

# The Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art Project (1900) and Its Convergences with the Stanislavski System

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English translation, Neil CHARLTON

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## Abstract

The present article relates a little known dramatic art school project, linked to the Darmstadt Artists' Colony, designed by Joseph Maria Olbrich and Hermann Bahr in 1900, to Stanislavski's System. The main objective is to identify the convergences and the foundations and methodologies they shared. To this end, I have drawn on G. Bott's 1974 publication of Ida Grünwald's typewritten transcription of the original document handwritten by Olbrich and Bahr that they gave to the Grand Duke. Stanislavski's complete bibliography published by Quetzal directly translated from Russian has also been essential. Similarly, I have used other primary sources on both cases, as well as some previous studies about them. The article shows that, despite the significant aesthetic differences, there were notable similarities in the pedagogies proposed in both projects, and concludes that, perhaps, the fact that the Darmstadt project never materialised was because it was ahead of its time.

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**Keywords:** Darmstadt, School of Dramatic Art, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Hermann Bahr, Stanislavski

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## The Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art Project (1900) and Its Convergences with the Stanislavski System

In early 20th century England, but also in Germany, a trend began from which the practice of design and the visual arts converged with the theatrical, based on dramaturgy and stage practice, but also on pedagogy. This was the case of schools conceived under the precepts of the Arts and Crafts movement, devised by Ruskin and Morris, such as the Guild and School of Handicraft, which was founded in 1888 by Charles Ashbee, or the Bauhaus that Walter Gropius conceived in Germany in 1919. Less well known, but undoubtedly a precursor to what would later happen in the Weimar, was the intermediate experience of the Darmstadt Artists' Colony, which was founded between 1898 and 1899 and supported by the last Grand Duke of Hesse, Ernst Ludwig.<sup>1</sup> The experiment took place in a cross-sectional art environment where there were not only notable stage initiatives, but also one of the first contemporary educational projects to study dramatic art.

Several German artists, including Georg Fuchs,<sup>2</sup> shared the desire of publisher Alexander Koch,<sup>3</sup> a staunch defender of the Arts and Crafts movement in Germany, to develop a new contemporary style through the applied arts that would resist historicism in architecture and design. From the links forged between them, in 1898, under the umbrella of Fuchs ideas, a memorandum emerged that proposed to Ernst Ludwig the creation of an artists' colony in Darmstadt that would also function as a design school and allow his duchy to take the artistic-cultural lead over the rest of the German states.

1. Ernst Ludwig of Hesse-Darmstadt, Grand Duke of Hesse and by Rhine (1868-1937), the last Grand Duke of Hesse, from 1892 until the November Revolution of 1918, which led to the abolition of the Duchy.

2. Georg Fuchs (1868, 1949), German theorist, playwright and theatre director, whose ideas about theatre are collected in *Die Revolution des Theaters*, explored a new form of revolutionary and anti-naturalistic theatre that he began to experiment with in a practical way during his years working with Peter Behrens (1899-1905) in the Darmstadt Artists' Colony. After leaving the Colony, in 1908 Fuchs founded the Künstlertheater (Artists' Theatre) in Munich, designed by the architect Max Littmann (1862-1931). His main aim was to create a theatre in which practical artists and sculptors could be involved in theatrical experimentation with classical works. The most important elements of this progressive style were: rejection of the naturalistic, restoration of fluidity in acting (less than three minutes for scene changes); and imaginative use of "relief" on stage, which also had to be divided into three sections.

3. Alexander Koch (1860-1939), German publisher of several magazines that functioned as local catalysts for the establishment of an artists' colony, by highlighting in his writings the significance of the cultural and economic movements derived from the applied arts and their involvement in the modernisation of Germany.

It was then, between 1898 and 1899, when Ernst Ludwig brought together in Mathildenhöhe the seven main artists related to the Jugendstil of the time, including the Viennese architect Joseph Maria Olbrich (1867-1908) and the architect and, later, AEG industrial designer, Peter Behrens (1868-1940).

Although Behrens was originally going to take on the Mathildenhöhe theatre, once the rivalry between him and Olbrich emerged, this decision was changed and his main contribution to theatre in Darmstadt was limited to the Zarathustrian parable that he introduced in 1901, under the title *Das Zeichen* (The Sign), in the context of the exhibition “Ein Dokument deutscher Kunst”, at the opening of the colony.

In the end it was Olbrich and fellow Austrian Hermann Bahr,<sup>4</sup> who would take the reins of all things theatre in the field of Darmstadt. Olbrich autonomously and independently designed the Spielhaus or “temporary theatre building” (Lorente, 2014: 443)<sup>5</sup> of Mathildenhöhe and proposed that it be opened with a series of performances, under the title *Darmstadt Spiele 1901*, which would also have to last for the three months of the Colony exhibition (Boehe, 1977: 151).

In support of the proper development of Mathildenhöhe, Olbrich and Bahr suggested the establishment of a Grossherzoglichen Instituts für schöne Künste (Grand Ducal Institute of Fine Arts) to be tasked with seeking, educating and developing all that is beautiful, good and noble<sup>6</sup> and promoting their ideas and artistic conceptions. The Institute would include a Darmstädter Schule für Schauspielkunst (Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art), with the greatest German figures and would have a special inclination for music.<sup>7</sup> Although the School of Dramatic Art never materialised, its description shows that this little-known project was conceived as an autonomous entity and that it anticipated certain ideas that, six years later, Konstantin Stanislavski himself would defend as part of his system of training actors (Benedetti, 1989: 149-170).

In 1900, Olbrich and Bahr submitted a detailed programme to the Grand Duke for a School to be opened in September 1900, whose first task would be to prepare the 1901 shows to perform them during the Colony Exhibition. This intention denotes the first function of theatre in Darmstadt, which would be to contribute an ephemeral dimension of leisure, entertainment and dissemination of ideas to an exhibition doomed, a priori, to architecture, urban planning and the visual arts.

The original manuscript that Olbrich and Bahr gave to the Grand Duke bore the title: “Organisationsentwurf der Darmstädter Schule für

4. Hermann Bahr (1863-1934), Austrian critic, playwright and director. Between 1906 and 1907 he worked as a director with Max Reinhardt at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin and from 1918 at the Burgtheater in Vienna.

5. Lorente points out that, through the sketches and old photos, the temporary premises designed by Olbrich can be seen. In his article he refers to: the entrance of the inaugural exhibition of 1901; the *Spielhaus*; the bandstand, where the New Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra performed and which also had a restaurant pavilion; and the Haus der Flächenkunst, an exhibition pavilion for the temporary exhibition of paintings, sculptures and decorative arts. According to Lorente: “All these ephemeral architectures designed by Olbrich were eliminated after the closure of that first contest entitled ‘Ein Dokument deutscher Kunst’ in October.”

6. OLBRICH, J. M. and BAHR, H., presumably in summer 1900, Österreichisches Theatermuseum Wien; AM 21/680 Ba, from *Durch 2010m*, p. 146 (Vinzenz, 2018: 90).

7. OLBRICH, J. M. and BAHR, H., no date, Hermann Bahr legacy, Vienna, A21 680 BaM (Boehe, 1977: 151, ed. 1977).

Schauspielkunst” (Organisational Design of the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art)<sup>8</sup> and detailed the creation of a complex for the performing arts. The overall objective of the project was to make Darmstadt a European benchmark, for which it was considered necessary to build a theatre (Bahr, 1900: 117, ed. 1974). The festivals held there, which would be annual, would be the first steps in a great theatre reform at national level that would also be extended to music.<sup>9</sup> This approach shows that the desire to connect different artistic disciplines, such as music, theatre, fine arts or architecture, was another of the fundamental purposes of the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art’s project.

The training of actors was not in itself a novelty in Central Europe. A study by Tim Zumhof locates the first references to professional training in dramatic art in present-day Germany in around 1690.<sup>10</sup> According to Fritz Assmann, specifically, three attempts to promote the “höheren Ausbildung der Schauspieler” (higher education of actors) can be established: from the beginning of the 17th century to the 18th century, before 1850 and, persistently, from 1900 (Assmann, 1921: 5-8). Dramatic art had inherited from the times of Plato and Aristotle the debate about the moral value of theatre, which differed from other arts in that the object and artistic subject formed an indivisible bodily unit. Its emancipation from rhetoric occurred in the course of the 18th century, when it was decided that the art of acting was based on the physical presence of producers and receivers. The manuscript created by Olbrich and Bahr heralded, along with other attempts, the third stage of the German story of the training of actors; that is, one that incorporated the arguments of contemporaneity. But it should not be forgotten that most of the artists in Darmstadt came from the applied arts and architecture. Thus, the true origin of the theatrical reform to which they aspired, as Fuchs had recommended, had to come from the conception of a new type of performing space that would serve to celebrate in community and stimulate artistic creation: Man, wird also nicht ohne Weiteres gerade eine Schaubühne neuer Art “gründen”, sondern diese ergibt sich von selbst aus dem Verlangen, die gemeinsame Feier zu krönen durch die erhabene Vereinigung und Steigerung alles Schöpferischen in den Künsten (Fuchs, 1900: 208).<sup>11</sup>

According to the document signed by Bahr, during the first six months, the students of the School of Dramatic Art would stage pieces by Georg

8. The transcription of the manuscript to typewritten text was done by Ida Grünwald, on a Vienna IX, in Clusiusgasse 10 and a total of 34 A4 pages. The document was presented by the wife of the founding member of the Christiansen Art Gallery, in 1964, to Gerhard Bott. Based on Bahr’s original text, Bott published: *Organisationsentwurf der Darmstädter Schule für Schauspielkunst* (Bott and Herzog, 1974: 109-117).

9. During the entire period of the exhibition, in addition to theatrical performances, there were numerous concerts (Anon, 1901: 993).

10. For more information about the training of actors from 1690 to 1830, see: Zumhof, 2018; Lackner offers a concise overview of the teaching of acting from 1900, see: Lackner, 1985.

11. (It is not, therefore, that a new type of scenario was being “founded”, but rather that it arises, by itself, out of the desire to crown the joint celebration with the sublime unification and exaltation of all that is creative in the arts.)

Fuchs, Hofmannsthal,<sup>12</sup> Maeterlinck<sup>13</sup> and Hans Sachs<sup>14</sup> — in a modernised version. The various plays had to serve a dual purpose: as a connection with the panorama of their time and also as catalysts for an individual way of acting, which would make naturalness and poetry converge, and would have the appropriate corporeal and gestural control for the work on *Reliefbühne*<sup>15</sup> (relief stage) (Bahr, 1900: 109-117, ed. 1974).

Olbrich and Bahr took Fuchs' ideas on board and designed a concise example of direction so that the Grand Duke could get an idea of what the *mise en scène* of one of the School's first productions would look like: *Der Kaiser und die Hexe* (The Emperor and the Witch) by Hofmannsthal. In their description of the project, they referred to the use of *Reliefbühne* and to the fact that the actors had to make certain appearances from the auditorium. From the aesthetic point of view, the dominant element was to be colour, and music would be used as a dramaturgical agent. Aware of the innovative nature of their proposals, through the manuscript, Olbrich and Bahr explicitly stated their intention to provoke a decisive shift in the entire theatrical system that, having begun in the Colony, would honour the name of Hesse.<sup>16</sup> By outlining a specific *mise en scène*, at the same time, the school-workshop model for the teaching of dramatic art was being transposed; that is, after a foundation of technical preparation, the actors were trained directly by acting. For this, in addition to the specialised teachers running the classes, the rehearsals were expected to have the participation of technicians, musicians, painters, playwrights and professional actors of the stature of Josef Kainz (Bahr, 1900: 114, ed. 1974). This involved taking advantage of the group dimension of theatre to connect experts in various disciplines. In fact, the relationship was intended to be two-way and for active playwrights like Hofmannsthal to work directly by creating and adapting their plays, depending on the abilities and skills of the Darmstadt students.

As mentioned, both the distribution of technical subjects, as well as many of the theoretical precepts and even some practical exercises proposed in the School of Dramatic Art project, maintained close similarities with the ideas that Konstantin Stanislavski would share a little later when transcribing his System. As with Fuchs, who preceded Craig and Appia, in 1900 Olbrich and Bahr anticipated many of the proposals that Stanislavski shaped between 1905 and 1914. However, we must emphasise that, in the case of the Colony, it

12. Hugo Laurenz August Hofmann von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929), Austrian writer who wrote novels as well as poetry and theatre.

13. Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949), writer of essays and plays, of Belgian origin, often included in the Symbolist movement, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1911.

14. Hans Sachs (1494-1576), German writer of songs, tragedies, comedies, fables and carnival plays.

15. *Reliefbühne* is a stage form conceived by Georg Fuchs — although Goethe and Semper had already referred to it — contrary to illusionist theatre and carried out efficiently in the Münchener Künstlertheater (Munich Art Theatre), in which there is no room for the orchestra and the audience sits directly in front of the actor. The stage is also characterised by having a minimum depth in relation to its width, as described by Georg Fuchs in 1905. Fuchs did not want a peep-box, nor was he interested in a panorama, but a spatial formation as conducive as possible to the movement of human bodies, in which these could be combined in a rhythmic unit and, at the same time, favour the movement of sound waves towards the audience. It was not a kind of perspective, or deep painting, but the creation of a stage in which flat relief was the most important (Fuchs, 1905: 47) and (Turk, 1992: 301).

16. These parallelisms are presumably due to the preliminary conversations between Behrens, Olbrich and Bahr in Vienna in 1900.

was a theoretical project that was never carried out. In any case, and despite the aesthetic differences, the similarity between the two proposals corroborates the evidence of the genuine interest in valuing to the acting profession within the Colony and, consequently, of the importance they attached to theatre within it.

The desire not only to stress the professionalization of the actor but also to make acting more accessible to the less privileged classes was already evident from the detailed description of the school admission process, run under the auspices of the Darmstädter Künstler-Kolonie. Despite the illustrious ancestry of the institution, from the outset students would be divided into two groups: those who had to pay a monthly fee of 300 marks for housing, food and education, and scholarship holders who would be exempt from their contribution and could even receive a small stipend to support their training. Both entry and assignment to one class or another would be subject to an examination evaluated by a committee — made up of professionals in the arts and theatre — which would ensure that candidates, who previously had to submit their CV and a photograph, possessed the nature and skills necessary for the productions. Bahr had no qualms about admitting that, in addition to accepting uneducated people, photographs identifying ugly or stunted human specimens would be immediately removed and that, in contrast, he would favour not conventional beauties but those who showed that they have something in their face or body posture that revealed a spiritual gift, be it a power or a special grace (Bahr, 1900: 112, ed. 1974). With statements like this, his presumed modernity betrayed still active legacies of romanticism. Once the aesthetic obstacle had been overcome, only those students who showed certain artistic abilities would be retained and the rest, especially those who showed the slightest inclination towards any form of “schönen Deklamiren” (imposed declamation), would be sent home. Despite the questionable objectivity of some of the selection criteria, the fact of having a group of experts and demanding certain basic talents already implied the tendency to dignify dramatic art that distinguished the Darmstadt case from many of its contemporaries. Somehow, there was an awareness that, despite the fact that the reform arose from the visual, the players needed to be adequately trained in order to contribute to the full and proper realisation of the total work of art. However, in Darmstadt, the School, rather than an end, was a means to enable the instrument of acting to contribute maximum qualities to the multidisciplinary reform of theatre.

Similar to Germany, entry into Russian drama schools required an examination before a panel composed of artists and members “who were not artists” (Stanislavski, 1924: 72, trans. 1993). It was precisely the lack of a foundation and a system in the teaching of Russian drama that led Stanislavski to create his own. The idea was to develop a methodology that did not seek to replicate the talent of one teacher or another but to extract the particularities of each student with a technique that would stimulate their own “creative state” (Stanislavski, 1924: 314, trans. 1993). Stanislavski’s writings chronicled the result of this endeavour, to which he dedicated much of his life. However, although his research was aimed at giving practical advice for

the artists who were starting out or who wanted to polish their talent, in no case did he detail the internal functioning of the different studios that, under his protection and consecutively, were created in different Russian cities. In this respect, despite its initial purpose, the System ended up being intimately linked to the person of Stanislavski and, therefore, not so much to an institution as was intended to happen in Darmstadt.

According to the organisational chart of the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art, the head teacher would be in charge of teaching all subjects, except those of a technical nature. He would also participate in all communal activities and events to have an in-depth understanding of the inner life and potential scope of each student, and thus be able to help them as efficiently as possible. Two representatives of the Colony would supervise the activities of the School of Dramatic Art, record their observations and criticisms, and present a report to the head every Saturday. The intention was for the curriculum to be continuous and active according to the results that were obtained. In fact, as part of the promotion of the School, Olbrich and Bahr proposed that certain excerpts of the letters and reports written should be published, under the title *Mitteilungen des Darmstädter Kreises* (Notices of the Darmstadt Circle) (Bahr, 1900: 116, ed. 1974). The publications, in addition to serving as a link with a social circle of people sympathetic to their approaches, would function as a tool for promoting German intellectual life accessible to potential applicants from the rest of Europe. This evolutionist approach conditioned by self-criticism was undoubtedly a symptom of modernity.

In the case of Stanislavski, although the different studios created under him were not always conceived as schools for beginners but as laboratories for experimentation with more or less gifted artists, they were supported by important figures of the theatre. Such was the case of Nemirovich-Danchenko, Vajtangov, S. Vaysotzkaia – Stanislavskaia – or Mamontov who, in the organisational chart of the Studio in Povarskaya Street, appeared as a consultant (Haldey, 2010: 200). Designers Nikolai Sapunov, Sergei Sudeikin and Nikolai Ulyanov, all members of the Blue Rose, also accompanied Meyerhold on the avant-garde project that Stanislavski endorsed, but was ultimately impeded by the 1905 revolution. In fact, it was not until 1912 that the First Studio was opened. But what is interesting is that while Stanislavski did refer to these studios in his writings, he did not detail their institutional inner workings nor did he try to make the laboratories serve as an example for other future schools. He adhered to the methodological systematisation of theory and pedagogy, assuming as the only critical reference his own artistic evolution and that of his company, the Moscow Art Theatre.

On the subjects necessary for training in acting, in *An Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Experience*, Stanislavski would point out as fundamental: dance, gymnastics, fencing, the use of the voice (singing), diction and scientific topics (Stanislavski, 1936a: 227, trans. 1980). As can be seen in the table below, except for the section referring to science-related studies, the similarities with the subjects that were planned to be implemented at the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art as of 1 September 1900 were quite notable:

**Table 1.** Summary of the classes proposed in the Darmstadt School of Art Dramatic project (1900)

TIME	TASK
7:00-8:00	Early Gymnastics and Light Outdoor Athletics.
8:00-9:00	Fencing: gentlemen half an hour of foil and half an hour sabre, ladies foil only.
9:30-10:30	Theoretical class according to Goethe's rules for actors.
10:30-11:30	Elementary vocal instruction, voice training, etc.
11:30-12:00	Gymnastics equipment.
12:00-12:30	Languages: Italian three times a week; English twice a week.
12:30-13:30	Communal lunch.
13:30-14:00	Rest.
14:00-15:00	Training in speaking and declamation.
15:00-16:00	Visual exercises.
16:00-18:00	Dance exercises.
18:00-19:00	Make-up and characterisation techniques (2 days/week) / improvisation (3 days/week).
19:00-20:00	Communal dinner.
20:00-22:00	Communal entertainment.
22:00	Retire to rooms.

Source: Prepared by the author based on Bahr, 1900: 112, ed. 1974.

Although Stanislavski would delve much more precisely into the specific content of the different subjects, even in this respect some convergences can be found. For example, Olbrich and Bahr proposed that in acting class they should combat – as had already been done since the admission exams – falsehood in gesture and posture, as well as in declamation. The project dared to anticipate that, for this purpose, simple poems by Goethe would be used, which would also serve to facilitate a type of teaching not in the form of a lecture but developed from conversations and questions that would lead the student to the lyrical core of the poem.

The struggle against declamation had already been a concern for great Russian actors such as Mikhail Shchepkin, who had been a servant before being an actor, and in 1854 described the customary manner of reciting in Europe as: loud, with almost pedantic stress on each rhythm, with cleverly controlled inflection.<sup>17</sup> Inspired by his predecessor, Stanislavski would consider as “craftspeople” and not actors those who possessed stentorian voices, well-defined diction, pathos in declamation, a solemn step, and an impressive posture (Stanislavski, 1938: 189, trans. 1986). Although Stanislavski designed his own exercises in order to foster and experience the truth on stage, he acknowledged having inherited isolated thoughts on dramatic art from Goethe (Stanislavski, 1924: 424, trans. 1993). In addition to all this, in a similar way to what was proposed in Darmstadt, the use of maieutics would be a constant in Stanislavskian pedagogy. In fact, in his texts, Stanislavski would present his theory as a product of lessons learned from his own life experiences, as well as from the questions and tests put to his students by his alter ego, Professor Tortsov. Regarding this idea, the complete working of

17. SHCHEPKIN, M. (20 February 1854), *Letter to Vasilevich* (Woodrow Myers, 1854: 109, trans. 1985).



the System was presented by Stanislavski as the diary of Kostya, a student at the Nazvanov School who recorded his teacher's lessons:

What a good lesson Tortsov gave us in the test performance, when with perfect aplomb we did everything that must not be done on the stage! It was a clever and convincing way of showing us his perspective (Stanislavski, 1936a: 164, trans. 1980).

The visual exercises included in the curriculum of the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art had to begin with simple tasks aimed at teaching how to move around a room, how to move around a large and empty hall or in a narrow and full space, how to sit in an armchair or chair, how to sit down and get up again or how to leave a room, something that Bahr described as "das Schwerste" (the most difficult). Once you learned the basics, you had to go up a level by combining easy movements with different moods: angry, sad, dismayed, etc. In short, the technical preparation had to encompass "die ganze Skala Witte der körperlichen Beredsamkeit" (the full range of physical eloquence).

Similarly, Stanislavski also advocated learning everything from scratch, something he called "artistic childhood." The purpose of his programme was to understand the logic and continuity of everyday actions, as well as their mechanical fixation, in order to be able to exercise adequate control over them (Stanislavski, 1936a: 195-196, trans. 1980):

An actor, like a small child, must learn everything from the beginning: to look, walk, speak and more. We all know how to do these things in everyday life, but unfortunately most of us do them badly, not as nature intends (Stanislavski, 1936a: 155, trad. 1980).

Later Stanislavski proposed similar exercises when he discussed radiation. Using foundations based on theosophy and yoga, his idea would be to turn ordinary activities into theatrical images that, performed mechanically or without importance, lacked intensity. For him it would be essential to find the "claw" that was not in any way external physical tension but the reflection of a great internal activity (Stanislavski, 1936a: 270-71, trans. 1980). The Olbrich and Bahr project, failing to come to fruition, did not have time to delve as deeply as Stanislavski's would. However, the similarity between the mystical dimensions of theatre seen as the "temple of art" (Stanislavski, 1907: 59, trans. 1986) and the "festive and solemn house" (Fuchs, 1900: 204) of Fuchs' followers is also clear.

For voice training, Olbrich and Bahr recommended the usual teaching methods: "nach der üblichen Methode." But, in addition, in order to extract different types of sounds from the students, in their School of Dramatic Art project it would be mandatory, beyond German, for students to practise Italian and English.

For Stanislavski, a polyglot from childhood, it was essential for an artist to know the musicality and intonations of each language and insisted that actors be able to distinguish different phonetic patterns (Stanislavski,

1936b: 102, trans. 1979). As a practical test to assess their power to emotionally influence the listener and that they possessed intonation and pause in themselves, although he did not refer specifically to the use of Italian or English, Stanislavski did propose testing with an incomprehensible language or glossolalia (Stanislavski, 1936b: 107, trans. 1979). Moreover, based on his experiences in studying the work processes of great actors of the time, such as the Italian Salvini, Stanislavski asserted that, to be a great artist, one needed “voice, voice, and more voice.” Along the same lines, Stanislavski used the quote from the German actor Ernst Possart “Mein Organ ist mein Kapital!” (my organ is my capital) to support his thesis (Stanislavski, 1936b: 61-63, trans. 1979). According to Stanislavski, the common element on which the intonations of any language were based was the tempo-rhythm. Language was formed with sounds and pauses impregnated with tempo-rhythm, an extraordinarily precise and expressive element that determined the quality of the result (Stanislavski, 1936b: 173, trans. 1979). As is known, Stanislavski extensively researched the concept of tempo-rhythm since he understood that rhythm and breathing were the foundation of creative work (Whyman, 2008: 150-151).

In the case of the Darmstadt Colony, training in speech and declamation had to first follow very simple examples, preferably drawn from Grimm’s tales. It was a matter of looking for the overall sound, without stopping, at least at first, at the details, the impure dialects or the small errors of speech that students might have. More globally, the objective was to teach the student to feel that each poem had its own rhythm, that it had to be heard and accepted as a dance movement: “dass jedes Stück Poesie seinen eigenen Rhythmus hat, den man heraushören und selbst wie eine Tanzbewegung annehmen muss” (Bahr, 1900: 112, ed. 1974). This interdisciplinary synaesthesia was common to Stanislavski, who, in turn, was inspired by the ideas of Delsarte, Dalcroze and the synthesis that Sergei Volkonsky developed based on both authors: “The main condition for creating art is the adoption of a different rhythm, whether in the voice, or in the movements of the body or the emotions of the soul” (Pelletieri, 1998: 22).

The dance exercises planned at the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art would not be carried out in the usual way, but would be limited to learning national dances such as the Schuhplattler<sup>18</sup> or the fandango. Ruben Simonov’s experience as a student of Stanislavski in the early 1920s left no doubt about the many similarities in this regard between the System and the pedagogy planned for the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art. According to Simonov, Stanislavski instructed his students mainly in the art of movement and locution. According to Simonov, Stanislavski made his students walk with music of different beats and dance to the rhythm of the waltz, the mazurka, the polka or solemn marches.<sup>19</sup> The acquisition of movements that were not

18. The Schuhplattler is a traditional popular dance in the area of the Bavarian and Tyrol Alps. It is characterised by the dancers slapping their hands, thighs and shoes. Hence its name: *Schuh* (shoe) and *platteln* (hitting with the palm of the hand).

19. SIMONOV, R. Power of a Scenic Image, *Soviet Culture*, 1962 (Roslavleva, 1965: 19).

natural but rather painstakingly learned required an effort aimed at producing the maximum useful work with minimum fatigue.

In Stanislavski's case, the inclusion in his System of regional dances, of dance in general or of fencing responded to the influence of Ribotian psychology, aimed at developing control of the will and attention over the body. The psychologist Theodule Ribot claimed that the mechanism of reinforcing certain movements, coordinating them in simultaneous groups or in series and suppressing or suspending others, entailed the development of voluntary or artificial attention (Ribot, 1943: 94-96).

However, in the Darmstadt Colony, incorporating the learning of regional dances in the programme was probably for other reasons. On the one hand, in German theatre schools the study of dance was common. Zumhof picks up a quote from the *Protokolle des Mannheimer Nationaltheaters unter Dalberg aus den Jahren 1781 bis 1789*, in which it is indicated that young actors and actresses should pay close attention to every involuntary movement of the body and never allow themselves an inappropriate position off the stage. To overcome these inappropriate habits and give their figures an elegant form, dance and the art of fencing could be useful: "Dass Tanzen, Fechten und andere Leibesübungen viel dazu beitragen, den Körper zu machen."<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, in the reform of the theatre that they wanted to carry out at the Colony, by limiting the power of the word in their creations, dance and the expressiveness of the body had to occupy a predominant role, so their instruction was essential. The choice of the *Schuhplattler* would also involve training in a choreography that required not only a high rhythmic ability and maximum coordination between the different parts of the body, but also the overriding need for teamwork.

Although based on a different approach, the aim of promoting cohesion and the feeling of union among the members was also a common element of the Darmstadt approach and the fundamental objectives to which Stanislavski aspired with his academic and professional *ensembles*.

In the case of the Colony, the students admitted would be kept together in facilities, like a hotel, where communal life would be encouraged both in daily routines and in different classes and activities. The group activities planned for the School included three meals a day and entertainment for after dinner, as well as excursions and folk festivals in which the other artists of the Colony would also participate.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that, in general, in Darmstadt the individualism of designers, architects and visual artists prevailed, and promoting joint work was undoubtedly another of the fundamental motivations when incorporating theatre into the disciplines researched there.

20. (Dancing, fencing, and other physical exercises contribute a lot to working the body), MARTERSTEIG, M. *Protokolle des Mannheimer Nationaltheaters unter Dalberg aus den Jahren 1781 bis 1789*, 1980, pp. 106-107 (Zumhof, 2018: 397).

21. The Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art sought to offer a Christmas show that would playfully feature traditional pieces or tales by the Brothers Grimm. It also planned to offer a carnival folklore festival with some modern versions by Hans Sachs, possibly with allusions to the bourgeois conditions of Darmstadt. Hans Sachs (1494-1576) was a German poet who defended Lutheran reform through his writings.

Suler and Stanislavski came to project a less bourgeois version of a suburban Studio, in which students had to design and build the *mises en scène*, while cultivating the fields for their own sustenance. For their part, the audience had to reside in a nearby hotel in order to “be prepared and willing to receive artistic impressions” (Stanislavski, 1924: 375, trans. 1993). In fact, this idea came from previous experience, at Stanislavski’s estate in the Crimea, during the visit by the Moscow Art Theatre company to its favourite playwright, Anton Chekhov, in 1900. During that time, in the group, the everyday tasks and rehearsals coexisted naturally. According to Stanislavski’s biographer David Magarshack, some holidaymakers were very surprised to see the director of the Moscow Art Theatre company and two of its actors, every morning, taking walks along Yalta beach improvising scenes “in character” (Magarschack, 1986: 34).

Zumhof does not consider improvisation as part of the techniques applied in the German schools of dramatic art prior to 1900. The fact that Fuchs’ reform attached importance to the *mise en scène* and the set design and relegated the role of the literary author and the text to the background was probably related to the consideration of improvisation as part of acting training within the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art programme. During academic hours, improvisations were scheduled from 6 pm to 7 pm, three days a week, which would alternate with two interspersed sessions on characterisation techniques and makeup. In improvisation classes, pieces were never memorised but, according to Bahr, everything had to be spontaneous: “sondern Alles improvisiert wird.” The teacher had to limit himself to indicating the theme and the situation, while the specific words and direction of each scene would depend on the students’ inspiration in the moment. Later reflection on what had emerged spontaneously would help aspiring actors to identify their own nature.

In *An Actor’s Work on a Role* Stanislavski, using the first scene of *Othello* as an example, also indicated that before memorising the text it was necessary to grasp the essence of its objectives and fundamental actions to obtain “the life of the human body” (Stanislavski, 1957: 212, trad. 1977). For him it was essential to consolidate the logic of the actions carried out in the rehearsals as much as possible and thus awaken a truer action. Improvisation was the way to get to the “notes of the score.” Actor V. O. Toporkov, a member of the Moscow Theatre Art company, also detailed specific improvisation exercises that Stanislavski proposed to his actors in his last period as a director. For example, when the young actress A. O. Stepánova, in a rehearsal of Tolstoy’s *Tsar Fyodor*, said to Stanislavski: “I don’t know anything, I didn’t learn my part (...) what do I have to say?” The teacher responded: “Anything that comes to mind in the circumstances...” (Toporkov, 1961: 111). Similarly, the teacher at the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art had to guide the students’ improvisation on classical texts from world literature to get them to connect with their essence. To this end, Bahr suggested the example of the Romeo and Juliet balcony scene, but in a modernised version.

During these rehearsals, and as noted by Bahr, the best way to get to know the students and for them to discover themselves in their innermost

being would be to provoke them by shouting, teasing or making annoying comments, to the point that their irritation, excitement and shame would elicit sounds or actions that, otherwise, they would not have dared to utter (Bahr, 1900: 113, ed. 1974). Stanislavski also said that in difficult moments it had helped him to imitate the *régisseur* despotism that Ludwig Chronegk inflicted on the Meiningen, which: “demanded obedience and made me obey” (Stanislavski, 1924: 207, trans. 1993), although it is true that as he gained more confidence and experience, Stanislavski abandoned the tyrannical approach of his early days to become a more conciliatory teacher and director. (Carnicke, 2008: 32).

In the Colony, as in the case of the Meiningen, the taste for figurines and their historical and aesthetic rigour was highly relevant. In fact, a peculiarity that distinguished the methodology proposed for the School of Dramatic Art from others of its contemporaries was that both the visual and declamation exercises in Darmstadt had to be carried out with costumes. Specifically, it was proposed that the same acting tasks should be carried out for three consecutive days with three different costumes. In this way, it was hoped to encourage a gradual feeling in the students for the nature of the costume and for the particular soul of each one: “sozusagen für die Seele jedes Kostüms geweckt wird” (Bahr, 1900: 112-113, ed. 1974). This training idea was especially novel since, even in the case of the Meiningen, it was not planned to do more than a single final rehearsal with the definitive costumes (DeHart, 1970: 224).

According to researcher Sharon Carnicke, at the Moscow Art Theatre, including rehearsals with the characters’ costume was Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko’s idea given the lack of rigour in theatre (Carnicke, 2008: 28). However, the costumes were part of the artistic production and not of the acting training. Such was the case of the 1898 production of *The Seagull*, for which fifty-one rehearsals were held, of which three were with the actors fully dressed as their characters (Carnicke, 2008: 31).

What Bahr proposed was an innovation in the pedagogy of dramatic art. This was consistent with the origin and visual predominance of the Colony and in some way anticipated the Bauhaus theatre, in which the costumes and masks would greatly condition the performance and would play a fundamental role in the conception of the production from its initial stage, as well as in the training sessions to rehearse it. But the innovations planned by the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art were not limited solely to what had to happen on stage. In keeping with the mysticism that, generally, characterised the art of the Colony, Olbrich and Bahr hoped that the productions created in the School would also encourage a spiritual transformation of the audience. Through a communion of music, silences, deep and solemn moods, children’s choirs and dreamlike images, theatre was to become a space of purification, a catalyst in which audiences could free themselves from grief and their everyday worries. In keeping with the Arts and Crafts movement, the architects of the School of Dramatic Art project also argued that artistic creation should be linked to the education of the audience: “Darum ist überall, wo man Kunstwerke aufzurichten versucht hat, sogleich das Bedürfnis

lebhaft empfunden worden, sich ein wohl gestimmtes Publikum zu erziehen" (Bahr, 1900: 116, ed. 1974).<sup>22</sup>

Olbrich and Bahr were aware of the transformative effect that the performing arts could have on the participants and they felt an obligation to pass on their wisdom, the meaning of existence and what, from their perspective, they considered a solution to great enigmas. In their view, one of the objectives of the productions that would emerge from the School was to be able to contribute to the life and happiness of the audience. However, the truth is that, to fulfil such an arduous task, they proposed a theatre of symbols and lyrical texts that, a priori, seemed difficult to translate for ordinary audience members.

To train that audience, sensitive to the artistic creations they hoped to produce, Olbrich and Bahr planned public lectures from the first month of the School's operation. In these lectures the meaning and nature of the theatrical performances would be debated, as well as the specific motivations on which the meaning of their festivals was based. The bimonthly talks were scheduled to be followed by the performance of a song and a poem which, in turn, would be accompanied by a simple explanation of their content. Beyond the specific events, in Darmstadt they had a relatively complex plan that aimed to interrelate all the lectures, so that they were all spiritually connected and complemented each other, and culminated in the holding of the annual festival.

With regard to how the audience were affected by the productions derived from his research in his respective Studios, Stanislavski debated between scientific positivism and a certain faction of mysticism, although, frequently, he ended up in the split between his bourgeois origin and Soviet post-revolutionary strictures that imposed a solely materialistic perspective. In any case, Stanislavski chose to be cautious, and concerning himself with the education of the audience was not one of his motivations, probably because, among other things, this would have forced him to explicitly position himself with respect to the successive political regimes of his rulers.

According to Carnicke and Wegner, Stanislavski began to be interested in yoga from 1906, when Suler joined as his assistant, while working on *The Drama of Life*. Nemirovich Danchenko organised readings on Hindu philosophy in 1913, when he directed a piece by Rabindranath Tagore (Huntly, 1929: 10) for the Moscow Art Theatre. Stanislavski also recounted how, after the performance of the shows, meetings and talks were held with the audience in which, in a relaxed atmosphere of sandwiches and wine "Kachalov declaimed, Moskvina delighted the group with his unsurpassed humour, while Vischnievsky laughed thunderously" (Stanislavski, 1924: 252, trans. 1993). However, far from seeing himself in the role of having to educate them, it can be deduced from his texts that Stanislavski attributed great power to the criteria of the audience, who, in some way, he would even come to consider as a teacher, mainly for those younger actors. Nevertheless, Stanislavski was

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22. (Thus, wherever works of art have been attempted, the need to educate a well-tuned audience has been immediately felt.)

aware of how important it was to inspire the audience by presenting plays that spoke of “big and not small things,” as well as establishing a continuous communion with the audience that culminated in a spiritual bond between the stage and the stalls: “The audience constitutes spiritual acoustics for us. They give back what they receive from us, as living human emotions” (Stanislavski, 1936a: 258, trans. 1980).

The Darmstadt plan also sought a feeling of participation and community with the audience. However, far from proposing that actors visualise the emission of radiation as Stanislavski did, at the School of Dramatic Art they planned to limit themselves to inviting the audience to a jovial meal or a guided tour of the city of Hesse. Olbrich and Bahr were aware that, in their relationship with the audience, they should pay special attention to young people because, as they understood it, they were more receptive, fresh and passionate, and a more active participation could be expected from them (Bahr, 1900: 116, 1974).

Although the manuscript delivered to the Grand Duke focused on the conception of the first year of the School, Olbrich and Bahr claimed that as soon as the teaching had progressed and significant differences were observed in individual students, or even in a single student, a second group would be formed which, although it would continue to participate in joint gymnastics, fencing, dance and singing classes, would be separated into declamation and body classes. In the document they indicated that these gifted disciples would be exempt from everything that, in some way, would be superfluous to their special talent and their training would be directed, specifically, to the *mise en scène* that they planned to include as part of the first artistic exhibition of the Colony.

But while the most alert disciples would end the first academic year performing pieces by theatre masters in front of an audience at the 1901 Festival, Olbrich and Bahr proposed being relentless and firing those other students about whom they felt they had made a mistake. Olbrich and Bahr hoped to open their second group in November and then begin, with the help of professionals like Hofmannsthal, to prepare for the festival.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that the School of Dramatic Art project explicitly spelled out the specific collaborations to be carried out with contemporary writers showed two approaches. Despite its visual inclination, Darmstadt attached great importance to the figure of the playwright. But, in addition, the writers chosen betrayed a certain aesthetic orientation, framed in modernity, with which they wanted to associate. Specifically, in the document by Olbrich and Bahr it was explained that, as an acting training formula, from time to time pieces by Hofmannsthal or Maeterlinck had to be performed, with the corresponding costumes and adequate lighting, in the presence of the advisory councils and according to basic pictorial principles “nach malerischen Gesichtspunkten geschehen.”<sup>24</sup> The idea was that the gestures and poetics designed by the

23. The way of working should encourage the playwright to establish the necessary relationships that allow him to adapt his texts to obtain the best performance from the students.

24. (Happening from a pictorial point of view.)

students themselves, and only supervised by the director, would acquire the characteristics of “reliefartige Haltungen” (postures in the form of relief) (Bahr, 1900: 113, ed. 1974). In other words, works conceived to be presented on shallow stages that favour bodily expression and a panoramic vision of the stage. Once Fuchs’ basic precepts had been incorporated, the students of the School had to prepare their performance for the Festival, which would take place in the theatre that they hoped that Olbrich would have finished by then. The performance would be a kind of total work of art under ceremonial precepts, in whose conception both the main painter and the conductor should have participated from the first rehearsals.

Stanislavski, along with Antoine and the Meiningen, would mark the director usurping the playwright as the core of theatre. However, as he himself would point out, playwrights such as Chekhov, Ibsen, Gorky, Hauptmann or Maeterlinck himself were also important substantial and aesthetic influences, who, at the same time, came to question the validity of his System. In fact, while the System proved to be ideal for the performance of the naturalistic pieces of writers such as Hauptmann,<sup>25</sup> Stanislavski had to strive to develop a style suited to the symbolist drama of Maeterlinck. The mysticism<sup>26</sup> and stylisation of his plays made new demands both in terms of the *mise en scène* and the acting. In fact, it was Meyerhold, a disciple of Stanislavski, who would end up providing valid scenic solutions to the line of symbolism-impressionism that governed most of Maeterlinck’s pieces. The Moscow Art Theatre chose three plays by Maeterlinck precisely to combat criticism that pigeonholed them in realism and produced three of them in 1904, coinciding with the determination to incorporate yoga into his System. (White, 2006: 15-20). However, his proposals were a failure and, perhaps to justify that the System did not provide enough tools for the actor to feel comfortable performing unrealistic plays, Stanislavski argued that the premature and extreme avant-garde meant a delay if it was taken into account that realism had not yet been mastered (Stanislavski, 1957: 362-64, trans. 1977).

In this respect, the acting model promoted by the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art could have provided solutions that escaped Stanislavski’s realistic precepts. On 15 May 1901, the Darmstadt exhibition opened its doors in a festive context where, in addition to the premiere by Behrens, brief theatre pieces were performed based on texts by Wilhelm Holzamer,<sup>27</sup> as mentioned, under the name *Darmstadt Spiele*. It was Olbrich who was personally responsible for the design of a stylised environment of abstract spaces that served as the background for pieces full of symbolism and in which Holzamer had

25. Stanislavski directed several of Hauptmann’s pieces. In fact, the Society for Art and Literature was the first to perform *The Sunken Bell* in the entire Russian Empire (Stanislavski, 1924: 181-186, trans. 1993). In *My Life in Art*, he also refers to having performed *Hannele* and *Solitary Souls*. If the Church had not vetoed it, *Hannele* would have been chosen to open the fourth production of the Moscow Art Theatre. A privilege that, instead, was granted to *The Seagull*, premiered on 17 December 1898 and that, from that moment, made Chekhov the company’s flagship playwright.

26. John McCannon refers to the spirituality embraced by Maeterlinck as a synthesis towards a universal mysticism that derived from Neoplatonic idealism, the Christian meditations of Eckhart and Boehme, the pantheism of Espinosa, Swedish Borgianism, romantic transcendentalism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Blavatskyian theosophy (McCannon, 2004: 449-78).

27. Wilhelm Holzamer (1870-1907), German novelist and playwright of brief pieces for theatre presented on the occasion of the opening of the Colony.



been clearly influenced by Maeterlinck's modernist aesthetic.<sup>28</sup> The event had international repercussions as shown by the article that the English newspaper *The Tatler* published, in July 1901, under the title *A New Theatrical Movement in Germany: and the Help Rendered to it by an English Actress*. *The Tatler* explicitly referred to the way the actors played. According to the journalist, the artists who performed the *Darmstadt Spiele* were ultra-secessionists from the norms of German Orthodox theatre and the performances there were "the first fruits of the 20th century" (Anon., 1901b: 231). All the props were oriented in the same reforming direction and proof of this was that the publication recommended that readers obtain Holzamer's text, which it described as the main repertoire of this new school. Somehow, the *Darmstadt Spiele* had covered, at least in part, the objectives of the Darmstädter Schule für Schauspielkunst, which, unfortunately, despite that impetus, failed to materialise.

To encourage funding for the school, Olbrich and Bahr had referred to the development of a budget that took into account the costs of the institution, the fees of poets, musicians, painters and technical staff, a fund for events necessary for the education of the audience and a press provision to fund international advertising. This conception was a mature and modern vision of the School that, nevertheless, saw its existence conditioned by the need for subsidies, at least in its first years of existence. The visual perspective denoted in the frequent use of costumes in training, as well as in the use of the *Reliefbühne* and the frequent mises en scène showed their practical will and an innovative application of a multidisciplinary approach in the teaching of acting. According to Boehe, in an undated letter to Bahr, Olbrich claimed that the Grand Duke agreed to provide an initial capital of more than half a million marks (Boehe 1977: 151-152). Perhaps it was not a financial problem but, as Bahr indicated at the end of the letter, the fear that they could not depend on the support of the other theatres.

Stanislavski, from his time in Russian Society until the end of his days, as indicated in a 1934 letter to his assistant at the Opera Studio, Alexander V. Bogdanovich, had to endure constant financial problems (Stanislavski, 1907-1938: 344, trans. 1986). However, this did not prevent both Stanislavski and his company, the Moscow Art Theatre, from fulfilling their purpose of becoming a benchmark in international theatre, both for the training of their actors and for the realism of their mises en scène. Perhaps, as Stanislavski had indicated, the aesthetic avant-garde of the early 1900s was ahead of its time and it took a couple of decades, in the case of the Colony, for many of its ideas to be picked up, for example, through experiments by the Bauhaus in Weimar.

In any case, despite the aesthetic differences, as has been shown, both with regard to the organisation of the subjects and the acting, dance and

28. Synaesthesias, poetic allusions to colours, atmosphere and sounds, etc.: "(...) von einem neuen Tage grüsst der erste Schein: er find euch wert, ganz mit ihm eins zu sein!" ([...] the light believes that it is worthwhile you being at one with it!), "und blassblaue Glockenblumen" (pale bluebells); rays of light, moons, flowers, bluebells, shining souls, silences, wind... "das möchte ich dichten, dies Lied der Stille" (I would like to compose this song of silence) (Holzamer, 1901: 5).

declamation exercises, the use of maieutics as a learning methodology, the practice of improvisation, research using texts by contemporary playwrights such as Maeterlinck, joint work between their respective casts, mysticism or communion with the audience, were common links between these two pedagogical conceptions, relatively close in time. The great paradox is that, despite their similarities, the Darmstadt School of Dramatic Art project is still quite unknown today while, in contrast, the Stanislavski System is often considered the greatest influence on acting of all time. Perhaps the conclusion is that it is not always enough to have a good idea, but that often you also need the right place and time to put it into practice.



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