball games, in which a "real" element of communication (the ball) is passed from one person to another. Students learn to pay attention and respond appropriately. The ball does exactly (and only) what it is asked to do by its thrower. "If we pay attention to it, we can see exactly what we asked it to do, we react to a ball coming

towards us, we notice how we respond to something being asked of us. It's that simple. The reality of the ball shows us the reality of our actions" [2, p. 330]. With the basics and knowledge of ball games, directors can then apply this knowledge on props moving and scene transitions: they can stage choreographed sequences of bringing in chairs, tables, beds or any other object that is needed on stage. Instead of aiming for invisibility of transition somewhere in the background – the key for a successful transition is in the joy of building and rehearsing a playful one: "The Lecoq-trained ensemble ideally learns to play not only with each other but with material, the space, the text, any costumes or props, the audience and everything that surrounds them" [2, p. 40].

With the basics of Lecoq methodology, we can especially learn how to create comic moments that are always built in contradiction. For Lecoq, the key to a successful clown, for example, is in "the discovery of how personal weakness can be transformed into dramatic strength" [3, p. 157]¹.

Then a certain methodology of an acting technique (e. g. Sanford Meisner's technique in acting that places a strong emphasis on active listening and emotional honesty [8]; M. Chekhov's "psycho-physical approach", in which transformation, working with impulse, imagination, inner and outer gesture are the essence of his method [12]; K. Stanislavski's method of emotional memory and the exploration of the character's objectives, obstacles, and tactics [9]; J. Grotowski's method of focus and awareness, that helps participants to break free from mental blocks that keep them from reaching the full potential of their performing ability [15] or T. Kantor's concept of "bio-object" and "room of imagination" [21]) can be applied on students in order to connect and fix the body and the mind together. This embodied knowledge of building a dramatic character with actor-students could be applied on moving them out of their comfort zone in order to be more present on stage. If an actor is way too comfortable in their zone, they become invisible for the audience, as it loses interest in watching them.

Once played with the group on those three methodological pillars – warm up games, body exercise and acting techniques – the foundation of an ensemble is set, and the group is ready to begin rehearsing or devising. Britton in short summarises the qualities of an ensemble: "«Ensemble» is not a thing, but a quality of behaviour. A group is not «an ensemble», but can learn to be «ensemble». Every ensemble is different. The intention of the training is to encourage performers to be truly individual while also putting themselves at the service of others. It is in the meeting of these two elements – self and others – that ensemble emerges" [2, p. 49].

With those tasks completed, directors have then a freedom of choice whether to devise a performance without a pre-existed text or (in our case) to adapt an existing play to a script that will reflect the problematics of current society, while also using the embodied knowledge of the above system.

The work on "The Law", based on the play by Volodymyr Vynnychenko (1880–1951) [18; 19].

Most plays written in the 19th or 20th century follow a male perspective: women are rarely subjects of drama on their own, but rather in their relations with men. Even though certain pioneering plays such as 'The Law' began to address social and political issues, allowing female characters to engage with more complex themes, it was still male-centred narrative [13].

¹ As an alternative to Lecoq can be used Laban Movement Theory.

A brief description of the play: Inna is a cabaret artist, often undermined by her family. She cannot have children and her loss of any hope for motherhood forces her to ask her husband, professor Panas Mustashenko, to find a mistress Liuda, get her pregnant and then take his child from Liuda and raise the child with her instead. Through the play, we learn that the reason why Inna can not have children is, in fact, her husband's fault, who had previously insisted on her undergoing an abortion. Inna's aunt, Maria Andriivna, is the fourth character of the play who opens up a question of two generations living under one roof, which consequently leads to unexpected consequences. Yurii Kruhlyk is a friend of Mustashenko and is somewhat in love with Inna.

For this production, with a group of four students – three female and one male actors – we decided to highlight the role of females within the current society. We reached a decision to cut off the scenes with Kruhlyk, as we only had one male actor. We also came up with a solution, that each of the female students will carry a certain quality of behaviour on stage: Inna is sexy, flirtatious, manipulative, but vulnerable; Liuda is naive, somewhat ambitious, responsible, but also has strong qualities of a mother; and as for Inna's aunt Maria Andriivna we searched for the solution for a longer time, until we found that she embodies "The Law", she has a quality of something beyond and above humans, she carries the truth by which characters must obey². Hence, by employing devising methods in the process of working on a play, we established equal roles for all four members of the ensemble. This was achieved without diminishing the significance of any character and without altering the rhythm of the original play.

Each of the students, during the devising process of rehearsals, has written an inner monologue about their role in "The Law", and by interweaving those monologues into the text we created a final script, which addressed the audience in a new way. For example, an actress who played Liuda wrote in her monologue a line about age: "I am 34, who would want to marry me, I was lucky that he looked my way". Later, one of the members of the audience gave us feedback about this particular fact, that this play for her was summarised in just this one line, as she saw herself in Liuda's position.

We also created a repetition of certain lines followed by a certain movement in order to exaggerate the problem and deliver it to the audience in an unusual manner. Each of the actors has rehearsed one particular movement that they repeated a couple of times on stage with their lines, that formed in the audience an already-known pattern of physical behaviour – a reflection of inner thoughts. This was rehearsed using Lecoq's methodology [6], when students learned to play with their movement around the stage.

The props and objects also played a vital role. One of the central ones was milk. We found this image throughout the devising process prior to staging the performance. The bottle of milk meant generational impersonation – from a mother to a child, from a husband to a woman, from an aristocracy to a servant. At some point, the actress, who played The Law, poured the milk and then Liuda drank it. In some ways it can be seen as a sin, because Liuda fell for a married man and now is being punished.

² First, we learned this method in 2014 during work on "Miss Julie" at DAMU (The Academy of Performing Arts in Prague), our directors Karel Vořárek and Ales Bergman came up with a solution to split Julie's nature into three: one student has performed clever and aristocratic Julie (Head), the other naive in love with Jean (Heart) and the third performed flirtatious and sinful Julie (Physical). This enabled us to use all the female actors within our group and devise a play in a new manner.

In our consequent production of "The Law" we were also inspired by "Miss Julie" a contemporary adaptation by Polly Stenham starring Vanessa Kirby titled "Julie", that opened at the Royal National Theatre in London in 2018.

In rehearsing “The Law” we also based our finding on resemblances with Ibsen’s Nora Helmer in “A Doll’s House” (1879), when Nora, for example, only sees her value in performing “tricks” for her husband and serves only as “a doll” that he can play with. Inna sees herself as a not-woman by not being able to fulfil her role of a mother. Nora, instead, walks away from her family and children, forever leaving an imprint in world dramaturgy, that a woman can do that, she has this right, identity does not have a gender. Inna walks away from her husband and leaves him with his new family. We ended the performance with a party, during which all the characters tried to give the baby to one or another and in the end destroyed the baby, leaving the stage in a mess and with an open question for the audience.

Conclusion. It is vital to contextualise and adapt earlier texts with a modern touch of devising methodology. This provides students with a unique set of skills in approaching their roles, skills that they will apply later in their careers. Those texts address the audience on an absolutely different level: they evolve questions, educate, provoke and leave a message to think about afterwards. In a certain way, it is a modern continuation of the revolutionary work of above – mentioned playwrights of the 19th century: who tried to see the world around them through the current lens of the particular cultural and political moment: they left an imprint on the identities of their protagonists that will always be drawn from, as they challenged the time they lived in and reshaped it in order to tell their stories for future generations. This task now falls on us, modern theatre makers, to carry on the message in a new way.

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РОЗРОБКА ПЕДАГОГІЧНО-РЕЖИСЕРСЬКОЇ МЕТОДОЛОГІЇ ПІД ЧАС РОБОТИ НАД СТУДЕНТСЬКИМИ ВИСТАВАМИ

Анастасія ТОРОС

*Університет у Великій Британії,
Докторант у Лафборо,
Лезні Евеню, 3, Бродкаст Центр, Тут Ест,
Олімпійський парк королеви Єлизавети, Лондон, E20 3BS
email: A.Toros@lboro.ac.uk*

Однією з основних тенденцій театральної індустрії XIX ст. була орієнтованість на історії про чоловіків. Жінки стикалися з обмеженнями щодо типів ролей, які вони могли виконувати на сцені. Проте, завдяки “новій драмі” у багатьох п’єсах з’явилась соціально-політична проблематика, яка давала змогу поглянути на жіночі персонажі через оптику комплексного зображення жінки та її місця в суспільстві.

Серед актуальних аспектів сучасного театру є процес адаптації драматургії XIX та XX ст. Одним із основних методів у цьому напрямі є *devised theatre*³.

Мета статті полягає в тому, щоб показати, як можна використовувати цю методологію під час постанови п’єс. З’ясовано, що техніка *devised theatre* містить чимало методологічних вправ, які готують акторів докомандної роботи під час репетиції. Серед них: *warm up games* (ігри для розминки), *body exercise* (фізичні вправи) та *acting techniques* (акторські техніки).

Проаналізовано репетиційний процес вистави “Закон” (за мотивами п’єси Володимира Винниченка) зі студентами-магістрами акторського курсу Львівського національного університету імені Івана Франка, під час якого, власне, використано метод *devised theatre*. Студенти написали внутрішні монологи, які введено у текст п’єси і за допомогою яких створено її кінцевий сценарій; зрежисували пластику, характерну для поведінки персонажів. Під час репетиції також використано різні предмети, які мали певний символічний підтекст. Усе це свідчить про спільну роботу театральної команди

³ *Devised theatre* – метод створення театру, в якому розробляють сценарій або партитуру в процесі спільної роботи творчого ансамблю.

над виробленням кінцевого продукту, що свідчить про використання методики *devised theatre*.

Ключові слова: “методологія творення театру”, тренаж, студентська постава, адаптація драматургії, роль жінки на сцені.

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