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STAGES OF CHARACTER CREATION IN DIRECTOR–ACTOR COLLABORATION: BALANCING INNER EXPERIENCE AND OUTER ACTION

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Abstract

This article proposes a four-stage model of character creation in director–actor collaboration and offers criteria for assessing the balance between an actor's inner experience and outer physical action. The model draws on a comparative reading of Stanislavsky's method of physical actions, Chekhov's psychological gesture and Meyerhold's biomechanics. It was tested in work with 18 fourth-year students during the 2026–2027 academic year, in the staging of Chingiz Aitmatov's novel Qiyomat (Russian: Plakha; English: The Place of the Skull). The study argues that inner experience and outer action are complementary expressive languages rather than opposites, and that a character becomes stable only when the director gives the actor the opportunity to justify the external form from within. The case of the she-wolf Akbara shows how an observation exercise lasting half a month helped a student-actor move from unconvincing, human-like movement to a plastic form grounded in inner logic. Implications for acting and directing pedagogy in higher arts education are discussed.

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Keywords: Director–actor collaboration, character creation, psychophysical acting, psychological gesture, method of physical actions, biomechanics, rehearsal stages, theatre pedagogy

Introduction

The artistic impact of a theatre performance depends on how closely the director's conceptual vision matches the actor's sincerity and plastic precision on stage. Because theatre is a collective and synthetic art, this match is formed in a continuous creative dialogue between director and actor.

In the theory of character creation, two directions have long been set against each other: psychological theatre, which relies on inner experience, and plastic theatre, which relies on external form and movement. Contemporary research on psychophysical acting, by contrast, treats the actor's mental and physical apparatus as an indivisible whole (Zarrilli, 2009; Merlin, 2003).

In educational practice, however, this wholeness is often broken. When the actor surrenders only to experience, movement becomes passive; when the actor attends only to form, the inner logic of the character is lost. Two further symptoms of the same break are a director imposing a ready-made external scheme on the actor, and an actor relying only on intuition and drifting away from the overall mise-en-scène. The break is clearly visible in practice. During the staging of Chingiz Aitmatov's Qiyomat, the first author took part as a pedagogue in work on all the roles. In creating the she-wolf Akbara, the performer lacked plastic means: it was difficult to find a convincing movement language for the wolf and to master it. It was especially hard to express the character's inner state in a precise plastic form in the scenes where Akbara loses her cubs. An observation exercise helped to overcome the difficulty: the performer was asked to become familiar with the life of wolves, to observe them in their natural mphasiz, and to study how animals walk, stand and move in general. After this exercise the performer found the plastic form of the character and showed a good result. The

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work was carried out in the 2026–2027 academic year with 18 fourth-year students.

Research question: at which stage of the director–actor collaboration, and by what pedagogical means, is balance between inner experience and outer action ensured?

Aim: to substantiate a staged model of character creation and to propose criteria for assessing the balance at each stage.

Objectives:

1. To compare the approaches of Stanislavsky, Chekhov and Meyerhold with regard to the relation between the inner and the outer;
2. To identify the four stages of the collaboration and their pedagogical tasks;
3. To test the model on the staging of Qiyomat with 18 fourth-year students and to analyse the results.

Theoretical Background

The three approaches resolve the relation between the inner and the outer in different ways, but they do not exclude one another. Table 1 compares them using the same criteria.

Table 1. Comparison of the three approaches

Approach	Starting point	Inner–outer relation	Fit with rehearsal stage
Stanislavsky: method of physical actions	A concrete physical action and its circumstances	Action evokes the inner state; experience justifies the action	Études and exercises
Chekhov: psychological gesture	A mphasizes plastic form expressing the character's core desire	Gesture prepares the inner state and directs the imagination	Finding and consolidating the character
Meyerhold: biomechanics	Precise, rhythmic, organised movement	Physical form evokes the actor's psychological response	Defining the plastic form and mise-en-scène

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Comparative conclusion. All three approaches regard the actor's body as an active instrument of character creation. The difference is that Stanislavsky relies on justifying action through circumstances and purpose, Chekhov on a mphasizes form, and Meyerhold on the precision and rhythm of movement. They can therefore be seen not as opposed but as tools applied at different stages of one process. This idea is the central hypothesis of the present article.

Contemporary research likewise brings these approaches together under the notion of psychophysical acting and studies how they are combined in practical exercises (Zarrilli, 2009; Merlin, 2003; Carnicke, 2009). In the local context, the application of these approaches in the practice of the Karakalpak stage calls for separate study.

In the Uzbek school of directing, too, the collaboration between director and actor is regarded as the basis of theatre art. Muhammedov (2007) stresses that the director's thought, artistic plan and intentions are mphasiz on stage precisely through the actor's body, and that the actor in turn needs a director who watches the creative process from outside and guides it. He defines action as the harmonious movement of a psychophysical process and notes that action arises from inner thought and purpose (Muhammedov, 2007). This view corresponds directly to the idea of balance between inner experience and outer action developed in the present article. At the same time, although Muhammedov calls the actor "material subordinated to the director's will", he also regards the actor as a creative artist on a par with the dramatist (Muhammedov, 2007). The coexistence of these two statements provides a basis for discussing the balance between the director's concept and the actor's freedom.

Abdullayeva (2014) presents observation as one of the key skills of actor training: creative observation prepares the ground for the natural and convincing "mphasizes" of the actor's work (p.53). She recommends that students be assigned to observe people around them in the street, in transport and in public places, paying attention to how they behave and to their inner and outer sides

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(p.53). The first and simplest stage of observation is carried out with animals: students observe the distinctive features, bearing and mphasiz of various animals and reproduce them on stage (p.54). Logic is also important in observation: if an actor is illogical when presenting a creature or an event on stage, the purpose and idea of the action being presented are damaged (p.54). This is close to the criterion of balance used in this article: the external form must rest on inner logic and justification.

All translations from Uzbek sources are by the authors.

Methodology

The study combines three methods: theoretical–comparative analysis, pedagogical observation and practical directing analysis.

1. **Theoretical–comparative analysis.** The approaches of Stanislavsky, Chekhov and Meyerhold were compared using the criteria in Section 2.

2. **Pedagogical observation.** The object of observation was a group of 18 fourth-year students in the 2026–2027 academic year. The observation exercise lasted half a month.

3. **Practical directing analysis.** The forms of collaboration were assessed at the stages of work on the play, from table work to mise-en-scène. The work was the stage adaptation of Chingiz Aitmatov's novel Qiyomat.

Assessment criteria. At each stage three indicators were observed: (a) the clarity of the inner basis of the actor's action (whether the actor can answer the question "why?"); (b) the repeatability and precision of the plastic form; and (c) the actor's initiative within the director's concept.

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Limitations

The sample is small and limited to a single higher education institution; the results are therefore not 6mphasizes6 but offered as a working model for further research.

Results

A Four-Stage Model of Collaboration

The proposed model divides character creation into four stages. At each stage the tasks of the director and the actor, the priority of the inner or the outer side, and the criterion of balance differ (Table 2).

Table 2. Four-stage model of director–actor collaboration in character creation

Stage	Director's task	Actor's task	Inner–outer relation	Criterion of balance
1. Explication and table work	Explains the idea, the concept and the system of characters	Grasps the text, motivation and subtext	Inner side dominates	The actor can state the character's main purpose in his or her own words
2. Psychophysical search and étude	Creates conditions for search instead of giving ready instructions	Discovers the logic of action and the character through études	Both equal; action evokes experience	Every action has an answer to "why?"
3. Plastic shaping and mise-en-scène	Defines form, tempo-rhythm and mise-en-scène; justifies the form together with the actor	Passes the plastic task through his or her own psychophysics and turns it into personal experience	Outer side dominates but rests on an inner basis	When the form is repeated, the inner state is repeated too
4.Consolidation and stage performance	Controls harmony in the ensemble; refrains from excessive correction	Fills the form with "new" inner life each time	Both unified	Performance is stable but not mechanical

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The first three stages follow the usual sequence of rehearsal work: table work, études and staging. The fourth stage was added because keeping the found form alive on stage is a pedagogical task in its own right.

Situations That Break the Balance

When the sequence of stages is violated, two kinds of deviation are observed:

- **Form without inner justification.** The director gives the form of Stage 3 without Stages 1–2; the actor performs the movement but does not feel it.
- **Experience without form.** The actor stays at the étude level without moving to Stage 3; the performance is sincere but not repeatable, and drifts away from the overall mise-en-scène.

Results of the Observation

The material for observation was the staging of Chingiz Aitmatov's Qiyomat with 18 fourth-year students in the 2026–2027 academic year. The first author took part as a pedagogue in work on all the roles; the analysis below concerns the character of Akbara, the clearest example.

Problem. In creating Akbara, the performer lacked plastic means. It was difficult to find the movement language of the wolf, especially in the scenes where Akbara loses her cubs and the inner state had to be expressed in a precise plastic form. In terms of the model, the problem arose in the transition from Stage 2 to Stage 3, that is, from search to a defined plastic form.

Means applied. The pedagogue assigned the performer an observation exercise: to become familiar with the life of wolves, to observe them in their natural 7mphasiz, and to study how they walk, stand and move in general. The exercise lasted half a month.

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Result. After the exercise the performer mastered the wolf's gait, posture and plasticity and showed a good result in the role. Before the exercise, in the scene of losing the cubs, Akbara's movements were coarse and unconvincing and resembled a human more than a wolf. After the exercise, in the same scene, Akbara's movements, body posture, gaze and inner experience changed.

Analysis. The case confirms the central idea of the model: the plastic form becomes convincing when it is not given as a ready scheme but found through the performer's own observation. The observation exercise turned the form from something imposed from outside into a process of search, which corresponds to the principle of "freedom of search" at Stage 2. Importantly, the performer was also able to reveal the inner basis of the movement: she or he could answer the question "why?" for each action. This corresponds to the criterion of balance in the model: the external form (the wolf's plasticity) was linked with an inner basis (the state of the mother wolf). Searching for the plastic form of a character through observation relies on the principle of observation in Stanislavsky's system (Daventry French & Bennett, 2016). In Uzbek pedagogy as well, the first stage of observation is carried out with animals: students observe the bearing and mphasiz of animals and reproduce them on stage (Abdullayeva, 2014, p. 54). Abdullayeva also stresses the need for logic when reproducing what has been observed (Abdullayeva, 2014, p. 54), which matches the performer's ability in the case of Qiyomat to answer "why?" for every action.

Discussion

The main idea of the model is that inner experience and outer action take the lead in turn at different stages of the collaboration but never separate from each other. This is consistent with the later view of Stanislavsky, namely that the path to feeling can be found through action (Stanislavsky, 2008; Merlin, 2014).

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For the director. Giving the form and giving the opportunity to justify it are two separate acts. If the director performs the first and does not leave the second to the actor, the actor's creative freedom is limited. The director must therefore create the opportunity for "inner justification" together with the form.

For the actor. The actor must pass the plastic task through his or her own psychophysics and turn it into personal experience. In this process Chekhov mphasizes the role of the psychological gesture in awakening the imagination (Chekhov, 2002).

For education. It may be more effective to teach psychophysical exercises (gesture, étude, biomechanical exercises) not as a separate subject but tied to the stages of rehearsal. This assumption requires further experimental testing.

Limitations and further research. The model rests on theoretical analysis and a small-scale observation. It should be tested with other groups, in other genres (musical drama, ballet) and in professional theatre rehearsals. The application of the model to the Karakalpak stage, especially to productions in which plastic solutions play an important role, may be a separate research topic.

Conclusion

Character creation in director–actor collaboration is an integral chain of four stages: table work, psychophysical étude, plastic shaping and stage consolidation. At each stage the inner and the outer side participate in different proportions, but neither is ever completely absent.

The practical criterion of balance is simple: the actor can answer the question "why?" for every action, and when the form is repeated the inner state is repeated as well. This criterion is reached only when the director, together with giving the form, creates the opportunity to justify it from within.

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For educational practice, it is recommended to teach psychophysical exercises (the psychological gesture, the method of physical actions, elements of biomechanics) in connection with the stages of rehearsal and to assess balance with an observation sheet. Testing the model on a wider sample remains a task for further research.

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