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Integrating Nonviolent Communication into Actor and Director Training at the University of
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Introduction: When I was pursuing my studies as a doctoral student, I had the opportunity to undertake research in the field of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and to discover its theoretical background. Nonviolent Communication is a method and theory based on humanistic psychology, first developed by the clinical psychologist Marshall B. Rosenberg, and represented and disseminated by the Centre of Nonviolent Communication since 1981.

The purpose of NVC is to settle conflicts by peaceful and nonviolent means and to reach our goals through such means with simple and well-defined communication tools. According to the tenets of NVC, every individual is capable of regarding the needs of others and improving the quality of human relationships. Institutions and social organizations created by mankind can also reflect the cumulative consciousness of individuals. Therefore, NVC can be employed to solve everyday personal conflicts just as advantageously as it can be used in the fields of economy, health management, peacekeeping, or education, i.e. in all fields of life.

The research center is present in 65 countries, carrying out educational programs and supporting projects that initiate social changes. When I first came across this theory at the lectures of Éva Rambala, the Hungarian representative of NVC, I first thought that I would participate in a personal training course to benefit from the teachings for my own personal purposes. When I began putting into practice NVC methods, however, I soon discovered that my communication during the acting and theatrical processes became more effective. NVC connects consciousness, language use, communication and power relations and affects all of these four fields. This is how I came to realize that NVC can be employed to manage conflicts in the theatre.

Methodology: The main idea behind the method is for the participants in the communication process to employ „emphatic listening,” in order to „honestly express” themselves. The practitioners or the participants of the dialogue take turns in employing these methods. The four basics of NVC are 1) observation, 2) the expression of feelings 3) the expression of needs, and finally, 4) making a request, which, once fulfilled, can make both speakers’ lives richer and bring about a qualitative change in their relationship. It is important that our observations should be made without passing a value or critical judgement, but it is also necessary to firmly state whether we like or dislike what the other person is doing. By expressing our feelings (2), it is important not to pass a value judgement in order to prevent the other person from becoming distanced from us. The essence of NVC lies in becoming conscious of all the four basic elements and not in the employed words.

It is my conviction that appropriate forms of communication are absolutely necessary during theatrical processes for improving the ways colleagues relate to one another, just as in other professions and all other areas of life. Since our communication skills influence and determine the quality of our lives and professional positions to a great extent on a long-term basis, I find it important to be in command of the communication skills that enable us to maintain and enhance the level of personal and professional relationships.

Structure: After the introduction of NVC, the second and third chapters of my dissertation focus on the forms of violence that can occur in the theater, the reasons behind such occurrences, and the increased vulnerability of the actors and staff working in the theater. Ever since 2016 there have been a series of public scandals affecting the theatrical profession, such as the #metoo movement or cases that have become highly publicized about verbal and physical abuse, violent managers, or violent behavioral patterns, the causes of which can be found in the hierarchical structure of the theatrical profession. All these cases have contributed to my firm conviction that the key solution to the problem and the means through which further traumas can be prevented can be found in communication. At this point in my study I use numerous examples from my own experience as an actress and costume designer to describe situations and dialogues in which the conscious use of NVC improved the quality of the work process, (or would have improved it).

In the fourth chapter of my dissertation I describe the evolution of a personal theatrical project: the performance of Jelinek's monodrama, *Shadow* (premiere: Budapest, Trafó Grand Hall, Sept.8, 2020). In this performance I addressed the problematic issues of violence in a relationship by artistic means. Throughout the work process in which I was not only an actress, but also the one who invented and developed the project, I tried to observe the principles of NVC. In consequence, our working methods in the area of consciousness, language use, communication and power relations remained effective. The theatrical production gave convincing proof of my previous hypothesis about NVC.

Aims: In my view, further results can be reached if theater and arts students, and future teachers become familiar with NVC at university and put these methods into practice in their future careers. It would be useful if thinking, listening to one another, and consciousness were skills that were taught in schools in order to make collaborative thinking and communication a requirement at workplaces. Teachers, who instruct not only course material, but can consciously pay attention to the feelings of students by assisting them to accept these feelings rather than hide them or allow them to become overpowering, can offer special help. NVC motivates students to collaborate, not to compete. Theater and arts students at university also require more skills than simply learning the basics of the profession within the framework of

scheduled course work, no matter how important they may be. They have to learn to consider their profession independently of one another and not just to understand the material and the correspondences they have been taught in classes; they have to learn to live and work as equal and creative partners when they are working together in different situations and positions. The aim of integrating nonviolent communication into the coursework of theater and arts students is to make their communication skills richer and to create a working and creative environment which generates independent and collaboration skills. For this reason, it is my conviction that integrating NVC into the curriculum of the university of Theater and Film Arts would be worthwhile and productive.