

## Clichés of Theatrical Gesture in the Recent History of Latvian Theatre<sup>1</sup>

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The term *cliché*, or in Latvian usage *štamps*, borrowed from the Russian language (*штамп*), is widely used to designate manifestations of theatrical routine, amateurism or professional weakness and helplessness. Clichés may occur at any level and affect any element of the *mise en scène*, including the work of the director, the set designer, the composer and the choreographer. They also have a definite impact on the actor, making his stage behaviour predictable and boring. Though the term *cliché* seems immediately to suggest negative meanings, there are also some positive connotations, especially if we take a closer look at the etymology of the term. The most common present use of the Latvian term *štamps* derives from Italian *stampa* 'a seal, a stamp', French *estampe* 'etching', Early Middle English *stampen*, German *stampfen*, Anglo-Saxon *steman* 'to press to pieces', Indo-European *stembh* – 'to crush' < *stebh-*, 'a post, pole'. Traces of older meanings are present in the contemporary understanding and use of the word – a cliché or *štamps* indicates affiliation, authenticity, authority, and its repeated confirmation. A example is the assertion "The last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by Sarah Bernhardt's annual tours to London bringing a new play and old clichés with her". A cliché helps to express oneself clearly or characterize something precisely: "The cordiality of prisoners' song needs clichés to avoid emotions too individual and intellectually complicated." A cliché can be used as a support in a situation of confusion or uncertainty: "The director has not been able to help actors so they have to resorted to clichés."

*Štamps* is closely linked with the area of the theatre; however, it has analogues in other fields of literature and art: cliché (from French *clicher* 'to stereotype', German *klitsch* 'clump, clay-like mass, hence to pattern in clay') – an expression or an idea that has once been fresh and significant but due to frequent use has become trite and boring; Latvian *šablons* (German *Schablone*, French *échantillon* 'a model, a mold') – a pattern or a matrix for giving a certain shape to a large number of items (copies, things), Latvian *trafarets* (Italian *traforetto*) – a stencil, i.e. a thin sheet of paper or metal, perforated or cut through in such a way that when ink or paint, or other substances is applied to the sheet, patterns, designs, letters, etc. form on the surface beneath the sheet; Latvian *stereotips* (Greek *stereos* 'hard, firm, solid' + *typos* 'a blow, mark of the blow, figure, outline' > *typtein* 'to beat, strike') – a one-piece printing plate cast in type metal from a mold taken of a printing surface; an unvarying form or pattern; a fixed or a conventional expression, a notion, a character, a mental pattern having no

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individuality. In Latvian, when referring to the theatre these words are used interchangeably, since all of them point to repetition or reproduction.

As a cultural activity the theatre is characterized by repetition. The theatre is seen as a reenactment of events already enacted (as long as the audience is willing to see them). The experience of theatre production, playing and reception always has a sense of return, of *déjà vu*. Theatre anthropologist Richard Schechner characterizes performance as “restored behaviour” (see Schechner 1981), while theatre theorist Marvin Carlson speaks of the theatre as a “memory machine” (Carlson 2001), suggesting its inescapable and continuing negotiations with memory. Each of the production elements – the story, the bodies of actors, the properties, and the play – are composed of materials “that we have seen before”.

Consequently, the question arises: does this mean that the entire history of the theatre is a history of clichés or using Konstantin Stanislavsky's term – *штампы*? Obviously, we will not call all the elements we have seen before clichés or stereotypes. Iron bars on a window that stand for a prison, or an open umbrella that refers to a heavy shower are widely used stage metonymies appearing in almost every show where the action takes place in a prison or in rainy weather. However, wreaths of smoke employed in Latvian theatre most frequently solely for decorative purposes – to disguise the inefficiency of the *mise en scène* and at the same time to serve as a metaphor for something vague, such as the mystery or complexity of life, or birch trunks, poles, bananas, sausages and other objects that can be pointed vertically and that evoke Freudian associations cannot be called anything else but clichés.

When comparing these examples it can be argued that a cliché signifies an artistic means of expression which deviates from the dominating canon of representation enough to draw attention to itself and has been used so frequently that it is felt to be hackneyed or worn-out. A barred window for a prison and an open umbrella for rainy weather are standard usages, which do not draw attention to themselves; but smoke as a mysterious twilight of life (not an indexical sign for a fire, a hearth or a ritual sacrifice) and a banana or a pole as a phallus have invaded Latvian theatre of late – over the last 15–20 years – and have been used so often that they can be termed clichés. Not only is a cliché created when a frequently used signifier (smoke) stands for too many signifieds to make the meanings understandable and effective, but clichés also result when one meaning (phallus) is ascribed to too many signifiers.

In Latvian theatre clichés are frequently seen in connection with actors' stage behaviour. Reading body language is an extremely complex and difficult task, which can be facilitated by linking the use of a dramatic gesture to the history of acting. To demonstrate how and in what conditions actions and gestures of characters played by actors turn into clichés, I would like to take a closer look at some examples from Latvian theatrical culture.

In 1995, when analysing the production of the comedy “Noises Off” by Michael Frayn, Latvian theatre critic Silvija Radzobe wrote: “When representing English people the actors of the National Theatre made ample use of their collections of clichés; from show to show

they developed what some critics characterized as a pleasure of performance, others as mere clowning.” (Radzobe, Tišheizere, Zeltiņa 1995: 182.)<sup>2</sup> Already in the 1930s a similar tendency had been observed by Kārlis Strauts: "... artistic means of expression and gestures become "worn out" and their emotional impression when repeated frequently does not reach the audience. [...] And what has become commonplace is dead for the art of the stage." (Strauts 1934: 859.)

Gesture is of decisive importance for theatrical performance, being the primary means whereby the presence and spatial orientations of the body are established. The term comes from the Latin *gerere*, which means to act in the broadest sense of the word – to bear, to carry, to demonstrate power, to take responsibility, to control, to carry out. The medieval Latin *gestura*, the origin of the English word *gesture* designated a mode of action (Guralnik, Friend 1968: 608). Initially *gesture* was the mode of bodily behaviour during religious ceremonies. Later it came to have the meaning of the speaker's choice of appropriate corporeal behaviour (movements of the body – hands, feet, torso or face). In the course of time the word came to be used for a form of nonverbal communication (Крейдлин 2002: 46).

Notions about the nature of gesture are multiple and ambiguous. In the narrower sense, a gesture is bodily communication by means of hands and arms and to a lesser degree by the head; in a broader sense, posture, body movement and facial expression are also included (Nöth 1990: 392). Gesture can be understood as neuromuscular activity (bodily actions, whether or not they are communicative); as semiotic activity (ranging from spontaneously communicative gestures to more conventional gestures); and as linguistic expression (fully conventionalized signs and vocal articulations). A common use of the term treats gestures as intentional, non-componential, symbolic structures: a single gesture represents a single meaning (Armstrong, Stokoe, Wilcox 1995: 38).

In a theatrical performance the gesture cannot be dissociated from body movements and facial expression. Verbal discourse is always accompanied by the use of body language, which serves to fix the meaning of an utterance, emphasizing, or even defining the kind of speech act being performed by the speaker (see Elam 1980, Ubersfeld 1977: 28–30). The actor's bodily behaviour will always communicate meaning to the audience, even if the purpose of the gesture is practical, not communicative – for instance, setting free a sleeve caught on a nail by accident.

When and under what conditions does the actor's gesture turn into a cliché? To answer this question the use of dramatic gesture should be linked to the history of acting. According to Elaine Aston and George Savona, three stages can be observed in the history of the theatre and acting. The first stage, which encompasses the theatre models of Ancient Greece, the Middle Ages and Renaissance, is characterized by a dominant use of deictic gesture. Gesture is used

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<sup>2</sup> All translations from Latvian by Valda Čakare.

as a means of drawing attention to the dramatic world (or world of fiction). In these theatre models, plot and action are prioritized over character development and the actor does not aim for identification with the character (Aston, Savona 1991: 117, compare Elam 1980: 139).

The beginning of the second phase is marked by a discussion between emotionalists and anti-emotionalists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From 1760 to 1770, in connection with the rise of new middle-class-oriented drama, the attention of French theatre practitioners and critics was focused on acting. The theatre of the middle classes demanded that the rhetorical-decorative style of acting be replaced by a psychological-realistic style. Exaggerated devices of pictorial styles were not acceptable to a respectable and educated citizen. The exquisite artificiality of the opera seemed to be appropriate to address the aristocracy, whereas crude entertainment (low comedy, pantomime, song, dance, variety shows and comic interludes) offered by the fair troupes was in line with the taste of unsophisticated playgoers. For the middle-class, theatre had to be a mirror held up to nature. This demanded a mimetic mode of representation. Hence, the leading interest lay in the question of the true bodily expression of feelings of the soul and the gesture as “a natural sign” of the emotions of the character (Fischer-Lichte 2002: 168). In *Paradoxe sur le Comédien* (“The Paradox of Acting”, 1773), Denis Diderot demanded that the actor should know “the outward signs of feeling” in order to apply them on the stage in the right places (Diderot 1968: 306–307). As distinct from Diderot, German theoreticians understood the body as a system of natural signs, not only of emotions, but also of the character and the mental state of the person, e.g. a head bent down from the neck is characteristic of a stupid and lazy man.

Alongside the new tendencies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the former kind of theatre, where distance prevails between the actor and his role, continued to develop up to the present day. Aston and Savona consider that both are supported by specific theatrical forms (Aston, Savona 1991: 118). In a well-made play or a melodrama, for instance, which prioritizes action over character, the rhetorical-decorative style is used. Emotional states are signified by a gestural picture governed by clearly codified rules. Photo 1 shows a scene from the



**Photo 1.** “The Times of the Land Surveyors” (1950).  
Photo by J. Krieviņš.

staging of the Latvian classical novel *Mērnīeku laiki* ("The Times of the Land Surveyors", 1879) by brothers Kaudzīte in the National Theatre, in 1950. The heroine's state of madness is announced in terms of melodrama – by arching her body backward, wild laughter, and gestures: one hand pushing away some horrible ghost, the other hand touching the back of her head to signify madness. There is no psychology of madness; madness is visually represented through gesture.

The New Drama in turn demands an emotional, psychological-realistic style of acting, which is based on a closer identification with the character. The development of the body as a natural sign system of the soul achieves ultimate perfection in Stanislavsky's theoretical views and theatrical practice. Stanislavsky and his collaborators succeeded in making the gesture express the inner state and motivation of the character. This understanding of bodily behavior continues until the rise of the avant-garde movements at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the third phase in the history of acting begins. With the advent of modernists, the mimetic patterning of speech and gesture is disrupted. Meyerhold divorces speech from physical movement and subjects each of them to a different rhythm; Artaud turns away from words in favor of a physical language; Brecht makes the actor's body opaque as a vehicle of meaning.

Thus, the concept of a cliché was formed during the second phase of the theatre development, within the framework of the emotionalist *versus* anti-emotionalist discussion and gained clarity in the system of theoretical and practical teachings of Stanislavsky. Not only does Stanislavsky hold the view (similar to the theoreticians of the Enlightenment) that there is an analogy between the soul and the body, but he is also absolutely positive about the psycho-physiological unity of the individual, which is expressed in the organic body and mind. The organic body-mind means that the body of the actor is engaged in the total expression of the soul of the role and is able to do so because a relationship of exchange exists between the physical actions and their spiritual impulses (Fischer-Lichte 2002: 282). The body responds to the demands made by the mind; it does not act in vain, does not avoid necessary action, and does not react in a self-contradictory and counter-productive way (Ruffini 1991: 150). When lacking the organic body-mind, the actor's body becomes clumsy and redundant; it refuses to move or moves in vain. Thus gestures arise which function as parasitic words do in language. There is no necessity dictated by inner impulses for these "parasite-gestures". Making redundant gestures – opening one's arms, rolling one's eyes, licking one's lips – testifies to the lack of the organic body-mind. When frequently repeated, these gestures become the actor's personal clichés, which make the audience see the actor in the first place, not the character.

Not only do clichés arise at the stage of building the organic body-mind, but also at the stage of building the character. If the gesture is an expression of the inner state and motivation of the character, the use of a sign of emotion without this emotion being present creates a cliché.

Imagine yourself standing on a platform in front of thousands of spectators in Red Square. There is a woman next to you and you see her for the first time. You have been commanded to fall in love with her publicly; moreover, you have to go mad and end your life. However, you are not dreaming of it. You feel confused; hundreds of thousands pairs of eyes are turned to you, expecting you to make them shed tears; hundreds of thousands of hearts are willing to be carried away by your ideal, self-denying, ardent love. They have paid money for it and they have the right to demand from you what they have paid for. They want to hear everything you are saying, so you have to shout all the tender words one whispers to a woman in a *tête-à-tête*. You have to be well seen and understood, so you make gestures and movements to be visible even to those standing far away from you. Is it possible to think about love, moreover, to feel love under such circumstances? You cannot do anything but try hard and exert yourself because you feel helpless and the task is unrealistic.

However, the beloved trade prescribes a whole assortment of means of expression in stock – signs of passion, actions, postures, vocal intonations, cadences, trills, stage tricks and techniques of acting that, as it were, express emotions and thoughts in a lofty style. These signs of non-existent emotions or in other words – clichés, are acquired before one is born; they become mechanical, unconscious; they are always at the actor's disposal when he becomes helpless and with an empty soul. (Станиславский 2000: 323.)

Consequently, the actor's gesture can easily turn into his personal cliché or a cliché of character representation within the framework of a theatre model based on the notion of the psycho-physiological unity of the individual and which employs a psychological-realistic acting style, paying great attention to introspective, "autistic" or involuntary gesture. To a certain extent the actor becomes a hostage of uncertainty and a lack of rules and tries to make do with parasite-gestures or gestures signifying non-existent emotions. However, in theatre modes where the actor's gestural sign-systems are strictly governed by semantic conventions, as in Japanese Noh or Indian Kathakali, there is no room for clichés.

Paradoxically, clichés within these theatre modes become impossible for the very reason that the actor's acting style consists entirely of clichés – unchanging, stylized, stereotypical movements and gestures, free from even a trace of accident, simplified to the point at which they become the essence of gesture. Jan Kott is perfectly right when he argues that this system of theatrical signs is very close to calligraphy. In calligraphy the relation between the signifier and the signified, between the image and what the image is to transmit, is, as it were, reversed. A sign becomes more important than its meaning, the medium more important than its message (Kott 1984: 112). Likewise, in a cliché the sign becomes more important than its meaning, since the sign communicates what does not exist. Consequently, a cliché can be characterized as a simulation of meaning.

Historically, the tradition of Latvian theatre is closely linked to German and Russian theatre. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Latvian theatre enthusiasts under the leadership of Ādolfs Alunāns, as well as the German actor and director Hermann Rhode-Ebeling, who managed the Riga Latvian Theatre from 1886 to 1993, shared the views of the theoreticians of German Enlightenment,

understanding the body as a system of natural signs that communicates not only emotions, but also the character of the dramatic figure. The same conception can be found in Zeltmatis' and Lejas-Krūmiņš' book *Skatuves māksla* ("Stage Art") which was published in 1923: "Every movement of an actor should be called forth by necessity and be relevant to the character's situation and inner state." (Zeltmatis, Lejas-Krūmiņš 1923: 248.)

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this conception was influenced by the ideas of Stanislavsky brought from Russia with the help of Latvian actors who developed their professional skills in Moscow. Specifically, as I have already indicated above, it was Stanislavsky's requirement that the psycho-physiological unity of the individual be expressed in the organic body and mind and in the psychological-realistic style of acting based on a complete identification with the character. In her seminal study *Aktiermāksla latviešu teātrī* ("The Actor's Art in Latvian Theatre") Latvian theatre researcher Līvija Akurātere emphasizes that in the period between 1920 and 1930 "there were many exciting theatrical practices that could further develop one of the most characteristic lines in Latvian theatre – the line of psychological realism". However, "the theatre also abounded in productions which encouraged actors who were less demanding towards themselves to create a character with the help of trite means of expression and clichés" (Akurātere 1983: 147).

The understanding of the word *cliché* in Akurātere's book is explained by quoting a passage from Jānis Jansons' study "The Actor's Technique of Acting": "... an actor playing the same part several times does not need to live through all the emotions all over again; they have to be experienced during the rehearsal or at a home training only once, and this feeling should be fixed in the acting technique." (Jansons 1936: 31.) Similarly to Enlightenment theatre theoreticians, Jansons argues that the outward signs of feeling gestures can be divorced from the emotions that aroused these gestures and applied on the stage in the right places. In the context of Stanislavsky's notion of the psychophysical unity of the individual Līvija Akurātere characterizes Jansons' views as outdated. She remarks that the style of acting Jansons describes has been recognized as cliché-generating and keeps Latvian theatre from further development.

To illustrate the gestural clichés of Latvian actors, I have chosen five photographs from different productions of a Latvian classical play *Ugunī* ("In Fire") written by Rūdolfs Blaumanis in 1905. The play tells a story about the love of a chambermaid (Kristīne) and a stableman (Edgars), which develops against the backdrop of life on the estate of a German landlord. Kristīne and Edgars are played by:

- Alma Ābele and Eduards Smiļģis (1938), Photo 2;
- Velta Līne and Žanis Katlavs (1948), Photo 3;
- Lidija Freimane and Žanis Katlavs (1948), Photo 4;
- Rasma Roga and Harijs Liepiņš (1963), Photo 5;
- Baiba Bartkeviča and Intars Busulis (2006), Photo 6.



**Photo 2.** “In Fire” (1938).  
Kristīne – Alma Ābele, Edgars – Eduards  
Smiļģis. Photo: Archive of the Union of  
Theatre Workers of Latvia



**Photo 3.** “In Fire” (1948).  
Kristīne – Velta Līne, Edgars – Žanis Katlavs.  
Photo by J. Krieviņš.

Taking into account the fact that the actors have most likely posed for the photos and they have not been taken during the performance, these photographs bring posture as a gestural sign to the foreground. In the photos the actors and actresses mark their attitude towards their partner with their postures. However, the postures and the spatial orientations of their hands, head and the body are strikingly similar, reminiscent of wedding photographs taken at a photographer's studio. There is one thing all the pictures have in common (except the one where Lidija Freimane is sitting and Žanis Katlavs is standing behind her (Photo 4)): the partners have bodily contact (they touch each other with hands or bodies), but eye contact is missing. The look or gaze of one or both of the partners is tense, resolute and directed far away – at the horizon –, or upwards – to heaven. Almost everyone has their eyes wide open – a mimic gesture communicating different degrees of shock, as well as a strong determination, desire and personal interest.

The word *gaze* means the invisible quality or essence that radiates from a person's eyes when he/she is looking at something or somebody. A gaze is linked to the person's feelings, thoughts, wishes, and strivings; it expresses the psychophysical condition of the person. The main features that characterize communicative eye-behavior are the direction of the look, the object of the look and the type of look. The photographs show all the partners looking in the same direction. The only exception is Alma Ābele and Eduards Smiļģis (Photo 2). Smiļģis





**Photo 4.** "In Fire" (1948). Kristīne – Lidija Freimane, Edgars – Žanis Katlaps.  
Photo by J. Krieviņš.



**Photo 5.** "In Fire" (1963). Kristīne – Rasma Roga, Edgars – Harijs Liepiņš.  
Photo by E. Kera.

is looking downwards, Ābele – sideways and upward. Smiļģis has cast his eyes down. This is a mimic gesture that expresses a feeling of being ashamed, confused or shy. If a person has to answer a difficult question, he/she turns his/her eyes away while thinking about the answer, changing the focus of his/her attention from an outer object of observation to an inner object of reflection. Such an introspective type of gaze is characteristic of Alma Ābele's Kristīne. This is the most interesting dramaturgy of gaze that can be observed in the photographs. All the other Edgars and Kristīnes are looking at an object spatially so distant that distance turns into time and acquires temporal parameters, becoming a sign of a distant, unknown future. Velta Līne and Žanis Katlaps are looking ardently into the future (Photo 3). Rasma Roga gazes into the future with hope and expectations; Harijs Liepiņš with despair (Photo 5); Lidija Freimane, with anxiety (Photo 4); Baiba Bartkeviča and Intars Busulis – with distrust (Photo 6).

None of the partners reflect a situation in which the more you like something, the more you look at what or whom you like. In European cultures the duration of eye contact is decisive, revealing the degree of mutual closeness or liking. Avoiding eye contact in turn emphasizes a psychological distance between the partners. These photographs clearly show a lack of eye contact that signals psychological distance, which contradicts the partners' tactile behavior.

Almost all the partners (except Lidija Freimane and Žanis Katlaps (Photo 4)) are holding each other's hands, thus conveying a mutual liking. As distinct from a spontaneous kiss or a hug, holding hands cannot be aroused by a sudden flow of emotion; it has to be motivated



**Photo 6.** “In Fire” (2006). Kristīne – Baiba Bartkeviča, Edgars – Intars Busulis.  
Photo by A. Požarskis.



**Photo 7.** “The Poem about a Storm” (1960). Žuburs – Eduards Pāvuls, Prāmnieks – Harijs Liepiņš. Photo by E. Kera.

by conscious will. The warm feelings expressed by this gesture characterize the general attitude towards the partner. Anna Wierzbicka argues that holding hands is an expressive rather than a communicative gesture. Usually people do not hold hands to let each other know about their warm feelings; they do so because they already have those feelings (Wierzbicka 1995: 236). Joined hands refer to a possibility of a joint action. This is a way to express encouragement, support, a promise to help, but broadly speaking the message is one and the same: we can do things together – as one person or as two parts of one whole.

In two of the couples (Alma Ābele and Eduards Smiļģis (Photo 2), Rasma Roga and Harijs Liepiņš (Photo 5)) Edgars stands lower than Kristīne: Smiļģis has bent his head in front of Ābele, Liepiņš presses his head to his partner's bosom. Higher/lower placement in these *mise-en-scènes* expresses not only spatial relations, but also personal relations of evaluation. In the eyes of other people Edgars is morally placed on a lower level than Kristīne – his gesture conveys humbleness, trust, a readiness to recognize Kristīne's authority and the power of love and self-sacrifice.

The three couples (Velta Līne and Žanis Katlaps (Photo 3), Rasma Roga and Harijs Liepiņš (Photo 5), Baiba Bartkeviča and Intars Busulis (Photo 6)) have been photographed embracing each other; their bodies are closely linked, but there is no eroticism in this corporeal proximity. When comparing the lovers' embraces with the embrace of two comrades-in-arms (Photo 7) of the 1960 staging of the novel *Poēma par vētru* (“The Poem about a Storm”) by Vilis Lācis – a prolific

writer of ideologically oriented best-sellers – it is obvious that this is the same type of embrace, characterized by corporeal closeness and widely opened eyes looking straight forward.

Almost identical postures and eyes directed at the horizon testify to the fact that Kristīne and Edgars are interpreted primarily as comrades-in-arms, not as lovers. This is a cliché of interpretation. The photographs confirm once again what is well-known from the history of Latvian theatre – the play by Blaumanis is constantly interpreted (with a very few exceptions) as a play to promote morality, where Edgars and Kristīne are allies in their fight against Edgar's alcoholism or the quagmire of relationships in the manor house.

The photographs also confirm something else. The actors' facial expressions, the expression of their eyes, and their postures and gestures are free from any trace of accidental feelings, overly specific or complicated emotions. Their physical expressions have been simplified to the extent that they have a maximum of communicative value, so that they do not provoke confusion and do not demand an explanation, becoming rather signs of art, condensations of emotions. Like a mathematical formula they have an unchanging meaning without depending on the personal sensations and the mood of the actor; in other words, they are clichés.

To summarize, clichés of theatrical gesture discussed in the present paper are part and parcel of dramatic art. The Western Aristotelian model of acting is based on mimesis and demands a body-mind, where impulse leads immediately to action without self-judgment or extended reflection (Zarrilli 2009: 97–98), however, not infrequently gestures are divorced from the emotions that aroused these gestures and applied on the stage as the outward signs of non-existent feeling, thus destroying the notion of acting as spontaneous and recognizably natural. One way of eliminating clichés of gesture could be to divest the performance of realist staging conventions. Latvian theatre of the post-Soviet period attempts to make use of this possibility, focusing on the presentational aesthetics of performance and thereby providing material for further analysis of theatrical gesture. A question that refuses to go away is whether participants being performers rather than actors in the mimetic Aristotelian sense are safeguarded against stereotypical stage behaviour.

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## Žestide klišeed läti teatri lähiajaloo

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*Klišee* või Stanislavski terminoloogias *stamp* tähendab kunstilist väljendusvahendit, mis kaldub kõrvale representatsiooni domineerivast kaanonist, nii et tõmbab endale tähelepanu, ning mida kasutatakse nii tihti, et see tundub kulunud või lääge.

Kehakeele lugemine on äärmiselt raske ja kompleksne ülesanne, mille puhul on abiks dramaatiliste žestide tundmine näitlemise ajaloos. Siin võib eristada kolme etappi. Esimene neist haarab Vana-Kreeka, keskaja ja renessansi teatrimudelid, kus domineerisid deiktalised žestid – žeste kasutati tähelepanu pööramiseks fiktsionaalsele maailmale. Süžee ja tegevus olid neis teatrimudeleis tegelaskuju arendamisest tähtsamad ning näitleja eesmärgiks polnud tegelasega samastumine. Teise etapi algust tähistas 18. sajandil toimunud diskussioon emotsionalistide ja anti-emotsionalistide (Diderot) vahel. Keskklassi teater nõudis retoorilis-dekoratiivse näitlemisstiili asendamist psühholoogilis-realistlikuga. Seega koondus põhihuvi hingeelu õigele kehalisele väljendamisega ning žestist sai tegelase emotsioonide „loomulik märk“. Ka uus draama ja Stanislavski süsteem eeldasid psühholoogilis-realistlikku näitlemist ning samastumist tegelasega. Kolmas etapp algas 19. ja 20. sajandi vahetusel avangardliikumistega, mis katkestasid mimeetilise kõne ja žesti domineerimise.

Klišee mõiste kujunes välja teisel etapil ning kristalliseerus Stanislavski praktilises töös ja kirjutistes. Ta leidis, et näitleja keha peab kuuletuma vaimule ning lavategevuses ei tohiks olla midagi juhuslikku. Kui puuduvad keha ja vaimu organika ning läbielamine, tekivad sisemiselt põhjendamatud parasiitžestid, mis korraes muutuvad kas näitleja isiklikeks või teatud tegelase esitamisega seotud klišeedeks.

Läti teatritraditsioon on ajalooliselt lähedalt seotud saksa ja vene teatriga. Juba 19. sajandi teatrientusiastid jagasid saksa valgustusajastu teoreetikute seisukohti keha loomulike märkide süsteemi osas. 20. sajandi esimesel poolel tõid end Moskvas täiendamas käinud läti näitlejad kaasa Stanislavski idee inimese psühhofüüsilisest ühtsusest ning tegelasega samastumisel põhineva psühholoogilis-realistliku mängulaadi. Vaatamata sellele, näitavad viis fotot Rüdolfs Blaumanise klassikalise näidendi „Tules“ (1905) eri lavastustest, et näitlejate füüsilised väljendusvahendid on sel määral lihtsustatud, et neil on maksimaalne kommunikatiivne väärtus: nad ei tekita segadust ega vaja selgitust, vaid on muutunud kunstilisteks märkideks, kondenseeritud emotsioonideks, millel on näitlejast sõltumatu muutumatu tähendus nagu matemaatilistel valemitel, ühesõnaga – klišeedeks.

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