

Voices advocating martial arts in actor training

Compiled by Grzegorz Ziółkowski

Sophia Delza (1972): 'The simultaneous use of mind and body is where the value [of Wu style of *taijiquan*] lies for the actor. The exercise frees the actor to become what [s]he needs or chooses to be through the mastery of the physical body so that it can function with correct or easy energy, simultaneously making the mind concentrate. The use of the body and mind then helps to put one into a state of calmness. The actor feels "whole" and totally confident, not distracted by random thoughts and victimized by irrelevant emotions. It is this "state of well being" that acts as a tranquil base of creativity'. (p. 29)

Delza, S. 1972. "T'ai Chi Ch'uan: The Integrated Exercise." *The Drama Review: TDR*, 16 (1): 28–33.

Linda Conaway (1980): 'T'ai Chi [*taiji*] encourages the actor to discover the physiological center of his [sic] person because all activity grows out of the center (tant ien) [*dantian* – energy centre two inches below the navel and centre of gravity of the human body]. In applying the teaching and movements of T'ai Chi the actor not only intellectually understands the center but utilizes it in motion'. (p. 55)

Conaway, L. 1980. "Image, Idea and Expression: T'ai Chi and Actor Training." In *Movement for the Actor*, edited by L. Rubin, 51–69. New York: Drama Book Specialists.

Richard Nichols (1991): 'Martial arts training can play a formative role in the establishment of new physical horizons for the actor. The physical forms required, the intense physical commitment, and the intense mental focus can lead the student away from restrictive habitual movement/behavior patterns towards creation of a more positive personal view of one's mental and physical capabilities – present and future. There is no reason to believe that a more positive outlook should not carry over into the actor's work as well'. (pp. 51–52)

Nichols, R. A. 1991. "A 'Way' for Actors: Asian Martial Arts." *Theatre Topics*, 1 (1): 43–59.

Adolphe C. Scott (1993): 'T'ai chi ch'uan [*taijiquan*] ... has a great deal to offer in helping to develop the mental and physical counterpoise that is the mark of a good stage presence. Most student actors tend to overdo their movements and gestures in the belief they are being natural. In their concern for realistic characterization, however, they rely far too heavily on facial expression and fragmented bits of business and, in the process, sacrifice the rhythmic unity that is the result of a perfect coordination of internal and external behavior. Pauses and silences make them nervous; they are uneasy onstage when confronted by the necessity of standing still. At first it is difficult for them to realize that elimination is a positive force in acting, which is a skill acquired not so much by learning what to do as what not to do. These are the problems that the practice of *t'ai chi ch'uan* helps to eliminate in the serious student of acting'. (p. 55)

Scott, A. C. 1993. "'Underneath the Stew Pot, There's the Flame...': T'ai Chi Ch'uan and the Asian/Experimental Theatre Program." In *Asian Martial Arts in Actor Training*, edited by P. B. Zarrilli, 48–59. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Center for South Asian Studies.

Phillip B. Zarrilli (1993): 'Practice of disciplines such as *t'ai chi ch'uan* [*taijiquan*] and *kalaripayattu* allow students to discover the breath-in-the-body and, through acting exercises, to apply this qualitative body-awareness to performance. Working toward mastery of embodied forms, when combined with the ability to fix and focus both the gaze and the mind, frees the practitioner from "consciousness about", allowing the person instead to enter into a state of "concentratedness" focused on the performer's relationship to his or her breath, its circulation through the body, and the deployment of this energy and focus through the body into the performance space. Training in the martial arts ... empowers the actor with a means of making *embodied* acting choices, and not simply choices that remain empty "mind-full" intentions'. (2002, p. 194)

Zarrilli, P. B. 2002 [1995, 1993]. "'On the Edge of a Breath, Looking': Cultivating the Actor's Bodymind Through Asian Martial/Meditation Arts." In *Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, edited by P. B. Zarrilli, 181–199, 355–358. London, New York: Routledge. First edition 1995. First published as "'on the edge of a breath, looking...'" Disciplining the Actor's Bodymind Through the Martial Arts in the Asian Experimental Theatre Program." In *Asian Martial Arts in Actor Training*, edited by P. B. Zarrilli, 62–89. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Center for South Asian Studies.

Phyllis G. Richmond and Bill Lengfelder (1995): 'Studying somatics [such as *taijiquan*] develops kinesthetic sensitivity, an understanding of personal movement habits and preferences, a body-level sense of how movement is put together, and an awareness of the mind-body link'. (p. 168)

Richmond, P. G., and B. Lengfelder. 1995. "The Alexander Technique, T'ai Chi Ch'uan, and Stage Combat: The Integration of Use, Somatics, and Skills in the Teaching of Stage Movement." *Theatre Topics*, 5 (2): 167–179.

Daniel Mroz (2008): 'Much of actor training is directly concerned with de-conditioning the stress-response. Actors' lack of physical ease, vocal projection and ability to respond creatively to their fellow players are all caused by habituated over-reaction to actual or anticipated stressors. This in itself is enough to recommend traditional *taijiquan* to any actor-training programme'. (p. 139)

Mroz, D. 2008. "Technique in Exile: The Changing Perception of *Taijichuan*, From Ming Dynasty Military Exercise to Twentieth-Century Actor Training Protocol." *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 28 (2): 127–145.

Campbell Edinborough (2011): 'A martial situation, much like the situations presented by live performance, necessitates the ability to respond clearly and instantly to constantly changing events. Indeed, the dangerous nature of any martial situation emphasises the importance of effective decision-making and the avoidance of mindless behaviour'. (p. 28)

Edinborough, C. 2011. "Developing Decision-Making Skills for Performance Through the Practice of Mindfulness in Somatic Training." *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 2 (1): 18–33.

Maria Brigida de Miranda (2012): '*Jogo* [game, play] *de capoeira*, adopted for the purposes of training actors, has the potential to develop a performer's physical connection with a partner without submitting the performer to actual physical contact. This is because the physical response to an attack in the *jogo* is to evade, rather than to block, absorb or redirect the blow. ... In relation

to training of actors, this “non-contact” principle of capoeira is an advantage over a great number of other martial arts. It favours a gradual development of confidence for performers wishing to avoid injuries and/or who are not used to physical training with partners’. (p. 184, 189)

De Miranda, M. B. 2012. “*Jogo de Capoeira: When Actors Play a ‘Physical Dialogue’.*” *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 3 (2): 178–191.

Zainal Abdul Latiff (2012): ‘*Silat* can help achieve a balance in which the physical, psychological, and moral all merge in the actor. *Silat* can form the basis for evolving a distinct training method for the performer since techniques instill discipline and dedication. *Silat* is useful for developing sensitivity towards the body, improving the body’s mechanics, and freeing up the body for a better stage presence. Among its benefits are full-body physical training with balance and body control, correct alignment, groundedness, flexibility, coordination, kinesthetic awareness, relaxation, and breath work. This training leads to total awareness and efficiency in movement as well as improved physical control. This develops self-confidence, and actors face and overcome fear’. (pp. 392–393)

Latiff, Z. A. 2012. “Revisiting *Pencak Silat*: The Malay Martial Arts in Theatre Practice and Actor Training.” *Asian Theatre Journal*, 29 (2): 379–401.

Christel Weiler (2019): ‘... practising Taijiquan [*taijiquan*] means to give oneself up to a never-ending process of learning, searching and transformation. Insight and intuition could only be reached by doing, by acting in the double sense of the word; they would neither be the result of rational knowledge nor correspond to skills or tricks’. (p. 176)

Weiler, Ch. 2019. “Grasping the Bird’s Tail: Inspirations and Starting Points.” In *Intercultural Acting and Performer Training*, edited by P. B. Zarrilli, T. Sasitharan, and A. Kapur, 167–178. Abingdon, New York: Routledge.

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