SigMa
RIVISTA DI LETTERATURE COMPARATE, TEATRO E ARTI DELLO SPETTACOLO
e-ISSN 2611-3309

Ex-stasis and Acting Methods

Eisenstein and Ignacio de Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*

Fabiola Camuti
ArtEZ University of the Arts, The Netherlands

Abstract

This paper addresses the in-depth study and interest of Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein in Ignacio de Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, related to the Jesuit practice. It demonstrates that Eisenstein not only calls upon Loyola's teaching in his theorization of pathos and ecstasy, but that he especially does so also to draw upon specific characteristics of well-known and established Western theatre acting methods. This second reference is mostly unknown to the Anglophone speaking academic field because of the lack of English translations of the specific essay in which Eisenstein constructs his parallelism between the Jesuit exercises and the work of the Stanislavskian actor. In fact, in the official English edition of Eisenstein's writings this specific passage, which is present in the Italian publication, was left out because of editorial choices. The paper aims at underlining the importance of Eisenstein's interests in the Jesuit spiritual traditions in outlining the idea of the practice of acting as an attraction in his theorisation of montage.

Keywords

Eisenstein, Loyola, Spiritual exercises, Meditation, Acting methods

1 Preamble

This paper addresses an example of contamination between meditative and performative practices, rooted in the tradition of the work of the Theatre Reformers of the Twentieth century and their development of Western actors training[1]. It examines the in-depth study and interest of Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein in Ignacio de Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. Drawing a parallel between these two names and including them in a comparative analysis might seem to be at least curious, if not even antinomic. But in fact, despite the peculiar distance of theories and practices, as Martin Lefebvre pointed out, "Sergei Eisenstein, the fervent Bolshevik, calls upon the Catholic mysticism of Ignatius of Loyola to explain his ideas about pathos and ecstasy" (2000: 349). Moreover, as I shall demonstrate, he does so also to draw upon specific characteristics of well-known and established Western theatre acting methods. Eisenstein recalled

SigMa • 7/2023
DOI 10.6093/sigma.v0i7.10521 | 241-256

the Loyolan practice twice in his writings. The best-known reference to Loyola can be found in his book *Nonindifferent Nature* (ed. Marshall 1987), on which Lefebvre himself conducted his analysis. The second reference, less known to the Anglo-Saxon speaking world for lack of English translations, appears in an essay that, together with other texts, focuses on his montage theory. However, closely looking at his personal history one should not be completely surprised by the interest of the Russian film director in such spiritual practices. Although not overtly, for obvious political reasons, many members of the intellectual class within the Soviet context were very much interested in mysticism and occultism, and in some cases to such an extent that they gave rise to real Gnostic circles (Glatzer Rosenthal 1997: 273-97). In this specific case, the interest in the concept of Gnosis led Eisenstein to analyse the methods of prayer, meditation, and contemplation belonging to the Christian Jesuit tradition.

2 Ignacio de Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*: a brief introduction

In the attempt of summarizing the important events of Ignacio de Loyola's life and work, we have to take into account few significant dates. After his conversion in 1521, while he was convalescing because of several injuries due to his involvement in the battle in defence of the city of Pamplona from the French attack, in 1522 Ignacio started to write the first notes to his future *Spiritual Exercises* (Broderick 1998: 55-58). During his years of pilgrimage, he continued to practice and to direct the *Exercises,* adding rules and indications. The practice of the *Exercises* directed by Ignacio became popular and more and more appreciated since 1534, when he founded the Company of Jesus, which later became the Society of Jesus, a new religious order, mobile and different from traditional monastic life. In 1541 he started to write the *Constitutions for the Society of Jesus*, also known as the Jesuit order. Few years later, in 1548, Pope Paolo III Farnese officially approved and allowed the publication of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignacio de Loyola directed the Society of Jesus until his death in 1556.

Even if at a first sight and reading the *Spiritual Exercises* might appear as a little more than a series of notes and indications for directors and exercitants, the book actually marks and represents a crucial turning point

in Catholic spirituality and its history. In fact, in addition to being undoubtedly the basic text of Jesuit spirituality, the *Exercises* have been studied and adopted by many other religious orders and also used in numerous both clerical and secular retreats. Nonetheless, the writing unquestionably presents itself as a handbook, rather for directors than for retreatants, that essentially consists in a specific pattern of reflective meditation or contemplation, related to a series of "Introductory Observations", "Additional Directions", "Rules", and "Notes". The main aim of the *Exercises* is to provide a set of experiences such as meditation, contemplation, periods of discernment, and to enable the retreatants to overcome their disordered inclinations (Haight 2010: 170). In order to achieve the complete course of the *Exercises*, the exercitant has to spend four or five hours of intense prayer a day for almost a month, precisely twenty-eight days. The whole cycle lasts four weeks, each of which with a specific and distinctive purpose. The first week, known as the "purgative" way, is related to the act of purification of the soul and consists in "a period of conversion from a life of sin to one of observance of God's commandments." The second week corresponds to the classical spiritual notion of the "illuminative" way. It represents a further step of the exercitant, who evolves from "mere observance of the commandments to a life of generous service" (Dulles 2000: xvii). In the traditional mysticism both the last two weeks correspond to the "unitive" or "perfective" way. In fact they are characterized by an intimate union with God, and respectively by a moment of "mystical identification with Christ's suffering", in the third week, and a "period of joyful communion with the risen Christ", in the fourth week (xviii). The path of the *Spiritual Exercises* is defined as a continuous, relentless searching character that, as Haight points out, "should not be reduced to the desire to know God's will in the case of a decision to be made or a general reform of life. The search may be […] a search for meaning itself" (2010: 169). The search is indeed related to a wider concept of significance and knowledge that allows a deeper clarity about one's own life, going beyond the mere relation to God. The *Exercises* can be considered and studied not only from a religious point of view, on the basis of Christian spirituality, but also and above all as an awareness practice that can transcend its own religious, Christian connotation. As stated by Dulles in the "Preface" to the *Exercises*:

> [a]lthough written for retreatants, *The Spiritual Exercises* is much more than a manual for retreats. It is the distillation of the spiritual wisdom of one of the great masters of practical life. The book can be used,

> for example, as a school of prayer. With the utmost conciseness, Ignatius sets forth a great variety of methods. Within the text of *The Exercises*, we find considerations, meditations, contemplations, and applications of the senses (Dulles 2000: xxi).

3 Eisenstein and Loyola in the Nonindifferent Nature

So, the question then arises: what did Eisenstein find in the spiritual practice of the Jesuit order that interested him so much as to connect it to his theorization of filmic montage? Martin Lefebvre outlines an accurate and interesting analysis of Eisenstein's fascination with Loyola's theory and practice. In fact, basing his observations on the *Nonindifferent Nature*, the author reconstructs the relationship between Eisenstein's fundamental notions of "pathos", "organicity", and "ecstasy" and the concepts of "memoria" and "imaginicity" applied to the *Exercises*. According to Lefebvre, to establish such a connection, we must underline the role played by memory in Loyola's mysticism. In fact, the ecstatic form of spirituality proposed by Loyola is not just a form of ascetic practice; it rather constitutes a sort of mnemonic device necessary to develop the right moment of imaginicity that exercitants must enter to fulfil their meditative and contemplative state (2000: 354). Memory, in fact, as Pierre-Antoine Fabre states, is constantly invoked all over the course of the *Exercises*; "[i]t nourishes all representations, it always inhabits the composed places, it bails out the senses, it invades the theatre of imagination […] and turns contemplation into a web of secret memory" (1992: 89 in Lefebvre 2000: 354). Memory, then, and the "imaginistic" practice are both part of the four-week cycle of *Exercises* and they both work for the fulfilment of the ecstatic process. Images, in fact, are necessary to purify the exercitant's memory and imagination, so that they can be later replaced by purified images mainly associated to biblical episode, thus creating the setting for a new *memoria*, as a point of departure for the process of *Imitatio Christi*. In his study, Lefebvre clearly shows the initial critical approach of Eisenstein's analysis towards Loyola, especially with respect to the identification, not at all surprising and actually inevitable, of a strong religious interpretation of the mystical experience. However, notwithstanding the Christian characterization, this mystical, or better ecstatic, process can be useful, and this was precisely Eisentein's application aimed at unravelling

the relationship between pathos, organicity, ex-statis, once the role of images and imagination in the construction of a rebuilt *memoria*, as the centrepiece of the compositional principle, is recognized[2]. In the exposition of his theory of imaginicity (*obraznost*), outlined in two of his most important essays, namely "Montage 1937" and "Montage 1938", Eisenstein also articulated that, in their representational filmic acceptation, images are probable of being received only and if in relation with other images in a montage sequence (Eisenstein, ed. Glenny & Taylor 2010b: 11-58, 296-326). This process of composition is what allows mental associations to arise within the spectator's mind. Those associations by means of emotions, thoughts and ideas, are connected with the capacity of recalling a personal *memoria*. In this process of association, the Eisensteinian spectator becomes the counterpart of the Loyolan exercitant. In fact, as the implicit aim of the *Exercises* is to enable the exercitant to use images and imagination in order to construct a *memoria* related to the biblical episode, so, in Eistenstein's theory, the spectatorial subject is defined "according to the power of memory and [...] [his/her/their] ability to project images onto the 'inner cinema' of the soul or mind" (Lefebvre 2000: 361). The role of the film director as that of the Director of the *Exercises* is to make it possible to happen, by using a rhetorical device, following the "laws by which nonartificial phenomena – *organic* natural phenomena – are structured" (Eisenstein, ed. Marshall 1987: 12). In the attempt to conceptualize the spectator's inner experience, Eisenstein refers to the previously mentioned notions of pathos and ecstasy. Considering the latter, it seems quite clear that especially this concept led Eisenstein's attention to the ecstatic experience described by Ignacio de Loyola. Eisenstein's concept of ecstasy, in fact, must be understood in its etymological sense of ex-stasis, by means of being beside oneself, and such a state can be achieved only through the reception of a "pathetic" composition. Such composition was defined by Eisenstein as "a construction that primarily serves as an embodiment of the author's relation to the content and at the same time forces the viewer also to relate to this content." It is then the "pathetic" effect, or better "the effect of the pathos of a work [that] consists in bringing the viewer to the point of ecstasy" (1987: 27-28).

4 The *Exercises* as psychophysical technique for the actor

As I have already mentioned, there is another essay in which Eisenstein does not only recall Ignacio de Loyola's ecstatic mysticism to better define his theory of the filmic composition, but also employs the *Exercises* as a psychophysical technique to define acting methods. The study of Lefebvre, albeit accurate and thorough, does not render the completeness and complexity of the whole comparative analysis of these different practices. This incompleteness might derive from the lack of available sources, or more specifically, from the omission of crucial writings within the English translation of Eisenstein's work. In studying the connections, interactions, and contaminations between spiritual and mystical traditions and acting theories and practices, it seems important, if not necessary, to point out that the decision of keeping this specific relationship unattested represents at least a missed opportunity. Eisenstein had clearly connected the *Spiritual Exercises* not merely with a general theatre technique, but precisely with one of the best known and established acting methods of the Twentieth century, that is Stanislavsky's system. In the official English edition of Eisenstein's selected works there are only two references to his essay on Stanislavsky and Loyola, i.e. in the introductory note and in one footnote in which the editors declare their choice of cutting a particular passage from Eisenstein's manuscript. To my knowledge, this passage is not available in any other English translation. In the "Note on Sources":

> It [the essay *Tolstoy's 'Anna Karenina' – the Races*] could have been followed by 'Stanislavsky and Loyola' but we chose to exclude this on grounds of both the length of the volume overall and the fragmented state of this particular part of the manuscript (Eisenstein, ed. Glenny & Taylor 2010b: xi).

A similar statement is present in footnote 150 to Chapter Five:

> The section "The Exercises Of Stanislavsky and Loyola", which is assumed to belong at this point, has been omitted from this edition for reason of space (146).

It goes far from the scope of this paper to elaborate on a philological analysis of the different translations of Eisenstein's work. In this context, I will rather show how this omission can be considered as a missed opportunity to provide a better, broader, and more complex framework of Eisenstein's revolutionary notion of montage. In fact, it is not by chance that precisely this text has been included in an important Italian study

on the Twentieth-century theatre, such as *Civiltà teatrale nel XX secolo* (1986), edited by theatre historians Fabrizio Cruciani and Clelia Falletti, who present theatre theories and practices, problems and perspectives. The authors refer to Eisenstein's essay, included in the 1985 Italian translation of his works, edited by aesthetics scholar Pietro Montani. The title of the essay is clear and well represents the mentioned comparison: *I metodi dell'attore: Stanislavskij e Ignazio di Loyola, James e Lessing* (*Acting Methods: Stanislavsky and Ignacio de Loyola, James, and Lessing*) (Eisenstein, ed. Montani 1985: 178-201). In this text, Eisenstein discusses the psychophysical and embodied aspects pertaining to both the work of the Stanislavskian actors and that of the Jesuit meditator. He also stresses the importance of the relationship between actions, imagination, and emotion by calling on two other sources and examples who have dealt with such relationship from different points of view. He refers to the work of William James and the Gestalt Psychology and to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and his reflections on the inner and outer representation of characters in laying down the base for the theories and practices of dramaturgy.

With respect to Eisenstein specific relation to theatre, it is possible to detect further references to Stanislavski's practices and theories. As a matter of fact, Eisenstein, who is mainly known for his revolution of the filmic montage, is also an important figure of the Twentieth-century theatre. His theatrical background characterised his whole life and remained always present and active in his teachings and writings about Meyerhold's biomechanics. Furthermore, in order to define the actor's work and methods, he often specifically made reference directly to Stanislavsky. For instance, in his comparison of the filmic and the theatrical quality of attraction towards the spectator, he mentions Stanislavsky's definition of the actor's task as the recreation of a process instead of the focus on the result[3]. According to Stanislavsky and consequently to Eisenstein, this is what allows the theatre actor to direct the spectator's attention at every step of their actions. In filmmaking, this process is replaced by the montage, which represents a tool, a vehicle that the filmmaker employs in order to create that composition of different sequences, by combining fragments in order to evoke associations within the spectator's mind. To better explain this difference between the theatrical and the filmic techniques, Eisenstein presents as example a scene preceding a fight or an argument. By using not only a long shot but relying on montage, the argument is then introduced in the spectator's perception.

In Eisenstein's words:

> [y]ou are *not seeing the depiction of an argument*: the *image of an argument* is evoked within you; you participate in the process of the image of an argument coming into being, and thereby you are drawn into it as though you were a third participant in the evolving dispute (Eisenstein, ed. Glenny & Taylor 2010b: 135).

For a theatrical scene, which could be defined as a long shot from a singular point of view, this process is carried out by the actor who re-creates a physically real event, while this unfolds in front of the spectator. In this regard, Eisenstein mentions Stanislavsky as follows: "[t]he mistake most actors make is that they think about the result instead of about the action that must prepare it. By avoiding action and aiming straight at the result you get a forced product which can lead to nothing but ham acting" (Stanislavski 1937: 117 in Eisenstein 2010b: 136).

This attention on the process of creation, through the actor's work on the segmentation of the theatrical action, is precisely what led Eisenstein to underline the analogies between the two methods at issue. In fact, Eisenstein's essay starts with a long quote of Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares*, and precisely a fragment from Chapter Seven, on "Units and Objectives" (Stanislavski 1937: 111-26). At the beginning of the chapter, Stanislavsky explained one of his most famous apologues: the turkey must be carved into pieces to be eaten. What does Stanislavsky mean with the metaphor of the turkey? And why is it important in Eisenstein's analysis? Let us follow Eisenstein's text and Stanislavsky's quotes[4].

The episode opening the chapter is a semi-comic description of a dinner, in which Stanislavsky uses the image of a turkey, compared to a five-act play, *The Inspector General*, in order to underline the necessity of fragmenting and dividing the play as well as the turkey, in order for them to be accessible.

> "Children!" said he [Shustov, a famous actor in Stanislavky's narration who is in this case hosting the dinner] laughingly, as the maid set a large turkey in front of him, "Imagine that this is not a turkey but a five-act play, *The Inspector General*. Can you do away with it in a mouthful? No; you cannot make a single mouthful either of a whole turkey or a five-act play. Therefore you must carve it, first, into large pieces, like this…" (cutting off the legs, wings, and soft parts of the roast and laying them on an empty plate).

> "There you have the first big divisions. But you cannot swallow even such chunks. Therefore you must cut them into smaller pieces, like this…" and he disjointed the bird still further.
>
> "Now pass your plate," said Mr. Shustov to the eldest child. "There's a big piece for you. That's the first scene."
>
> To which the boy, as he passed his plate, quoted the opening lines of *The Inspector General*, in a somewhat unsteady bass voice: "Gentlemen, I have called you together, to give you a highly unpleasant piece of news."
>
> "Eugene," said Mr. Shustov to his second son, "here is the scene with the Postmaster. And now, Igor and Theodore, here is the scene between the Mayor's wife and daughter."
>
> "Swallow it," he ordered, and they threw themselves on their food, shoving enormous chunks into their mouth, and nearly choking themselves to death. Whereupon Mr. Shustov warned them to cut their pieces finer and finer still, if necessary (Stanislavski 1937: 111-12 in Eisenstein 1985: 178-79).

Eisenstein concludes by underlining the importance of the following sentence of Stanislavsky's text as a fundamental point of connection between the two methods: "'Give it taste,' […] 'by adding 'an invention of the imagination".' 'Or' […] 'with a sauce made of magic *ifs*. Allow the author to present his "given circumstances" (1937: 112). Stanislavsky's apologue, in fact, evoked in Eisenstein's mind another system, related to a completely different field, which however "is not less based on a 'montage' psychology, and moreover, entirely informed by the method of the 'offered circumstances' to obtain the necessary emotional effects and spirit" (Eisenstein 1985: 179). He overtly referred to Ignacio de Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. In his analysis, Eisenstein followed two main sources: the text of Alexandre Bron (1925), *Saint Ignace, Maître d'oraison*, and an anonymous edition of the *Exercises* titled *Manrèse, ou les Exercises Spirituels de Saint Ignace* (1911). Comparing the two methods, Eisenstein pointed out that Loyola's spiritual path reveals the guidelines of the psychological influence on human mind, which is of great interest for theatre, when it manages to control personal and emotional life. "What are we trying to obtain?" – stated Eisenstein – "That a high emotional 'reviviscence' can produce the scenic reality of feelings, which in turn might give rise to real and truthful actions and expressions" (1985: 181). In conclusion, he wrote that in some terms the *Exercises*' path is basically the same. These terms depend on how real is the exercitant's way of experiencing the meditation events and tasks.

In fact, relying on *Manrèse* and drawing directly from examples from the *Exercises*, he underlined that, in the ascetic tradition, the Church's whole liturgy involves the devotee in a first-person experience: *"'[w]hat we saw with our own eyes, what we heard with our own ear, and touched with our own hands*: that is what we believe in and preach!'" (Loyola 1911: xv in Eisenstein 1985: 183). More practically, in order to understand the central image of Christian mysteries and, thus, to achieve the role incarnation, Jesuits refer to a specific method: the *meditacion con las tres potencias* (meditation with three power of the soul): "[t]hose three elements are memory, intelligence, and will or love. With memory I remember, with intelligence I examine, with will I embrace" (Bron 1925: 132 in Eisenstein 1985: 183).

The application of this method consists of meditation and contemplation. Eisenstein points out how important it is to avoid the mistake of associating these two moments with passivity or abstraction: "[w]e are actually dealing with a process of extreme activism and incredible concreteness [...] [a process in which] one meditates not 'on' or 'about' a scene from the Gospel. One meditates *the* scene" (1985: 184). At this point of his analysis Eisenstein proposes another fragment of Stanislavsky's text, which provides a clear analogy with the Loyolan principle of "incarnation" of images and the act of "meditating *the* scene", highlighting the importance of a first-person experience. In this part of the text Stanislavsky underlines the necessity for the actor to have what he calls a "super-objective". In other words, an objective that cannot rely only on the actor's intellect but depends on the complete involvement of his physical and emotional being, aimed at creating that moment of truthfulness on stage.

> Can we use a main theme which is merely *intellectual*? No, not a dry product of pure reason. And yet a conscious super-objective, that derives from interesting, creative thinking, is essential.
>
> "What about an *emotional* objective?" It is absolutely necessary to us, necessary as air and sunlight.
>
> "And an objective based on *will* that involves our whole physical and spiritual being?" It is necessary (Stanislavski 1937: 301 in Eisenstein 1985: 184).

According to Eisenstein, in both processes it is possible to find the requirements of the montage of action. In fact, both in the three powers exercise and in Stanislavsky's method, the actor or the ascetic splits and reunifies, according to their interior spiritual forces and external feelings,

through the application of physical sensory organs (Loyola, ed. Puhl 2000: 44-45). Another part of the *Exercises* analysed by Eisenstein concerns the concept of "prelude". In fact, the focus of every exercise is at the very beginning on the three preludes[5]. The first prelude consists in calling to mind the story of the subject to contemplate (Loyola, ed. Puhl 2000: 41). It corresponds, in Eisenstein's analysis, "to the problems of oriented attention, of concentration as well as to the preliminary training required in order to execute the exercises and, so to say, to 'enter the circle'" (Eisenstein 1985: 186). In Stanislavskian terms, he referred here to the "given circumstances" and the "solitude in public". This need of reconstructing a narrative that may recall the story and history of the subject at issue evokes another of Stanislavsky's teachings, concerning the notion of "subtext". In fact, in his writings Stanislavsky underlined the importance for the actor to provide an access to the subtext, so that the life of the character as well as the whole play becomes richer: he defined it as the missing novel among the lines of the theatrical dialogue. In Stanislavsky's term, the subtext is the spiritual life, which is clear and can be felt internally by the character; it is the same life flowing beneath the words of the theatrical text (Malcovati 1988: 162-63). He did not consider the third prelude, since it is specifically related to the divine and mystical part of the process, and he rather focused on the second one: "Le prélude de la composition du lieu", the mental representation of the place. This moment of the *Exercises* corresponds exactly to the same condition that the actor needs to enter the scene and the sphere of the scenic feelings. In this phase of the meditation exercitants must mentally recreate the place they are meditating, by "truly and concretely representing first and foremost the path towards the place of the action: from where, how and in which manner they arrived there. And later the actual place of the action" (Eisenstein 1985: 186-87).

As already pointed out, the *Spiritual Exercises* are rather a handbook for directors, who have the task of guiding exercitants through the whole process. And this is precisely the other parallelism that characterised Eisenstein's analysis. He identified both the spiritual and the theatrical directors as someone who is there to guide but not to fully intervene, to suggest but not to influence, to support the task of the actor or the ascetic, without abandoning their role. To show these analogies, he compared again two fragments of different writings. He quoted again the *Manrèse* and Bron as follows:

> If the subject that undertakes the exercises is provided with common intelligence, the Director can limit him [herself/themselves] to a brief exposition of the object of meditation. He/she can do so by rapidly recapitulating the main points and by adding a concise explanation, so that the exercitant can think about it by him [herself/themselves] and be also able to search and find on his [her/their] own a way of feeding more concretely on the result of his/her own research. However, if this person requires more developed instructions, Ignatius' explicit intention is that he/she is given these comments and explanations. […] The most adequate composition of the place is the one that we will create by ourselves, combining the spectres laid on our memory. […] What we find by ourselves touches more and is therefore more effective than we are given from the outside (Loyola 1911: xxxii and Bron 1925: 121 in Eisenstein 1985: 187).

I would like to follow Eisenstein once more, by comparing Stanislavsky's indication on theatre directors and their role with respect to the actor's personal work and experience:

> He [the actor] must not be forcibly fed on other people's ideas, conceptions, emotion memories or feelings. Each person has to live through his own experiences. It is important that they be individual to him and analogous to those of the person he is to portray. An actor cannot be fattened like a capon. His own appetite must be tempted. When that is aroused he will demand the material he needs for simple actions; he will then absorb what is given him and make it his own. The director's job is to get the actor to ask and look for the details that will put life into his part. He will not need these details for an intellectual analysis of his part. He will want them for the carrying out of actual objectives (Stanislavski 1937: 303).

5 Conclusion

The specific aspect of performative knowledge related to spirituality in theatre practices remains a scarcely acknowledged topic within the field of theatre and performance studies. In fact, on the one hand the study of religious, meditative, and spiritual practices often entails a sort of social prejudice, connected to the misconception of the religious issue as tied up to a mere manner of blind faith and belief. On the other hand,

albeit recognized, this connection between the theatrical and the religious, spiritual phenomena has been mostly examined for what concerns the specificities related to sacred and religious representations[6]. This paper instead aims at considering the religious phenomena for what concerns their spiritual and meditative experiential characteristics. My engagement is rather with what lies behind and beyond the theological and theistic aspect of religions, namely the meditative and spiritual principles and practices and the application of these constituent principles to what is before performance, that is the actor's training and preparation. This way of extracting principles and methods might seem somehow reducing the practices under examination. As William James underlines in his famous *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, reductionism is not at all the aim when dealing with identifying and drawing the common principles shared by spiritual and religious experiences, or when the intent is to analyse and employ them from a biological, cognitive, epistemological, performative, or psychological point of view. It is mostly a way of considering the phenomena of religious experience, in James' terms, from a "purely existential point of view" (1960: 28-29). Rather than to a form of scientific reductionism, this way of researching applicable principles of spirituality can be assimilated to the notion of "searching theology" presented in the field of religious studies by Roger Haight S.J., who refers to this way of considering spirituality as an initiative that "comes from a depth of human freedom that encompasses mind, will, and emotions" (2010: 160). These examples clearly show how fruitful the possibility to compare and associate two different models derived from different fields can be. This association becomes even clearer if we consider that the theatrical condition of the *Spiritual Exercises* has been highlighted by different scholars in the field of religious studies, underlining their narrative and dramaturgical properties (Haight 2010: 168). And it is certainly possible to recognize the importance of Eisenstein's interests and fascinations and his attempt to analyse, examine, and connect the two practices and theories, in outlining the idea of the practice of acting as an attraction in his theorisation of montage. In conclusion, paraphrasing Eisenstein, from a thematic point of view, no parallelism can be considered fully legitimate. However, it is nevertheless true that what has been presented here can be read as a valuable intuition of how "two apparently different forms of individual preparation and representation can be connected in a quest for a higher effect of *affective impulse*" (Eisenstein 1985: 201).

Note

1 The words "actor" and "director" will be used throughout this paper referring to he/she/them pronouns simultaneously unless specified otherwise. In the used quotes the reference to the actor and director with the masculine pronoun will be left in the original version. Moreover, quotes from non-English texts have been translated by the paper's author unless otherwise indicated.

2 Cfr. Lefebvre (2000: 356). It is important to underline that in his analysis Lefebvre draws upon the concept of *memoria* starting from its origins that he connects with Plato's philosophy, in its acceptation of Form and Idea as access to knowledge, and from the distinction between the perception of the past and its recovery process, between *Memoria* and *Reminiscentia*, within the Aristotelian thought.

3 In the essay "The Montage of Attractions", Eisenstein states that "[t]heatre's basic material derives from the audience", and he defines the quality of attraction as follows: "[a]n attraction (in our diagnosis of theatre) is any aggressive moment in theatre, i.e. any element of it that subjects the audience to emotional or psychological influence, verified by experience and mathematically calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole. These shocks provide the only opportunity of perceiving the ideological aspect of what is being shown, the final ideological conclusion. (The path to knowledge encapsulated in the phrase, 'through the living play of the passions', is specific to theatre.)" (2010a: 34).

4 As I have already mentioned, Eisenstein's essay is available in the Italian version. For this reason, I will paraphrase and eventually translate some parts of the text. For Eisenstein's quotes of Stanislavsky mentioned in the text the editor, Montani refers sometimes to the Italian translation and sometimes to the English one, depending on the availability of the fragment at issue. When possible, I will refer to the English version, otherwise I will use other texts.

5 The preludes are three in Week I, II, and III. The first week starts with only two preludes. They all follow the usual preparatory prayer.

6 For historical analysis on religious and sacred representations cfr. for example, Guarino 1988 and 2010. Many religious traditions have been considered for their cultural aspects and for their involvement in artistic production. For instance, the theatre activity of the Jesuit order, as for example for what concerns the production of the *Collegio Romano* of the Seventeenth century, has been thoroughly discussed and analyzed, providing exhaustive results to the body of research. Cfr. for example, O'Malley *et al.*, (2006). Cfr. also Filippi (1994) and (2001). For a comprehensive analysis around the *teatro di collegio*, cfr. Roma (2022).

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Fabiola Camuti is Senior Researcher in Art Education as Critical Tactics at ArtEZ University of the Arts (The Netherlands), Research Affiliate with the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis (ASCA), and program leader Research in Arts Education (Arts Sector, Dutch Association Universities of Applied Science). She has been researcher and practitioner in different countries and institutions (Italy, France, Denmark, UK, NL) and has worked as Lecturer at the Departments of Theatre Studies (University of Amsterdam) and Media and Culture (Utrecht University). Her research is characterized by transdisciplinary methodology which involves the dialogue between humanities, cognition, and spirituality. She conducts research, leads projects, and gives seminars on topics that include embodied and socially-just pedagogies, participatory arts, performance & politics, politics of arts and cultural education, non-hierarchical learning, arts education in a more-than-human world.