

# DRAMATICA

STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI

2/2022



**STAGE DIRECTING AND  
THEATRE PEDAGOGY  
NOWADAYS**

**STUDIA  
UNIVERSITATIS BABEŞ-BOLYAI  
DRAMATICA**

**2/2022  
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**STAGE DIRECTING AND  
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## **ARTICLES AND STUDIES**



## *Paradigms of Education in the Art of Acting*

**Cătălin CODREANU<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** Embedded in interculturality and transculturality, this paper focuses on the actor's training, on facing, understanding and assimilating the theater lessons of the Far East, especially those of the Nō theater, based on the constructive encounters with them by practicing the Tadashi Suzuki (b. 1939) method, Japanese martial arts, researching Zen philosophy and the writings of Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443). This article points out the similarity between certain paradigms of the Western theatricality with those of the Far Eastern one (holism, body-mind, *here and now*, flow, imaginary) as well as their fusion with other paradigms due to the interdisciplinary transfer existing between martial arts (aikidō and iaidō), Japanese culture, and the art of acting (*shin-waza-tai*, *shoshin*, *ichigo ichie*). The way in which fixed forms relate to imagination (*kata*), specific to both Far Eastern theater and martial arts (aikidō and iaidō), is also very important. This research highlights the essential nature of the fixed form for the impulses of imagination and creative freedom.

**Keywords:** interculturality, art of acting, Zen, Nō theater, martial arts, holism, body-mind, imagination.

### **Holism and the harmony of shin – waza – tai**

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the actor attempts self-definition by facing the issue of diversity and cultural difference, of different syntheses: between tradition and modernity, between old and new, the impure and

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eclectic style of postmodernist or postdramatic forms which still persists up to this date. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Western theatre was interested in the traditional theatrical forms of the Far East as well as in the actor model proposed by them. Mastering the vocabulary of signs, the syncretism of expressive means, dance, body plasticity, and singing, having a perfectly-trained, out-of-the-ordinary body, the oriental actor is, as George Banu points out, a superior model for western actors. The current training of actors has been enriched by some techniques of the Far Eastern theatrical forms.

We will briefly analyze the holistic approach which characterizes Japanese thought and was observed among others by Solomon Marcus and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In a semiotic approach, Solomon Marcus, the Romanian philosopher and mathematician (1925-2016), observes that postmodernity was a moment of connection between the Western and Far Eastern way of thinking. Solomon Marcus starts his analysis by observing the influence of Chinese ideograms on Japanese and Korean culture. An ideogram is first and foremost a pictogram, depicting an object found in nature. The ideogram is a graphic symbol through which “one can obtain a direct intuitive access to a holistic representation<sup>2</sup>”, says Solomon Marcus, while also highlighting the opposition with the fragmentarism and analytical approach of the western thinking. The East Asian mentality has a tendency to view an event as a whole, as opposed to Cartesian dualism or Kant’s sharp distinction between subject and object. There is a difference between the dualism of the European philosophy and “the monistic vision unifying mind and body, a fundamental aspect of Buddhist thinking<sup>3</sup>.” Western postmodernism indulges in holistic and monistic visions, tending to blur the distinction between subject and object. Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) observes the first difference between Western and Eastern thinking in how the subject is conceived. In Eastern thought, in Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, there is a refusal of the subject – says Lévi-Strauss, these doctrines demonstrating the illusory nature of the self, which is only “a provisional arrangement of

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2. Solomon Marcus, “Monism japonez și postmodernism occidental” [“Japanese Monism and Western Postmodernism”], *Secolul XX*, nr. 11-12 /404-405 (1998): 38.

3. Solomon Marcus, 39.

biological and psychological phenomena, with no lasting element such as a 'self': it is vain appearance, destined ineluctably to dissolve.<sup>4</sup> Lévi-Strauss believes that Japanese thinking has a peculiarity, it does not completely annihilate the subject, but, instead of being the cause, the subject becomes a result: "Japanese thought places the subject at the end of the line."<sup>5</sup> Thus, there is a difference between Western philosophy, which seems to be centrifugal (everything starts with the subject) and the Japanese, centripetal way of thinking. Like Solomon Marcus, Lévi-Strauss's analysis also takes into account the Japanese language and syntax, where the subject is placed at the end of the sentence. These observations are combined with those about the ethics and behavior of Japanese individuals within the community. For Japanese people, the sense of belonging to a community, to a collective work of art, respecting the hierarchies entailed therein, those moral obligations imposed by the *giri*, is extremely important. There is a tendency to define the individual from the outside, based on his/her place in the family and society.

The annihilation of dualistic distinctions is specific to Buddhist Zen thought. The sense of relativity developed by such a way of thinking is part of the histrionic character that celebrates change, being a fundamental part of the art of acting. Relativism, holism, the integrative approach rooted in the concept of body-mind, are all of paramount importance today in the art of an actor.

Japanese martial arts are deeply connected to Zen philosophy. To practitioners of martial arts, the mental training provided by Zen is of the utmost importance. Relevant in this regard in martial arts is the principle of *shin – waza – tai*, which expresses the connection between *mind*, *technique* and *body*. Practitioners of martial arts seek the unity and harmony between these three components. Even if one starts with the physical component, he has to move on to the mental one. In this trinity, the techniques are the path itself. Karate master Kenei Mabuni (1918-2015) emphasizes the connection between physical and mental training, warning practitioners that Zen training is done

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4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Other Face of the Moon. Writings about Japan*, Foreword by Junzo Kawada, Translated by Jane Mary Todd (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 36.

5. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Other Face of the Moon*, 37.

with “our flesh and bones” and that “the spirit must be forged through the physical.”<sup>6</sup> As a reply, Eugenio Barba notes that “the physical exercises are always spiritual exercises.”<sup>7</sup>

This unity and harmony between *mind – technique – body* is fervently sought by actors. This harmony grants the actor’s performance an organic nature and credibility. The techniques used by an actor through the unity of body and mind are, of course, adapted to the aesthetics that he embraces as an artist. But, apart from the aesthetics addressed, an actor’s psychophysical training must also take into account the three concepts above. An eternal problem one faces, as an actor, is the outside-in/inside-out approach. In his book entitled *Take Up the Bodies* (1982), director and theoretician of performance Herbert Blau (1926-2013) observes this insolvable dilemma an actor has to deal with: action or motive, being or becoming, inner or outer? In his opinion, the actor embodies both.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, as Zen gained popularity in the West thanks to the works of Alan Watts, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki and Taisen Deshimaru, the martial arts of the Far East also spread, and the art of acting did not miss this opportunity to revitalize psychophysical training. From Grotowski, Barba and Brook to Anne Bogart, Phillip Zarrilli, theater practitioners have used martial art techniques to train actors. Anne Bogart was an *aikidō* practitioner, Phillip Zarrilli experimented with *kalarippayattu*, *yoga* and *taiqiquan*, Herbert Blau used *taiqiquan* when training actors. Master Taisen Deshimaru’s book, *Zen et arts martiaux [The Zen Way to the Martial Arts]* is like a reply to Herbert Blau’s book *Take Up the Bodies*, being even published in the same year, in 1982. In this book, the author states something of utmost relevance regarding the holism of Far Eastern thinking and the outside-inside relation:

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6. Jose M. Fraguas, *Karate Masters*, vol. II, *Deschizătorii de drumuri [Karate Masters 2, The Pathfinders]*, translated from English by Monica Hriscu, Documentation: Eva Ion (Cluj-Napoca, Curs Publishing House, 2020), 103.

7. Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe. A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, Translated by Richard Fowler (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 87.

8. Quoted by Phillip Zarrilli, *(Toward) A Phenomenology of Acting*, Foreword Evan Thompson (London & New York: Routledge, 2020), 9.

Mind and body, interior and exterior, substance and phenomena: these pairs are neither opposed nor in duality, but form a unity without separation.<sup>9</sup>

This is the vision that shaped my pedagogical thinking and allowed me to open up more to new explorations in the art of acting. The perspective I appropriated combines this holistic view of Zen Buddhist origins with Zeami's poetics and poetry on Nō theater, with the Tadashi Suzuki method and martial arts, which allowed me to establish the theoretical frameworks of an actor's training. Personal contributions are inspired from the exercises of the Suzuki method, which I teach rigorously in the exact way they had been transmitted to me by director and professor Izumi Ashizawa. I use personal ideas in the preparation and warm-up process and other adjacent studies that emphasize, support and harmonize with the Suzuki method.

In the student's training plan that I developed for the academic curriculum, I introduced elements of *aikidō* and *iaidō*. The interdisciplinary transfer that I operated between martial arts and the art of acting proved its usefulness, efficiency and pedagogical value. The elements taken over were productive and they paid off, proving their benefic effects in several ways, including: body awareness, breathing while moving, *hara* – the source of vital energy and the work center of an actor, posture, the relationship between relaxation and concentration, the equilibrium between balance – imbalance, the qualities of energy, intelligent effort distribution, body dynamics and flexibility, spatial relationships, proxemics. All these explorations are permanently supported by the imagination. In this integrative approach aiming to embodied consciousness, breathing, *hara*, movement and imagination are all connected one with another. Breathing can progressively turn into expressive breathing, vocal expression, word, text. The first step, however, is to link breathing to body movement. All Far Eastern martial arts achieve this goal. In the art of acting, this integrative approach is about how the invisible is seen. The Tadashi Suzuki method is one of these integrative

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<sup>9</sup>. Taisen Deshimaru, *Zen et arts martiaux* (Paris, Albin Michel : 1983), 18. Our translation of the French original: "L'esprit et le corps, l'extérieur et l'intérieur, la substance et les phénomènes : ces couples ne sont ni dualistes ni opposés, mais forment une unité sans séparation."

methods and fully harmonizes with my interdisciplinary explorations. In Phillip Zarrilli's excellent study entitled (*Towards*) *A Phenomenology of Acting*, the author points out:

Whether *taiqiquan* or another process of structured psychophysical training such as Suzuki training, what is important is engaging and exploring embodied consciousness, attending to, perception, imagining, in detail as one learns what it is like to listen, and to touch 'the untouchable.'<sup>10</sup>

Performing arts and Far Eastern martial arts highlight the holism as well as the harmonious unity between *mind, technique and body*. This is an important foundation stone in the creation of the modern body-mind concept that actors are currently working with.

### ***Shoshin* –the beginner's mind**

The Sōtō Zen school developed the concept of *shoshin*, which means *beginner's mind*. Practitioners of Sōtō Zen are taught to adopt this attitude of a pure, fresh mind seeing beyond dualism, apprehending everything with curiosity. Based on the paradoxes specific to Zen thinking, Master Shunryu Suzuki (1904-1971) points out that "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."<sup>11</sup>

Implementing this concept in the art of acting helps actors keep their mind fresh, leave behind their preconceptions, "empty their cup", as the famous Zen koan says. This eternal resumption of the actor is also emphasized by Ariane Mnouchkine, who believes that artistic development lies in one's power to be in a continuous apprenticeship.<sup>12</sup> Routine, stereotypical thinking,

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<sup>10</sup>. Phillip Zarrilli, (*Toward*) *A Phenomenology of Acting*, 9.

<sup>11</sup>. Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Edited by Trudy Dixon, foreword by Huston Smith, introduction by Richard Baker (New York & Tokio: Weatherhill, 1995), 21.

<sup>12</sup>. *Ariane Mnouchkine*, Introduction, selection and presentation by Béatrice Picon-Vallin, translated from French by Andreea Dumitru (Bucharest: "Camil Petrescu" Cultural Foundation, Cheiron Publishing House, 2010), 25.

fatigue, impasse, blockages of all kind, can be eliminated by accessing the *beginner's mind*. After observing certain physiological disorders with unpleasant artistic consequences in an actor's life, Grotowski makes the following observation:

Every actor – even one who is technically skilled – undergoes some form of vocal crisis after a period of several years. This is due to age which changes the physical structure of the body, demanding a new adaptation of the technique. The actor who wants to avoid stagnation must periodically begin all over again, learning breathing, pronunciation and the use of his resonators. He must rediscover his voice.<sup>13</sup>

*Aikidō*, and Japanese martial arts in general, have the gift of training the intuition, of taking the other's energy and transforming it, carrying it forward, sometimes with a different sense, in different direction. Martial arts constantly train one's sense of anticipation, which becomes useful in case of accidents or unforeseen events onstage. One can deal with the situation without breaking the convention, without giving away that little syncope. The fluidity of the mind, in harmony with the prompt, firm, adaptable kinesthetic response, makes such trained performer an ideal partner. By thinking and acting with the *beginner's mind*, one will know not to stop, to carry on playing, to adopt one of the possible scenarios based on the situation played. Ordering of the mind is achieved by ordering of the body, by adopting the correct posture. This is a necessary practice not only for actors but also for people in general.

The man on the stage should not be concerned with "to be or not to be", because the moment he asks himself this question, he already knows very well that "he is". The actor is first and foremost *the doer*, the one who acts, so "doing" is his permanent intention and he should be aware of the fact that he can change our logical perception of time (in the general sense). We can travel from the past to the present and then to the future, but the course can change from the present back into the past or from the future back to the present. The

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<sup>13</sup>. Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Edited by Eugenio Barba, Preface by Peter Brook (New York: Routledge, 2002), 172-173.

beginner's mind can make this journey possible. When the mind no longer perceives space and time as different entities but rather as a continuous whole, the duality disappears or rather harmonizes with the actions that are taken.

The attitude implied by the *beginner's mind* protects actors from the vices of the job: getting stuck in clichés and manners, the immeasurable pride, the egocentrism, the complacency of victors. It can help actors to stay fresh, alive, *now and here*. Communication and empathy are enhanced in the open mind of a beginner. This mind knows how to listen to its partner and accompanies the actor when observing the relativity of the phenomena. *The beginner's mind* is boundless and curious, always eager to learn new things.

### *Ichigo ichie and here and now*

In Japanese culture, there is a concept called *ichigo ichie* whose literal meaning according to neurologist Ken Mogi (b. 1962) is "one time, one encounter."<sup>14</sup> The concept is associated with Sen no Rikyū, who seems to have developed it during tea ceremonies, based on Zen philosophy, which is shaped by the ephemerality of the world and its phenomena. According to this concept, a meeting between two people, a meeting between a person and things, places or events, is transitory, and, as such, should be appreciated, cherished, honored. Therefore, each meeting is ephemeral, unique, unreproducible, but, above all, it is a chance, an opportunity. *Ichigo ichie* urges us to fully enjoy the moment of a meeting. It is like being brought back to life. The concept appears in Zen meditation, martial arts and Nō theater. In martial arts, *being present in the moment* is a matter of life and death. Martial arts require the practitioner to engage with effort, energy and full concentration each time.

The art of acting is fundamentally related to the present, to *here and now*. The actor sanctifies and amplifies the moment, he gives himself completely in. Theater is the art of the present, says Ariane Mnouchkine.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>. Ken Mogi, *The Little Book of Ikigai. The Essential Japanese Way to Finding Your Purpose in Life* (London: Quercus Editions, 2017).

<sup>15</sup>. Ariane Mnouchkine. *Arta prezentului. Convorbiri cu Fabienne Pascaud* [*The Art of the Present. Conversations with Fabienne Pascaud*], translated from French by Daria Dimiu (Bucharest: "Camil Petrescu" Cultural Foundation, Cheiron Publishing House, 2010), 17.

When describing actors, director Mihai Măniuțiu finds that the actor's joy "seems to derive from everything that remains ambiguous and only has its confirmation in the moment."<sup>16</sup> Theater director and educator Radu Penciulescu (b. 1930) designed a series of exercises entitled *Ici et maintenant* (*Here and Now*) that were published by Patrick Pezin in *Le livre des exercices* (1999). The actor, says Radu Penciulescu, is required to have a higher level of presence than other people, he must not imitate yesterday but the color of the existence resulting from the *here* and *now*. In his plea for the actor who amplifies the theatrical moment, Radu Penciulescu shows that:

There is some kind of mysterious computer in us, which can receive all the signs, all the vibrations of a situation, organize them in a fraction of a second without opposing them, and which can find the right, instinctive solution to something involving the whole human being, exceeding all its intellectual, physical, sensory abilities. [...] It is the gathering of certain stimuli that causes the human being to react to what is going on in his environment).<sup>17</sup>

In our everyday life, as Radu Penciulescu observes, "we are half asleep," and moments of genuine awakening are rare. The actor is obliged to create such work situations on his own. The actor's extraordinary situation demands a state of permanent hyper-awakening.

The concept of *ichigo ichie* (*one time, one encounter*) and the actor's presence *now and here* are closely related to the concept of *flow*, described by psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1934-2021) in his book *Finding Flow*:

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<sup>16</sup>. Mihai Măniuțiu, *Despre mască și iluzie* [*On Mask and Illusion*], (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2007), 9. Our translation.

<sup>17</sup>. Radu Penciulescu, "Ici et maintenant" from "Les « Dits » de Radu Penciulescu," in Patrick Pezin, *Le livre des exercices à l'usage des comédiens, suivi de Une amulette faite de mémoire, La signification des exercices dans la dramaturgie de l'acteur par Eugenio Barba* (Saussan: Éditions L'Entretemps, 1999), 334. Our translation of the French original: "Il y a en nous une sorte d'ordinateur mystérieux, qui peut recevoir tous les signes, toutes les vibrations d'une situation, les organiser en une fraction de seconde sans s'opposer à eux et trouver la solution juste, instinctive, et qui implique tout l'être humain, dilaté dans toutes ses capacités intellectuelles, physiques, sensorielles. [...] C'est le rassemblement de certaines circonstances qui fait que l'être humain réagit à son milieu."

*The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (1997). For the American psychologist, the state of flow means complete mental engagement in a given situation, on all levels, when, immersed in an activity, our will, mind and heart resonate in unison with each other. When “what we feel, what we wish, and what we think are in harmony”, we have what Csíkszentmihályi calls a *flow experience*.<sup>18</sup> Characteristics of the *flow* state are the complete immersion in an activity, absolute and harmonious focusing of psychic energy, the loss of the sense of time. *Flow* is an intrinsically autotelic experience (it is *per se*, a goal in itself), for which no reward is expected. The state of *flow* is associated with joy, satisfaction, fulfillment. The state of flow is characteristic to artists that are passionate about their art. In fact, the concept was discovered by the American psychologist while observing his painter friend as he was working. Csíkszentmihályi noticed how immersed he was in his activity, a state of incessant devotion and pleasure which persisted for hours. Actors are used to working long hours when training or rehearsing. The *flow* state generates those rare moments that will be remembered and, perhaps, will be part of the performance. Immersion does not have to be a goal in itself, it is free, success being only a consequence. It is the joy of *being in the present*, of doing what you like *now and here*:

When experience is intrinsically rewarding life is justified in the present, instead of being held hostage to a hypothetical future gain.<sup>19</sup>

Being fully in the present theatrical moment, in a good *flow* state, grants actors the possibility of a valuable performance. An actor’s performance and excellence are closely related to his/her ability to focus their attention on the object of the attention, personal or common, in a given moment during his training or performance. According to American psychologist Daniel Goleman (b. 1946), the state of flow is achieved by focusing your attention. Pleasure, says Goleman, “is the emotional marker for flow.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>. Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, *Finding Flow. The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York: Harper Collins/ Basic Books, 1997), 29.

<sup>19</sup>. Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 69.

<sup>20</sup>. Daniel Goleman, *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence* (New York: Harper, 2013).

The concept of *mindfulness* is also closely related to *ichigo ichie*, *here and now* and *flow*, as it also involves a complete anchoring in the present. *Mindful awareness* means to fully participate in what you experience *here and now*. The concept has Buddhist origins, with roots in the practices of meditation, yoga, tai chi, qi gong. For American psychiatrist Daniel Siegel (b. 1957), *mindful awareness (conscious attention)* is “a form of attentional skill that focuses one’s mind on the present,”<sup>21</sup> as he points out in his book *The Mindful Brain. Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being* (2007).

The imperatives of the *present*, together with the *beginner’s mind*, always curious and empathetic, demand from the actor to always be able to start all over again. According to Mihai Măniuțiu “the actor always starts himself: in this lies his glory.”<sup>22</sup> Immersion in the *here and now*, awareness of the theatrical moment amplify the quality of acting, improve adaptability and creativity.

### **Creativity and reinventing tradition**

In *Fūshikaden*, Zeami recommends to actors to “improve” the techniques learned from their ancestors using “their own talent”, letting us understand that the “*Transmission of the Flower of Acting Style*” from generation to generation takes place with the special contribution of each actor.<sup>23</sup> In this process, in which the teachings are passed down, there is a clear, firm, rigorous component, but also a subtle invitation to make your own creative contribution, to innovation. There is an objective part of the teachings passed on which allows for refreshment through subjective contribution. In his book *On Directing and Dramaturgy. Burning the House*, Eugenio Barba comments on the dialectics between the “field of objectivity” containing the technical procedures condensed into clear principles and the “opposite extreme”, the one

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<sup>21</sup>. Daniel Siegel, *The Mindful Brain. Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

<sup>22</sup>. Mihai Măniuțiu, *Despre mască și iluzie [On Mask and Illusion]*, 27. Our translation.

<sup>23</sup>. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nō Drama. The Major Treatises of Zeami*, translated by J. Thomas Rimer Yamazaki Masakazu (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), XIX and *passim*.

of subjectivity, namely personal “heat”, the “temperature” of an individual. The opposite extreme, i.e. that of subjectivity, of the artist’s *temperature*, is the field of imagination, of creativity, of the invisible.

Eugenio Barba observes that, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a *revolution of the invisible*, which disclosed the importance of hidden structures in fields such as physics, sociology, psychology, art and myth. A similar revolution took place in theater too, except that here the invisible structures were not meant to be discovered in order to understand how reality functioned, but were re-created onstage so as to give greater vitality to scenic fiction.<sup>24</sup> As a result of his research, Eugenio Barba developed the concept of *subscore*, the invisible element of a theatrical score, part of the “actor’s dramaturgy.”<sup>25</sup> The subscore is built up from associations, memories, photographic images, the lyrics of a song, a melody, a line, etc., anything deemed by the actor’s imagination as appropriate for the situation or the texts he is working with. What matters is not the intellectual value of these elements but rather their effectiveness: once found, these elements provided for Barba’s actors materials to be used in their improvisations. The actions resulting from these suggestions were first performed in their natural dimension and then miniaturized, becoming part of the subscore, made “invisible”. While directors, actors, playwrights and the other performers onstage are all working on the same score, the subscore is each actor’s individual task, where he can bring his/her own contribution based on their creativity and imagination.

A quasi-divine faculty, as regarded by poets like Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire, imagination is the creative force of the artist. Thanks to the imagination, the actor can experience the new, the original, he/she is able to invent new forms. In the case of the Far Eastern theatrical forms, which are codified, and which also include the Nō theater, tradition has enshrined body expression in fixed forms of play, in *kata*, which are passed on from master to disciple. *Kata* means rigor, the discipline of the form, the accuracy of techniques. On the other hand, it is also the freedom and the ardor of the

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<sup>24</sup>. Eugenio Barba, Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology. The Secret Art of the Performer* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>25</sup>. Eugenio Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy. Burning the House*, translated by Judy Barba (London & New York: Routledge, 2010), 29-33.

imagination. Thus arises the issue of the relationship between the fixed form – *kata* – and the creative freedom of the imagination. It is known that stable things last for a long time but they hurt with their rigidity, immobility, stiffness, sometimes even becoming synonymous with death. Of course, in case of the traditional theatrical forms of the Far East (Nō, Kabuki, Kathakali, Peking Opera, Balinese dance), the virtuosity of the artists is what lends the form its shine. Virtue arises from maintaining the form. The question one might ask is how can you respect *kata* but also revive the form? To what extent and how can tradition be recreated? To what extent does *kata* accept novelty?

In her work entitled *Teatrul Nō. Tradiția creatoare /The Creative Tradition of Nō Theatre*, researcher Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno dedicates a few pages to actors Kanze Hisao and Umewada Rokurō, who, in her opinion, managed to recreate the Nō tradition when approaching Zeami's play, *Izutsu* in two different ways. In *Izutsu*, both actors played *shite*.<sup>26</sup> Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno describes us the different visions and interpretations of these two actors: Kanze Hisao chose to be closer to imagism, metaphor and symbol, while Umewada Rokurō focused on the psychological state of a “woman waiting for a man,” to her madness, approaching a more realistic territory. Well versed in the Japanese language (her paper is bilingual), Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno's research provides us with valuable materials, such as excerpts from Kanze Hisao's writings and essays, as well as excerpts from her interview with actor Umewaka Rokurō.

From the writings of Kanze Hisao<sup>27</sup> (1925-1978), we learn that he rejected the idea that tradition is only a faithful observance and rendering of the form. He thought that tradition should be recreated with each new interpretation. To respect the form learned and inherited is only the first step in art, its foundation, says Kanze Hisao. The great actor of the Nō theater states:

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<sup>26</sup>. *Shite* (“the doer”) is the main character of the Nō Theatre. Most researchers of the Nō theatre consider that this theatrical genre has, in fact, only one character, the *shite*, the other – the *waki*, being only a surrogate of the audience or a mediator between the worlds. *Shite*, the spirit of a man or a woman, represents the “unquenchable suffering of the dead” in search of knowledge, understanding, peace and enlightenment.

<sup>27</sup>. In gratitude, Kanze Hisao received the honorable distinction of Important Intangible Cultural Asset.

*Kata-zuke* – the book of directing, or the director’s notes on the play – should never be turned into supreme rules. It may seem as an exaggerated statement, but Nō is only alive onstage if the actor, on the foundation we talked about, superimposes his reading of the book of directing so that on each of these lines he imprints his thoughts and feelings on Nō, his theatrical vision, his vision on life and the world.<sup>28</sup>

In his essay “Kokoro yori kokoro ni tsutawaru hana – nō no genshōgaku” (“The flower passed from one heart to another – the phenomenology of the Nō theater”), Kanze Hisao states that he would eliminate the *monomane*<sup>29</sup> from each character, because all “speculations on realistic acting” seem to him incompatible with *mugen nō*-type (*illusion-dream*)<sup>30</sup> plays. Kanze Hisao has valuable remark on playing “the woman waiting for a man.” For him, the male actor who plays a woman dressed in her husband’s clothes is a moment signifying “a world of androgynous, sensual beauty”, for which “both the actor and the audience should embark from the real world and journey to an inner time”. The scene of the reflection of the “woman waiting for a man”, dressed in her lover’s clothes, in the water of the well, is a “sexual ecstasy,”<sup>31</sup> says Kanze Hisao. For researcher Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno, the vision and performance of master Kanze Hisao contributed to the recreation of the tradition and to the firm outlining of “the eternity of love” in Zeami’s play *Izutsu*.

Our research focuses on Master Kanze Hisao’s preference for metaphors and images, his preference to work on the connection between the images

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<sup>28</sup>. Quoted by Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno, *Teatrul Nō. Tradiția creatoare* [The Creative Tradition of Nō Theatre] (Craiova: Scrisul Românesc Foundation, 2009), 168.

<sup>29</sup>. *Monomane*, spelled and *mono-mane*, a concept of Zeami’s poetics, means “imitation of work”, a concept somewhat similar to Aristotelian mimesis. *Monomane* is only a seemingly realistic imitation, as the Nō theater means essentialization, stylization and a specific semantic code. The strictness of the rules, the norms, as well as the particular canon, protect the Nō theatre from the dangers of naturalism. However, in order to meet the requirements imposed by monomanes, Zeami recommends to the actors to study and carefully document the human behaviour.

<sup>30</sup>. Quoted by Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno, *Teatrul Nō. Tradiția creatoare*, 166.

<sup>31</sup>. Quoted by Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno, *Teatrul Nō. Tradiția creatoare*, 168-169.

taken from the text and body language, the attention paid to the colors of energy. The *jo-no-mai* dance, a very slow dance from the second part of the paly *Izutsu*, demands from actor Kanze Hisao both his imagination and his entire vital energy. The dance lasts about ten minutes, but for Kanze Hisao time is elastic, it expands and contracts, the dance seems to last for a moment or a year. Kanze Hisao refers to his own dance using metaphors, and, as noted by Baudelaire and many others, metaphor is the language of imagination.

In the performer's style of acting, one might observe the *tameru* technique, characteristic of both the Nō and the Kabuki theater. The expression *tameru*, whose Chinese ideogram means "to accumulate" and whose Japanese ideogram has the meaning of "to bend something which is both flexible and resistant", indicates retention, holding back. Hence the notion of *tame* which means the ability to retain energy, to concentrate into an action which is limited in space the energies necessary for a much larger action, to compress the same amount of energy into restricted movements.<sup>32</sup> Eugenio Barba admires Kanze Hisao's dance, especially when the shite sits motionless in the center of the stage, when the actor "is dancing inside himself", a moment called "the action of silence" or "to dance with the heart."<sup>33</sup> There is a principle in the Peking Opera which also exists in the schools of the Nō Theater: it stipulates that the movement should stop outside and continue inside. In a workshop conducted by Eugenio Barba, he told us: "the movement stops in space and continues in time." Such moments require the extensive, strong support of our imagination. We would like to mention that such moments resemble *Radiating* on the scale of the four Qualities of the Movement (*Molding, Flowing/Floating, Flying and Radiating*) according to Michael Chekhov's (1891-1955) method. There are also similarities with the exercise of the seventh level of energy in the Viewpoints method, as developed by Anne Bogart, where the actor suddenly stops the unleashed movement of energy and "freezes", does not move any longer, but inside him/her the energy reaches its maximum.

The actor-poet Hideo Kanze reveals:

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<sup>32</sup>. Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, 28.

<sup>33</sup>. Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, 29.

I want to exist on the stage as a flower might, one which by chance has just happened to blossom there. Each member of the audience too sits brooding over various images of his own. Like a single flower. The flower is alive. The flower must breathe. The stage tells the story of the flower.<sup>34</sup>

The reference to Zeami's *hana*<sup>35</sup> is obvious but, beyond that, the actor reveals fragments from his subscore and the way he/she makes the invisible visible. It is his particular way to infuse novelty into an old *kata*, to sustain the ancient form through a color of the energy that belongs to him. In his work, *The Invisible Actor* (1998), Master Yoshi Oida (b. 1933) uses the concepts of *tai* and *yū*,<sup>36</sup> by which Zeami attempted to divide learning into "fundamental structure" and "phenomenon". In Zeami's poems, *tai* is the flower and *yū* is its scent. Yoshi Oida's comment extends the explanation by adding another example: if *tai* is the moon, *yū* is the moonlight. We can say that the actor Kanze Hisao did not work on the structure but rather on the light of the *yū*, and those who saw him perform – including Tadashi Suzuki, Yoshi Oida and Eugenio Barba – shared the same scent of the flower blooming in the moonlight.

The contribution of invention and novelty offered by Master Kanze Hisao is an example from a stage performance. We will now highlight the part played by imagination which manifests during training. A principle by Yoshi Oida says: "Ideally, any physical exercise that you do should also become an exercise of imagination, not just working your body."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>. Quoted by Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, 29.

<sup>35</sup>. Hana (Flower) is the main and particular concept of Zeami's poetics, it is the concept he always returns to, developing it and presenting its details or connections, demonstrating its practical use for the benefit of the actors. It is both an ethical and an aesthetic concept, it is metaphorical and ambiguous. *Hana* follows the *monomane* principle, but it is the original, the unusual, the element of surprise that removes the rigid conventionalism of imitation. *Hana* contributes to the quality of a performance. *Hana*, says Zeami, is in the depths of our art, it is its secret and essence.

<sup>36</sup>. In Japanese, *tai* means body, and *yū* can be translated as *mystery*, *darkening*, *something that is hiding*. In Zeami's poetics, *yūgen* is an essential concept that signifies the grace, the charm, the secret spell of the actor's creation.

<sup>37</sup>. Yoshi Oida and Lorna Marshall, *The Invisible Actor*, Foreword by Peter Brook (New York & London: Routledge, 1998), 18.

Working with Yoshi Oida, I had the opportunity to experience the imaginary in a certain exercise called *Fune kogi undo* (the rowing exercise), taken over from *aikidō*. This exercise was taken over from *Shinto* purification rituals and brought into *aikidō* by Morihei Ueshiba.<sup>38</sup> The *Fune kogi undo* exercise is also called *ame no torifume no gyo* (the rowing of celestial birds) and aims to connect voice with movement and to exercise the balance of Yin-Yang energies. The movements of the body are physical metaphors. Standing with one foot in front of you, the torso and arms move back-and-forth, as if rowing, while uttering *ei-hou, ei-hou* and *ei-sa, ei-sa*. In the *Shinto* ritual, these sounds form a kind of *mantra* called *kotodama* (word spirit). According to *Shinto* religion, sounds affect our mental state, thus, the vowels have certain aims: E for mind, I for spirit, O for power, U for emotions, A for birth and creativity. Working on this exercise with my students, I recommended them to make an *imaginary journey*, to build their inner images, to see with their own eyes the places they “cross” while rowing. In the exercises of the Tadashi Suzuki method, there are moments of free composition by the expressions of the arms, where imagination can intervene. The second part of the exercise, *stamping*, when the actors stand up and move forward, is such a moment. Moving forward with the same pace – *suriashi*, the actors are free to use their arms to create expressions that convey their emotions and thoughts. This complementarity between the body segments, established by Zeami, appears in many exercises of the Suzuki method, an opportunity to individualize the common requirements through expressive gestures. Such is the *statue* exercise, where the movement of the lower body is the same for everyone, while the arms move freely, according to everyone’s imagination. In fan and umbrella studies, in the actors’ dialogue of gestures with these objects, imagination also has a supportive role. Based on the *tame* technique, by compressing the action and retaining energy, one can generate suggestive body metaphors.

In conclusion, there is a living controversy between the fixed form – *kata*, and the fresh, renewing impulses brought by the restless imagination in accordance with the ideas of the current times. *Kata* is not the final destination but rather a solid base for creativity. *Kata* is not a *stazione termini*,

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<sup>38</sup>. Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969) is the founder of the Japanese martial art of aikidō.

but rather the *starting point*. The purpose of the training is to prepare actors for the labor that follows, the roles they have to take up, to teach them how to create useful tools for their profession, to install in them patterns of theatrical thinking which, with the contribution of imagination, will be able to lead to theatrical creation. “For no matter how skillful an actor may be, if he does not perform his own plays, he will be no better than a great warrior on the battlefield without his weapons,” said Zeami.<sup>39</sup> Entering the uncertain realm of creation, a trained actor will be armed with the necessary “weapons” to face and create theatrical fiction.

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<sup>39</sup>. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nō Drama. The Major Treatises of Zeami*, 21-22.

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*Actor Training as a Method of Directors.  
Training in Context of the Odin Teatret's Creative  
Work and Higher Education*

**Gábor Viktor KOZMA<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** In my recent research, I am interested in investigating the logic of actor training practices in different approaches, such as the training of the Odin Teatret, the Suzuki Method, or the Viewpoints technique, trying to compare them and expose the training's common logic. The present paper focuses on the analysis of training at the Odin Teatret and tries to employ a deconstructive analytical technique to analyze this training according to a straightforward set of standards: (1) From where? – the context and history of the training practicing company (2) What? – a comparison of several concepts of training (3) When? – the scheduling of training inside the companies (4) For what? – the training's objectives and the ideal actor image they create (5) How? – the training tools. To set the stage for my article, I will first define the term “training” as I use it, then I will examine Odin Teatret's methods, and lastly, based on all of these, I will summarize the notion of training as a directing method from an Eastern European perspective.

**Keywords:** Actor's training, Odin Teatret, education, Eugenio Barba.

### **Education or training?**

“Training is an extremely malleable word that shifts and changes according to its many contexts and those involved, be they teachers, trainees,

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students, workshop leaders or others.”<sup>2</sup> - Paul Allain writes. The term “training” refers to two distinct concepts: (1) a learning or teaching process of skills; and (2) physical exercises one engages to maintain good health or get ready for a competition.<sup>3</sup> The two functions are frequently difficult to clearly separate.

From a French-language perspective, theatre historian Josette Féral writes about this topic. He asserts that the English word “training” has French origins based on the grammatical and semantic history of the term. He also makes the observation that once the term “training” entered Anglo-Saxon theatre jargon, it was used to refer to all facets of actor education, including the learning phase, the exercises for the performance, as well as for self-training and conditioning outside of a production’s context. Féral divides the training process into two phases based on the theories of Eugenio Barba and Jerzy Grotowski. (1) the learning phase, during which the student learns the technical foundations of a certain technique or way of acting (2) the challenging phase, during which exercises are used to test one’s current condition. The terms training and entraînement, which are now in use in French, distinguish the many purposes of training.<sup>4</sup> “The use of the English (training) seems to prevail in the case of a structured preparation done within the formative framework of a specific method (Suzuki, Barba), while the notion of entraînement seems to dominate in artists’ daily practices when they devote themselves to exercises in order to prepare for a performance: stretches, physical work-outs, even ‘warming up’.”<sup>5</sup>

If we approach the matter from the perspective of sets, education surely defines a bigger set, of which training is, or can be, a subset. Training in the sense of practice, in comparison, describes a specific space-time framework with multiple functions, time management and relation to production. In my study I separate the words training and education according to their didactic

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2. Paul Allain, “Physical actor training 2.0: new digital horizons,” *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (2019): 170.

3. Stephen Bullon (ed.) et al., *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, (Essex: Longman, 2003), 1764–1765.

4. Josette Féral, “Did you say »training«?,” *Performance Research*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, English trans.: Leslie Wickes, (2009), 23.

5. Féral, “Did you say”, 25.

function. By training, I am looking at the logic of entraînement, the specific and systematised practice of each theatre company. My research focuses on ongoing self- and group-training, on the subject of continuing to be in training, rather than institutional education.

Training, according to Ian Watson, is a multidimensional process that involves Method Acting in New York City studios, French classical conservatory work, the introduction of mask at the Lecoq schools, Kerala kalaripayattu, and more. According to Watson, the term “training” is a general one that different practitioners use to refer to various activities.<sup>6</sup> He also wonders why the actor’s engagement in learning is described as “training” rather than “studying.” Unlike the activity described by train, which involves both cognitive and physical activity, Watson views studying as a cognitive learning process. Watson highlights the significance of this skill-learning aspect of training. “Acting may well be an art, as may have suggested; there is no question that it is a craft.”<sup>7</sup>

Watson makes a distinction between “indirect” and “direct training”. He refers to indirect training as a methodology frequently utilized in the West, whereby the trainer or student learns techniques for the body and voice, diction, interpretation, body language, dance, singing, etc. that can be used to participate in creative processes. Direct training comprises the codified performing arts training logic, in which the apprentice learns specific abilities for fixed performance structures and fixed character types in order to be able to perform them later within the context of a performance. In this way, the learner gains a set of practical abilities rather than a general collection of tools. These include instruction in performing arts such as kathakali, noh, kabuki, odissi, and Peking opera.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the differences, Watson believes that training’s common objectives should be to prepare the trainee or apprentice for performance, enhance their talents, give them a way to engage in the creative or performing process, and get them ready to interact with the audience. Although the phrase can be used to theatrical practice, it does not seem valid to me if

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<sup>6</sup>. Ian Watson, “Introduction,” in: *Performer Training – Developments Across Cultures*, ed.: Ian Watson (New York and London: 2001), 1.

<sup>7</sup>. Watson, *Introduction*, 1.

<sup>8</sup>. Watson, *Introduction*, 2.

I consider training just from a little wider viewpoint, such as in the context of Grotowski's paratheatrical activity. According to John Matthews, rigorous ensemble training through repetition enables learners to refine not only their performing abilities but also their awareness of their own social and physical selves. He claims that trainees develop themselves within the "negative" limits of the exercises. Regular practice allows the trainees to feel a "positive" sense of freedom in the process of "self-actualisation".<sup>9</sup>

Training can therefore refer to both learning and practicing. It could involve direct or indirect, character-related training. Although there is not enough space to go into more detail in this study, I have identified six characteristics that training shares: (1) it is always developed within a defined time-space framework, typically in a closed, "group theatre"<sup>10</sup> environment; (2) it is repetitive, continuous, and systematic. They develop new routines that assist the performers in shifting their attention to other things.<sup>11</sup> Here, it's crucial to notice that they instead create space for a new level of focus and involvement rather than promoting the "normal or daily mindset of work." (3) They serve as an "ethical framework"<sup>12</sup> in each group by encoding the actions that represent each group's culture and value system. (4) Body-centered: it takes into account the whole of the "bodymind"<sup>13</sup> or "body-world"<sup>14</sup>; (5) it is structured by techniques and exercises, therefore organized according to a structured logic; and (6) there is a person who establishes the framework for these or contributes to their creation. The trainer can be analyzed as a role or function that has an impact on each of the key outcomes of the didactic activity. According to this interpretation, training establishes an ethical

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<sup>9</sup>. John Matthews, *Training for Performance: a Meta-Disciplinary Account*, (London: Methuen, 2011), 216.

<sup>10</sup>. Barba's term: Eugenio Barba, *Beyond the Floating Islands*, English trans.: Judy Barba (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1986), 70.

<sup>11</sup>. Frank Camilleri, "On habit and performer training," *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2018): 41.

<sup>12</sup>. Frank Camilleri, "Of Pounds of Flesh and Trojan Horses: Performer training in the twenty-first century," *Performance Research*, Vol. XIV No. 2, (2009): 27.

<sup>13</sup>. Phillip Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting – An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 4.

<sup>14</sup>. Frank Camilleri, *Performer Training Reconfigured*, (London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, and Sydney: Methuen Drama, 2020), 62.

framework for ongoing training based on the logic of consistent practice. Training serves as a transitional tool between a performer's civil, creative, and character selves by forcing daily confrontation with the artist's current state.

### **The relationship between training and performance at the Odin Teatret**

I frequently encounter the idea that a specific training supports a certain theatrical aesthetic. Questioning this idea, a complex interaction between training and performance at Odin Teatret will be shown in the following section, together with an analysis of the texts of Barba, the Odin actors, and theorists. Although training shapes a mindset, it cannot be directly linked to the performance's aesthetic that is generated in conjunction with or as a result of training.

Barba founded his company in Oslo, Norway in 1964. In 1966, the Odin relocated to Holstebro, Denmark, and they still regard it as their home today.<sup>15</sup> The training and performances of Odin Teatret have been in ongoing, evolving communication with one another. The training has always been present in the company in varying forms, but always as a point of professional reference. Training and performance existed in full parallel during the early years of Odin, adding to one another but being kept separate.<sup>16</sup> Since the majority of the group consisted of amateur performers, training was essentially an autodidactic process.<sup>17</sup> This also applied to Norway's beginnings and the early years in Holstebro. The Teatr Laboratorium, with whom Barba collaborated between 1961 and 1963, and the work of Jerzy Grotowski served as his primary sources of inspiration.<sup>18</sup> Barba adopted Grotowski's training practice as well as his general view of training, according to which training constituted

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<sup>15</sup>. Eugenio Barba, *The Floating Islands*, ed.: Ferdinando Taviani, English trans.: Judy Barba et al., (Holstebro: Drama, 1979), 15.

<sup>16</sup>. Eugenio Barba, "The Ghost Room," *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Vol. 19 No. 2, trans.: Judy Barba, (2009), 218.

<sup>17</sup>. Barba, *The Floating*, 12–13.

<sup>18</sup>. Eugenio Barba, *Lands of Ashes and Diamonds*, English trans.: Judy Barba, (Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 1999), 15-33.

an escape from the features of conventional theater.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the Odin's initial self-image as self-educated amateurs, Barba saw the Teatr Laboratorium as "aristocrats" who created their group's identity by rejecting the legitimacy of their original theatre culture.<sup>20</sup> The development of fundamental skills and conditioning was therefore the focus of training at this time, serving as a replacement for formal schooling. The ensemble debuted their first performance, *Ornitofilene* in 1965.<sup>21</sup>

Moving to Denmark in 1966 has brought significant changes. Due to a lack of performing opportunities, among other things, they were unable to continue with their previous performance. As a result, Odin changed its self-definition and established the Inter-Scandinavian Theatre Laboratory for the Art of the Actor, or *Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium* (NTL) for short.<sup>22</sup> Because there were not enough audience, the actors could not communicate with them, and Barba lacked the directorial ability to come up with quick ideas, he knew they wouldn't be able to perform every day. Barba had to provide the mayor with a reasonable justification for why they would not play every day, though. He began by describing the company as a theater laboratory.<sup>23</sup> The Holstebro invitation was greatly appreciated by Odin, who was having financial difficulties in Oslo and had no genuine possibilities in their future.<sup>24</sup> Barba was compelled to make this choice by the circumstances; he had not planned to adopt the model of the theatre laboratory program he had observed in Poland. Tatiana Chemi notes that in this way, Odin's research and educational endeavors, which took the shape of training and methodological study, served as the foundation for the organization.<sup>25</sup> Training in this situation was already a force of group-identity and organized the way people worked.

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<sup>19</sup>. Barba, *The Ghost Room*, 216.

<sup>20</sup>. *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>21</sup>. Ian Watson, *Towards a Third Theatre – Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 2.

<sup>22</sup>. Barba, *The Floating*, 15.

<sup>23</sup>. Tatiana Chemi, *A Theatre Laboratory Approach to Pedagogy and Creativity – Odin Teatret and Group Learning*, (Melbourne: Creativity, Education and the Arts, 2017), 17–18.

<sup>24</sup>. Watson, *Towards a Third*, 2.

<sup>25</sup>. Chemi, *A Theatre Laboratory*, 18–19.

Although it is unclear when training began to have a more significant influence on the creation of performances, their coexistence and hence their mutually inspiring effect are undeniable. The phases of training and creation were still separate at this time. The company's actors Torgeir Wethal, Else Marie Laukvik, and Iben Nagel Rasmussen also discuss the connection between their recent training and their earlier roles in *Ferai* and *My Father's House*.<sup>26</sup> Before they performed *Ferai* in 1969, according to Laukvik, their technique had transformed into a type of strength training that included composition, slow-motion movements, and individual training.<sup>27</sup> Wethal summarizes this process by stating that in the initial years of training, they used fixed elements such as the "pictures" they had inherited from Grotowski's approach, among other things.<sup>28</sup> After some time, the company realized that they had started to express their emotions using certain "psychological clichés," which had a negative impact on their performance. At that point, they took the decision to change the direction of their training to one that was more physically demanding, "(...) like athletic training: a physical obstacle to be overcome, a result to be made better, improved."<sup>29</sup> Laukvik claims that the training got considerably shorter, more rigorous, and freer during the rehearsal period at *My Father's House*. "It was no longer skill training but impulse training, which is a warm and expressive training, a wave flowing through the body, causing the body to act without stopping, fluently, but yet with variations."<sup>30</sup>

In support of what has already been said, Barba writes that "(t)he performance reflects the training. If you have a training which tames the body, this is seen in the performance. Training, even if it impresses the observer because of its technical and expressive results, is actually a means of colonizing the body, of forcing it to accept a new form of culture which the brain has decided is the right one. All this is visible in the performance.

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<sup>26</sup>. Erik Exe Christoffersen, *The Actor's Way*, English trans.: Richard Fowler, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 34, 36, 48.

<sup>27</sup>. Christoffersen, *The Actor's Way*, 34.

<sup>28</sup>. Ibid., 48.

<sup>29</sup>. Ibid., 48.

<sup>30</sup>. Ibid., 36.

If you have a muscular training, you have a muscular performance. If you have a soporific training, of the psychological type, the performance will show it. The voltage remains the same. If training is at 220 volts, the performance will also be at 220 volts; if training is at 6 volts, the performance will be at 6 volts. The quality of energy which drives the actor in his training is the same as that which drives him in the performance.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Barba agrees that there is a clear link between training and performance, but this does not imply that one’s aesthetic defines another’s.

In other places, Barba openly denies the effect of training on learning and development: “(...) does not prepare to perform nor does it teach something. Rather, it makes us ready to estrange ourselves from our usual behaviour, the so-called spontaneity or conventional theatricality.”<sup>32</sup> Comparing the two claims, we might draw the conclusion that there are two opposing, but not mutually exclusive, points of view on the same issue that, ironically, are both still relevant in the twenty-first century. However, in the early 1970s, the connection between training and performance served as a kind of psychophysical foundation for the company to lay, where the performances might develop.

Odin Teatret participated in two extended residencies in southern Italy’s Campignano and later in Campignano and Sardinia in 1974 and 1975. These residencies had a significant impact on the development of training and can be seen as a phase boundary in the relationship between training and creative work. Alongside the *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours!* rehearsals, the training continued, although it was no longer conducted indoors but rather in the courtyards of villas, on the beach, and in the fields. The ensemble, according to Roberta Carrieri, went running at morning, worked hard physically until midday, then took a siesta owing to the heat. Carrieri received additional training from Barba as a newcomer during the siesta.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>. Barba, *Beyond the Floating*, 72.

<sup>32</sup>. Barba, *The Ghost Room*, 216.

<sup>33</sup>. Roberta Carreri, *On Training and Performance*, English trans., and ed.: Frank Camilleri, (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 15–16.

Jen Christensen and Iben Nagel Rasmussen started experimenting with long sticks that had ribbons attached to the ends of them. Barba took notice of this and encouraged his actors to try out various objects that might be used in open spaces. They “were searching for the life in the requisite” according to Nagel Rasmussen; they investigated the creative uses of props, the interaction between body and objects, and their relationship with movement. The actress’s description also emphasizes that the examination of the relationship between the object and the human being, rather than the usage of props, was the main focus. The vocal training was organized by the intention of functionality and the nature of the space. Without sound amplification, the ensemble had to make themselves audible to the spectators in public areas. The group began experimenting with stilts to let the audience look through due to the open-air design as well.

Because verbal communication with the locals proved challenging, they created their clown performance *Johan Sebastian Bach* (1974), which was based on a workshop the Colombaioni Brothers led in Holstebro. The majority of the performance’s expression was non-verbal.<sup>34</sup> This application of training can be thought of as a form of direct training instead of the previous indirect way.

Watson claimed that the audience frequently requested more from the company. The ensemble started presenting the training exercises as performative pieces because there were no alternative ready-made productions available. This led to their performance *The Book of Dances* (1974), which gave the previously closed research a whole new perspective. Training and performance were previously distinct; training exercises could not contribute to the physical score of the performance.<sup>35</sup> The link between training and performance was altered by the creation of *The Book of Dances*. As a result, there is now a more complex relationship between learning, training, rehearsal, and performance: training serves a different purpose inside the company. The boundary between training, rehearsal, and performance has blurred due to the inclusion of training in the performative act, making the concept of training in terms of time considerably more complicated.

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<sup>34</sup>. Watson, *Towards a Third*, 53.

<sup>35</sup>. Barba, *The Ghost Room*, 217.

In 1979, the “work demonstration,” as Odin refers to it, first appeared. The phrase describes a one-man performance when actors showcase their varied vocal and physical training techniques, some of the characters they play in shows, and their etudes using costumes and masks. The performative elements are connected by didactic explanation. The work demonstration can serve as a transition between the three phases of training, rehearsing, and performance because it is both a performative and didactic act. Nagel Rasmussen’s *Moon and Darkness* (1979), the first example of this work, was followed by numerous other similar productions. According to Janne Risum all experienced Odin performers have produced their own work demonstration.<sup>36</sup>

The practice of “fiskedam” and “vaeksthus” was the final significant alteration in the link between training and performance. The fiskedam activity was first introduced in the company’s training in 1977. The Danish word “fiskedam” means “breeding pool,” “fishpool,” or “fishtank.” In their respective utterances, Carreri and Watson take different positions on the metaphor. Fiskedam, as translated by Carreri, means “breeding pool,” where, according to her, both Barba and the performers fostered their fresh ideas. The actors were free to experiment with any role they were creating for the next production, as well as props, costumes, music, and lyrics. Barba continuously found inspiration in the performers’ experimenting as he watched.<sup>37</sup> “(...) the creative freedom I had experienced with in the Fiskedam never left me”<sup>38</sup> - says Carreri. Watson refers to a fiskedam as a fish tank. This type of training is defined as a time when the company was involved in a range of activities in the same space and at the same time, all of which, according to Carreri, continuously inspired, stimulated, and motivated the work of the other actors. In the fiskedam metaphor, Watson sees the practice as the water, the actors as the fish, all connected by the body of water and engaging with one another at every turn. In a similar way, Chemi translated fiskedam to fishpool that characterizes the actors as

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<sup>36</sup>. Janne Risum, “A Study in Motley – The Odin Actors,” In *Performer Training – Development Across Cultures*, ed.: Ian Watson, (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2001), 114.

<sup>37</sup>. Carreri, *On Training and*, 88–89.

<sup>38</sup>. *Ibid.*, 92.

cooperating yet acting independently.<sup>39</sup> According to Taviani in 1979, the company had created its own Odin culture through *fiskedam* rather than imitating its ancestors (Stanislavsky or Meyerhold).<sup>40</sup>

The so-called *væksthus* [greenhouse/grow house/plant nursery] system is still used in the ensemble's training practice, and it is conceptually similar to, or a version of, the *fiskedam*. A place for character investigation directly related to a production is offered by the *væksthus*. The actors practice exercises, improvising with costumes and props that aid in character development in a shared space and time. In his account of the rehearsal process for *The Chronic Life* (2011), Carreri recalls a regime that ran from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. until the rehearsal started.<sup>41</sup> Donald Kitt told me in a personal conversation that the greenhouse practice is still part of the company's work today.<sup>42</sup> The actors have a lot of freedom during the greenhouse since they may plan their work around their individual requirements and physical capabilities. Work may also include practice and technical learning. The *fiskedam* and *væksthus* have very similar logic, but the *væksthus* practice is more oriented toward practicing the performance in advance and is hence comparable to a free self-rehearsal.

The relationship between training and performance became more and more entwined as the training framework became more flexible, the practice became more diverse, and actors had more freedom to explore in accordance with their own interests within the ethical framework they had jointly developed. Individual research resulted in the production of performative aspects such as characters, costumes, songs, and lyrics that were subsequently employed in specific performances. The performative components that Kitt has come across, played with, or created but has not yet been used in any Odin or NTL production are kept in a separate notebook, he personally revealed to me. So that he can check his list before a new production to determine if he has an *etude* or performative component in stock that fits the director's notion.

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<sup>39</sup>. Chemi, *A Theatre Laboratory*, 70.

<sup>40</sup>. Ferdinando Taviani, "A Point of View", In *The Floating Islands* by Eugenio Barba, ed.: Ferdinando Taviani, English. trans.: Judy Barba et al. (Holstebro: Odin Teatret Forlag, 1979), 54.

<sup>41</sup>. Carreri, *On Training and*, 70, 151–152.

<sup>42</sup>. Donald Kitt, Personal conversation, Holstebro, 2019.

The practice of *fiskedam* and *vaeksthus* has given rise to, fostered the growth of, and allowed for more reflection on characters of many iconic Odin performances. As a result, the training serves as a kind of individual rehearsal for the performance in rehearsing period. On the other hand, if this occurs after the performance has already been created, a new purpose of the training can be observed: it allows to dig deeper into the characters and materials of the performance. In contrast to repertory theater, where the rehearsal period lasts until the performance, in Odin's practice the training continues to exist as a sort of space-time framework alongside the performances that are already in progress, allowing the actor to experience and thus deepen his or her relationship with the character outside the fixed structure of the *mise-en-scène*. Training can become a place for focusing attention, but as Barba notes, it cannot guarantee this.

Since it differs from person to person, it is now challenging to analyze how Odin manages the interaction between its trainings and its performances. Any of the examples above could come up in their practice because, generally speaking, full members have a great level of freedom in terms of what they do during training.

Barba also emphasizes the dangers of training. Beginning with the idea that there are an infinite number of practices that may be taught, Barba notes that a desire to learn new skills without assuming the confrontation with the audience, the performance situation, can start to emerge in the trainee. "Through these practices, a new dimension of theatre amateurism (with the superficiality and dedication that distinguishes it) is born which supplants the performance with seminars and courses."<sup>43</sup> According to Barba, these courses create a virtual space and time in the everyday allowing trainees to spend their time engaging in theater without having any clear plans to continue doing so. As he claims, this process can be dated back to the Great Reform in the early 20th century, which he refers to as the work of the leading theatre thinkers of the era, including Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Copeau, Dullin, and Decroux. Some of them identified training as a core value to the point where it changed from being a procedure to being the ultimate objective. "This drift of the

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<sup>43</sup>. Barba, "The Ghost Room", 215.

exercises has created situations of activity which are autonomous islets: neither professional nor amateur theatre; neither rehearsals nor performance. Here we have one of the many ghost rooms of the theatre.”<sup>44</sup> Barba thusly clearly states that training can only make meaning when it is consciously aimed towards a performance, fulfilled within the context of an engagement with the spectator. As we can see, the history of Odin Teatret has seen numerous variations in the relationship between training and performance, which can be used as inspiration for the practicality of training. I will not discuss the precise dramaturgical framework of Odin in this essay, or how the pieces are combined to produce the various etudes of the performance.

### **Actor training as a method of directors**

I have briefly discussed the connection between the company’s training procedures and its creative output through the story of Odin. I have not talked about how training plays a part in skill development or how it affects group dynamics. One of the oldest workshops, Odin Teatret has had a long history of rethinking its training philosophy, developing an ethical framework for ongoing self-reflection and questioning. The initial authoritarian leadership structure was gradually dissolved over time, and responsibility over the training was increasingly divided among the experienced members. Authority inside the training also underwent ongoing transformation. Some of the company members also showed signs of separation from training, yet actor training remained a prevalent frame of reference through or against which the theater was considered.<sup>45</sup>

However, the term “actor training” might be misleading because, while actors are the training’s subject, it is ultimately a director’s method of operation. In this situation, Barba, an authoritarian leader, has opted to cooperate with the Grotowski-adopted system. In all situations, this approach has determined the identity of the group: only performers who were prepared to undergo a form of reconditioning through training could be recognised as company members.

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<sup>44</sup>. Ibid., 216.

<sup>45</sup>. Ibid., 217.

It has also been defined as a demand, a force of necessity, and a burdensome framework for the actors sometimes.

If we take this into consideration, then the ownership over the structure in which the actor engages must be analysed. Most of the time, the actor does not have an influence on the working framework or the objectives of the work. The exercises of the training produced via ongoing, guided experimentation, or actors develop it with given materials to work with, or after some time, they are given freedom to shape the exercise. It is also possible, and this has a long history at Odin, for experienced actors to create their own training or design their own course for learning. However, in this case as well, trainees were taught the basics upon which to base their own training or were given the time and freedom to experiment and explore as a working strategy. As a consequence, actor training cannot be separated from the director's position as the initiator. Even while the actor has some independence, it is closely linked to the choice of the director. If we consider actor training approaches as structured methods of directors, it creates more questions about institutional education.

Among the most influential directors of the 20th century are Meyerhold, Grotowski, Barba, Copeau, Lecoq, Suzuki, Bogart, Staniewski, etc. Although their theory is well-known and frequently used as a primary reference in theatre education in Transylvania and Hungary, their practice is not often presented in an organic and structured manner in practical education. Some of the approaches in acting education are primarily used in acting or improvisation classes as a hidden material of the curriculum. Actors are given a key to themselves through the methodologies, and they learn to explore their own bodies and the characters through various vocal and physical exercises. Although the actors practice some of the exercises, the several structured techniques do not appear as distinct subjects to either acting or directing students.

After graduation actors are frequently incorporated into guided systems in the public and independent sectors. The institutions or the directors have control over the structures. Even in the increasingly popular devised theater work procedures, the leader role is still present, albeit with a different form of authority and sometimes in a different hierarchy. Actors typically have no influence over the functioning structures. The training's

structured time and space framework very rarely appear in the public and independent sector since (1) in the postsoviet cultural context did not allow to well integrate these knowledge, (2) it did not appear in the education properly, (3) the logic between the theatre industry and the group theatre working method's seems incompatible with each other. If an actor is exposed to research reasoning during her formal schooling and learns to become fully immersed in a character through methodology, but the field lacks such structured environments, she may feel conflict. Here, education and industry are divided, and the distance between them has felt insurmountable for many years. Usually, institutional theater-making pushes out group theater research practice because it doesn't have the time or because the knowledge being researched in other systems seems weird. However, in my opinion, actors in both group theater and institutional public theaters need to possess very similar skills, attributes and qualities. Additionally, group theater techniques aid in creating and sustaining positive group dynamics, which seems to be a problem that public theaters frequently face.

The director training, in my opinion, serves as a link between the two structures. Group theater actor trainings are an organized director's method. By teaching the group theatre methodologies, exercises and outlining the responsibilities of a training leader in institutional education, directors may be able to develop certain skills, ways of thinking, and desired group dynamics during the ensuing creative process. Exercises are psycho-physical experiences that allow for the transmission of information or instructions on a physical rather than a cognitive level. Decades of exploration have led to the exercises in the various approaches and techniques, which have specific dramatic values and traits. In workplaces where the creative process is halted or group dynamics are established that make work difficult, shared training in the same approaches for actors and directors can open a line of communication for the next generation of artists.

In order to better incorporate the highly valued theatre research that defined the 20th century into the practice of the theatre industry, I would like to point out that actor training is fundamentally a director's approach and should be given a structured role in director training.

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*Les Inquiétudes du destin dans le monde de Caragiale :  
pour une poétique de la mise en scène*

**Alexa VISARION<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** This paper approaches the work of the great Romanian playwright and prose writer I. L. Caragiale from a personal perspective. The author focuses on the concept of destiny and the ambiguities of this concept in Caragiale's thought. The ambiguity of destiny, always defined between the comic and the tragic, between the sublime and the grotesque, is investigated here, showing that Caragiale had an extraordinary philosophical openness, which he translated into situations and characters. Some emblematic human figures, situations and lines from Caragiale's work are briefly analysed and the modernity and prophetic nature of his political thought are also treated. All these aspects were elements that stimulated the author's practical interest in staging or making films inspired by Caragiale's work. Caragiale profoundly shaped the author's conception of the actor's art and the role of theatre direction: this is the conclusion of the present paper.

**Keywords:** Caragiale, destiny, characters, philosophy, politics, actor's art, stage and film directing.

La confession publique, plus ou moins cryptée, par le biais d'une œuvre, de mouvements affectifs intimes, de pensées, d'aspirations, d'émotions, de sentiments, est un acte de communication unilatéral, une révélation consciente et assumée de conceptions sur le monde et la vie, proche d'une confession tacite. Ce type de communication, à travers une œuvre d'art, se prolonge dans le cas de la performance théâtrale, amplifiant de manière exponentielle,

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à chaque répétition de l'acte artistique, la multiplicité des significations, permettant ainsi une ouverture de type universel, une potentialisation des symboles, des significations.

Cela s'est produit constamment dans l'œuvre de Caragiale. Traduite et retraduite sans cesse dans de nouvelles versions scéniques, retournée de tous côtés par les critiques littéraires, les critiques dramatiques, les metteurs en scène et les acteurs, par les simples lecteurs qui ont vu chacun leur propre Caragiale, démolie pour être reconstruite sur de nouvelles bases, sa création permet encore des interprétations, des analyses, des compréhensions différentes, des associations avec d'autres grands esprits ou des créations universelles, ce qui lui donne un statut emblématique, faisant entrer son auteur dans le panthéon des grands créateurs.

La proposition du classicisme comme avant-garde est justifiée par des arguments fondés sur l'évolution sinueuse des arts, sur la découverte que les vrais créateurs, tout en renouvelant les formes artistiques, s'en tiennent à des archétypes immuables. L'art intègre la forme d'une pensée, mais quel que soit le point de départ, on finit par arriver à la condition humaine tant discutée, qui relève fondamentalement d'une seule grande représentation, celle de la dissipation. L'apparence se déchire, la construction se détruit, et dans le théâtre du monde demeure le Logos perpétué par l'être qui l'habite temporairement.

Le dialogue des idées se justifie par leur affinité essentielle avec le « mot ». Personnage du monde qui parle du monde, le créateur est en dialogue constant avec l'intérieur fragile, avec le destin inconnu, avec le monde « qui tourne et s'érode », acceptant et se rebellant. Sa révolte et sa résignation enveloppent et révèlent des obsessions ou des abattements fébriles de la pensée.

Le grand critique Tudor Vianu, dans son ouvrage *Arta prozatorilor români* [*L'Art des prosateurs roumains*], commente, avec des nuances suggestives, l'essai de Caragiale intitulé « Câteva păreri » [« Quelques opinions »] (1896). Vianu considère que cet essai-là est un véritable « art poétique du grand écrivain » et insiste sur la distinction que Caragiale fait entre « style et manière »<sup>2</sup>. Caragiale reprend cette distinction tout au long de son essai, puisqu'il y voit

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<sup>2</sup>. Tudor Vianu, *Arta prozatorilor români* (Bucharest : Minerva, 1981), 109.

une opposition semblable à celle entre « l'organisme nécessaire de l'être vivant, et la structure délibérée de la chose artificielle »<sup>3</sup>.

La dissociation proposée se fonde sur un matériau artistique et vivant, Caragiale commentant, dans une perspective esthétique, deux types de discours dramatiques, celui de Victor Hugo et de Schiller, et celui de Shakespeare. Ces remarques visent à distinguer les styles « codifiés et appliqués » de ceux qui naissent du « corps vivant de l'œuvre » même, en montrant ce qu'il y a d'absolument individuel dans le phénomène du style, comme dans toute autre manifestation de la vie : l'unicité du style est le résultat de l'accord de deux rythmes, le rythme dans lequel le spectacle du monde se déroule pour notre âme et le rythme dans lequel, par la création artistique, notre âme répond au rythme du monde. L'essence du style est, pour Caragiale, le rythme, et celui-ci ne doit pas être altéré par un accompagnement aléatoire.

« On ne pense que par image. Si tu veux être philosophe, écris des romans. », disait Albert Camus, considérant que, comme l'artiste, le philosophe pense de manière imagée<sup>4</sup>. Cette activité de l'âme humaine, contenue dans « l'irritabilité » (la sensibilité artistique), donne au créateur le pouvoir de refléter le monde ; le créateur-penseur transforme le sujet connaissant en un reflet, « en goutte de rosée » de la connaissance, en miroir, de sorte que la multiplication de ce miroir tend à une élégante confirmation du principe d'individualité : « combien de gouttes de rosée entre le ciel et la terre, autant de miroirs mobiles et de cieux, de même, combien de personnes, autant d'âmes et de mondes »<sup>5</sup>.

En commentant ces remarques dans son essai sur *La Philosophie de Caragiale* [*Filosofia lui Caragiale*], Marta Petreu observait « une monadologie caragialienne spectaculaire et étonnamment belle, qui nous montre que le prosateur ne manquait pas de vision philosophique et de capacité théorique, mais seulement du langage éthique et conceptualisé que présuppose généralement la pensée théorique, la philosophie sectaire »<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>. I. L. Caragiale, « Câteva păreri » [« Quelques opinions »], *Opere*, vol. III *Publicistică* (Bucharest : Univers Enciclopedic, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă – Academia Română, 2010), 62. La traduction du roumain m'appartient.

<sup>4</sup>. Albert Camus, *Carnets I. Mai 1935-février 1942* (Paris : Gallimard, 1962), note de janvier 1936.

<sup>5</sup>. Caragiale, « Câteva păreri » [« Quelques opinions »], 69.

<sup>6</sup>. Marta Petreu, *Filosofia lui Caragiale* [*La Philosophie de Caragiale*], Deuxième édition, revue et augmentée (Iași : Polirom, 2012), 115.

Le commentaire de l'essai établit des liens élégants entre la monadologie de Leibniz et l'âme « goutte de rosée » dont parle Caragiale, qui, comme la monade vivante de Leibniz, est intérieurement infinie. L'univers est représenté dans l'âme, et les miroirs, gouttes de rosée mouvantes qui reflètent toutes l'infinité de l'univers, organisent de manière impressionnante et convaincante la pensée théorique du dramaturge dans un dialogue incandescent de connaissance et de vérité, en tant que chance de la révélation dans la multiplication.

L'exégèse exclut la connaissance de Caragiale de la pensée de Leibniz, mais elle relie l'image porteuse d'idées de l'âme-miroir à une monographie de C. Rădulescu-Motru sur Nietzsche, écrite spécifiquement pour Caragiale. Parmi les citations de Nietzsche, traduites et commentées par Rădulescu-Motru, il y en a aussi de *La science joyeuse* et de *Par-delà bien et mal*, dans lesquelles apparaît l'image de la conscience-miroir : « L'homme objectif est en effet un miroir ; habitué à s'assujettir à tout ce qu'il faut connaître, sans autre désir que celui que donne la connaissance, le "reflet" – il attend qu'il se passe quelque chose, alors il s'étend doucement, afin que les plus légers indices et le frôlement des êtres surnaturels ne se perdent pas en glissant à la surface de sa peau. »<sup>7</sup>

La connaissance de cette démonstration métaphysique est plus qu'acceptable en tant que fil conducteur, et sa transformation en commentaire permet d'aborder la préoccupation du dramaturge pour Schopenhauer, en particulier à travers l'œuvre *Le monde comme volonté et représentation*.

Pour Kierkegaard, l'humour est une limite de l'intériorité et implique la conscience du péché, c'est pourquoi l'humoriste parle rarement d'un péché particulier, il ne fait que saisir l'ensemble. Une fois parvenu sur l'échelle de la foi, l'homme se rend compte que ses efforts pour atteindre la transcendance sont vains : le rire étouffe les pleurs, l'humour devient la conscience du sérieux et sa rétraction par le rire.

L'association de l'humour et du tragique est courante dans la pensée littéraire et philosophique : dans *Hamlet*, l'humour peut devenir diffus au point d'être impénétrable, comme une empreinte de l'anormal, du morbide

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7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Par-delà le bien et le mal. Prélude d'une philosophie de l'avenir, Œuvres complètes. Tome X*. Traduction par Henri Albert (Paris : Mercure de France, 1913), 207.

et du tragique qui domine la pièce. Pour Jean Starobinski, fin analyste des maux de l'âme, *Janus bifrons* devient un emblème du travail artistique et de la condition de l'artiste qui, si l'on en croit Baudelaire à la suite de tant d'autres, est un « clown tragique », un « bouffon martyr », qui trouve parfois son salut dans l'ironie mordante<sup>8</sup>. Si pour le romantique Hoffmann l'ironie est une guérison, pour Kierkegaard elle n'est qu'un aspect de la même maladie, du même univers spirituel. Le remède de la « vision inversée », c'est-à-dire le saut, s'appliquera à l'un et à l'autre, car il faut être passé par l'ironie pour se libérer du grave mensonge ; il faudra ensuite dépasser l'ironie elle-même, l'acte existentiel du repentir étant remplacé par l'acte intellectuel de dénégation, pour s'installer dans l'humour et dans un sérieux supérieur, de grande altitude réflexive.

L'homme qui devient un personnage est projeté dans un destin artistique et assume le rôle de médiateur entre la vie et l'art, entre l'idée et la forme. « *Je sens énormément et je vois monstrueusement* », la phrase la plus citée de Caragiale, traduit l'impulsion créatrice provoquée par le jeu des impressions fixées sur la rétine... Paul Zarifopol a affirmé que : « ces mots ne sont pas une formule de circonstance, mais résument un tempérament et précisent une méthode artistique. En général, cet homme ressentait énormément ; son appareil psychique était toujours prêt à l'interprétation excessive. Toute sa production témoigne de cette envie. Dans la gravité ou dans le ridicule, ses constructions portent la marque d'une violence fondamentale. Chacun de ses personnages est un excès, chaque situation une culmination. Les manies verbales des personnages ne sont qu'une des particularités typiques de son système naturel. Ainsi disposé et dirigé tout particulièrement vers le comique, son talent a été consacré inévitablement à la caricature. »<sup>9</sup> L'abîme, l'agonie, le cri trouvent parfois d'étranges miroirs dans la dégradation et la dérision, dans la caricature et la moquerie, l'être et le néant dialoguant jusqu'à la fin du monde.

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<sup>8</sup>. Jean Starobinski, *Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque* (Genève : Editions d'Art Albert Skira, Paris : Flammarion, 1970), 81, 93.

<sup>9</sup>. Paul Zarifopol, *Pentru arta literară (Pour l'art littéraire)*, Edité par Al. Săndulescu (Bucharest : Minerva, 1971), 185.

Au début de l'époque moderne, le talent d'écrivain de Pascal a permis d'élucider des systèmes de pensée dispersés, alliant la littérature à la philosophie. Il les utilise comme des armes contre l'esprit cartésien, également moderne dans son essence. En comparant l'« esprit de géométrie » à l'« esprit de finesse », Pascal montre que tous les objets sont capables d'un traitement géométrique, mais que seul ce dernier peut caractériser la subtilité et la diversité de la nature humaine. L'énigme de l'être humain ne peut être que contradiction et manque d'homogénéité, de sorte qu'aucune pensée rationnelle ne peut expliquer cette irrationalité de l'être.

L'âme de l'être humain peut ainsi être pensée comme un minuscule miroir sphérique qui a conscience de l'absurdité de sa propre profondeur – à l'extérieur et à l'intérieur, ou encore, le grand infini et, à l'intérieur et au-delà, le petit infini<sup>10</sup>. Le monde intérieur change en fonction du monde extérieur. L'infini humain est intangible, et les mouvements du monde ont leurs correspondants dans notre âme. Le sentiment d'angoisse, de désespoir, dû à la constatation de l'isolement de l'homme dans l'univers, ne peut être évité, et la réflexion de Pascal à cet égard est bouleversante d'évidence : « le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie »<sup>11</sup>.

Dans ses ouvrages *Philosophie de l'art* et *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, Taine introduit un type original de philosophie de la culture, le cercle de fer de la nécessité, du déterminisme, qui enferme notre vie physique et devient, sur le plan de la vie spirituelle, un « cercle magique » dans lequel les idées, les pensées et les inclinations de l'être humain, exprimées dans les œuvres d'art, deviennent une étude comme la « métamorphose d'un insecte »<sup>12</sup>. Chaque penseur nous donne sa propre image de la nature humaine et les faits font pencher la balance vers la connaissance, même si leur interprétation est arbitraire. La volonté de puissance, l'instinct sexuel ou l'instinct économique deviennent, l'un après l'autre, des concurrents pour la suprématie dans

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<sup>10</sup>. Sylvain Portier, *Le Miroir, objet philosophique*, <https://iphilo.fr/2021/01/04/le-miroir-objet-philosophique-sylvain-portier/> (consulté en juin 2022).

<sup>11</sup>. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées et Opuscules*, Publiés avec une introduction, des notices, des notes et deux fac-similés du manuscrit des *Pensées* par Léon Brunschvicg, Cinquième édition revue (Paris : Hachette, 1909), 428.

<sup>12</sup>. Hippolyte Taine, *Philosophie de l'art. Voyage en Italie. Essais de critique et d'histoire* Textes réunis et présentés par Jean-François Revel (Paris : Hermann, 1964).

l'explication de la vie humaine. Le centre d'intérêt intellectuel se perd vers la périphérie, le problème humain étant disputé entre les domaines précités, de sorte qu'en fin de compte le tempérament de tel ou tel penseur-écrivain joue le rôle décisif dans l'évaluation de la vie humaine.

Cet élan histrionique, déguisé et participatif, expression d'un caractère tordu et tortueux, du oui et du non qui accumulent les tensions, exprime une peur mais aussi une prostration, fût-elle auto-ironisée, devant un mystérieux transcendant qui peut être exprimé métonymiquement par le *rocher sisyphéen*, expression de grandeur mais aussi de résignation. L'univers de Caragiale atteint cet au-delà, parce qu'il produit de la compréhension – non pas une compréhension de quelque chose de connu, et non pas une compréhension qui peut ensuite être enseignée plus loin. Elle ne peut même pas être exprimée. L'expression est l'acte artistique lui-même. Et ceci, par son identité propre, ne peut être expliqué. On ne peut pas expliquer pourquoi la torture de Leiba Zibal est révélatrice. On pourrait à la rigueur essayer de la décortiquer et de l'expliquer psychologiquement, mais les significations plurielles ne passeront pas. On ne parviendrait qu'à les faire naître.

L'auto-ironie est aussi présente dans *O făclie de Paști* [Un Flambeau de Pâques], dans *Inspețiune* [Inspection], dans *D'ale carnavalului* [Au temps du carnaval], dans *Două loturi* [Deux billets de loterie] ou dans *Conu' Leonida față cu reacțiunea* [Maître Léonidas face à la réaction]... C'est de l'auto-ironie parce que celui qui interprète – l'écrivain, le lecteur, l'acteur – assume Leiba Zibal, l'oncle Anghelache, Pampon, Mița ou Crăcănel, Cănuță ou Lefter Popescu. Il ne s'identifie pas à eux, ce serait la voie d'une sentimentalité explicite ou du mélodrame. Les personnages sont assumés, ils sont dans le feu de l'action.

Caragiale écrit comme s'il prophétisait, il a l'équivoque d'un oracle. Ce qui arrive à Leiba Zibal parle effectivement d'horreur, de délire, mais de la même manière que le ferait une scène où l'on pose une punaise de lit sur l'épaule d'un homme, qui se met à hurler et à se débattre, et qui, lorsqu'il l'enlève, la piétine, en sueur et bavant, et la cogne et la cogne et la cogne jusqu'à ce qu'il se fatigue. Il y a quelque chose de drôle à propos de cela, tout comme il y a quelque chose de tragique. Si l'étincelle est transmise, si elle allume une lumière inattendue quelque part, c'est à la fois comique et tragique. Caragiale allume ces petites lumières, et c'est pourquoi son univers, bien que construit sur le modèle de la farce, est largement tragique.

Dans l'univers de Caragiale, toutes les situations sont des drames sans répercussion. Il n'y a pas de support pour de véritables enjeux, et à cause de cela les personnages de ce monde élèvent les enjeux de leur existence à des dimensions astronomiques. Rien ne se passe jamais vraiment dans le destin abject de ses personnages. Et c'est pourquoi tout le monde a envie d'action, de suspense. La vie serait trop ennuyeuse sans le scandale. Sans mélodrame, sans vaudeville, ce serait l'enfer sur terre. Ce serait juste tragique.

Qu'est-ce que *Conu' Leonida fațã cu reacțiunea* [Maître Léonidas face à la réaction], sinon un délire nocturne, une étude de ce que Caragiale appelait « *fandaxie* » et qui pourrait se traduire *grosso modo* par idée fixe ? Et qu'est-ce que Leiba Zibal sinon Maître Léonidas ? Un homme reste enfermé dans sa maison et combien de pensées ne se mettent-elles pas à courir dans sa tête la nuit ? Et donc il entre en hypochondrie et la « *fandaxie* » est terminée. Le pogrom frappe à la porte... Peut-être que si la Réaction frappait à la porte, quelque chose pourrait se produire. Du moins s'il y avait une réaction ou un ennemi présent. Mais ce n'est qu'une mystification d'une imagination trop vive et prête à s'allumer de rien. Dans l'univers de Caragiale, les fusillades ne sont rien d'autre que l'amusement stupide du peuple, éternellement en état de liesse et d'ivresse, qui, à cause de son ennui sans limites, fomenta la révolution, s'introduit dans un magasin juif ou va voter de temps en temps, avant qu'il ne soit trop tard, et Lui – le peuple – trop ivre. L'aubergiste Stavrache, délirant et obsessionnel, n'est-il pas encore un exemple de personnage tombé dans la « *fandaxie* » ? « Pensaistu que j'étais mort, mon frère ? » – est une phrase digne d'une tragédie grecque, mais... une phrase non dite que les gens s'imaginent adresser aux dieux invisibles tout le temps.

République, Réaction, Liberté, Démocratie, Révolution, Peuple Souverain, Progrès, Mon Pays – Roumanie (*larmes, applaudissements, huées*), ce sont les mots prophétiques qui soutiennent le destin des personnages de Caragiale, qui les répètent obsessionnellement, à chaque étape, partout. Les grandes vérités, les idéaux révolutionnaires sont morts, ils ont perdu depuis longtemps leur sens dans cette débâcle générale purement constitutionnelle, dans laquelle les « bonnes dames » vivent avec intensité l'adultère existentiel et la souffrance burlesque. L'existence des héros de Caragiale est l'énorme mystification de

l'existence. La nation est devenue un sujet brûlant sur l'agenda de n'importe qui, comme lors de l'inoubliable 11 février auquel personne ne veut échapper, lorsque le vacarme patriotique s'est prolongé tard dans la nuit.

Oui, la politique est une existence entachée, mais que ferait-on sans la politique, comment pourrait-on se leurrer soi-même ? Pour les héros de Caragiale, la politique est un espace vital monstrueux mais tentant, propice au mensonge. Mais ils y croient tous et veulent et pleurent... et donnent et se battent, et se battent... « Moi-aussi, je suis Roumain ! » – s'écrie le jeune étudiant en droit et publiciste Rică Venturiano : « Notre Dieu, c'est le peuple ! *Box populi, box Dei* », et enfin : « Soit vous mourez tous, soit nous nous échappons tous ». Tout est possible. Tout se falsifie, tout se dégrade. « On trahit en riant, on rit en trahissant... »

Peut-être est-ce parce que ceux qui représentent et imposent le gouvernement démocratique et qui maintiennent cette folie où l'envoyé du centre détient l'autorité sur tout et sur tous, avec son bilan révolutionnaire depuis '48 quand il se bat et se bat avec toute sa nation, et ça ne finit jamais, que les choses vont si mal. L'envoyé du centre n'est autre que le ridicule cafard Agamiță Dandanache, soutenu par l'équipe de campagne Trahanache, Cașavencu, Zoe : on le choisit pour représenter le peuple, et ainsi certifier, défaire et refaire continuellement la terrible crise dans laquelle nous vivons la plénitude du Grand Rien. Et pourtant, pourquoi Agamiță Dandanache gagne-t-il les élections ? Parce que nous sommes toujours dans une crise existentielle aiguë des valeurs, dans le triomphe grotesque de la mystification !

Caragiale assume un masque après l'autre pour exprimer son désir « de scandaliser et de réprimander ainsi la société », mais c'est surtout lui qui, comme le coquin de l'anecdote allégorique, met en lumière, avec une inspiration et un humour augustes, le fameux « nez » de l'effrayant mentor, afin de permettre au peuple de s'amuser et à l'âme de se délecter. Si les fous de Shakespeare deviennent d'éternels messagers de la sagesse suprême, l'énigmatique Ion de la *Năpasta* [*Le Malheur*] de Caragiale donne voix de la manière la plus troublante à ce sens du mystère cosmique que le grand écrivain s'est systématiquement interdit à lui-même, en son propre nom.

L'imagination, le côté trompeur de l'homme et le malheur béni de l'artiste, ces maîtres de l'erreur et du mensonge, sont d'autant plus trompeurs qu'ils ne le sont pas toujours, car ils seraient des maîtres infaillibles du vrai,

s'ils n'étaient pas des maîtres absolus du faux. Et, cependant, chez Caragiale demeurent constantes une quête du vrai à travers les plus terribles mystifications et une interrogation permanente sur l'éthique à travers les échecs moraux les plus retentissants et les plus comiques.

Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994), grand dramaturge d'origine roumaine, a été très passionné par Caragiale dont il a adapté une « esquisse » intitulée *Căldură mare*, sous le titre français *Grosse chaleur*. Ionesco a donné, dans son essai *Littérature roumaine*, où se trouve en annexe l'esquisse déjà mentionnée, ce qui est peut-être une des meilleures caractérisations synthétiques de l'œuvre de Caragiale, dans laquelle on peut retrouver aussi une conception du « destin » semblable à celle que j'ai essayé de développer dans le présent article. Quelques citations relativement étendues parleront d'elles-mêmes :

I. L. Caragiale, lui, ne fut, apparemment, que l'observateur des mœurs et des caractères des gens de son pays, son attitude étant, comme celle de tout observateur, celle d'un homme en dehors du milieu qu'il a observé, et qu'il nous a rendu, attitude essentiellement critique, sans sympathie, ironique, dure, sévère. [...] Les personnages de ses pièces et de ses contes, ce sont les petits bourgeois stupides, fous de politique, représentants de la classe ascendante dans une société démocratisée, selon le modèle occidental [...]. L'univers de Caragiale est l'enfer de l'imbécillité. L'humanité y apparaît sous-humaine, l'existence du monde semble injustifiée. Et tout ceci dans une langue d'une efficacité parfaite faisant corps avec le contenu, étant le contenu lui-même : le parler de ses personnages les reflète exactement, c'est une langue désarticulée, détériorée comme leurs caractères, comme le monde social dans lequel ils vivent, un langage volontairement confus et chaotique, le langage des journaux du temps où toutes les grandes notions s'embrouillent, se confondent effroyablement. [...] La critique de Caragiale n'est pas celle de telle ou telle société. En réalité, c'est la critique anarchiste, désespérée, de toute société humaine possible.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>. Eugène Ionesco, *Littérature roumaine* (Paris : Fata Morgana, 1998), 38-40 (jugements critiques), 61-68 (l'esquisse *Grosse chaleur*).

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En tant que metteur en scène de théâtre et que réalisateur de cinéma, j'ai toujours été « tenté » par Caragiale. La compréhension intellectuelle, théorique et philologique de ses œuvres, esquissée dans ses grandes lignes dans les paragraphes précédents, s'est doublée d'un désir d'approcher Caragiale à travers une vision plus pratique, plus appliquée : lumières, sons, espaces, meubles, tissus, interactions des personnages devenus vivants. Toutes les subtilités de l'écriture, les complexités et les inquiétudes que je lisais dans ses personnages, toute la force prophétique que je voyais dans son interprétation du politique, tout cela m'a sans cesse poussé vers lui et m'a déterminé à me confronter avec ses pièces de théâtre ou ses nouvelles. Sur les scènes de théâtre, à la télévision, à la radio, au cinéma, j'ai rêvé de Caragiale, depuis 1967. J'ai voyagé à travers le monde accompagné par lui, sur la scène du Théâtre d'Art de Moscou, à Reykjavik, Arezzo, Chişinău. Dans ma vie personnelle, Caragiale a joué un rôle de premier plan, à travers ma relation de 55 ans avec mon épouse Veronica. De nombreux détails des scénarios écrits, théâtraux ou filmiques, sont venus de sa part et se sont matérialisés à la fois sur scène et sur l'écran. Je peux me confesser, à voix haute, publiquement, à travers Caragiale. C'est lui qui me donne la liberté de savoir vivre dans une inquiétude vitale. Mes peurs sont de la confiance dans l'assainissement de l'humain à travers la compréhension des interrogations que Caragiale nous lance avec autant de sagacité.

J'aime l'acteur : c'est impossible de ne pas le faire si l'on aime le théâtre. C'est lui qui est la vie. Vie inquiète, ardente de la richesse du sens. L'acteur, c'est de l'amour. De l'amour et rien de plus. À travers le talent performatif d'un grand acteur ou d'une grande actrice, la scène donne de l'imagination à l'existence, une grande puissance de réflexion, de la dignité et du courage. L'art de l'acteur est un art qui se suffit à lui-même, indépendant et singulier dans ses connexions histrioniques... Solaire et damné. Nietzsche parlait de l'identité en termes de destinée de cet art fidèle à soi-même. L'art de l'acteur est créativité *in progress*... L'acteur, celui qui est né par la bénédiction de la grâce, n'est pas forcément un interprète de caractères, il n'est pas une présence active dans le contexte scénique d'un spectacle, mais il est plutôt le vivant, fort et incitant, qui fait que rien d'essentiel ne puisse se perdre.

Les acteurs sont des favoris des dieux car faire rire ou pleurer les gens, les aider à se réjouir de compréhension et de sens, les faire aimer et penser, c'est sans aucun doute une vocation privilégiée, semblable à la sainteté. Fellini (dont l'univers humain a beaucoup de points communs avec celui de Caragiale) considérait les acteurs comiques des bienfaiteurs de l'humanité. Donner l'insouciance, l'amusement, un bon état psychique, illuminer l'âme, provoquer et entretenir une communion par le rire et par les pleurs, c'est peut-être le métier le plus miraculeux qui soit.

L'art d'un grand acteur ou d'une grande actrice ennoblit toujours l'attente, met le cachet de l'unicité Être-Jeu sur toute action. Ce cachet s'éprouve à travers les pores et la respiration, par les battements du cœur, dans la fantaisie dilatée de la lucidité. L'acteur joue son être. Il joue et explore l'intérieur de l'être. Il joue et crée une trinité – lui-même, le personnage et la création – une mission, un but qui accomplit à la fois le texte, la scène, le spectacle et le public.

Cet acteur nous convie à la lutte fascinante entre lui et le personnage. Les acteurs de grande envergure sont ceux qui ont plusieurs personnages dans leur structure psychique et corporelle. Eux, ceux dont parle Caragiale, ne sont pas les esclaves vendus à plusieurs rôles. Ils ne corrompent pas leur talent pour plaire aux personnages. Le personnage vient vers l'acteur qui jouit d'un ample espace de réception et de transfiguration expressive en soi-même. Les grands acteurs atteignent la hauteur du personnage et peuvent même la dépasser. Ils vont plus loin que c'est dit dans le texte. Ces acteurs donnent naissance au spectacle inconnu, incitant et surprenant du personnage, dans le spectacle qui se développe de manière séquentielle par des images spectaculaires.

L'art de Caragiale est dans le mot, parmi les mots, au-delà des mots et, de cette manière, sa création s'enferme ou se repose en elle-même comme pourrait le dire Heidegger. Caragiale a été celui qui a donné naissance à des sens dans le discours, avec l'énergie des mots ou bien dans l'écho de leur silence. Le cri de cette osmose contient le fondement de flammes inconnues qui rend l'habituel miraculeux. L'œuvre de Caragiale est combattante à travers la nature poétique de ses arguments et résiste au temps qui mystifie la force de la nostalgie et à la fascination de la quête de la vérité. C'est

l'inclusion destinale dans les signes qui font irruption et apportent des énergies spirituelles renforçant la vitalité de l'art. Toujours attentif au détail à travers la pensée, Caragiale, par la magie du mot, hausse la compréhension au rang pluriel des sens.

Le metteur en scène, quand il est touché et marqué par la magie d'une compréhension, transfigure des significations, et guide les images (provocatrices dans leur incandescence visuelle-réflexive) vers l'altitude du sens, où elles ont la possibilité de se constituer, à un moment donné, en une poétique de la mise en scène. Lui, le metteur en scène, recherche l'identité du spectacle et, dans cette initiation, bâtit la structure rigoureuse d'une vision, le concept de l'ensemble. Si moi j'ai réussi à achever une telle poétique de la mise en scène, je le dois en bonne mesure à Caragiale et aux inquiétudes du destin que je lis dans son monde...

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ALEXA VISARION

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## *Waiting for... the Debutant Director*

**Călin CIOBOTARI<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The present study aims to discuss a series of problems identified over time in Romanian directing education, with an emphasis on the Theatre Faculty of Iași where the author has been teaching for many years. In the second part of the paper, I publish the results of a questionnaire that I did, on the occasion of this research, among the best graduates of the last five years of the Department of Directing at the Faculty of Theatre Iasi.

**Keywords:** directing class, survey, questionnaire.

The opinions below belong both to the professor who teaches theoretical subjects in the directing classes (Aesthetics, Drama Theory, Spectacology and, in the past, Theory of Culture, Dramaturgy), but also to the theatre critic concerned to observe the rise in the Romanian spectacular landscape of some young directors, able to come forward with formulas of continuity between past and present aesthetics. These directors face a theatrical past that, too often, tend to be idealized, and a present from which the figure of the director as a stage personality begins to dilute.

I will start by listing a series of problems that, over the years, I have noticed in the Romanian directing education, with an added knowledge for the one practiced in Iași. In the second part of the paper, I will publish the results of a questionnaire that I have created, on the occasion of this communication, among the best graduates of the Department of Directing at the Faculty of Theatre Iași from the past five years.

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1. Personally, I think that the lack of maturity of the Directing student seems to be one of the most delicate aspects. The majority of students arrive at the Faculty without the slightest theatrical background. At 18, viewer experiences are random. They have seen few performances, their theatrical culture is negligible, the information they possess about the profession they chose is limited. It's discouraging when, in the first year, you find that, in many cases, you have to start from scratch, starting with the teaching of a theatrical alphabet that will require at least two semesters to instil. It takes a similar amount of time to erase a number of harmful preconceptions about theatre and performance art in trying to raise the stakes of the learning process as much as possible, so as to transmit the students a set of authentic values to relate to. If, for better or for worse, vocational high schools provide what would be called an introduction to the art of acting, in terms of directing it is not at all clear to me what kind of knowledge prior to the faculty can be accumulated. I have met directing students for whom the semantics of the term *director* only became clear at the end of their first year, when they found that what they knew directing meant had nothing to do with the definitions provided by the Faculty.<sup>2</sup>

2. Beyond theatrical culture, the increasingly fragile general culture of high school graduates in Romania constitutes another major impediment in a profession based enormously on cultural background. Worryingly, for more and more theatre students, the show is no longer a cultural product, but an easy show, the stepping stone of an entertainment industry for which, it is believed, you need good instincts and that's about it. It is difficult and daunting to begin teaching the great theatrical systems, from Stanislavski to Grotowski and Barba, when the student does not know how to use a hyphen or express his thoughts in coherent sentences<sup>3</sup>. Disciplines such as "Theory

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<sup>2</sup>. Hence the rather high degree of abandonment registered at the directing departments.

<sup>3</sup>. Already in the 60s, Grotowski observed this risk of derision of art and the separation of theater from the cultural sphere. See Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Edited by Eugenio Barba, Preface by Peter Brook (New York: Routledge, 2002). It is equally true that, in the hundreds of pages that make up K. S. Stanislavski's, *An Actor's Work*, translated by Jean Benedetti (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), you do not identify any obvious interest in the cultural development of the artist; the actor's work, as Stanislavski describes it, has little to do with libraries or art galleries.

of culture” or “Spectacology”, which should theoretically fulfil and nuance pre-existing accumulations, often become a desperate attempt by the professor to consolidate, as much as possible, a minimal general culture.

3. The time crunch troubles us all. In the third year, you feel that some of the students have finally settled on a direction of evolution, that they have begun to accumulate and refine their creative springs. Unfortunately, since the end of the first semester, you have a feeling of “too late”. Look at the quality of directing degrees in Romania: there is something incomplete in them, even in the most successful ones, something not carried through to the end. You often see good intentions, show drafts, signs of exciting, challenging stage discourses, but unfulfilled or not fully articulated. You wonder what’s missing and you answer: one more year! The Bologna system seemed impregnable to us all these years... The consequences of its implementation in theatre schools were obvious from the beginning<sup>4</sup>, but the effects can only be truly perceived today... Fortunately, from the fall of 2021, the study programs in the Faculties of Theatre from Romania return to four years.

4. During the years of study, students miss the big meetings, those public-private events able to overwhelmingly influence a destiny, a conception of the world and life, the cultivation of certain attitudes. I think it is time for a modular teaching system that facilitates a diversity of experiences, including international experiences. It still seems to us that a compact course held by a great director of the world in Romania is in the realm of the impossible. It is very difficult for us to imagine, perhaps, that Ostermeier could teach for a month in Iași. What’s more, this scenario worries us a bit: isn’t it after Ostermeier leaves Iași, that we, the professors here, won’t be so interesting for our own students anymore?!

5. As far as study programs are concerned, there is a certain deadlock in the theatrical benchmark. The character sheet and the director’s notebook still remain Moses’ boards without which we cannot imagine theatrical education. On the other hand, in my opinion, techniques for stimulating and developing creativity are missing, or are too rarely discussed. Appetite for

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<sup>4</sup>. A good analysis in this sense in the series of four articles by Iulia Popovici, „Efectele sistemului Bologna asupra școlii românești de teatru și film” [Effects of the Bologna system on the Romanian theater and film school.” I-IV. *Observator cultural*, nr. 781-784, July-Aug. (2015).

dreaming, poetry and poetics, appetite for risk, courage and a certain way of creative impertinence – all these are, again, from my perspective, neglected or, at best, relegated to “and others”. I am exasperated by the shyness, politeness and low profile of many of the directing students. I look for signs of great uprisings or future “blasphemies” in them, and I find nothing but the accumulation of predetermined recipes, a state of comfort (installed since the second year), the inability or lack of desire to leave the protective halls of the University. Nothing turns me off more in a directing student than the allure of a technocrat or corporatist. I am not now suggesting that curricula should include Bohemian courses, but Bohemianism should, in one way or another, be experienced...

6. The almost total absence of international experiences. Strangely, Romanian directing after 1990, with very few exceptions, avoided any internationalization. Paradoxically, Romanian directors edited and were known much more outside during the communist years: Lucian Pintilie, Liviu Ciulei, Radu Penciulescu, Andrei Șerban and others are examples in this sense. In the meantime, directing, it seems to me, has become an art with a national vocation, otherwise I can't explain the low circulation<sup>5</sup> of our contemporary directors through the theatres of the world. It's an effect that also affects directing schools where the international experience is purely theoretical. It rarely happens in Iași that a directing student applies for an Erasmus or another form of mobility, as if what happens from a theatrical point of view in spaces other than the Romanian one is not really a serious stake and ... not worth the trouble.

7. As it follows from the questionnaire that this paper proposes, the infrastructure is frequently taking all the blame for the great failures of the directing student. I think that Faculties should be much more concerned with concluding partnerships with performance institutions, convinced to include in their management plans programs dedicated to the preparation of stage debuts. Acquainting the student with a professional troupe, with an adequate technical staff and with a reasonably set-up technical stage is an essential stage in his training.

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<sup>5</sup>. Silviu Purcărete and Tompa Gabor are exceptions, the weight of productions in Romania being, however, clearly superior to those abroad.

8. Assistant directing is currently an option, not an obligation, although this kind of theatrical practice has an indisputable pedagogical relevance. Sometimes I have the feeling that the directing professor is afraid of being contradicted by the directors with whom the student would come into contact. He tacitly manifests the ambition to remain the only “opinion leader” at this level of student training. On the other hand, however, directing assistance should not, in my opinion, remain outside the realm of control imposed by the school. It could be mediated by the school, with the direct involvement of the directing professor, who would explicitly undertake this temporary exit from the school. I had the unpleasant surprise of finding out how Acting students, cast in bad shows, not only did not come out to any professional advantage, but also destabilized their accumulated knowledge and skills. Likewise, assisting a mediocre director can become a counter-benefit. And the other extreme is possible: a student from the Directing department at Iași University assisted Andrei Șerban, to the delight of the department. The amount of self-sufficiency with which he returned to school surprised us all.

9. I think that the contemporary director must, more than ever, also hide a theatre critic within himself. A theatre critic who deals with a form of personal management starting from his time at the Faculty, who is involved in self-promotion, entrepreneurial endeavours, who follows and applies for national and international projects. Unfortunately, for a debutante putting on a good show is not enough; that performance must be turned into an event and delivered as such. Formation and consolidation of the name-brand – here is a subject that I do not know is part of our school programs. Including Bachelor theatre shows into the current repertoires of some theatres, a solution successfully applied in the old days, does not immediately translate into establishing a name-brand for an artist.

10. We are in a phase of weakening inter-university relations in the theatre field. Of course, we still have some contexts where we can learn about each other, see an undergraduate show or students acting in theatre productions. Beyond that, though, I think a tightening of ties would be beneficial for everyone. Why couldn't the directing student take one exam per year in Cluj, Bucharest or Târgu Mureș. And, of course, the reciprocal... This

would give him/ her an overall picture to which, captive in his/ her own school, with the same professors and colleagues he/ she keeps distributing from the first year to the third year, he/ she does not have access. I remember the case of a graduate who, during the Faculty, passed exams with very high grades, but each time with the same 5-7 students. At the Bachelor exam I arranged for him to direct a show in a professional theatre, with the actors there and the result was below the limit of acceptability.

Annex<sup>6</sup>

*1. List three pluses and three minuses of the Department of Directing within the Faculty of Theatre.*

*2. On a scale from 1 to 10, how professionally prepared do you consider yourself to be after graduating from the Faculty?*

*3. If you were a directing professor, what would you remove and what would you develop in the curriculum?*

**Graduate 1**

1) Minuses: few rehearsal spaces, lack of scenography section, master's courses are not taken seriously.

Pluses: the very existence of the ward, the city, some creative freedom.

2) Honestly, I think between 4 and 5 after BA, 6 after MA.

3) I would increase the number of exams; I would work more with students; I would try to make other stages/spaces available, I would try to facilitate the student's relationships with professional scenographers; I would prepare the students for the undergraduate show from the beginning of the second year; I would introduce psychology as a compulsory subject; I would try to create a reward based system to get them to read more and more; I would encourage them to use paper and pencil more often; I would organize trips to different theatre festivals. I would eliminate subjects that students show disinterest in anyway and encourage them to rehearse as much as possible.

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<sup>6</sup>. The questionnaire was carried out during the years 2020 and 2021, with graduates of the Department of Directing in Iași from the period 2017-2021.

## **Graduate 2**

1) Pluses: the opportunity to work with acting students. There is a sufficient number of professors with both practical and theoretical experience. Geographic location.

Minuses: few study and practice rooms (Along these three years we had only two rooms available); the lack of a storeroom for props and costumes; scenic equipment was limited.

2) The marks I gave myself for the first staged shows were between 6.5-7.

3) I would encourage giving more feedback to our shows or rehearsed scenes. I would insist returning to four years program. Getting in touch more with the students from the acting department. The theoretical knowledge is very good, but a lot of time is wasted at the expense of the practical part, which for me was not enough. Because of that, 50% of the director's notebook failed at the first rehearsal. Equipping the workrooms accordingly. Mandatory theatre practice. I would make the opera directing course optional. Instead, I would impose a creation course with the choreography students. I would do the light design course over at least 4 semesters, not just in one semester. I would insist that every year of study has a study hall.

## **Graduate 3**

1) As a graduate of the directing section, I can say that I encountered a series of problems that affected my professional future. A college doesn't end like an elementary school, it should end like a college. After you're done, it's a good idea to have your Master Professor continue to guide you, at least for a short while. Unfortunately, no one cares if you existed or not. I listen to the great Romanian directors, who are even up in their 90s, evoking their beginnings, their debuts: they all refer to professors who not only helped them after completing their studies, but, through their authority, helped them with imposing themselves on the theatrical market, vouched for them. The time I had at my disposal was so short that I myself sometimes wonder whether or not I existed as a directing student. The three minuses: a. Lack of professionalism on the part of the majority of professors. Zero ambition, zero energy. b. The timetable was a mess. Classes that required a certain intellectual performance from the part of the student were always scheduled

at eight in the morning. c. The assignments were chosen in a whimsical manner. My colleagues and I were fulfilling them in a similarly whimsical manner. No one got any real benefit from doing them. I believe that homework, in such a department, should be given in class, done in class and assessed in class. A rarity obviously, but I could also enjoy something like that. The pluses would be the workshops organized by the Faculty, in which I had the opportunity to participate.

2) How prepared am I from 1 to 10? When I left, I was at 2, very lucky that I reached that level as well. Until now, I blamed myself for not getting out the way I imagined I would get out of here. Kudos to YouTube for allowing me to develop on the actual work side. The Faculty never knew how to explain to me that simplicity is essential, that exactly what is simple helps you learn and evolve.

3) If I were a professor, I would dedicate myself completely to this profession. If a professor is busy with other activities, extracurricular, always citing that he has so much work, then let him resign and come back when he has time with a workshop or a compact course. I would absolutely invest three years of my life – the university life cycle student generation – in which I would try to be part of their projects, as well as mine, organically intertwined with the students. I would constantly try to help them find and define a creative personality. Many problems arise right after the entrance examination, when students are not selected in order to allow the creation of a group, but only to fill the seats needed to provide that “per student” funding. I would try my best to find the human in each student, his sensibilities, his depths.

#### **Graduate 4**

1) Pluses: The fact that it is a Faculty that is still young and you can easily break the patterns of methods that are barely coagulating through the practice of the assistants and professors, who do not have so much prejudice towards canonical directing, as is the case in Bucharest or in Târgu Mureș. The fact that you can benefit from the proximity of the choreography specialization, developing yourself in an area of luxuriant theatricality, of the dancing body, looking for paths that are as engaging as possible and that are closer to one’s personal ideal of performance. In my opinion, most of the

professors, lacking the arrogance or time crunch of some professors from Bucharest, who, as far as I know, barely manage to get to class or closely follow the students' evolution, are also among the pluses.

Cons: The spaces, the confusing schedules of the various sections, the fact that some are constantly rushing to participate in too many disciplines, all mean that a productive use of creative effort is often clogged up by the collision of other students announced before you in the only acceptable space: the Studio Room. The impossibility of having sufficient physical time for rehearsals – this is one of the fears of any directing student. The lack of a location intended strictly for the Directing students, where they could more easily adjust to stage lighting techniques, to the idea of a professional show, where to help attract an audience of the Faculty, not only made up of relatives and friends. It is important, because in this way the student becomes familiar with the so-called "large audience", develops his self-esteem, feels more motivated, etc. Another minus: the so rare and already routine directorial thematic cycles that are chosen to be studied and the refusal to innovate this research area.

2) On a scale of 1 to 10, going over the nostalgic excitement with which I remember my college years, I rate myself at 3.

3) I would make it last longer. Three years is too short; if we are to be honest, compressed, two remain, a statement that is also valid for Acting. When you have so many areas to research, when the energetic-material construction of the show is so complex, three years seems to me... a warm-up of the feet and leaving the rest of the body still numbed. In link with this objection is, of course, the issue of rehearsal spaces. Let's not say that I felt the need for a separate building, but at least of a floor that is only for the directing students. Why? First of all, because in this way a correct working climate would have been ensured, a favourable atmosphere for rehearsals, for creation.

Another concern of mine would relate to connecting the student to the new currents of the European, South American or Asian Theatre. We know next to nothing about what's going on in the world, and we tend to do theatre or talk about theatre as we did half a century ago. I would then strive to make important disciplines such as Cultural Marketing to be more than theoretical

ones, but ones that offer an approach that can truly be implemented in the real theatre industry of Romania. Similarly, courses in public speaking and argumentation of ideas, courses in philosophy and history of art, psychology... Consequently, I would create channels of inter-disciplinary connection with other Faculties in the humanities area, trying to train sensitivity and intellect in my students.

### **Graduate 5**

1) Pluses: It would be a great plus for the University if it had a storage space for props, scenery and costumes, and of course an employee to manage them. I would encourage a project through which, in the Studio Room, a micro internship would be held that would include exams or undergraduate performances from other Universities in the country. Exchange of experience, both between students and professors, would be encouraged. Organized semesterly artistic "pilgrimages" for students (selected according to grades and attendance) to have access to important performances in Romania. It would be a reward at least as important as the scholarship for great achievements that is currently offered. I enjoyed an openness to collaboration from students and professors from other departments. Another plus relates to the fact that there are employees in the technical department of the faculty; they are engaged, creative and available. I really appreciated the willingness of the professors (at least my professor) to communicate with the student for the sake of his development, to accompany him in the research process, helping him to discover his own solutions, including counselling outside the official program.

2) 7-8 is the grade with which I evaluate myself (but it is due, first of all, to my time management problem. I could have absorbed more knowledge during my student years).

3) If I were a professor... I would dedicate the contemporary theatre exam especially to the experimental area of theatrical practice, with increased attention to the new formulas of directorial expression. I could not remove something from the curriculum because all the steps are necessary. The problem is, I think, the insufficient number of years of education.

### **Graduate 6**

1) The three pluses would be: the people you meet during College, the pleasure of working with other people in the field and ...the cigarettes after the rehearsals. The three minuses: the need for a directing laboratory; the current rehearsal spaces are inadequate; professors who don't let you experiment, but ask you to do things right the first time; lack of budget for exam/degree.

2) 3 is the grade I give myself.

3) If I were a professor of directing and I, as a director, had to work on a show in a theatre, I would take my students to work side by side with me. We learn a lot through practical experience, not through books written by others who have already gone through the experimental stage of our development. I would enforce compliance with the established timetable (I wouldn't do only two out of six hours, for example). I would devote my time exclusively to working with students, trying to create a creative working atmosphere and develop a deeper relationship with them, not a formal relationship.

### **Graduated 7**

1) I will start with the minuses, which are more technical. First of all, the limited number of spaces available to directing students is a problem. Sometimes three or four colleagues created exam shows in one room, which meant that the schedule for rehearsals was quite strict, and at the exam, no matter how well we organized, there was still more commotion than was needed. Another problem is the lack of equipment, which probably exists in the college, but it arrives quite difficultly and often late to us, and if we talk about spotlights... for two directing classes that take their exams a day apart to only have two spotlights it's not very useful. I'm not saying, I can look at things from a different perspective, and many times situations like this forced me to find much more creative solutions, but I would have found creative solutions even if we had the benefit of more rehearsal spaces and equipment at our disposal a month before the exam, for example... And the last thing that is not only the minus of the Faculty in Iași, but also becomes the minus of most directing graduates in our country is the size of the

directing class, which is too big. Let's allow 10 students to enter in one year and let them constitute three different generations... I think that if there is someone who thinks that all students get equal chances in this context, that person has no idea what theatre direction entails. It is true that half or more drop out along the way, but until then, directing professors, no matter how well trained, cannot give enough attention to each student, and in the first year of study it is essential to get enough of your professor's time and attention. Okay, now if we wouldn't only have three years of directing training, maybe the problem wouldn't be so acute, but in the way the system is thought out now, 10 students, three years and the survival of the fittest... that can't possibly be for our benefit.

And now the pluses... I think that the pluses offered by the Faculty of Theatre from Iași bear the name of the few extremely well-trained and involved professors who were with us as much as they could during the short time spent in college. There were more, but the two directing professors in the class mean a lot to me. I think they managed to create a good and extremely complex program for their students. Now, I don't know, maybe it's personal and it has to do with the fact that I resonated better than I expected with what was asked of us in class, but I feel like there was a lot of engagement and the class was well structured, which managed to balance the situation out, considering how many faults the faculty has. Another good part I noticed is the openness to innovation of the directing department. I had the feeling that I could evolve and search for myself as an artist during my time here; leaving college I realize that I have already made contact with a theatrical area that is not stuck in the past. Of course, there are voices everywhere that try to limit you and tell you clearly which way to go (and often it's a beaten path that you don't care about), but these voices were heard very quietly compared to the ones that told me and constantly encouraged me to find a path that interests me, to experiment. Another plus of the faculty is the great potential that the actors have here. Maybe there are a lot of good actors out there, I'm sure there are, but I know that a lot of my personal success in terms of my exams has also been due in large part to the teams I've worked with, and this feels like a big addition.

2) I would answer the question about self-assessment with 7. I think I got most of the information I needed during college, but the extremely complicated situation of my senior year didn't help me feel prepared at all. It's a situation that affected many artists regardless of the stage they were in, and students in the last year of directing were not exempt. There is also the fact that I feel very strongly the lack of two more years of bachelor's degree. Anyway, 7 is a good grade to describe how emotionally prepared I feel.

3) If I were a professor... Honestly, in this situation I don't know how much control a professor has, but I would diminish the number of students in a directing class and add another year or two, I think that would solve a significant number of problems we faced in college.

### **Graduate 8**

1) Pros: Freedom to choose the plays according to the theme offered. It is very important for us to be able to choose something that inspires us; freedom of speech; the chance to test ourselves, the directing students, the directorial ideas. I'm talking about the first exam in year 1, where directing students have to act in something they've directed. I think that's where we start to discover ourselves, but also the director's craft in its early forms.

Cons: Professors who are not physically present in the faculty; the lack of access to equipment for making performances. For example, the spotlights that I still don't know how to adjust, mount on or explain how the light should fall from. The types of light, which are unknown to me. Theoretically I know them, practically not. The biggest lack is that of theatre practice. We don't know what really happens in a theatre, how the project for the theatre is made, we only know about a director's notebook, but even that vaguely. A deeper understanding of these seems to me very important; likewise, the information on how to create an entire project, with a concrete scenography. The involvement of professors seems to me another minus.

2) I give myself a grade of 3.

3) If I were a directing professor... In the first year I would have started with what directing and acting means. I would have delved into, for example, Stanislavski, Vahtangov, Peter Brook, etc., ancient theatre, Russian theatre, Romanian theatre, etc. Everything that is done in the history of the universal theatre I would have introduced in the practical part, about a

month at a time; at the end, each student should direct a piece of what was done that month. I think that this way we would be able to better understand the way in which the theoretical merges with the practical. At least you don't feel like you're missing out. It seems to me that we rush through the material too quickly, when we should be taking the time to delve into it and understand it. Professors should insist more on reading, watching performances, going to the theatre and discussing freely all things. I would do different exercises with the staging of the plays, I would give them different unconventional spaces to direct something from ancient theatre, for example. What would I remove?? The professors who do not physically come to the college (I am speaking of the time when COVID was not among us) because they always have other projects. We need professors, not people who are always on the run... I would eliminate classes that do not bring any benefit and add more hours for set design, lighting, music, play analysis, determining what is important and what is less important in creating a show, criteria for choosing texts, attending acting classes to see how to work with the student-actor, elements related to creating appropriate costumes, matters of applied marketing etc.

### **Graduate 9**

1) Pluses: I took part in workshops; we took joint courses with students from other departments, which proved useful for getting to know each other, but also for the accumulation of knowledge from neighbouring fields; at the directing exams we had spectators, which gave us a certain impression of professionalism.

Minuses: I did not insist on working with the actor in the multitude of aspects that this type of activity involves. I have covered the material costs of my exams; there was no contact with theatre festivals in Romania, not to mention the international ones.

2) I give myself a 6.

3) If I were a professor... I would remove the fear of working with actors by using improvisational exercises, then creating with students new exercises that facilitate the director's relationship with the actor productively. I would develop exercises to make the student aware of what is valid and what is only apparently valid from a directorial point of view.

### **Graduate 10**

1) I can't speak, from the directing graduate's perspective, about the entire Faculty because I didn't work with all the professors, but only with C.G. and A. C. In fact, I started directing that year precisely because G., one of the best directors in Romania, had come.

Pros: No pressure; in the sense that the student can work quietly and freely with the actors he wants, and his work not being altered by the commercial temptation of television and film studios. The professor-student human relationship is more important than in other departments, more relevant in the perspective of the future becoming of the director. I think it is essential for the development of the future director's personality. The consistent collaboration between departments and the immediacy of collaboration by the teaching staff.

Cons: Rehearsal spaces (as everywhere in the country). The production/examination budget should be more generous, but the school's resources do not allow it. One can only speak of an elusive competitiveness between classes/years.

2) Regarding the self-evaluation, it should be taken into account that I already had about 14 years of activity, more or less relevant, but also the fact that I did not come to study directing in order to change my focus to another type of theatre. I set up and re-contoured some rules of work (from text approach to performance teaching) essential for me and assumed/understood at a mediocre, truncated, even amateur level in some respects, beforehand. I reset some meanings about directing for myself, I changed a lot in what constituted the "relationship" between the director and the show. But there was no way a school could prepare me for what I needed, so I turned to what I knew school could provide. In the end, it comes out to be about an 8, but strictly in my case, particularly, with what I had done and studied before.

3) If I had decision-making power, I would force directing students to assist in specialized courses from the other departments, during all 3 years; I would try/risk other didactic strategies in the development of directing skills; I wouldn't remove anything, but I would introduce all the subjects of the other sections (even if they were 80, as optional), so that the directing student would have a wider palette of choices, depending on his/ her own options, understandings, etc.

### **Graduate 11**

1) Pluses: I believe that a fundamental factor in the creative process is the experiment, which I was not deprived of in any way during my years of study. My generation was encouraged to discover, to decipher, to search, to push the limits of our imagination. I hit the wall by myself, I messed up until I couldn't handle it anymore, I destroyed everything and started over. I think it is a very good method of learning, the student needs freedom to play with the mechanisms of creation and, at the same time, to know himself. I wasn't cornered, I didn't have barriers, I didn't have to follow certain rules to the letter, I can even say that I went against certain criteria regarding the exams, but I was charged for not following the rules and encouraged to continue with my experiment. The professors taught us the theory very well, showed us the path that has been the norm until now and explained the rules, but the rest remained in our hands. They have no way of teaching us a successful method, there is no such thing, they showed us what can be done, what are the limits that were discovered so far, they showed us the way to the great directorial systems so that later we could create our own way. I believe it is up to each individual student what they choose to learn. They always answered our questions and made us come up with dozens of other questions. They aroused our taste for curiosity, for innovation even. And they made sure that we didn't get lost on the way... A plus and at the same time a minus is the lack of budget in terms of creating exams. We've been taught to create set with the resources at our disposal, however, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, we could learn to let go of absolutely everything that isn't necessary and get rid of fads. You bring out the actor and the creative direction, there's no need for more. But in this way, you are also a little limited in terms of directorial vision.

Minuses: The only minus that can be felt is the lack of rehearsal spaces for all directing students. We only had two rehearsal spaces and we rehearsed wherever we could, which involved a constant change of space, not exactly optimal for a good growth of the show. We therefore need more space.

2) I believe that an 8 would describe my level of professional training. There are many things I still don't know and yet to discover, there are many hours of experience I need, limits to push. But now, after graduating from

college, I consider myself quite prepared to enter what is called the job market. When you have the foundations well anchored, it remains to be seen how you work with the actor, or I can personally say that I have found that you have to work with each actor in a different way, you have to know how to get him into character and how to help him get out of character. Directing college taught us to choose our collaborators, how to be selective, how to take care of the cast, but also of ourselves. On the other hand, we lack practice in a large performance hall, we cannot do exams in small spaces only to later face a hall of 500 spectators.

3) If I could change something, I would go to the authors that should be studied; we can study comedy without Caragiale, and psychological realism is not limited to Chekhov. Not all students resonate with certain authors and do not see this obligation beneficial. I would make directing assisting mandatory until graduation. I would bring the students shows from around the world, shows from the archives for them to watch. I would impose collaborations with students from the other departments because it is important to know how to look for what you need. I would remove students who cannot meet the criteria set by regulation. I would eliminate intercessions, friendships that bring some people certain advantages and all ageism.

### **Graduate 12**

1) Pluses: Studying and creating the director's notebook, a director's basic tool; the increased emphasis placed on the "relationship" between author and director and between text and performance, on deciphering the play, on the "permanent discussion of pros and cons" with the playwright; encouraging the collaboration of acting students with directing students.

Cons: very short time for studies; directing is a complex art, I think it requires a longer period to accumulate information and be able to actively use it. The lack of indulgence and patience for young students, I mean here those who have just finished high school, talented children who have no life experience and no very rich general culture, things that are so necessary in this field. Lack of mandatory active participation of acting students in the preparation of directing exams. Lack of financial support from the University for the purchase of sets, props, costumes, necessary for exams and the lack of spaces for their storage.

2) In terms of self-evaluation, I could compare this college to driving. In college you have an “instructor” by your side at all times, who “signals”, “adjusts the mirrors” or “puts on the brakes” for you, if needed. It’s only when you’re “in traffic” or, rather, in a theatre, that’s when the “fun” begins. I believe that the degree of professional training differs from one graduate to another, and the job of a director requires continuous improvement.

3) Not having the qualification of a professor, I never thought about what I would do from this position. It is certain that there is always room for improvement.

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WAITING FOR... THE DEBUTANT DIRECTOR

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## *The Theatrical System's Reform as the Aim of the Theatre Director's Education in Romania*

**Marius-Alexandru TEODORESCU<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** This article emphasizes the profound interdependence between the theatre directing educational system and the cultural system, taking into account the specifics of the situation in Romania. Identifying the theatre director as a pillar who defines the *status quo* in the cultural system and that oversees the implementation of a given global vision in theatres, the article argues that the director's educational process naturally results in defining tomorrow's theatre practices. In this context, the article identifies the key skills that the young director should have when entering the cultural system and argues in favour of their importance starting from practical situations in the institutional theatre system in Romania. These basic skills are: a deep understanding of all the compartments of a theatre and how each compartment functions, being able to further educate actors about the basic concepts of theatrical art, the ability to conduct a profound text analysis and, lastly, a commitment to use a directing notebook as starting point for their shows. The article concludes that the main reasons why the education system currently fails to develop these skills are the lack of time allocated to theatrical practice, but also the prevalence of the desire to train a small number of exceptional directors to the detriment of training all student directors to become capable of operating in the cultural market.

**Keywords:** director, theatre, pedagogy, practice as research.

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Every young director suffers a panic attack when he/ she first comes into contact with the Romanian theatrical system in its least disguised form: when he/ she begins work on his/ her first show in a professional theatre. The young director wakes up at the first rehearsal face to face with a room he does not know in which there are actors he does not know, whose first instinct is to do anything they can in order to test and understand who is the man or woman they are dealing with. Considering Peter Brook's definition of the theatrical act, in which all that is needed to create theatricality is a person walking across a stage and another person watching<sup>2</sup>, the director is now engaged in a theatrical act in which, ironically, he/ she is the actor, while the actors are his/ her spectators.

With this act comes an overwhelming sensation of stage fright, fuelled not only by the fear of being watched, as Bella Merlin describes the causes of stage fright in her book, *Facing the Fear*<sup>3</sup>. The director's stage fright comes with the fear of being judged, especially in the case of a cast with older actors; it comes with the fear of failure; it comes with doubts about the show he/ she is going to coordinate. The stake of the educational system should be to prepare the young director to face this truly critical moment. In this sense, there are two key aspects that contribute to the way in which the future director overcomes his/ her own fear of failure and launches constructively in creating and taking responsibility for the show.

On the one hand, the director must be trained extensively in the tasks he/ she will have to perform in order to successfully direct a show, regardless of the aesthetic formula to which he/ she adheres. In other words, he/ she must possess the set of practical skills necessary for the successful completion of the project. A good theoretical knowledge of the cultural field in which he/ she works is useful for the director in elaborating complex performances, anchored in the historical and present cultural practices and values. However, once the work on stage begins, the plethora of theoretical baggage becomes almost useless for the director. We believe that a director who successfully stages a theatre show that is not culturally and artistically brilliant is much more a director than another, who has thought of the most scholarly show possible, but who is unable to stage it in real working conditions.

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<sup>2</sup>. Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996), 7.

<sup>3</sup>. Bella Merlin, *Facing the Fear* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), 33.

Unfortunately, the director's profession as it is generally practiced in Romania, namely as freelancing, with a small number of employed directors and the majority of directors who travel from theatre to theatre staging projects, becomes a profession in which surviving on the market is pivotal. Directing becomes a profession focused on dealing with radical changes: the different working conditions in each theatre and the fragile discipline in Romanian theatres. Taking these matters into account, the structure of the university programmes in directing pedagogy in Romania is deeply deficient.

Out of the total of 60 subjects studied by a director at the Faculty of Theater and Film at "Babeş-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca<sup>4</sup>, only 25 are practical ones, and their importance in relation to theoretical subjects according to the transferable credits system also undermines their importance. At the Faculty of Theater at "George Enescu" National University of Art in Iași<sup>5</sup>, the proportion is 32 subjects in total to only 12 practical subjects, while at the National University of Theater Art and Cinematography in Bucharest<sup>6</sup>, the proportion is 22 subjects in total to 8 subjects practice. As such, we can conclude that the theatrical educational system in Romania is not focused on transmitting the skills needed by the young director to complete a show, but rather on transmitting a broad cultural background.

On the other hand, the professional theatre system itself should be prepared for the first meeting with the young director. In other words, beyond the creating straightforward opportunities for collaboration with directors who are only now beginning their careers, theatres should also tailor their repertoire and troupe in such a way that they can follow the trends of younger generations of creators. Unfortunately, however, the theatrical system is not formed by itself, but is also formed by directors. So, the training of today's young director coincides with the shaping of tomorrow's theatrical system, which in turn influences other young directors. It can be seen that we could

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4. <https://teatrufilm.ubbcluj.ro/studenti/planuri-de-invatamant/>, accessed on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

5. <http://www.arteiasi.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PLAN-REGIE-2020-2023-docx.pdf>, accessed on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

6. <https://unatc.ro/devunatc/departament/artele-spectacolului-regie/>, accessed on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

enter a very dangerous cycle, that has for now become a downward spiral left to chance by to the lack of vision of the rulers of Romanian culture. “Prenez un cercle, caressez-le, il deviendra vicieux.”<sup>7</sup>

This cyclicity cannot be interrupted without a radical reform of the Romanian theatrical educational system, which should focus on the training of cultural trainers. Its current focus on aesthetics and theatrical theory as resulting from analysing all the curricula mentioned above creates a deficit in the ability of directors to define and intervene on theatrical practices within the artistic system. As stated in the curriculum for the Theatre Directing specialization at the “George Enescu” University of Art in Iași, the study program is focused on “stimulating creativity, innovation, courage to approach the original and stage truth, whilst training young people as professionals and researchers, in order to access master’s and doctoral studies. The practical work of applied research stimulates the discovery and modelling of the student’s artistic personality, of one’s own vision about the art of the show.”<sup>8</sup> The Romanian theatrical education system is focused on creating cultural innovators, often without taking into account the conditions on the cultural market.

Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to talk about innovation in a system that is barely functional. From Ion Sava<sup>9</sup> onwards, the great Romanian directors constantly complain about the gross lack of qualified technical staff, the general indifference of the employees, the pride and egotism inside the troupes, but also the artists’ lack of knowledge and common sense. Of course, the directors are to blame for this as well. Therefore, it is necessary to ask ourselves what would be the skills that the young director should have, both to survive in the Romanian cultural environment and to produce a change in this environment, in order to allow real research and innovation, from a cultural point of view. It is worth mentioning that the director, as he/ she is perceived in Romania, as the author of the theatre show, is the ideal person to implement this reform, as he/ she sets the standards according to which a show is staged.

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<sup>7</sup>. Eugène Ionesco, *La cantatrice chauve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 72.

<sup>8</sup>. <http://www.arteiasi.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PLAN-REGIE-2020-2023-docx.pdf>, accessed on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

<sup>9</sup>. Ion Sava, *Teatralitatea Teatrului* [*The Theatricality of Theatre*], notes: Virgil Petrovici, pref. Liviu Ciulei, (Bucharest: Eminescu Publishing House, 1981), *passim*.

A "Theatre Directing" Bachelor's Degree is one of the few lines of study that prepares the student for a position of power, from the first day of practicing the profession. Even the faculties of economics, which theoretically train tomorrow's entrepreneurs, do not have such a strong correlation with a leader position, taken upon himself by the student since the beginning of his professional life. By signing a first contract by which the director undertakes the staging of a show, the director commits that he/ she will coordinate, to a greater or lesser extent, all the departments of a theatre, from the artistic or technical ones, to the administrative one.

The director, in collaboration with the theatre's staff, not only establishes the stage actions or the way the text is uttered on stage, but approves the budget execution of the show, sets the rehearsal times, the cleaning schedule, establishes when the set should be built and taken down, he/ she supervises the implementation of contracts with collaborators and much more. For this significant side of his/ her work as a mature director, the young directing student is not systematically trained, except if happily, by chance, he/ she meets a coordinating Professor with a rich history of staging shows and who understands the need for such an intervention. However, this kind of meeting, no matter how fortunate, is a fortuitous one and cannot be the basis for the systematic training of directors in Romania as it is today.

Therefore, it is unfortunate that the student director carries out his/ her practical activity exclusively at the university and not in a real theatre. The only solution would be for this practice at university to perfectly simulate work in theatres or for at least one semester for the young student to work in an actual theatre. In this sense, we strongly align ourselves with the opinion of Gelu Badea, who, in his book, *Soliloquy*, highlights exactly this problem:

At the same time, we opine for a period of practice in theatres extended over one semester – or at least over three months – in the middle of the training period. This practice, together with the 3<sup>rd</sup> year graduation show, will give the future director greater confidence in approaching the mission of leading the process of completing the show. The contact with the theatre, targeting all its components – the artistic, the stage assistants,

the sets and costumes workshops, as well as the administrative-financial side – will make the future director able to provide answers to all the challenges that arise during the staging of the show.<sup>10</sup>

Placing the internship in the middle of the educational process would allow the young director to test the skills he/ she has acquired until then. Moreover, it would allow the students to more effectively identify their own shortcomings in relation to real working conditions. In addition, taking into account the typical age of the undergraduate student (18-21 years of age), and also the fact that the pre-university educational system in Romania is a rigid one, we must take into account the rebellious tendency of the majority of the students. Confronted with the professor's opinion on a certain educational aspect, they will often be inclined to oppose the suggestions in principle, asserting their artistic independence. From our experience in teaching students, but also by close observation of our own colleagues, the differences in opinion between teacher and student often disappear after the bachelor's exam, which consists in staging a show in a professional theatre. Here, the student is faced with the limitations of the system. Thus, by placing the internship in the middle of the educational process, we give the student time to accumulate enough revolt in relation to the teacher, but we make an intervention early enough to allow effective accumulation of information in the second half of the process.

It may seem strange that we are talking almost exclusively about state theatre, not also about independent theatre. The reality, however, is that the director earns most of his income from work in state-subsidized theatres. The independent Romanian theatrical system is, for the most part, also a system financed by the state, through project competitions carried out by various institutions. To truly support an independent theatre in Romania, namely from ticket sales, is an utopia. For example, the "Lucian Blaga" National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca was subsidized by the Ministry of Culture with 185

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<sup>10</sup>. Gelu Badea, *Solilocviu: fundamente ale regiei de teatru* [*Soliloquy. Basis of Theatre Directing*] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Eikon, 2017), 26. Translation ours.

RON / beneficiary in 2018, with a total expense of 204 RON / beneficiary.<sup>11</sup> How can we expect an independent theatre to be able to sell a full hall of 200 RON / seat / performance every night? How to create performances that can compete at the artistic level in a sustained way in the independent theatre when the price of a ticket rarely exceeds 30 RON?

The previous digression is by no means accidental. It responds to arguments presented by professors in several public conferences, such as the Theatre Networking Talents festival, organized by the National Theatre "Marin Sorescu" Craiova, or the Festival of Theatre Schools, organized by the "George Enescu" University of Arts Iași. These arguments are also reflected in the curricula mentioned above, through subjects such as "Management of the independent company", but also through master's programs such as "Management and cultural entrepreneurship". Professors often ask the question "What kind of theater do I prepare the student director for?" The answer, regardless of the type of aesthetics we want to approach, cannot be in contradiction with the state system. The director's training, at least for the Bachelor's Degree, should not go beyond the borders of the state system. The director must be prepared so that he/ she can lead a normal financial life, which, for now at least, can hardly be imagined in unsubsidized theatres at a large scale.

This means that they must be trained so they can earn enough income to pay bills, secure a home, start a family, afford to finance their own intellectual and professional development, and so on. It is in vain if the system manages to train a truly great director once every three generations if ninety percent of graduates work in other fields because they are unable to cope with the theatrical system. Otherwise, we are dealing with a deeply discriminatory, elitist system without educational standards. An exceptional director would come out of three generations in Romania without a single educational facility dedicated to theatrical training, only with open libraries!

The second major skill that the young director should have is that of mastering a basic theatrical language with the utmost accuracy. From our own experience of directing shows in two universities in Romania, in four state theatres and in three independent theatres, talking to actors at rehearsals and

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<sup>11</sup>. <https://www.teatrulnationalcluj.ro/pagina-72/rapoarte-si-studii/>, accessed on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

festivals, actors from different faculties, from different generations, working in different theatres, we reached the conclusion that each of these actors internalizes differently elementary terms such as: *relationship, situation, extra-text, character, state, emotion, feeling, score, intention, gesture, movement, action, activity, pathos, meta-theatricality, conception, vision*, etc. This indicates that the directors these actors have worked with so far have used these terms in different ways and with different meanings.

Roland Barthes defines the ideosphere as “the linguistic system of an ideology, with this caveat from the outset that makes the definition already inexact: in my view, ideology, no matter which, is and is only language: it’s a discourse, a type of discourse.”<sup>12</sup> Today it seems that every theatre creator has his own ideosphere in Romanian theatre. This leads to inefficient and inaccurate communication between the director and the other co-creators of the show. This brings a great deal of harm to the theatrical system in lost time and lowered quality. It is not that the director “has no one to work with”, in the sense that the actors are not able to meet the director’s requirements, nor that the director “did not do his homework”, in the sense that he/ she is not prepared or does not know what to direct the actor to do. It is purely that what the director is able to name, to request, the actor cannot understand and internalize effectively.

It is fundamental to understand that the Romanian theatre constitutes an ideology in itself, in which there are, it is true, many artistic currents, some of which are valid, even if they are contradictory. However, even if we have different artistic conceptions, our global stake is (or should be) common: to be able to create the shows we want, in the most efficient way possible, making it as enjoyable as possible, both for us, the artists, as well as for our spectators. Our goal is to serve the public and to develop the Romanian culture, and this thinking must start from the common ground between us. This spirit of belonging to an artistic community is completely absent from the educational system of directing and is, perhaps, the factor with the most devastating effects for the development of a cultural system relevant and necessary to the society it serves.

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<sup>12</sup>. Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, translated by Rosalind E. Kraus and Denis Hollier, notes by Thomas Clerc, coord. Eric Marty (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 86.

The third basic competence of the young director is the ability to perform a profound text analysis, relevant from the point of view of the characters' psychology. Changing the repertoires of theatres from classical toward contemporary plays, but also the emergence of modern aesthetic currents, such as postdramatic theatre, could lead us to believe that psychological analysis is no longer relevant today because the dramatic characters in performances no longer behave like believable psychological entities in contemporary aesthetics. However, to say that in current theatrical aesthetics the show no longer starts from a written text that requires a watchful analysis denotes a superficial understanding of the theatrical and educational system.

First of all, in Romania, whether we subscribe to this cultural vision or not, the vast majority of shows are built starting from texts with a classical narrative structure, or at least with a clear narrative structure. This will not change in the near future due to the requirements of both funding institutions and the public. In addition, the ability to make an eloquent text analysis is not only useful when approaching a realistic-psychological text. Text analysis educates the director to dismantle complex social phenomena. Only by exercising these analytical skills starting from the limited universe of the dramatic text can he/ she make the social analysis necessary for the processing of a show of collective creation. Only through the reflection of psychological analysis can he/ she guess the probable reaction of the public to a sign or set of signs. Damon Kiely shows in his book, *How to Read a Play*, how several devised theatre companies analyse their own texts and how they adapt traditional situational analysis to the play context they create in their own performances.<sup>13</sup>

We need to understand that the use of slightly archaic training methods in teaching young artists does not mean anchoring these artists in a cultural past. These techniques tested over time are intended to convey skills, not aesthetics. We do not believe that Perdekamp or Meisner can be understood without first thoroughly grasping Stanislavski and Grotowski. We do not believe that Sarah Kane or Eugène Ionesco can be understood without first making out Sophocles and Shakespeare. We do not believe that

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<sup>13</sup>. Damon Kiely, *How to Read a Play. Script Analysis for Directors* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 120-150.

Augusto Boal, Thomas Ostermeier or Silviu Purcărete can be understood without fully comprehending the works of Edward Gordon Craig, Vsevolod Meyerhold or Liviu Ciulei.

The fourth and perhaps the most essential skill that the young director must learn is that of working on the director's notebook, of getting used to exhaustively preparing the show. It may seem outdated, but the director's notebook is fundamental to the director's training. There are certain directors or theorists of the theatre who support creative directing, the show based solely on working with actors and the creative team. Personally, we oppose this vision of theatre. However, regardless of the option that the mature director will have regarding the way he/ she prepares his/ her show, the complete imaginary conception of the show is indispensable for the student's training.

This is also the opinion that Dinu Cernescu, the great Romanian theatre director, shared with us in a recent interview, still unpublished, in which he reinforced the importance of making a director's notebook, at least in the first stage of the director's career. Subsequently, the mature director can go through the stages of preparing the show without actually writing the notebook. Putting on paper these notes is though necessary for the first shows one directs in order to create the rigor required by the work on stage. Only by elaborating ample directing notebooks, in which to offer exact technical and artistic solutions, can he/ she learn to master the semiotic system of the show. In Western theatre, the director creates a new semiotic system with each artistic product. This confluence of signs from different artistic languages cannot be mastered by random creation. The freedom that the future mature director arrogates himself/ herself on stage is based on this training.

Only starting from a strong theoretical foundation, namely the director's notebook, can the young director face the actors, face his/ her own stage fright, evaluate his/ her ability to stage a concept, discover his/ her mistakes, his/ her obsessive tendencies and mannerisms. You can only improvise if you start from something concrete. Otherwise, it's a staged vague dream, a random creation, something that since Dada can no longer be called interesting from an aesthetic point of view.

Last but not least, there is a final reform of the Romanian educational system that must be undergone and that does not necessarily depend on the skills that the director must acquire: the time given to practice. The freedom

that a director has to work with the actor must increase considerably in terms of quantity. Working with the actor is something that the director has to learn, but it cannot be learned in a traditional, didactic way, with the professor sitting at the desk and the students taking notes. We are not talking here about practice in theatres, the importance of which we have talked about above, but about the research practice that the director should have at his/ her disposal with a group of actors, without necessarily being pressured to create a cultural product in a given time. The young director is subjected to specific working conditions in the theatre, and he/ she must respond brilliantly to all challenges. Thus, the freedom of theatrical creation and research that he/ she can afford to do is limited. The training period, in which the exam performances created by the director are not subject to a judgment on the cultural market, must be the place of true artistic research, which will give the director enough self-confidence to be able to find his/ her artistic vision in the first years of working in theatres.

How can the students learn to lead an improvisation when they have two weeks to put on a show, as is currently the case at the Faculty of Theatre and Film at the "Babeş-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca? How can they give themselves time to make mistakes and rebuild, to create the cohesion of a group when they repeat a maximum of 4 hours a day? How can they focus on all aspects of working on stage with the actor when they have to do the lighting design during this time, to build the set, to buy the props themselves? We honestly think they can't.

These are, we believe, the basic aspects of the director's work that the students must learn in the albeit too little time they are protected by the educational system. In the Romanian educational system, we rely too much on talent, both that of the students and of the teacher. Without a serious central coordination, apparently opposed to the liberal principles of art, we have a deeply discriminatory educational system. This means that at Faculty X there are not the same standards as at Faculty Y. It means that Professor A's students are better prepared for the labour market than Professor B's, and this is not ethical. Before we try to train artists, we should, we think, try to create craftsmen. Then some will be able to become artists through their own work.

We have the misfortune of trying to prepare people for a profession that is, by definition, infinite.

This youngest art, a few decades ago, barely existed. The old director was just a technician or, at best, the organizer of a show. Nowadays, the director, apart from talent, must be endowed with a series of other qualities: high ideological level, a vast general culture, pedagogical sense, organizational capacity, developed sense of criticism and self-criticism, average knowledge of music, knowledge of fine arts, and more. Without them there can be no true artist. And all these qualities... to one man!<sup>14</sup>

Mihai Măniuțiu used to say in his classes that a director is fully trained only ten years after graduating from college. In order to be fully trained, however, the director must actually work during these ten years. For this he/she does not have to make extraordinary creations. He/she has the rest of his/her thirty-year career for extraordinary shows. At the beginning, he/she must be able to complete a show that is standing on its own, that is intelligible and that is at least mediocre, and all in a sustained way, project by project. He/she must fulfil his/her duty to the public honourably.

Before directing *Peer Gynt*, *Richard III*, *The Bald Soprano*, *Waiting for Godot*, before Sarah Kane, Richard Schechner, collective creation and socio-political theatre, the young director must be able to stage *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Jocul de-a Vacanța*<sup>15</sup> [*Holiday Play*] or *Paper Airplanes*<sup>16</sup>. One question remains at this point: how many of the directing graduates in Romania are really capable of this minimal performance standard. We believe that the proportion is way below our expectations and we wonder whether it is not due to directing professors in Romania trying to make students burn through stages because they want to create stars.

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<sup>14</sup>. György Harag, "Forța principală a spectacolului: munca regiei cu actorii" ["The Main Force of the Performance: The Director at Work with the Actors"], *Teatrul*, no. 9 September, year VI (1961), 11.

<sup>15</sup>. Play written by Mihail Sebastian.

<sup>16</sup>. Play written by Elise Wilk.

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MARIUS-ALEXANDRU TEODORESCU

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## *La Scène au temps de l'Intelligence Artificielle*

**Oltița CÎNTEC<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The study makes a theoretical-predictive analysis of the transformations that the use of Artificial Intelligence and new media will generate in a medium time horizon in the theatre arts. Analysing some examples of contemporary creations in performing arts from Romania and other countries, it highlights different types of creativity through specific scenographic choices, dramaturgical compositions and spectator's involvement, which break the tradition and draw a new horizon of scenic and performative experiences thanks to the intelligent use of new technologies and virtual realities. The directions targeted are aesthetic, professional and following the evolution of the act of reception.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, theatre and new technologies, live and virtual performances, online broadcast, virtual set design, immersive theatrical experience.

L'année dernière, l'université de Harvard a invité vingt-quatre chercheurs du monde entier à participer à un projet visant à anticiper ce que les arts deviendront à l'avenir. L'analyse et la projection ont été réalisées sous l'angle de la culture numérique, où des changements essentiels de paradigme se produisent à un rythme plus rapide que jamais. Le noyau dur du collectif metaLAB s'est formé depuis 2011 et s'est défini en tant que : « communauté de chercheurs, de concepteurs, d'artistes, de fabricants, de technologues, de

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<sup>1</sup>. Theater Faculty of Iași "George Enescu" National University of Arts, email: oltitacintec@gmail.com.

conservateurs et d'éducateurs qui se consacrent à la modélisation de nouvelles formes de communication culturelle, de pratiques créatives et critiques et de production de connaissances »<sup>2</sup>

Les projets metaLAB consistent en des exercices collectifs de préfiguration de la réalité dans un horizon temporel moyen, de trassage d'une trajectoire de prévision, basée sur des données scientifiques, des chemins possibles d'évolution du plus volatile des arts. Le collectif interdisciplinaire a travaillé de manière intensive : le résultat de leur collaboration a été appelé le Manifeste *futureStage* (25 octobre 2021), et l'axiome sur lequel ils ont architecturé la construction idéatique est le suivant: « performance is a human right » / « la performance est un droit humain ». L'originalité de l'approche, la cohérence des propositions et l'ouverture aux débats ont rapidement conduit à sa traduction en 13 langues, dont le Roumain.<sup>3</sup>

Comment la créativité s'adapte-t-elle à la technoculture? Quelles transformations auront lieu au sein des spécialisations classiques que nous connaissons, les unes depuis des millénaires – comme le dramaturge, l'acteur, les autres depuis des siècles - comme le metteur en scène ? Qu'est-ce que le public attend des artistes de théâtre? Comment le public se rapporte-t-il par sa réception aux nouvelles postures auxquelles l'obligent les productions utilisant les technologies visuelles ? Le groupe a l'intention de livrer chaque année un rapport de ce type, à la fois comme une somme de conclusions sur la réalité esthétique du moment et comme une projection de développement.

L'effort d'anticipation de *futureStage* est à apprécier, tout comme la périodicité de son renouvellement. Compte tenu de la vitesse à laquelle le numérique progresse, de son impact sur le quotidien, sur le monde professionnel et sur la créativité artistique, les rapports se doivent d'être actualisés. Il est dans la nature humaine d'imaginer l'avenir, il est productif de le questionner de manière fictionnelle et d'agir dans le sens des modèles développés. C'est un exercice stimulant pour les experts et digne de l'attention des travailleurs culturels et des théoriciens.

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<sup>2</sup>. "A community of scholars, designers, artists, makers, technologists, curators, and educators dedicated to modelling new forms of cultural communication, creative and critical practice, and knowledge production.", voir <https://mlml.io/about/>

<sup>3</sup>. <https://revistascena.ro/editorial/performance-ul-este-un-drept-uman-un-manifest-pentru-scena-viitorului/>, traduction de l'Anglais par Ilinca Todoruț.

## Les avatars de l'immatérialité théâtrale

L'essence du théâtre se trouve au cœur de sa qualité d'être un art vivant. Son existence est désignée par la concomitance dans l'espace et le temps de l'artiste et du spectateur, par la communication en temps réel à travers les émotions. C'est la perspective dominante. Cependant, la culture électronique en pleine expansion permet des solutions qui impliquent le télé-visionnement, la dispersion des créateurs et du public à des distances totalement vaincues par les nouvelles technologies. La télé-présence, autrefois unimaginable, devient une banalité technique dans les environnements virtuels. Et dans cette trajectoire dessinée par distance physique, un nouvel intermédiaire apparaît : l'écran. Interposé entre les créateurs, l'action scénique directe et le public, l'écran constitue, symboliquement, un nouveau « mur » de l'architecture théâtrale : le cinquième. Son caractère concret contraste avec l'invisibilité du quatrième mur, marqué par le miroir de la scène, une démarcation claire entre le monde réel et le monde imaginaire qui émerge à la rampe. Dans la formule à distance, bien qu'il parvienne au spectateur par l'intermédiaire d'un *gadget*, le théâtre rend plus évidente sa propre nature immatérielle. De quelle manière ? La présence humaine concomitante (dans le cas de la diffusion en direct - *live streaming*) est aliénée géographiquement. La communauté aléatoire qu'est le public réuni dans une salle est pulvérisée devant des appareils situés à divers endroits, qui éloignent les spectateurs les uns des autres. Si le télé-visionnage se fait dans une salle d'une autre ville ou d'un autre pays, la communauté de la soirée est toujours fonctionnelle. Lorsque les téléspectateurs sont chacun chez eux devant leur propre écran, le groupe n'existe plus, le téléspectateur devient solitaire, aliéné. La communauté des téléspectateurs est ainsi atomisée, éventuellement limitée à un petit entourage de membres de la famille et de quelques amis. En règle générale, la formule est individuelle. Le théâtre diminue ainsi, jusqu'à l'annuler, sa valeur socialisante.

Et les applaudissements, alors ? Qu'en advient-il ? C'est bizarre et peu probable d'applaudir devant un écran. Et si nous le faisons, les interprètes ne ressentiraient ni l'intensité des applaudissements ni des rappels. Dans les nouvelles formes d'agrégation culturelle, ils peuvent être remplacés, par

exemple, par des commentaires à la fin du spectacle ou en temps réel. Il y a, par exemple, des metteurs en scène qui s'appuient sur ces commentaires, en les incluant comme un élément actif de la construction artistique selon lequel le récit peut aller dans un sens ou dans l'autre, les variantes plurielles de l'évolution du scénario ajoutant ainsi de la surprise par la participation des spectateurs, modérés par un membre de l'équipe de production.

Malgré toutes les vulnérabilités mentionnées, la diffusion en ligne présente de grands avantages : elle peut résoudre l'accès à la culture. Dans les zones dépourvues d'infrastructures théâtrales, elle présente des avantages indéniables. Elle réduit les coûts non négligeables liés au déplacement des personnes, des décors et des plateaux dans des endroits où il y a un public potentiel, mais pas d'offre.

Dans son sens traditionnel, une représentation théâtrale n'est pas reproductible, étant unique chaque soir, dans le cadre imposé par la mise en scène jusqu'à la dernière répétition. Il existe des nuances d'une représentation à l'autre, des variations perceptibles de l'intensité émotionnelle dont les interprètes sont conscients et qui se traduisent par « c'était moins fort qu'hier soir », « on était mieux aujourd'hui », etc... La technologie intervient sur la possibilité de reproductibilité du théâtre. Enregistré en vidéo, le spectacle est accessible en *streaming* même en l'absence des interprètes, il reste le même, conservé dans un format qui se rapporte à un autre art et le transforme un peu. Le spectateur peut le regarder quand, dans un quotidien de plus en plus chargé – personnel et professionnel – il trouve le temps et l'envie de le faire. Faire une pause, lorsqu'un facteur perturbateur intervient ; dérouler en avant, s'il ne trouve pas cela suffisamment intéressant ; ou revenir en arrière, pour revoir les séquences pertinentes.

Les scénographies virtuelles éliminent le caractère concret représenté par l'élément matériel du théâtre qu'est le décor. Et je ne parle pas ici des technologies qui ont révolutionné l'éclairage scénique, comme l'a fait, à une autre échelle historique et dans une autre mesure, le passage de l'éclairage de la scène avec des bougies (en suif, puis en cire) aux lampes à gaz et puis, la grande invention de la fin du XIXe siècle, l'électricité. L'explosion de la gamme des réflecteurs et des dispositifs de contrôle a fait de la lumière un véritable personnage de la mise en scène et, des lumières intelligentes, elle a

fait un élément constitutif des moyens d'expression visuelle. Ces changements ont défini un nouveau métier de la scène, celui de *concepteur lumière* (*light designer*). Après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, l'amplification, l'enregistrement et le traitement du son rattrapent leur retard aussi, perfectionnant cette composante majeure de l'univers scénique à tel point qu'elle va nécessiter également une spécialisation : le *concepteur son* (*sound designer*). Au cours du dernier demi-siècle, la scénographie est devenue le travail de plusieurs logiciels, dont le but est de façonner visuellement les zones clairement définies d'un bâtiment, que ce soit par la construction ou par le design intérieur. Les nouvelles technologies et les nouveaux média sont théâtralisés en étant intégrés au processus de création.

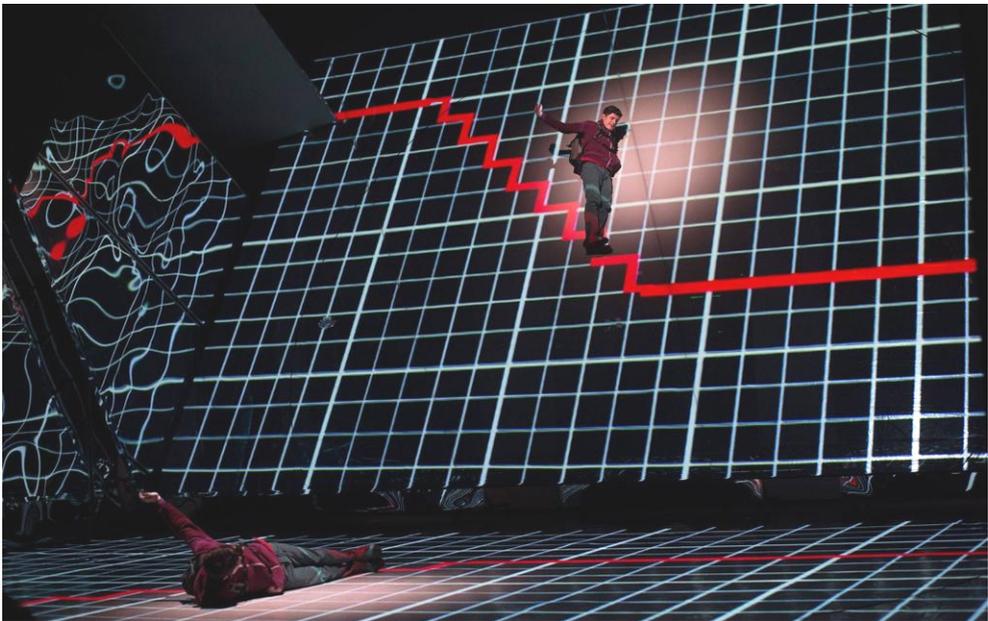
A mesure que le désir d'utiliser tous les aspects imaginables du paysage scénographique s'est accru, et que les technologies et les compétences d'atelier concomitantes sont devenues plus complexes et sophistiquées, le XXe siècle a vu un élargissement et une fragmentation progressive de l'équipe scénographique.<sup>4</sup>

Évidence illustrée par la lecture de n'importe quelle affiche où l'on voit bien les équipes de travail. Les scénographes font appel à des spécialistes en électronique – également des natures créatives mais sur le plan technique, et ils traduisent leur fantaisie en algorithmes qui contrôlent les éléments plastiques sur scène. À chaque représentation, l'espace vide circonscrit par la scène s'anime de manière surréaliste, créant un cadre supplémentaire d'illusion scénique, cette fois-ci au sens propre du terme. Je donnerai un seul exemple: le scénographe Adrian Damian, grand amateur de nouvelles technologies, a travaillé avec le metteur en scène Bobi Pricop pour le spectacle

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<sup>4</sup>. Christopher Baugh, *Theatre, Performance and Technology. The Development and Transformation of Scenography*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 216. "As the desire to utilize every conceivable aspect of the scenographic landscape has grown, and the concomitant technologies and workshop skills became more complex and sophisticated, the twentieth century saw an enlargement and a gradual fragmentation of the scenographic team." (notre traduction)

*Le bizarre incident du chien pendant la nuit*, d'après Mark Haddon.<sup>5</sup> Convaincu du potentiel esthétique des nouvelles technologies, Damian a collaboré sur la partie visuelle avec Dan Adrian Ionescu et Răzvan Mizdan, spécialistes de la programmation vidéo, qui ont conçu une imagerie qui parvient à révéler le monde tel qu'il est perçu par le personnage central, un enfant atteint du syndrome d'Asperger. Le mappage et les projections sur le sol, sur les parois frontales et latérales mobiles utilisées comme écrans et miroirs pour le public intégré à la performance à certains moments, renforcent de manière surprenante les effets théâtraux.



**Fig. 1:** *Le bizarre incident du chien pendant la nuit*, d'après Mark Haddon, TNB, 2016, photo Adi Bulboacă

<sup>5</sup>. "O Întâmplare ciudată cu un câine la miezul nopții", produs par le Théâtre National "I.L. Caragiale" Bucarest, 2016, adaptation: Simon Stephens, traduction: Andrei Marinescu, mise en scène: Bobi Pricop, décor: Adrian Damian, vidéo: Dan Adrian Ionescu & Răzvan Mizdan, costumes: Liliana Cenean, musique: Alexei Turcan, lighting Design: Andrei Florea. Avec les acteurs: Ciprian Nicula, Emilian Oprea, Ana Ciontea, Rodica Ionescu, Carmen Ungureanu.

## La théâtralisation des nouveaux media

Que signifie aujourd'hui une transmission *live* ? La diffusion en direct est devenue une activité courante. Nous vivons sur Messenger, WhatsApp, TikTok, les *réels* font fureur sur Instagram, nous transférons notre quotidien dans des vidéos de quelques secondes postées sur des média électroniques sans frontières. Ce sont comme des messages autrefois placés dans des bouteilles et jetés à la mer, sauf qu'aujourd'hui ils naviguent grâce à des algorithmes propres à chaque application.

*FutureStage* affirme que « la scène du futur doit être intimement mêlée aux autres scènes sur lesquelles se déroule la vie contemporaine, des rues et trottoirs, à TikTok et Zoom, au lieu de travail, aux festivals et foires culturelles. »<sup>6</sup> En effet, Bobi Pricop a imaginé *#acedesiguranță* (*#épingles*), une « performance-installation sur l'adolescence et la (sur)vie, conçue pour fonctionner sur deux niveaux : d'une part, comme un événement performatif dans un espace théâtral, et d'autre part, comme un récit ancré dans l'environnement virtuel, plus précisément au sein du réseau TikTok. »<sup>7</sup>. Un réseau qui rassemble virtuellement plus de 600 millions d'utilisateurs, un nombre croissant, avec le potentiel d'un milieu d'expression performatif. Chaque utilisateur est un réalisateur et un acteur de ses propres scénarios vidéo, ce qui banalise des professions autrefois réservées aux arts. Bobi Pricop combine la performativité théâtrale et celle des médias sociaux à travers un montage de mise en scène. Le concept élargit la simultanéité des plans de jeu, virtuel et réel, l'immédiat (les acteurs *in situ*) et le technologiquement médiatisé (la transmission vidéo sur un écran où l'on voit les adolescents

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6. <https://revistascena.ro/editorial/performance-ul-este-un-drept-uman-un-manifest-pentru-scena-viitorului/>.

7. Dans le cahier-programme du spectacle, fait en coproduction avec le Théâtre National "Marin Sorescu" de Craiova, Le Théâtre "Andrei Mureșanu" de Sfântu Gheorghe, La Théâtre d'Etat Constanța et le Théâtre de Nord Satu Mare: dramaturgie: Ionuț Sociu, scénographie: Oana Micu, musique et corégraphie: Eduard Gabia, image et montage: Iustin Șurpănelu. Avec les acteurs: George Albert Costea, Claudiu Mihail, Romanița Ionescu, Ramona Drăgulescu, Cătălin-Mihai Miculeasa, Vlad Udrescu, Alina Mangra; Avec: Alexandra Francu, Jacqueline-Alessia Crăciun, Raluca Tender, Adrian Săpăceanu, Andrei Sava, Cristian Corbu, Matei Stăncuța.

Alexandra, Andrei, Jacqueline, Matei, Raluca, Adrian et Cristian préenregistrés, dans la scénographie TikTok). Le public porte des écouteurs, il est organisé en de petits groupes de spectateurs guidés par un acteur qui, à la fin, les invite à un dialogue qui prolonge celui proposé par la mise en scène, et amorce ainsi une communication directe à la fin de cette ronde d'approximativement 90 minutes de communication hybride. L'énergie créative de l'équipe réunit professionnels et jeunes utilisateurs de TikTok dans une formule qui ouvre l'art de la scène aux média très populaires de notre histoire actuelle.

Le manifeste déjà mentionné introduit dans le débat le concept de *liveness plus* (les variations que les transmissions *live* impliquent en ce début de XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle sont complexes et les formes se diversifient sans cesse), révélant des aspects qui méritent la réflexion. Les années de pandémie ont élargi, dans les conditions d'isolement motivé par des raisons sanitaires, la communication à distance, y compris la communication artistique qui été réalisée de cette manière. Le travail s'est fait sur Zoom, l'équipe du spectacle était dispersée dans tout le pays, répétait et créait depuis chez elle, avec l'infrastructure vidéo dont chacun disposait.<sup>8</sup> Et après que les vagues du Covid 19 se soient calmées, bien qu'un point de saturation ait été atteint, la communication en ligne a continué à fonctionner en parallèle avec le face-à-face.

Le *streaming* présente des variantes : les acteurs sont en direct sur une scène, la représentation est diffusée en temps réel vers d'autres lieux ou vers le domicile du spectateur ; les acteurs sont chez eux, un montage préconfiguré est réalisé et le résultat est livré directement en ligne aux personnes connectées ; le *live* et la vidéo, le filmé en direct ou préenregistré, coexistent dans l'espace de représentation et dans le produit livré aux spectateurs. L'art hybride propose de nouvelles résolutions dramaturgiques, élaborant des dramaturgies du visuel dans des formes qui génèrent de nouveaux états émotionnels.

Comme nous l'avons vu, le metteur en scène adapte son métier aux nouvelles réalités et besoins du travail scénique. Il va ainsi coopter des experts en nouvelles technologies dans l'équipe qu'il coordonne. Le concepteur

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<sup>8</sup>. Cf. Ștefana Pop-Curșeu, « La pandémie sur et autour de la scène Roumaine », *La scène mondiale en période de confinement*, sous la dir. de Françoise Quillet, (Paris : Editions L'Harmattan, coll. Univers théâtral, 2022)

vidéo reprend les idées et les « translate » en virtualité par une conception scénographique autre, avec du mapping, des projections 3D qui meublent la scène, des hologrammes qui multiplient les artistes. « A la place des metteurs en scène traditionnels de théâtre et de performances, il est nécessaire d'élever et de former une nouvelle génération de metteurs en scène qui construisent les résultats de leur travail avec le *liveness plus* en tant qu'élément organique, pleinement intégré au processus de leur création, »<sup>9</sup> concluent les spécialistes de *futureStage*.

C'est ce que fait, par exemple, la réalisatrice allemande Susanne Kennedy. L'artiste explore esthétiquement la relation du corps à la technologie, la question ontologique étant de savoir comment redéfinir l'humain dans un monde où l'IA est intégrée dans les routines quotidiennes, du contrôle des appareils ménagers aux assistants virtuels ? Kennedy travaille dans une esthétique post-humaine, réunissant le corps de l'acteur, les objets technologiques et les machines intelligentes. « Le devenir est vital, et cela me fascine toujours. La technologie fait partie de cette chaîne, elle fait déjà partie de nous d'une certaine manière et le fera de plus en plus. L'accepter comme telle, de manière responsable [...] et ne pas en avoir peur est une stratégie qui nous montrera où nous allons. La technologie sera un énorme miroir pour nous et je pense que beaucoup de choses surprenantes s'y passent ».<sup>10</sup>

Depuis plusieurs saisons, elle s'est associée sur le plan créatif avec Markus Selg, un artiste qui s'intéresse aux mythes anciens et aux nouveaux médias, et qui s'exprime sous la forme de peintures et de sculptures numériques, d'installations immersives, de spectacles de théâtre, d'opéra et de films<sup>11</sup>. Leur rencontre a permis à Kennedy de prendre un tournant artistique dans une direction centrée sur l'attention scénique, qui existait aussi auparavant mais qui est devenue désormais plus développée. Leur relation créative se résume ainsi : « Nous pensons le concept ensemble, et il

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<sup>9</sup>. <https://revistascena.ro/editorial/performance-ul-este-un-drept-uman-un-manifest-pentru-scena-viitorului/>.

<sup>10</sup>. <https://www.draff.net/susanne-kennedy.html> (notre traduction)

<sup>11</sup>. Voir une de mes études à ce sujet dans : Oltița Cîntec (coord.) *Fereastră către digital. Teatrul și noile tehnologii/Open New Tab. Theatre and New Technology*, trad. Carmen Tărniceru și Mircea Sorin Rusu, (Iași: Junimea, 2021), 39-60.

fait la scénographie. C'était une étape importante dans la direction que prenait ma création. Il m'a sorti de la boîte dans laquelle j'étais [...], qui me contraignait, ne me permettant pas de m'y sentir libre. Le travail avec Markus m'a conduit à quelque chose de différent, il m'a fait remettre en question les formes que j'utilisais, sans que cela signifie que je jetais par-dessus bord tout ce que j'avais créé jusqu'à présent, mais, je ne sais pas, cela a lancé un nouveau développement. [...] C'est un vrai partenariat et ça c'est nouveau pour moi. »<sup>12</sup>

Les personnages de ses spectacles se « robotisent », l'accent est déplacé du personnage et de l'histoire vers une atmosphère qui cite la réalité virtuelle. Les acteurs portent des masques, les dialogues sont préenregistrés et passés par des filtres numériques, la voix se détache de son possesseur, qui se contente de mimer la parole. La subjectivité devient post-humaine, son art simule la transformation de l'être humain. On ne parle plus d'individualité, mais de sérialisation, de duplication, de multiplication de la personne. L'acteur est piégé dans ce « costume », il se transforme en un avatar androïdisé. Les flux visuels, la fragmentation, la répétitivité sont les nouvelles caractéristiques des expériences proposées.

*I am (VR)*<sup>13</sup> – l'installation créée en tandem avec Markus Selg, est ainsi un voyage virtuel du spectateur connecté par des lunettes VR à un espace surréaliste où il marche guidé vocalement par un guide dont les paroles sont préenregistrées et traitées numériquement. Les dramaturgies de l'internet, de l'hypertexte, des éléments d'algorithmes de jeux, la possibilité de choisir la direction dans laquelle on va et le temps que l'on veut passer dans chaque lieu, puis de revenir – des possibilités qui n'existent pas dans le théâtre vivant traditionnel, *live*, esquissent une sorte de cyber-théâtre qui vous téléporte imaginairement dans un univers complètement nouveau, un monde proche

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<sup>12</sup>. <https://www.draff.net/susanne-kennedy.html> (notre traduction)

<sup>13</sup>. **Ultraworld Productions** (Berlin, Allemagne), en coproduction avec **Theater Commons Tokyo** (Tokyo, Japon), **Münchner Kammerspiele** (München, Allemagne), design: **Susanne Kennedy, Markus Selg, Rodrik Biersteker**, programmation: **Rodrik Biersteker**, design video: **Markus Selg, Rodrik Biersteker**, conception son et composition: **Richard Janssen**, texte: **Susanne Kennedy**, dramaturgie: **Tobias Staab**, voix: **Susanne Kennedy, Ixchel Mendoza Hernandez, Frank Willens, Ibadet Ramadani**, avatars: **Ixchel Mendoza Hernandez, Benjamin Radjaipour, Thomas Hauser**, costumes: **Teresa Vergo**.

de l'onirisme, dont la perception se fait sur des coordonnées différentes de celles traditionnelles, qui activent d'autres centres neuronaux. Les personnes souffrant du mal des transports, par exemple, ont besoin d'une courte période d'adaptation, car le corps reste immobile, alors que le cerveau traite les stimuli visuels comme si nous étions en mouvement. Nous ne faisons pas que regarder, nous nous immergeons dans une réalité fictive créée artificiellement. L'illusion théâtrale nous avale entièrement.

### **Le siècle du spectateur**

Au cours de l'histoire, le centre d'intérêt s'est cycliquement déplacé d'un élément constitutif du théâtre à un autre. Le *textocentrisme* a été le plus durable. Puis, *le metteur en scène* a été la figure dominante pendant plus d'un siècle et continue de l'être, dans les formes classiques. Dans la lignée de ce que *futureStage* a mis en évidence, je pense que le XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle appartiendra au *spectateur*. Il sera l'épicentre de l'attention et, inévitablement, ses comportements de consommation axés sur le numérique se refléteront dans ses attentes culturelles. Les efforts des équipes artistiques viseront à le capturer sous toutes les formes possibles. Le spectateur immergé, sur lequel comptent de plus en plus de créations, devient, en quelque sorte, le metteur en scène de son propre parcours de réception. Il a, comme dans les jeux vidéo, des options, il peut décider sous quelle forme son propre « spectacle » doit évoluer. Les gadgets le soutiennent dans le chemin imaginaire sur lequel il s'aventure.

Une autre possibilité de performance assistée par ordinateur, un terme plus pratique que le cyber-théâtre ou la performance post-organique, est de permettre au public d'accéder de manière interactive à la performance grâce à des banques de données hypertextuelles, d'images et de sons, auxquelles les membres du public sont capables d'accéder et de diriger ainsi le processus d'une performance. Très probablement, le site de performance assistée par ordinateur le plus prometteur serait un environnement intelligent, où les objets, les vêtements et l'environnement lui-même, grâce à la technologie des capteurs, réagiraient à la présence

des acteurs et des spectateurs, déclenchant des banques de données d'images et de sons pour les projections, ou activant la machinerie scénique d'une manière ou d'une autre.<sup>14</sup>

Immersivité signifie simulation, le théâtre renonce à sa capacité de représenter des mondes imaginaires et les recrée sous forme d'expériences sensorielles. La formule repose sur les technologies qui incluent le spectateur, dont le design conceptuel vise la dimension expérientielle<sup>15</sup>. La performance ou l'installation devient la réalité de derrière la réalité, le monde qui se trouve derrière les appareils (*devices*) électroniques. La révélation d'environnements auparavant inaccessibles est rendue possible par les ajouts technologiques. Les effets cathartiques sont évidents, même en assumant la proverbiale « froideur » émotionnelle propre aux nouvelles technologies. Une question sous-jacente dans *Orphée et Eurydice* de Romeo Castellucci<sup>16</sup>, par exemple, est de savoir comment révéler le soi. Le réalisateur a eu recours à une histoire vraie, liée à la maladie *locked-in*, qui se manifeste par une paralysie générale à l'exception des muscles des globes oculaires. Les yeux, le regard, restent le seul moyen d'exprimer la conscience piégée dans le corps du malade, le corps d'une jeune fille en l'occurrence. Grâce aux technologies innovantes appliquées dans le domaine médical, la patiente qui se trouvait dans un sanatorium situé à quelques dizaines de kilomètres du Théâtre Royal de Bruxelles était aussi « présente » dans la salle de spectacle. Depuis le lit où

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<sup>14</sup>. Mathieu Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture. From simulation to embeddedness*, (Routledge, 2006), 48-49: "Another possibility of computer-aided performance, a more practical term than cyber-theatre or post-organic performance, is to allow audiences *interactive-access* to the performance with hypertextual, image and sound data banks, in which audience members are able to access and to direct the process of a performance. Perhaps the most promising potential computer-aided performance site would be a smart environment where objects, clothing and the environment itself, through sensor technology, respond to the presence of actors and spectators, triggering image and sound databanks for projections, or activating stage machinery in some manner." Notre traduction.

<sup>15</sup>. Une étude intéressante ne ce sens, qui discute ce thème est : Andreea Iacob, *De la tehnologic la imersiv. Spre un teatru al spectatorului și al spațiului* [*De technologique à l'immersif. Vers un théâtre du spectateur et de l'espace*], (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Eikon et Ed. Școala ardeleană, 2020).

<sup>16</sup>. Théâtre de la Monnaie Bruxelles, 2014, d'après Christoph Willibald Gluck și Hector Berlioz.

elle était confinée par sa maladie, elle écoutait en direct les aires des solistes à l'aide d'écouteurs, et sur scène, à la vue du public, sur un grand moniteur, on pouvait voir ses réactions neuronales à la musique, qui y étaient traduites graphiquement. Téléprésence, participation en direct, le spectateur devenu interprète, co-auteur de cette dramaturgie unique qui fait descendre un mythe depuis l'immémorial dans la factualité du présent.

Spectateur ou actant ? C'est l'un des thèmes lancés par la production roumaine *Worker of the Year*<sup>17</sup>.



Fig. 2: Flavia Giurgiu dans *Worker of the Year*, 2022, <https://arcub.ro/worker-of-the-year>

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<sup>17</sup>. Coproduction ARCUB, Centre Culturel de Cluj et AFCN, concept et réalisation Ioana Păun et Flavia Giurgiu.

La situation créée par Ioana Păun fait du spectateur simultanément le performeur de son propre spectacle. Le théâtre est déconstruit et envoyé en pièces détachées à ceux qui le souhaitent, sous la forme d'un kit théâtral. Vous suivez certaines instructions (une courte liste de règles, l'écoute d'un podcast narratif), vous vous impliquez physiquement, vous êtes à la fois acteur et spectateur. L'expérience théâtrale requiert une participation. Dans ce type d'art, le spectateur réalise sa propre production et la soutient chez lui. Assumant quelque chose qui n'est pas spécifique aux arts vivants, *Worker of the Year* repousse, par une attente, la rencontre de l'œuvre d'art avec le spectateur visé. Il déplace les artistes et les spectateurs de l'immédiateté d'un bâtiment dédié à l'expérience théâtrale vers des espaces-temps beaucoup plus cléments en termes de concomitance. La boîte à illusions comprend cinq petits sachets scellés, il faut scanner un code QR qui vous mène directement au podcast et le spectacle peut commencer.

Avec vous en tant que performeur, avec vous en tant que spectateur. Une histoire facile à suivre, 50 minutes de fragmentarisme, de séquentialité, de multifocus. La sensorialité devient le pont entre l'espace personnel et l'espace théâtral. Entendre, voir, goûter, toucher sont les sources qui alimentent l'imagination dans le voyage de récréation du récit théâtral. L'écoute est le moteur de nos propres phantasmes, le verbe parlé perce une réalité volatile qui prend forme dans notre esprit par la conjugaison kinesthésique. La nouvelle proposition fait de vous une instance hybride, avec des attributions spécifiques : assembler une histoire, la représenter et de la décoder par la participation physique et ludique. En tant que participant, vous êtes une construction multifonctionnelle, contribuant à la recomposition du produit artistique en traversant les territoires du son et d'une performativité engagée.

## Conclusion

À quoi ressemblera la scène du futur ? Le rapport *futureScene* prévoit que la scène sera un « espace » localisé uniquement dans le nuage informatique, où l'intelligence artificielle est le conteur et où seule la réalité virtuelle persiste. [...] Une scène mentale n'ayant plus besoin d'être incarnée. »<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>. <https://revistascena.ro/editorial/performance-ul-este-un-drept-uman-un-manifest-pentru-scena-viitorului/>

Nous n'aurons plus besoin d'infrastructures traditionnelles, ce sera une expérience un à un (*one to one*) entre les artistes, l'IA et un public téléporté réceptivement dans une fiction dont il fait partie. L'acte théâtral sera totalement intériorisé, devenant une expérience assumée personnellement.<sup>19</sup>

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### Sitographie :

- <https://www.mlml.io/about/>
- <https://www.revistascena.ro/editorial/performance-ul-este-un-drept-uman-un-manifest-pentru-scena-viitorului>
- <https://www.draff.net/susanne-kennedy.html>
- <https://arcub.ro/worker-of-the-year>

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<sup>19</sup>. <https://revistascena.ro/editorial/performance-ul-este-un-drept-uman-un-manifest-pentru-scena-viitorului/>

## OLTIȚA CÎNTEC

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## *Performing the Self & Staging Agency*

**Monica Olivia GRECEA<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** *When I feel like crying it's political* is a performance created through devised techniques, combining director-driven dramaturgy with content generated by the actresses-performers, in a process shifting the role of the director into one of a curator. Centered on self-representation, the work proposes a frame for empowerment while approaching sensible themes, such as the hierarchy of power in theatrical contexts (vocational schools and professional theatres) and the objectification of female performers. This paper contextualizes the concept and artistic process of the work, while proposing a work model based on care and owning differences.

**Keywords:** self-representation, performative theatre, agency, feminism, divergence, empowerment, pedagogy of care.

### **Creating context**

*When I feel like crying it's political*<sup>2</sup> is a performance that proposes a frame for empowerment of female performers in the specific cultural context of Romanian theatre. From a production perspective, the performance frame was The Day of National Culture, an annual project of the Romanian Ministry of Culture funding one-time events to take place in January. The

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<sup>2</sup>. *When I feel like crying it's political*, concept: Olivia Grecea, by / with: Raluca Mara, Oana Mardare, Alina Mişoc, with the audio participation of Mariana Mihuţ, produced by Reactor de Creaţie şi Experiment in the frame of "Feminine perspectives in Romanian theatre", cultural project funded by the Ministry of Culture.

15<sup>th</sup> of January is the official Day of National Culture, a date chosen because it is the birthdate of Mihai Eminescu, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic poet still considered Romania's national poet due to its unparalleled genius. As many projects financed by this mechanism are recitals by canonical poets created in a celebratory, nostalgic and reverent tone, it was our intention to create a different type of event.

As the time frame and budget do not allow for the production of a theatrical performance based on collectively creating a text and rehearsing it, the feasible choice was to work with devised techniques on a performance channeling the performers' experiences and creativity into a structure filled by experiences of women and inspired by a theoretical work on the first professional Romanian actresses, also written by a woman.

The starting point of the artistic process was Anca Hațiegan's *Dimineața actrițelor*, a pioneering research on the beginning of professional acting for women in Romania. Its reading served as an anchor for a debate of the artistic team on the differences and similarities in the public perception of the professional actress then and now, as well as for a subjective projection of what it means to act for a living in terms of goals, challenges and breakthroughs.

The gap between the 19<sup>th</sup> (the first Romanian actresses) and 21<sup>st</sup> (the present time) centuries was addressed through an interview with Mariana Mihuț, an emblem of the golden age of Romanian theatre. While the interview consisted of questions formulated by the three performers to a personality, a mentor, the dramaturgy of the performance was built on questions or performative tasks opening up possibilities that I addressed to the actresses-performers.

*When I feel like crying it's political* appeals to the knowledge and experience of living practitioner Mariana Mihuț and theorist Anca Hațiegan as a frame to curate personal experiences, challenges and reflections from the cast. An important point is that all the stakeholders involved in the making of the performance are women, in contrast to theatrical projects marketed as an all-female cast and focused on feminine issues, whose director is a male working in a traditional hierarchy with the other artists involved in the creative process. For me, doing a text-based performance on actresses with professional actresses playing the roles written by a playwright was insufficiently challenging a

concept. Doing the performance in such a way that the process benefited all parties involved and offered them space for formulating personal reflections was mandatory and part of the concept. I will refer to the three actresses involved both as actresses and performers, as they employ and deconstruct their acting experience and professional actress persona, becoming performers in the process.

### **Dramaturgy**

The performance intro takes place in the dark, while the audience hears an audio fragment of the interview with Mariana Mihuț answering the performers' questions: 1. I assume you are familiar with the polemical discourse regarding the definition of the actor as an artist. What do you think about that? Is the actor an artist-creator? If yes, what is his personal and unique work of art in the greater ensemble of the theatre performance? 2. Would you call yourself a feminist? How would you define a feminist? 3. How do you deal with failure when you don't get a part that you want? 4. Have you felt the difference between being an actor and being an actress? In what way? 5. Were there times when you didn't act? How did you feel them? 6. What did you experience as a failure in your career? 7. What are the sources of your inspiration? What do you feed on artistically?

Once the intro ends, the lights fade in revealing the stage, a non-theatrical site populated by the three performers showing themselves with the aid of props of their own choice, punctuating and emphasizing moments from the past and present connected to their profession, which is inextricably linked to an emotional landscape and a tendency to introspection and reflection.

Performativity, and not theatricality, is the conceptual pillar of the work: no interpretative bravado, no character work. It is the mishaps of the profession and the patterns in it that build the personal, subjective layers of the dramaturgy during the solo scenes.

For the group scenes, tasks given to the three performers conceptualize the usual director's prompts in a theatrical rehearsal and are formulated on the basis of key skills related to the practicalities of the profession and its perception by people outside the arts. An example of a performative task is

crying on command, skill considered a leverage for an actress, as it allows her to quickly express sense and sensibility. Here crying is performed outside of any relation to a character or dramatic situation, as a pure technical skill.

The overall vibe of the performance is that of a living installation collating fleeting moments that might be overlapping or diverging, building on each other to add another layer to the figure of the present day young actress. Embodied by three individualities, the actress is depicted in her behind the scenes mode, questioning, reflecting and pointing out.

*Dimineața actrițelor* is quoted at the end of the performance through a fragment read on stage. Echoing the personal objects displayed by the performers and introduced to the audience as symbolic memorabilia connected to studying acting, performing or sharing experiences with peers, the text describes the funeral of Fany Tardini<sup>3</sup>, a prolific actress of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and founder of an independent company. Authored by a journalist who was her contemporary, the text depicts the poverty and anonymity surrounding her death, in stark contrast with her glamorous life as a valued professional and celebrity figure. It ends with the appeal of the journalist for the preservation of Fany Tardini's memorabilia, which could be deemed valuable by future generations.

The frame of *When I feel like crying it's political* connects with an authority on the issue of being an actress, whether it's the expertise of Mariana Mihuț or Anca Hațiegan. Its performative corpus is an organized, willed disorder, having to do less with an articulated common discourse or manifesto than with a critical process of self-reflection catalyzed by references and focusing on significant personal experiences.

## **Feminism – a dragon**

In Romania, feminism is a term still perceived as destabilizing and avoided by the critical discourse of the arts and by the society in general. If we define it as "addressing uncomfortable topics"<sup>4</sup> we are able to relate the

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<sup>3</sup>. Anca Hațiegan, *Dimineața actrițelor* [*The Morning of the Actresses*] (Iași: Polirom, 2019), 261-63.

<sup>4</sup>. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta. Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (New York: Farras, Strass and Giroux, 2000), 161.

concept with a fairly common process of critical analysis. Avoiding feminism is therefore caused not by an irritation with the concept per se, but rather by the avoidance of discomfort, by an inability or disinterest to pressure the flawed status quo.

It has been pointed out that distancing oneself from feminism is connected to a fear of being misidentified: "That idea that all feminists are lesbian is scary enough to keep some women, even those who are equality-minded."<sup>5</sup> Feminism regarded as a niche for specific political claims can be a deterrent for categories less politically involved: "Women who love lipstick and also love standing up for themselves, but are not politicized, are especially vulnerable to being conned into distancing themselves from the feminist movement."<sup>6</sup> In the latter case, it is rejected as an extraneous movement, appealing only to the small category of people that are highly politically involved. Perhaps paradoxically, the notion of feminism can segregate instead of creating solidarity, when one labels feminists as a group acting in a frantic, excessive, extreme way or as a niche movement with a highly specific, foreign and incomprehensive agenda.

While some might agree with the claim of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie that we should all be feminists, cases when the F word is used with a derogatory meaning and even makes its way into hate speech are quite common in Romania. On many occasions women have used the term feminism as a pejorative to talk about other women they clearly distance from. Feminism is a dirty word, one that will most likely spark dissent, fear and aggression, a dragon in the room. It is a notion mainly approached with caution, when not entirely eluded.

In the case of *When I feel like crying it's political*, feminism was not acknowledged as a personal attribute neither by Mariana Mihuț, nor by Anca Hațiegan, who affirmed during the post performance Q&A that she came to write *Dimineața actrițelor* somewhat accidentally and not as an act of restitution for the less known female figures in the history of Romanian theatre.

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5. Barbara Findlen, "Introduction", in *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation*, ed. Barbara Findlen (Seal Press, 1995), xv.

6. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta*, 163-164.

Performers' feminism, albeit not theorized or verbally owned as such, points out systemic patterns pressuring the young female artist in contemporary Romania: "Feminism is what helps us make sense of the unfairness by affirming that it's about political injustice, not personal failure."<sup>7</sup>

The issue of responsibility has only recently begun to be addressed in relation to ethics in the workplace of Romanian vocational education and professional institutions, which in most cases remain untouched, unreformed even after incidents leading to media coverage and a public showcase of disapproval. An unquestioned, inertial system only perpetuates its toxic mechanisms, while taking responsibility begins with the individual becoming aware of its role in the passing on of behaviors and values: "I need to know that every minute of every day I am being colonized, manipulated and ignored, and that minute by minute I am doing this to others who are not shining white and middle class. There's a system of abuse here. I need to know what part I'm playing in it."<sup>8</sup> While writer Christine Doza refers to racism and classism, misogynistic discourses are also deeply embedded in vocational education and artistic practices, to the point where they have become part of the institutional culture. They are rarely challenged and questioned, although they are silently condemned.

One of the scenes in *When I feel like crying it's political* collates authentic lines the three performers heard from teachers, peers or family in relation to their vocational training or profession. While some stem from a misunderstanding of the artistic education or from a stereotypical portraying of actresses as bohemians, promiscuous, superficial and unreliable, others are intended as stimuli for a betterment of the emerging artist akin to the discipline and rigor imposed on athletes by their trainers. Some of the lines in this group scene underline the bodily normativity professed in vocational schools: as blondness is generally perceived as less threatening, therefore less damaging to the status quo, therefore desirable and preferred<sup>9</sup>, the thin, appealing,

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7. Barbara Findlen, "Introduction", in *Listen Up*, xiv-xv.

8. Christine Doza, "Bloodlove", in *Listen Up*, 43.

9. "The worry is that this particular hair color promises 'the world' to these women. Can it be given? If white supremacy and antiblack racism remain fundamental structural modes of violence by which countries continue to govern, blondness might be one of our most

inviting, seductive female body is the only body type considered appropriate for a young actress. Of course, this limiting paradigm can be replaced by a more diverse and realistic representation of body types, similarly to the recent business-motivated changes undertaken by major fashion brands in their choice of models.

Feminism can push uncomfortable topics center stage, as long as it's not vilified or fearfully dismissed.

### For a pedagogy of care

Astrid Henry points out to the familial trope in the evolution of American feminism: the second wave of the three feminist waves is positioned in a daughter-mother relationship with the first.<sup>10</sup> The mother role implies here too a duplicity, that of both a mentor and an obstacle to be overturned in order to create one's own identity.

During the process behind *When I feel like crying it's political* my intention as a director-coordinator was to smoothen as much as possible the censoring status of the director and to create a frame that allows the three actresses-performers to reveal as much as they feel comfortable with in a form of their choice. Prompts in the form of questions or challenges were given to stimulate them to generate performative material. Another important work principles were respect and validation for the other's experiences and perspectives, as they surfaced during discussions and rehearsals pointing out divergence rather than consensus on most topics.

The notion of pedagogy of care is associated with early childhood development and building communities<sup>11</sup>. Although this performance is a

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passive and fluid modes of complicity. It points to white power and its values as desirable, whether the thought enters one's head or not.", Claudia Rankine, *Just Us. An American Conversation* (Graywolf Press, 2020), 156.

<sup>10</sup>. Astrid Henry, "Feminism's Family Problem: Feminist Generations and the Mother-Daughter Trope", in *Catching a Wave. Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, ed. Rory Dicker and Alison Poepmeier (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 140.

<sup>11</sup>. Further information can be found in Carol Garboden Murray's *Illuminating Care: The Pedagogy and Practice of Care in Early Childhood Communities*.

one-time live event, this principle can guide further co-created artistic processes based on subjectivity and personal stories. Here the subjects involved were professional actresses with experience with devised techniques based on their personal stories. In other contexts, when working with non-professionals, taking time to build a climate of care and security is primordial for an ethical process.

Taking into account the long history of abuse and problematic practices revealed by former students of vocational faculties<sup>12</sup>, schools that form young actors and actresses appear as oppressive, toxic system dismantling those personalities that are subjected to humiliation and abuse. They seem to have no doubts in discerning between the worthy and unworthy, the strong and the weak, as a totalitarian regime that promotes some and discards others. Another ongoing investigation<sup>13</sup> pursuing cases of sexual harassment shows with numbers the lack of information and procedures available to victims in order to lead to ensure a sanction is put in place. Too little space is given, procedurally and symbolically, to stories of less-than-perfection and less-than-celebration. Although it can be affirmed that not all schools or teachers are operating in this logic of intimidation and aggression, it is imperative for vocational schools and theatrical institutions to recurrently revise the core principles informing their activity. A new paradigm can be turning to the pedagogy of care, focused on developing assets and skills in lieu of operating with a brutal top-down standardization.

### Revolution's question mark

Conceived as a platform for self-representation, *When I feel like crying it's political* did not become a manifesto as no consensual, unequivocal approach unifying the performers' discourses was explored or intended. The concept was to give agency through space for self-representation<sup>14</sup> and

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<sup>12</sup>. <https://www.scena9.ro/article/hartuire-sexuala-umilire-viol-studenti-teatru> and <https://www.scena9.ro/article/marturii-hartuire-umilire-teatru-continuare-sibiu-cluj>

<sup>13</sup>. <https://www.riseproject.ro/catedra-de-abuz/>

<sup>14</sup>. An essay by Mihaela Drăgan on the importance of self-representation in Roma theatre is available at <https://howlround.com/cultural-appropriation-self-representation>

owning the derived performative eclecticism, in terms of tools and means used on stage. Furthermore, the actresses were the ones to decide which individual scenes they wanted to contribute to, with an image of the dramaturgy in mind. I imposed no participation in the scenes based on biographical, personal material.

A state of crisis, fragility and uncertainty is the red thread traversing the performance's dramaturgy, differently filtered by the performers. How can female artists be empowered while confronted with systemic disempowerment since the beginning of their careers in this professional field? For me, empowerment means embracing a divergence of opinions and experiences and considering differences while owning your personal experience. Some feminist theorists emphasize the need to acknowledge how some types of feminism might show a lack of empathy and produce discrimination. With this in mind, during the process it was important not to discard another's experience or perspective or label it, minimize it or make it enter a competition of superlatives.

Having agency over how and what they choose to present and the appropriate modes for self-representation fights the risk of exploitation of narratives by an outside figure. Most of theatre performances marketed as all-female are in fact all-female cast projects directed by a male director in a traditional, hierarchical artistic process. The director directs the actor who acts, contributing to the creation of a role attributed by someone else inside an exterior narrative. Apart from the exceptional all-female cast, which in part addresses the issue of the scarcity of roles available for women and places them center stage, they don't further challenge the prevailing dynamics.

New narratives are within reach when given space, when a frame to accommodate them is created. *When I feel like crying it's political* is an effort to counter testimonial silencing and testimonial smothering, notions coined by philosopher Katie Dotson<sup>15</sup> to describe mechanisms of silencing and self-silencing put into place by a failed communication between a speaker and its audience and rooted in ignorance.

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<sup>15</sup>. Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing", *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236-57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23016544>.

If the male entitlement to power is based on the all-gendered assumption that men are more competent than women in positions of power<sup>16</sup> and if there is a strong tendency to regard power-seeking women as off-putting<sup>17</sup>, allocating space for counter-narratives to challenge these biases is beneficial for a more inclusive and diverse professional environment of any kind, theatre included. If autobiography on stage can be an act of reclamation, reinvention, transformation or survival<sup>18</sup>, it is also one of empowerment and gaining agency.

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<sup>16</sup>. Kate Manne, *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women* (Penguin Books, 2021), 279.

<sup>17</sup>. Kate Manne, *Entitled*, 280-81.

<sup>18</sup>. Dee Heddon, "The Politics of the Personal: Autobiography in Performance", in *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory*, ed. Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 133.

*Online sources*

*When I feel like crying it's political* performance recording:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdYXKjIA\\_To&t=705s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdYXKjIA_To&t=705s)

Post performance Q&A recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNOQslgr3lg>

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## *Happening, a Controversial Hybrid Way of Cultural Expression*

**Bianca HEDEȘ<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to explore an experimental acting exercise that took place in 2015 during a survival workshop guided by the Romanian-Canadian stage director Alexander Hausvater. The name of the workshop was “The total actor – The survival” and took place in Colibița, a mountain resort in Bistrița-Năsăud county involving 25 young actors. The actors embodied different human typologies for almost 12 hours in the town of Bistrița. The exercise was conducted in different areas of the town and each actor was supposed to remain in the “skin” of the character no matter the circumstances. Even though they interacted with civilians from the urban environment, they had to continue to exhibit the traits and features assigned to the character as if they were on stage. Many of the citizens were taken in by the deceitful appearances and believed that the actors they interacted with were real people with real issues. The closeness between reality and pretence was so tight that some of the spectators insisted on helping the needy, underprivileged typologies some of them were interpreting. Consequently, the difficulty in going on with the acting part became even harder for the participants in the workshops because of this interference. The main purpose of this type of exercise was to point out the complexity an actor is capable of and the involvement s/he must show in front of a changing audience, with a nonconformist moving stage. Were the actors able to prove the director’s expectations according to his given definition of a true actor? Were the actors ready enough to exploit previously unpaved roads? Was this type of practice beneficial to achieve the ultimate goal? Is happening the best way of showing the mixture of abilities an actor has?

**Keywords:** happening, hybrid, workshop, survival, Hausvater’s artistic experiment, street performance, complexity, challenge, remain in character.

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## Synthesis

One of the main purposes of this workshop was to prove the complexity of the actor when dealing with unexpected situations. The experiment took place both in a rural and urban environment. There was a great diversity in mixing unpredictable fields that gave birth to remarkable hybrid manners of expression. According to Hausvater, the actor reaches the creative process to its utmost only by achieving total exhaustion. In his view, this is the only way of touching the highest peak in the artistic development. As a result, most of the proposed exercises were physical and involved movement and body language tasks. At the end of the workshop, each participant lost weight unwittingly and for some of the actors the experience ended in the worst scenario - at the hospital needing medical assistance. It was due to the lack of nourishment or simply bad feeding in relation with the intense workout and crowded schedule. The program of the workshop was very similar to a military one: wake up very early in the morning, intense workouts, eating at specific time slots, activities and rehearsals all the time, expected to learn by heart scripts or lines you had to know even in the free time in order to be able to participate in the next scheduled activities. Everything you did was linked to the next thing you were alleged to do.

As acting coach Sally Stewart puts it, "The main goal of our workshop is to leave the actor feeling prepared and empowered to pursue an acting career fully aware of its uniqueness."<sup>2</sup> The aim of this article is to prove the influence and the high potential such an experience can have. The two-week intense laboratory became a revelation for many of the participants who retrieved themselves and realized how many things they actually knew and were capable of, but they hadn't been aware of and never tried to exploit. The mixture of arts in this spectacular experiment unearthed unexplored fields that deserved to be examined.

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<sup>2</sup>. "About," The Total Actor, accessed September 26, 2021, <http://www.thetotalactor.com/about-sally>.

The diversity of the entire experience was literally science fiction and at least controversial: starting with the burial of the actors and the recitation of different lines, drowning in Colibița Lake and holding your breath until the stage director decided to, splitting in tribes, climbing the trees, going blindfold into the woods while being guided by a chosen partner you had never met before but still had to trust up to getting your clothes off, going naked in the forest and interpreting monologues. The happening performance was the icing on the cake. It felt like the entire workshop was meant to prepare the big moment: 12 hours of acting without interruption. Bistrița became the new stage for the 25 actors where each one tried to prove one's best acting and endurance skills. Besides, every actor had to survive the day without getting any financial help from the stage director or from his/her own pocket. Not even in an extreme situation, should the performer quit his/her role and try to endure the consequences of his/her actions.

In their actions performers use freely all kinds of materials, techniques, and means of expression. They even raised the freedom of means-selection to a purposefully formulated postulate, and pleaded, like happeners, for interdisciplinary character of art and against all established rules of creation. They grounded this postulate in the artists' need of spontaneous, authentic expression. According to performers, care for purity and homogeneity of means, observation of rules, exerts a restrictive, braking effect upon the creative process. That is why many of them rejected such currents in contemporary art as Conceptualism or Minimal-Art.<sup>3</sup>

Tadeusz Pawlowski points out the diversity of available tools the actors can use in their art performance without being limited by the old concepts. One of the main reasons for which this kind of current has been rejected is because it doesn't fit the beliefs of a disciplinary art. Is happening the right way of emphasizing an actor's multiplicity of skills? What types of arts combines this kind of performance?

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<sup>3</sup>. Tadeusz Pawlowski, "From Happening to Performance," *Philosophica* 30, no. 0 (January 2, 1982): 64-65.

## The main focus of the research

On August 14 2015, starting from 11.30 and until 23.30, in the town of Bistrița, the 25 actors carried their spectacular characters all over the place. They tried to change the cultural vibration of the host town and performed everywhere they had the chance to or in front of whom they could or choose to. For 12 hours without interruption, the actors studded all the major attractions of the town. Each performer was dropped in a different place.



**Fig. 1:** Participants during an exercise.

There was an actor who started his performance right from the Cemetery in accordance with his acting part. They reached the Evangelical Church, the Gendarmerie, the Police, the Nursing Home, the Town Hall, the main artery of the town, the Evangelical Cemetery, the Synagogue, the Bistrița-Năsăud County Museum, the County Hospital, the Coopers' Tower, bookstores, restaurants and even the Evangelical Church in Herina, outside Bistrița.

Everywhere, the inhabitants of Bistrița encountered characters / typologies or emblematic figures of the society and the times in which we live and who belong to us and define us from a social, cultural, economic, political, religious or mystical point of view: The Blind, the Nun, the Homeless, the Itinerant Seller of Happiness, the Artist (be it Sculptor or Jacques Brel), the Virgin Mary advocating for Love and for the awakening of the instinct of historical survival of a Romania sick of ignorance and false intellectual pity, an apocalyptic Romania, the backbone of conscience and self-respect, the Protester, the Deceived Woman, the Healer, the parody and the polyvalent couple The Woman and the Dog, the Woman of Loose Morals, the Orphan, the One-always-seeking-for-work, The Suicide Bomber, The Professor or Researcher from the Institute of Psychology, interested in the issue of poor relationship between man and woman, the Female Figure of the Trauma of Oedipal origin and many others, picturesque and subtle in the game. They aroused the interest of the inhabitants of Bistrița, a former medieval fortress and market town, and perhaps managed to open the hearts, eyes and mind of people thus making them look into their inner selves.

In their effort to assimilate art to real life these happeners admitted that chance is a factor which may determine their artistic decisions, because, as they say, life is also governed by chance. Happening should not have a plot, nor should it represent or express anything; it should have features of real, objective actions, like those we meet with in common life situations. That is why it is sometimes described as a manifestation of the most consequent realism.<sup>4</sup>

Through this happening performance the actors were able to prove their skills and also discover abilities they weren't aware of. Moreover, they were obliged to react to actions they hadn't rehearsed before and implicitly encounter situations they didn't expect or for which they hadn't anticipated or prepared a reaction. The beauty of the happening is that art happens without being programmed for a particular time slot, on a precise day. Art happens

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<sup>4</sup>. Tadeusz Pawlowski, "From Happening to Performance," *Philosophica* 30, no. 0 (January 2, 1982): 61-62.

here and now, without knowing what the end of the show will look like. The Unforeseeable could be one of the main characteristics of this type of hybrid performance.

The concept of happening as a type of performance art was first used by Allan Kaprow, being defined as a game, an adventure, a number of activities engaged in participants for the sake of playing. In his new way of art, he wanted to emphasize the interaction between artist, audience and the environment.<sup>5</sup>

It's exactly what Alexander Hausvater targeted too. He wanted to show the huge connection among these three important elements: artist, audience and environment. Through the challenge he launched in Bistrița, he followed specifically the same fundamentals.

## Methodology

In his lecture, "How to make a happening", Allan Kaprow established 11 rules for art happenings:

1. Forget all the standard art forms.
2. You can steer clear of art by mixing up your happening by mixing it with life situations.
3. The situations for a happening should come from what you see in the real world, from real places and people rather than from the head.
4. Break up your spaces. A single enactment space is what the theatre traditionally uses.
5. Break up your time and let it be real-time. Real-time is found when things are going on in real places.
6. Arrange all your events in the happening in the same practical way. Not in an arty way.

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<sup>5</sup>. Mustafa Gultekin, "Using a 'Happening' Performance to Get Reflections of Teachers," in *Proceeding of 3rd Annual International Conference on Education & E-Learning (EeL 2013)*, ed. Global Science and Technology Forum Pte Ltd (3rd Annual International Conference on Education & e-Learning (EeL 2013), Global Science and Technology Forum Pte Ltd, 2013), 157.

7. Since you're in the world now and not in art, play the game by real rules. Make up your mind when and where a happening is appropriate.
8. Work with the power around you, not against it.
9. When you've got the go-ahead, don't rehearse the happening. This will make it unnatural because it will build in the idea of good performance, that is, art.
10. Perform the happening once only. Repeating it makes it stale, reminds you of theatre, and does the same thing as rehearsing.
11. Give up the whole idea of putting on a show for audiences. A happening is not a show. Leave the shows to the theatre people and discotheques.<sup>6</sup>

These principles were applied by the director Alexander Hausvater in the workshop he held in 2015, highlighting the importance of not being redundant and rehearse a reaction you got used to. These rules were strictly obeyed by the director Alexander Hausvater in his teaching methods and implemented to his participants who in turn strictly followed the rules of the game. Allan Kaprow also accentuates the negative association of art performance with a show. There is no connection between these two concepts, actors are not acting in order to entertain the civilians, but to perform their part following the real rules. Now that actors are outside the stage and outside theatre, they need to obey new rules, the rules of real life, creating real life situations in real places with real people, not with other actors with whom they rehearsed before the art performance.

In this article it will be particularly observed the transformation of one of the actors that played the Woman with Light Mores, character involved in the happening performance that took place in Bistrița in 2015. Were all the eleventh rules obeyed by the actress interpreting the Woman with Light Mores? Which were the difficulties the actress encountered in her art performance? Which are the pluses and which are the minuses of such an exercise? Is it the same in theory as it is in practice? Which were the biggest challenges?

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<sup>6</sup>. Stefanie Graf, "Allan Kaprow and the Art of Happenings," *TheCollector*, August 6, 2021, <https://www.thecollector.com/allan-kaprow-art-of-happenings/>.

## **The challenge of the happening performance in the hometown of some of the actors and its impact to the qualitative study of the analysed character**

The quality of the act of performing a happening exercise depends on plenty of factors. When such a drill happens in the hometown of the actor, the difficulty of the acting becomes almost impossible to surpass. The moment you suddenly meet your drama teachers from high school who don't seem to understand why you don't remember them any longer, the artistic performance gets tougher. It is very difficult and at the same time awkward to find a reasonable explanation in which you will be genuine in front of people with whom you worked for years.



**Fig. 2:** Alexander Hausvater conducting an exercise.

The rules must be obeyed when it comes to the art of happening and there is no turning back in this kind of process. You become a soldier that has to go on in order to reach the finish line, by following the path of his new life story, his new character and assume his new issues. The assumption of the characters is a notion taught in drama schools as a basis. The same theory is available in the performance of a happening.

When you as an actor decide to pursue the line of your role, no matter the circumstances, your acting becomes incomprehensible and controversial to a former acquaintance of yours, as long as you carry on with your interpreting the assigned role. More particularly for all the people you already knew or met in different circumstances before performing such a role, this concept develops into something understandable but nonsensical. Some of them might even consider that you have gone insane and you might have some mental disorders. This is the manner in which the happening is seen as a controversial hybrid way of expression and gets a bit obscure for the viewers. The adjustment of the civilians to new situations, new contexts and new circumstances with a person they knew only in a specific environment has little chance of success. Our society is not used to this type of manifestations that take place in the street, in the real life. They are accustomed to see reality in the street and fiction on stage. In their opinion this mix should or could not happen. Hence, due to this blending we can discover the beauty of this hybrid performance.

Even for the drama teachers from high school it is tough to adapt their principles and values to a larger variety of games and acting exercises. Not even as a hypothesis could they join the game, they totally refused to imagine that the person they were interacting with was the same person, the same student from high school, trying to embody something else or actually trying a new artistic way of expression. Hybridity is a strange concept for most of the spectators because it is not the framework and the structure they got used to, in which they knew exactly their part. When novelty happens, the audience quite often seems to reject the permutation of the stage.

Culture is concerned with established ideas. Education is concerned with communicating those established ideas. Both are concerned with improving ideas by bringing them up to date. Education is based on the safe assumption that one only has to go on collecting more and more information for it to sort itself into useful ideas.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>. Edward De Bono, *Lateral Thinking: Creativity Step by Step*, Nachdr. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 9.

Ideas are continuously changing. Art is also in a permanent dynamic, reason why people should and have to be part of the same development mechanism. Society and art need to merge together in order to succeed. The Happening is such a movement in which people should try to understand and embrace it. Educating ourselves to keep up with diversity will ensure the enhancement of our knowledge and the ability of understanding. It is highly important to collect information regularly to make sure you remain connected to the innovation around us. Otherwise, you might find yourself lost in a whole new world in which you don't fit. In order to be a social person, you need to live according to rules and regulations of the society. Finally, you become a small part that helps in the building up a whole.

As other actors working with Alexander Hausvater have noticed "This is the first thing you learn by working with Hausvater, immediately followed by another one of his sayings: "In theatre there is no I cannot, there is only self-limitation!"<sup>8</sup> This concept was valid and used in the working method of the workshop "The Total Actor – The Survival". Hausvater suggests that there are no limits in the art of performance, the only limit is yourself. He points out self-limitation as being the only real obstacle in achieving the expected results in the artistic process. The same methodology was applied in the manner of approaching to the actors. He pushed the limits of each participant in order to help them explore undiscovered parts, they weren't even aware of.

### **The Woman with Light Mores, the researched character in the process of achieving the culmination**

The role I had to act for 12 hours in my hometown was the contemporary version of Mona from "Steaua fără nume" written by Mihail Sebastian, named by the director Alexander Hausvater as "The Woman of Light Mores". It was a character suggested by the leader of the workshop who tried to cover the entire palette of human typologies by trying to give the actors roles as different as possible. One of the requirements we were told before beginning the

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<sup>8</sup>. Antonella Cornici, "In Theatre There Is No 'I Cannot', There Is Only Self-Limitation! - Alexander Hausvater Portrait," *Theatrical Colloquia* 11, no. 2 (December 1, 2021): 103.

happening experience was that we were not allowed to have money on ourselves at all and therefore, we had to find solutions in order to survive physically and financially that day. By telling the story of the character, we were supposed to convince people to feed us, give us water and help us with anything we needed in order to pass the day as survivors or winners regarding the credibility we had in front of the civilians. We weren't allowed to use our mobile phones, but we had to have them on ourselves in case something bad happened and we needed the emergency number. In theory we were being followed, but also protected by the police and the stage director all over the town. Practically it was impossible to know where the 25 actors were simultaneously, a reason why in some of the cases it could have become really dangerous, like in the example of the attractive single woman searching for companion.



**Fig. 3:** Participants performing at the Bistrița Synagogue.

Even if it wasn't a big city, there were still possibilities of getting into places you wouldn't expect or situations you wouldn't know how to handle. On finding yourself further away from the town centre where everybody was performing their role, could have been scary, alarming and intimidating. In the case of the Woman with Light Mores, she was brought by a guy in the car to a restaurant on a ring road in order to have lunch. It was extremely risky, but also very exciting. She had to look after her interest, but also make sure she remains safe. The man started to tell his life story, too and he felt at ease as he found someone to share his problems. He has just got divorced in Germany and came back to his hometown to start it again from the beginning. He left aside his entire life: job, wife and children, because his wife cheated on him. The classical sad love stories. Now he was searching for someone new, to help him get over his ex. Somehow the meeting with the Woman with Light Mores was a release for him, for being able to find understanding in a stranger. There were some similarities between the story of the man with the woman with light mores and Mona with professor Miroiu in "Steaua fără nume" written by Mihail Sebastian. In a provincial town in Prahova Valley, a woman with unknown identity gets off the train at the train station because she doesn't have a ticket. She came from the casino and had no money on her, only the winning chips she couldn't use anyway.

As in the case mentioned earlier, the meeting between the two was a coincidence and just like Mona, the Woman with Light Mores had no money available, so she had to use her feminine charms in order to persuade the man to help her. Professor Miroiu, who was at the train station waiting for a very expensive book from Bucharest, offers to host her overnight, during which time an emotional relationship develops between the two. Miroiu found a fixed, invisible star, behind another star from Ursa Mare, unknown on the celestial vault, and he doesn't know what name to give it, when he finds out that the name of the woman he had just met is Mona. So, he decides to call the star exactly the same name. In the morning, Grig appears, the man with whom Mona has been having a relationship for 3 years. As he is rich, Mona finally returns to the world she got used to, leaving the dreamy astronomer behind. Mona chose money and comfort instead of love and sincere feelings. The Woman with Light Mores embodied the same human

typology. Even though there could have been some fireworks between her and the man who had returned from Germany, she simply pursued her own interest-the achievement of what she needed and went on her way.

“Intensity gets misinterpreted. Not all acting is necessarily extremely intense. But it is concentrated and very much about being here, now.”<sup>9</sup> The same thing is available in the happening performance. Even though you had a character to interpret, the process was about how you as an actor are capable of dealing with new situations and your ability of finding solutions to your role’s complications, not about pointing out the fact that you are acting a role in the street, just to captivate other people’s attention, by exaggerating your gestures or your purposes.

Acting in the present and living in the present are the most difficult things to do, because people usually have the tendency of speaking all the time about the past and bringing it in the actual present or making plans about the future, not knowing how to take advantage of the beautiful things life offers to them in that particular moment. Even though it might sound like clichés, acting and life are literally about living in the present and about doing things according to our thoughts and feelings, without involving past and future in our sentences and decisions.

### **Happeners as hybrid performers, reaching their complexity of skills**

Happeners strived to change the world: to make more humane the existing framework of social life; to abolish authoritarian convention and customs which impoverished inter-human relations. They hoped to achieve this aim by penetrating the objective social world with their artistic actions. To make the actions most efficient it was necessary to integrate art in real life, to abolish the separating line between them.

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<sup>9</sup>. Judith Ohikuare, “How Actors Create Emotions: A Problematic Psychology,” *The Atlantic*, March 10, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/03/how-actors-create-emotions-a-problematic-psychology/284291/>.

That is why happeners often carried out their actions in public places frequented by a great number of people: on busy streets and squares, at railway stations, airports, etc.<sup>10</sup>

The variety of reasons for which performers like actors choose to act in public places are many and in constant change. When the play takes place in the street, the actor automatically becomes a hybrid actor due to his ability to adjustment. Happeners develop into hybrid performers that can act even by interacting with people who might not want and enjoy the participation in their individual show. Even so, they have the power of convincing them to stay and become part of their artistic moment. This way, they turn into spectators that start establishing human relations with the hybrid performers. Another proof that actors have the ability to adapt was demonstrated alongside with the appearance of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic that released magnificent skills they hadn't exploited before.

As the world stopped with the appearance of SARS-CoV-2, theatres also shut down and actors had nowhere to play. This was the beginning of hybrid performances for actors. Being in front of their laptops, iPads, computers or even mobile phones, actors started to act different plays in front of an amateur camera with online viewers. The audience was now online, most of the times with the camera off and without giving the performers any visual eyed contact feedback. It was very difficult for the actors to be online, without having any task or a character sheet to follow. This way, a lot of entertainers chose a character to interpret and remained to that same role for every day they were online. Even though many of the artists didn't realize they actually gave birth to a new phenomenon: happening performance online. They remained in character and moved on with their live performance. As it was mentioned earlier, a happening performance was about establishing human relations with the public, with the civilians in the street through the authenticity and credibility of their acting. For an actor the practice of online happening performance became extremely difficult, almost impossible. All that instant feedback s/he was used to enjoy has now vanished. Through the

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<sup>10</sup>. Tadeusz Pawlowski, "From Happening to Performance," *Philosophica* 30, no. 0 (January 2, 1982): 61.

disappearance of the reaction, the actors had to keep on acting without getting the approvals or disapprovals of the audience. Actors feed themselves with the emotions they can capture from the public.

“You might subconsciously be colored by real pain, but your imagination could bring up something else.”<sup>11</sup> Every time an actor acts there is something different in his acting, even though he follows the same path. The same thing is available in the happening hybrid performance in which even the actor interprets the same role, depends a lot on the people he interacts with. The changes made to the role are influenced by its moving audience that is in a constant change. Of course, it is very important to take into consideration the human factors too. For example, the actor that must act a certain role, maybe he had a bad day exactly when he is supposed to act and even though he is a professional and tries to leave his problems aside, maybe his acting will vary and differ. As Konstantin Stanislavski said, actors must search for the “believable truth”:

Stanislavski first employed methods such as “emotional memory.” To prepare for a role that involves fear, the actors must remember something frightening and attempt to act the part in the emotional space of that fear they once felt. Stanislavsky believed that an actor needed to take his or her own personality onto the stage when they began to play a character. [...] Later Stanislavsky concerned himself with the creation of physical entries into these emotional states, believing that the repetition of certain acts and exercises could bridge the gap between life on and off the stage.”<sup>12</sup>

As it was mentioned earlier actors need to get their personal baggage when it comes to giving birth to certain characters. While taking this emotional baggage with themselves, they try to empathize with the role they have to assimilate. When practising a role too much or when playing it too many times, as Stanislavski said earlier, a pattern appears and the actor has the tendency of repeating instinctually gestures, lines and behaviour, assimilating them automatically in everyday life without even realizing it.

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<sup>11</sup>. Judith Ohikuare, “How Actors Create Emotions: A Problematic Psychology,” *The Atlantic*, March 10, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/03/how-actors-create-emotions-a-problematic-psychology/284291/>.

<sup>12</sup>. *Ibidem*.

## Conclusions

The happening performance that took place in Bistrița was the most challenging acting test for me as an actor and I am sure that it meant the same for most of the participants that were able to complete the happening performance. The workshop was a prologue in preparing the final round of this roller coaster of dares. Every exercise executed with diligence and strictness helped actors to remain in character until the end of the day, for 12 hours, more precisely. Some of the actors gave up or failed, because they encountered situations they weren't able to manage properly. Hausvater's main rule about self-limitation turned out to be true and general valid for all the actors involved in the happening performance on the streets of Bistrița. Each participant has exceeded his condition relative to his own level. This means that some of the performers were able to fulfil the 12 hours challenge. The main concern of this article was *The Woman with Light More*, the studied case in the presented article, who was successfully completed, despite the encountered difficulties such as the ones mentioned earlier (meeting the drama high-school teacher and many more pointed out in the lines before).

As a result, happening is a manner of combining arts that reveal the complexity of the actor's skill. The actress playing *The Woman With Light Mores* was capable of holding her character, following the eleven rules of Allan Kaprow. At first, she forgot all the standard art forms she was aware of. Secondly, she began mixing art situations with real life situations. Thirdly, the situations that took place in Bistrița with this character were situations that were created after interacting with real people, with real issues that gave birth to authentic happenings, not creations of the actor's imagination. Fourthly, the *Woman With Light Mores* broke her spaces, she acted outside the stage, she was on the streets of a town called Bistrița. Fifthly, time became real and longer. In comparison to one, two or three hours to twelve hours. Sixthly, the order of the events was a practical one, not an art one, a logical one, exactly like in real life. Seventhly, she was aware of the fact that she was playing a game in the real world, so she adjusted the rules of her game to the real rules. Eighthly, she embraced all the situations she encountered, she didn't refuse anything, even though some of them were dangerous and extreme.

Rule number nine was about not rehearsing the lines and the acting before interacting with the people, rule obeyed by the actress playing the Woman With Light Mores. Rule number ten was about performing such an art only once, as in the mentioned case. The last rule implemented by Allan Kaprow was about not transforming the happening performance into a show, fact that didn't happen to the Woman With Light Mores, in comparison with some of the colleagues actors that showed the need to stand out and making sure they are being seen. Drawing the attention in an explicit way could be a little bit ostentatious and also disturbing for the eye of the beholder.

Finally, the question is: is happening a hybrid art that can dare people to embrace culture? Yes, we believe the arguments expressed in the present article and the case study of 'the Woman with Light Mores' as mentioned and analysed, we can observe that a happening combines acting, performance and street art in a mystic magical experiment. In conclusion, happening is definitely the tool through which actors can prove their diversity of skills and find out unknown and unexploited ones. Even though it hasn't been as common as theatre is, it became an authentic manner of cultural expression thanks to Alexander Hausvater and his survival workshop. The strength and the ability to remain in character were qualities strongly cultivated by Alexander Hausvater to the participants to the workshop through the daily theatrical exercises that were focused on four main points: to observe, to orient themselves, to decide and to act. The actress playing the Woman with Light Mores at first observed the environment she found herself in, the real time of the moment when the acting began and after that she acted according to the character's purposes.

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## *The Reconfiguration of Homme Fatal in The Third Millennium Joker Adaptions*

**Amira Rihab SAIDI<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The relevance of the Joker as a prominent character in popular culture and the film industry merited tremendous scholarly attention. It has been analyzed through the lenses of various critical theories, *inter alia* the Bakhtinian “carnival”, the Freudian psychoanalysis, and several others. Still, nearly there is no critical development of the Joker as a *homme fatal*. It is thus the novelty of this paper to do so; on the one hand, it aims to reconfigure the conceptualization of the *homme fatal* beyond its classical seductive and inveigling power within women’s world. Here, I endeavor to redefine the fatality of *homme fatal* from the perspective of the Joker, which is centralized more on an outlawed destructive personality far from being a sexually desirable man. I focus on the “fatal men” and “fatal rebel” by Mario Praz in his *Romantic Agony*<sup>2</sup>. This study focuses therefore on the reconfiguration of *homme fatal* in two Joker adaptations: *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *Suicide Squad* (2016). Thereby, I contend that the two jokers share common features with the classical *homme fatal*, most of which contribute to the *comic-ization* of their ‘fatality’.

**Keywords:** Joker, Homme fatal, The Dark Knight, The Suicide Squad, the Vice.

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<sup>2</sup>. Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

## Introduction

The significance of the Joker as a pre-eminent character in popular culture and the film industry merited tremendous scholarly attention considering the fact that it has been analyzed through the lenses of various critical theories, *inter alia* the Bakhtinian “carnival,” the Freudian psychoanalysis, and several others. However, there is nearly no critical development of the Joker as a *homme fatal*. It is thus the novelty of my research to do so. On the one hand, I aim to reconfigure the conceptualization of the *homme fatal* beyond its classical seductive and inveigling power within the women’s world. Indeed, similar to *the femme fatale*, “the *homme fatal* is often transformed into a sexual spectacle; the buff”, Samantha Lindop argues, especially in cinema noir, “he appears in his most sophisticated form as a greedy, deceitful, but seductive provocateur”<sup>3</sup>. Here, I aim to redefine the fatality of *homme fatal* from the perspective of the Joker, that is centralized more on an outlawed destructive personality far from being a sexually desirable man.

I have inspired this idea from my doctoral adviser Zsófia Anna Tóth 2011’s book that investigated the changing representation of the “*femme fatale*” elatedly film-noir feminine character in her *The Farcical (Re) Figuration of the Femme Fatale in Maurine Dallas Watkins’ Chicago (1927) and its various adaptations*<sup>4</sup>. In this book, she discusses how these violent and aggressive women could alter their image in the twentieth-century American cinema, theatre and even how they incorporated feminist visual culture revolution. In fact, all female criminals and murderers were commonly epitomized by the figure of the *femme fatale* who always evade punishment and defeat their masculine victims. For me, the Joker movies are very reminiscent to *Chicago’s* silhouette as they give the chance to classical criminal characters to revive.

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<sup>3</sup>. Samantha Jane Lindop, “Femmes, Filles, and Hommes: Postfeminism and the Fatal(e) Figure in Contemporary American Film Noir” (Thesis, The University of Queensland, 2014), 137-140.

<sup>4</sup>. Zsófia Anna Tóth, *Merry Murderers: The Farcical (Re)Figuration of the Femme Fatale in Maurine Dallas Watkins Chicago (1927) and Its Various Adaptations* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

After reading her book, I realized there are currently few critical studies about the development of *Homme fatal* compared with the large interests in *femmes fatales*, especially while trying to describe this masculine persona and figure out its features. My attention is then different from trying to understand why the Joker is evil from social-psychological lenses to concentrating more narrowly on investigating the “*Homme Fatal*” persona in the Joker 2000s adaptations beginning with Heath Ledger’s Joker from *The Dark Knight* (2008), Jared Leto’s Joker from *The Suicide Squad* (2016).

The emergence of the *humorous Homme fatal* figure, as Dr. Zsófia Anna Tóth labeled it in her book, has its roots back in the English morality dramas shaping the *Vice* figure. The *Vice* is historically the personification of evil. Replacing the devil during the Tudor and Renaissance periods, the *Vice* character was the prototype of evil and represented almost every villainous action. Based on what A. W. Pollard called the “obvious etymology” of the naming; the New Cambridge edition of *Richard III* defines it as: “*Vice*, comic character in the old Morality plays; also called ‘Iniquity’”<sup>5</sup>.

To this end, if we take heed of the notion of “inequity”, which means inequality, unfairness, and unbalance, thus reaching the tacit implication of chaos in law and order that has been staged in the DC universe through the Joker figure. The two characters share the task of spreading anarchy and representing evil. However, the categorization of the Joker character within the *hommes fatals* list is not only linked to his devilish personality but more interestingly, to the appealing aura and magnetism he performs towards his audience that, analogically, has genesis in the characterization of the *Vice*. First, Agnès Matuska argues that the “*Vice* has always been the sense of comedy that makes him, although evil, appealing”<sup>6</sup>. Correspondingly, Daniel Wallace links the allure of the Joker with the nature of his character as part of the spectacle. He argues: “If it is not spectacularly theatrical, it’s boring, and the [Joker’s] audience might fail to see the humor in the horror”<sup>7</sup>.

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5. Quoted in Francis Hugh Mares, “The Origin of the Figure Called ‘The Vice’ in Tudor Drama,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (November 1958): 11.

6. Ágnes Matuska, “Haphazardly Ambidextrous. Interpretations of the Vice in 16th-Century English Drama,” *The AnaChronisT* 11 (2005): 2.

7. Daniel Wallace, *The Joker: A Visual History of the Clown Prince of Crime* (New York: Universe, 2011), 105.

This task could not be achieved since the Joker and *homme fatal* nature is entirely distinctive. Here, I endeavor to redefine the fatality of *homme fatal* from the perspective of the Joker that is centralized more on an outlawed destructive personality far from being a sexually desirable man, focusing on the “fatal men” and “fatal rebel” discussed by Mario Praz in his *Romantic Agony*<sup>8</sup>.

My article aims at reconfiguring the *homme fatal* in two Joker twenty-first century selected movies. My theoretical background would be grounded upon the conceptualization of three concepts: *homme fatal*, the *Vice*, and the Joker figure as a clown prince of crime. This step will provide the necessary data to discuss the alteration of the *humorous Homme fatal* representation within the selected movies. Henceforth, I will look specifically at the hazardous impact of the Joker in a way to redefine the “fatal” from being seductive to literally lethal on the other characters.

### **The Figure of *The Homme Fatal***

*The homme fatal* is a cinematic figure that appears in early film noirs such as in Alfred Hitchcock’s (1941) *Suspicion*, George Cukor’s *Gaslight* (1944), and other neo-noir productions such as Mike Figgis’ *Internal Affairs* (1990) and Mary Harron’s *American Psycho* (2000). Within these films, all male protagonists share the masculine destructiveness, wealth, physical attraction and strong desire to pursue women, the four essential characteristics of what an *homme fatal* signifies.

To begin with, Spicer underlines the essential features of the *homme fatal* as an “exciting mixture of cunning, cool calculation, manipulative charm, and deep-rooted sexual sadism”<sup>9</sup>. In fact, through his role in *Suspicion* (1941) as Johnnie Aysgarth, Cary Grant seems to be the exemplary figure of the classical *homme fatal* defined in the above quote. In detail, *Suspicion* (1941) explores the marriage of a naïve woman named Lina, who has never been in a serious relationship before, to a charming playboy. They met at a train trip,

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<sup>8</sup>. Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

<sup>9</sup>. Andrew Spicer, *Film Noir* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2002), 89.

and he tried to approach her but failed. Eventually, failure does not exist in *homme fatals'* dictionary, so this represented a fuel for his engines to keep racing for her. Johnnie Aysgarth is jobless with no stable income, a gambler, and a deceitful person. However, he succeeded in charming many women which is the thing that led Lina not to suspect him at the very beginning. They got married since her family pressed her to do so after reaching marriage time.

Over time, Lina suspects that Johnnie could possibly be a murderer; thinking he is willing to for her life insurance. Here, Johnnie's fatality lies in his womanizing capacities. Barrenetxea said that this kind of *homme fatal* has "positive social connotations, as it usually denotes a successful man", while being "a 'womanizer' refers to men who serially seduce women and then discard them"<sup>10</sup>. In this vein, the figure of *the homme fatal* does not necessarily hold womanizing traits, nevertheless, they are very intelligent in their interaction with women. which means not every womanizer could be an *homme fatal* and not every *homme fatal* is a womanizer. Let's take the example of Giacomo Casanova de Seingalt who was an Italian/Venetian explorer and writer and one of the most notorious womanizers of the 18th century and almost all history. In his controversial autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie*, he opens about his love life, and he managed to seduce more than one hundred women, "to a man who has bid farewell to women after having possessed twenty mistresses, and only when he felt himself compelled to acknowledge that he could no longer be accepted by any woman"<sup>11</sup>. He mentions his adventures with women and how he could not control himself but not in a criminal way when they "had in the fortress a colony of five or six hundred women, with God knows how many children! I felt greatly interested in them all. Happy idleness! I often regret thee because thou hast often offered me new sights"<sup>12</sup>. Although he mostly narrates his traveling, his confession

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<sup>10</sup>. Ane Barrenetxea Gerekiz, "Hommes Fatals: Masculine Destructiveness in Alfred Hitchcock's Rebecca (1940) and Sam Taylor-Johnson's Fifty Shades of Grey (2015)" (Thesis, Universidad del País Vasco, 2017), 10.

<sup>11</sup>. Jacques Casanova, *The Complete Memoirs of Jacques Casanova de Seingalt 1725–1798*, vol. 12 (Project Gutenberg, 2001), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2981/2981-h/2981-h.htm>, 57.

<sup>12</sup>. *Ibidem*, 107.

about women made his reputation increases as the most cited womanizer, even his name is now an adjective to describe the apex of seduction. However, this does not mean he masculinity is fatal or lethal, still he knows how to deal with women. in this case, Casanova is not *homme fatal*.

In another case, precisely in relation to the *American Psycho* (2000), Patrick Bateman is a rich unequivocal womanizer and a shadowed serial killer. He basically tries to kill anyone who could be superior to him whether a woman or a man. What he ventures for is causing unreasonable pain to others; "I want my pain to be inflicted on others, I want no one to escape"<sup>13</sup>. With his women's approach, his fatality is rather "transformed into a sexual spectacle; the buff", highly-stylized"<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, several segments of the film portray the good-looking man but more precisely, how he is keen on being looked at while looking attractive. Patrick has been shot several times taking care of his hygiene. To his end, it seems that the Joker and Patrick share the same mirror but not the same products nor do they have the same objective. The Joker as well tries to make his outfits and face attract the eyesight. In fact, both aim for making a public show to attract others. Whether to infatuate people or engender a spectacularized terror; both seek attention.

Be that as it may, this category of *the homme fatal* is not what concerns this study, however, with my aim to recontextualize the significance of the *homme fatal*, I shall first refer to his classical meaning within the noir/neo-noir films and then define it as the fatal rebel in the comics space. To this end, the *homme fatal* is not a confined character to film noir but has been appearing in even more ancient texts.

His origins are back to the Byronic hero who shares the same fatal fate with noir *homme fatal* but with other characteristics. He does not need to be a wealthy man nor with an erotic aura, but the core term is the fatality. In this, I am referring to Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony*, through which he expatiates on the fatality of several classic heroes to fall under the label of "hommes fatal". René in *Chateaubriand* is for Praz an *homme fatal* due to the love and suffering he imposes on whoever is close to him.

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<sup>13</sup>. Mary Haron, *American Psycho* (Lionsgate Films, 2000), 01h:36min:33sec-01h:36min:39sec.

<sup>14</sup>. Samantha Jane Lindop, "Femmes, Filles, and Hommes: Postfeminism and the Fatal(e) Figure in Contemporary American Film Noir" (The University of Queensland, 2014), 157.

To love and to suffer was the double fatality he imposed on anyone who approached his person. Thrown into the world as a great misfortune, its pernicious influence extended to the surrounding beings.... Everything became fatal to him, even happiness.<sup>15</sup>

In this sense, the Byronic hero does not limit his damage to others only but to himself as well. There is no strict indication of his relationship with women or his sexuality. What sounds to be important for his portrait is his psychological attitude towards himself and others. For Praz, he is a cynical outlawed figure but for him, what he does is for the sake of law and order;

It seems that he was born jaded, and that he can only truly feel outlawed. Also, when one considers as artificial, as conventional the innumerable portraits that Byron has drawn of himself under the figure of the outlaw, one commits an irreparable misinterpretation about him, for his portraits emanate, all go up from the lowest layer. deeper in his sincerity. In the law, he experiences nothing; outside the law, he feels thoroughly.<sup>16</sup>

Besides being fatal to himself and an outlaw figure, Praz cited the qualities of the Fatal man as “mysterious (but conjectured to be exalted) origin, traces of burnt-out passions, suspicion of a ghastly guilt, melancholy habits, pale face, unforgettable eyes”<sup>17</sup>. Even though Praz’s reformation of the fatal man may conduct the villain’s “romantic agony”, he insisted on a monster of energy. For Praz, the fatal man was a Byronic hero through which Charles Du Bos, in his essay *Byron et le Besoin de la fatalité*, asserted that his

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<sup>15</sup>. Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 68. Original text : “Aimer et souffrir était la double fatalité qu’il imposait à quiconque s’approchait de sa personne. Jeté dans le monde comme un grand malheur, sa pernicieuse influence s’étendait aux êtres environnants.... Tout lui devenait fatal, même le bonheur.

<sup>16</sup>. Ibidem, 70. Original text : il semble qu’il est né blasé, et qu’il ne puisse sentir vraiment que hors-la-loi. Aussi, lorsqu’on envisage comme factices, comme conventionnels les innombrables portraits que Byron a tracés de lui-même sous la figure du *l’outlaw*, on commet à son sujet un contresens irréparable, car ses portraits émanent, remontent tous de la couche la plus profonde de sa sincérité. Dans la loi, il n’éprouve rien ; hors la loi, il se sent à fond.

<sup>17</sup>. Ibidem, 59.

nature is constructed out of an innate melancholy that made his heart static and to react his heartbeats. As a result, he needs to accelerate *à la folie*, which means extreme insanity<sup>18</sup>. This insanity is, therefore, the fatality of the Joker that shaped his popularity despite the malevolent behavior he operates.

### The Vice

The *Vice*, the master of ceremonies, is “a tempter, a mischievous, humorous villain is a real crux: he appears first in morality plays<sup>19</sup>. In fact, the character of the *Vice* is a complex character who combines the humorous comic persona and the vicious villainous one. He is an entertainer on stage and tries to break the invisible wall between actors and audiences. However, as Tóth asserts, the *Vice* usually carries an enigmatic persona, a kind of duplicity with cleverness to look artful, shrewd and witty, appealing to audiences. Again, the fatality I am referring to here is not inclusive to the film-noir sexualized men but the appealing fatal men who are hazardous to the social fabric they belong to. His ludicrousness conceals his lethal casualty, which I am attempting to underscore in the following lines. Thoroughly, Tempe E. Allison defines the *Vice* as “the emissary or agent of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Devil,” whose job is “to seduce mankind”<sup>20</sup>.

I would emphasize the *Vice's* seduction mission in Allison's terms which has a tacit implication of what the *homme fatale* allude to in their destructive masculine persona toward women. However, the distinction lies in the *Vice's* determined asexuality in many of his appearances. This all is relevant to the Joker as well, being the modernized *Vice* character. He is a fool who is often portrayed as the outlaw character *tout court* without any

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<sup>18</sup>. Charles Du Bos, *Byron et Le Besoin de La Fatalité* (Paris : Buchet Chastel Corrêa, 1957). Cited in Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 71.

<sup>19</sup>. Ágnes Matuska, “Haphazardly Ambidextrous. Interpretations of the Vice in 16th-Century English Drama,” *The AnaChronisT* 11 (2005): 1.

<sup>20</sup>. Quoted in Zsófia Anna Tóth, *Merry Murderers: The Farcical (Re)Figuration of the Femme Fatale in Maurine Dallas Watkins Chicago (1927) and Its Various Adaptations* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 144.

indication of his love life; this, is what bound the two; however, he is never portrayed as a sexualized character. Even after Harley Quinn's coupling relationship with his character, he is still the outlaw rebel *par excellence*. As Mares states in his description of the *Vice* character; he assures that he "seems often to be outside the moral law. He is not evil disguised as good as the conventional morality explanation would lead one to expect but does both good and evil 'Haphazardly'." <sup>21</sup> Also, since he is not necessarily evil, he does not necessarily have to be punished <sup>22</sup>. Again, this supports why the Joker always ends victoriously though he is a vicious villain. Being a comic *homme fatal* grants him immunity to punishment and, in almost all death cases. In each case, I maintain that the Joker being an *homme fatal* is representative of an outlaw, rebel and lethal man, albeit with some sexualized/romanticized aspects within Jared Leto's Joker in *The Suicide Squad* (2016).

## The Joker

The Joker is the comic *homme fatal*. A carnivalesque figure in popular culture often aims to gain attention through the disruption of the status quo. He is a maniacally deprived and disturbed character, a "psychopathic, mass-murdering, schizophrenic clown with zero empathy", and a "terrorist" <sup>23</sup>.

His *modus operandi* distinguishes him from other villains. He is originally a clown, a trickster, and a man of spectacle. Joker, of course, defies any attempt at identifying him coherently. He keeps changing his tactics and goals, which is how others, including Batman, perceive him. Hence, my objective is to identify his figure as a fatal man, since setting people in peril for his personal psychopathic deeds puts him in the category of *hommes fatals*. By the same token, Erich Fromm cautioning about evil-changing faces made the Joker

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<sup>21</sup>. Francis Hugh Mares, "The Origin of the Figure Called 'The Vice' in Tudor Drama," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (November 1958): 14.

<sup>22</sup>. Ágnes Matuska, *The Vice-Device: Iago and Lear's Fool as Agents of Representational Crisis* (JATEPress Kiadó, 2017), 48.

<sup>23</sup>. Mary E. Camp et al., "The Joker: A Dark Night for Depictions of Mental Illness," *Academic Psychiatry* 34, no. 2 (March 2010): 145-146.

seem to be clever enough with an enigmatic aura than his insane featuring character. He notifies that “as long as one believes that the evil man wears horns, one will not discover an evil man”<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, His *raison d'être* is the question of several scholars.

In his *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*<sup>25</sup>, Geoff Klock brings about the homoeroticism of The Joker's role in *The Dark Knight Returns* (2012) that embodies his relationship with Batman; however the dissonance between the erotic frame of earlier archetypes of *homme fatal* in film-noir and with which the Klock's identifies the Joker here are still not identical and neither I am searching for such similarity to dismantle the Joker puzzling figure. His homosexuality is one probability of numerous speculations concerning his remodeling of the classical *homme fatal* added to his possible asexuality. Nevertheless, neither of these points has been proved cinematically. The Joker is either framed as a total lethal man with a genderless victimization process with a past abusive marriage or as a possessive partner to Harley Quinn.

## Results and discussion

### 1. *Dark fatal*

Christopher Nolan's 2008 Joker's version is perhaps the greatest screening of the Joker from the comics to cinemas. *The Dark Knight* (2008) establishes a visual representation of binary oppositions: light and dark, good, and evil, chaos and order, justice, and anarchy. Evidently, Batman is the good knight in the story, ironically named “dark knight”; however, the real darkness hides between a colorful smiling “white” face who deems to be the villain. His psychopathy renders his character captivating, through which all psychopaths often seem to be more intelligent than the superheroes simply because they are unpredictable, and their mannerisms are so quirky to be considered original. He is committing crimes out of complete awareness of having fun though

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<sup>24</sup>. Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2013), 432.

<sup>25</sup>. Geoff Klock, *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why* (New York: Continuum, 2002).

his philosophy of chaos is never explained; he seems to have selfish desires to hurt others and disregard their existence. This in fact, has been further enlightened by Alfred warning Bruce about the tough task of stopping the Joker since he has no stop button nor an objective to reach; "...some men aren't looking for anything logical, like money. They can't be bought, bullied, reasoned, or negotiated with. Some men just want to watch the world burn."<sup>26</sup>

Calling all the sadism, he showed throughout the movie demonstrated that he is a fatal man who seeks to satisfy his desires. For instance, in the scene when the Joker has been interrogated by Detective Gerard Stephens, he explains why he uses knives instead of guns: Do you want to know why I use a knife? Guns are too quick. You can't savor all the... little emotions... you see, in their last moments, people show you who they really are"<sup>27</sup>. His ways of pursuing his goals through anarchy are different from what film noir does, Joker denies the existence of gender while selecting victims while the traditional *homme fatal* weaponizes his masculine deeds primarily to pursue his victims. Nevertheless, what they both do is a common thing of a fatal man, proving to their victims their vulnerability.

In the case of the Joker, he frightened, threatened, and killed the general populace, putting Gotham city in the state of anarchy he so desired. He turns Batman's strength into a weakness. Indeed, during Harvey Dent's transfer sequence to the central prison, Batman was chasing the Joker, and unsurprisingly, the latter did not run away but was waiting with a thrilling excitement; he repeatedly uttered, "come on, I want you to do it, come on hit me"<sup>28</sup>. He was there standing immobile while Batman's motor was approaching him not only because he does not fear death instead, but because he also wanted to change the morality of Batman which does not allow him to people. So, the more chaos the Joker causes, the more people he kills, and the further he proves that Batman's system has a weak point since the only solution to stop the Joker is by killing him, and Batman could never do this thing. This idea is what makes him fatal; he studies his opponents' minds very well and tries to defy their moral convictions.

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<sup>26</sup>. *The Dark Knight* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2008), 55min:00sec-55min:11sec.

<sup>27</sup>. *Ibidem*, 01h:33min:06sec-01h:33min:30sec.

<sup>28</sup>. *Ibidem*, 01h:22min:08sec- 01h:22min:17sec.

The series of conundrums he made did not affect Batman only but Harvey Dent as well as several other characters. In this vein, Polidori explained the magnetism *homme fatal* has that affects society; "his character was dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society"<sup>29</sup>.

The Joker succeeded in seducing Harvey Dent to be on the dark side after the death of Rachel. He made him believe that the only solution is to create your justice, not only your chance. Also, officer Ramirez betrays Harvey Dent for her mother's medical care bills after being threatened by the Joker. Hence, the seduction power that the Joker has is not sexualized but implies power and fearlessness that sets him up as an ominous character.

Moving to the Joker's iconic physicality, though, it looks so messy that it incited a carelessness of his outer image; Ledger's Joker tricks us again by taking care of his makeup and the greasy slicked back hairstyle to look like he is always ready to party and cease attention. He transformed the gentlemen's classy look of the classical *homme fatals* into a carnivalesque outfit that grants him full public notice all the time. Profoundly, the gambling motif in *The Dark Knight* is reminiscent of film noirs *homme fatals* gamblers who seek rich women to pay for their debts.

Cinematically, most of the Joker scenes are framed using low-key lighting from a single source. The key light is set at a 45 degree angle to the character, this creates contrast and lights up the face, leaving some of his faces in the shadow. This is often coupled with a smirking expression, his insolite lips' mannerisms that highlight his arrogance and egoism, emphasizing the dark tone of the film.

Gotham as well participated in the making of the film as a modern comic film noir. The dark city with approximately dark glass skyscrapers, in addition to the train lines and the down below railroads that have shot with low light features; all contributed to the mise-en-scène of the Joker as the twentieth century most eligible *homme fatal*.

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<sup>29</sup>. John Polidori, *The Vampyre: A Tale* (London: Sherwood, 1919) quoted in Samantha Jane Lindop, "Femmes, Filles, and Hommes: Postfeminism and the Fatal(e) Figure in Contemporary American Film Noir" (Thesis, The University of Queensland, 2014), 152.

What is interesting is that the cumulative effect of all these actions did not lead the Joker to his end. He is a fatal rebel but with a vampire twist. He is immortal in contrast to the classical *homme fatal*, who often dies or gets punished by a more powerful entity than his playfulness.

## 2. *Homme de Suicide*

David Ayer's *The Suicide Squad* (2016) marked the first filmic appearance of Harley Quinn. The complex narrative demonstrates another tumultuous romantic relationship between the Joker and Harley circulated in an atomic space. Before her transformation into Harley Quinn, Dr Harleen Quinzel was a psychiatrist at Harlem asylum, she was assigned to the Joker himself "she thought she was curing him, but she was falling in love"<sup>30</sup>. During the first sequence of introducing the Joker and Harley, both characters had an insightful conversation about the nature of their relationship,

Dr Quinzel. You know, I live for these moments with you. What do you got?  
I got you a kitty.  
So thoughtful.<sup>31</sup>

In this scene, his stares were intently trying to catch her empathy and attention as if Harley was resisting how he watches her. Leto's character was vicious with the possession of enticing skills of seduction as Praz states in his description of *homme fatal* "Who could avoid the fascination of his gaze? ... His mouth is bloody and smiles like that of a man asleep and tormented by hideous love"<sup>32</sup>. He was keen on her falling for him and that she could do anything he asked for, driven by her infatuation and his unusual charm. That's why he demanded a machine gun and eventually had it.

What is still intriguing is what hides in the shadows of his seduction. Was Jared Leto's Joker just a playful man with no serious love interests for Harley? Well, even before her transformation into the Joker's lover, he

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<sup>30</sup>. *Suicide Squad* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016), 09min:40sec-09min:45sec.

<sup>31</sup>. *Ibidem*, 09min:31sec-09min:42sec.

<sup>32</sup>. Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 77.

declared his interest, "Dr Quinzel. You know, I live for these moments with you," was a lie or a truth, still part of the plan<sup>33</sup>. He maintains selfish decisions to hurt others. In these accounts, Harley's jump into the chemical toxins to answer the Joker's question if she would die for him, then replies, "No, that's too easy. Would you live for me?" incites his manipulation of her feelings, however, his dive after her demonstrates that his disruptive state of mind<sup>34</sup>.

On the other hand, all the violence he committed was attended to keep her far from him; perhaps the Joker has another psychological weakness; fear of intimacy, which he tried to hide. Hatfield<sup>35</sup> explained the concept of a fear of intimacy and how men and women are different in their reactions to intimacy. Intimacy here to be clear, does not incite any sexual intercourse but how one could be close to another.

Elaine Hatfield argued that there are numerous reasons for this fear of intimacy which lies in the fear of exposure, fear of abandonment, fear of angry attacks, fear of loss of control, fear of one's own destructive impulses and a fear of losing one's individuality or of being engulfed.

First, fear of exposure is the deepest level of intimacy when boundaries fell, and all limits are concealed so that the significant other may know profound personal data. Second, fear of abandonment is constant thinking of losing the other or being left behind. To this point, the next calculations may line up with Leto's Joker. Fear of angry attacks and loss of control like what happened with their jump in the chemicals. What clearly happened with this version of the Joker is his fear to change from an *homme fatal* who can play with any woman and kill anyone to someone afraid of losing his lover. He feared his own destructive impulses because he knows that his madness may surpass his love, "that if they ever got in touch with what they are feeling, they would begin to cry....or kill"<sup>36</sup>. Finally, he feared that his affections for Harley may cost him his individuality or "engulfed" by her<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup>. *Suicide Squad* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016), 09min:31sec-09min:35sec.

<sup>34</sup>. *Ibidem*, 01h:15min:30sec-01h:15min:46sec.

<sup>35</sup>. Elaine Hatfield, "The Dangers of Intimacy," in *Communication, Intimacy, and Close Relationships*, ed. Valerian J Derlega (Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 1984).

<sup>36</sup>. *Ibidem*, 212.

<sup>37</sup>. *Ibidem*.

Again, the question I posited above of whether this is love or a master/doll game is without a concrete answer due to the numerous hypotheses that prove both cases. Be that as it may, his testimony to Harley during the motor chase of his car scene: "I am not someone who is loved. I'm an idea. State of mind. I execute my will according to my plan and you, Doctor, are not part of my plan" offers a clear explanation to his sadist *homme fatal* persona and his fear of losing the Joker he is<sup>38</sup>.

However, after his mad love intensified, his fierce devotion shifted toward protecting his lover. His fatal ending posits another question mark above his intentions. Wager underscores the double-edged fatality of *homme fatal*, "they are, above all, fatal to themselves"<sup>39</sup>. As they can hurt others, they are responsible for their ill-fated ends. Suicide Squad's Joker turns out to be a *Homme de suicide*, as I propose to label his character. He came to rescue her though he knew it would be a challenging mission. He was fatal to himself, equally to what he ventures to do to Harley and other victims.

## Conclusion

I contend that these two characters share common features with the classical *homme fatal*, most of which contribute to the *comic-ization* of their 'fatality'. Their destructiveness appears to be mixed with the comic tone of the genre and the clownish nature of their characters. Still, they are modernized *homme fatals*. Destructiveness, hideousness and rebellion appear to be essential when describing their behavior towards their carefully selected victims, but also towards themselves.

The Joker figure has been depicted as a force of chaos<sup>40</sup>, an evil person with no limits for his actions or external fear to stop his chaotic aspirations.

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<sup>38</sup>. *Suicide Squad* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016), 01h:06min:12sec-1h:06min:30sec.

<sup>39</sup>. Jans B. Wager, *Dames in the Driver's Seat: Rereading Film Noir* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 21.

<sup>40</sup>. Anna-Sophie Jürgens, "Batman's Joker, a Neo-Modern Clown of Violence," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 5, no. 4 (October 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2014.926956>.

Violence is his motive to live, whether it is targeting men or women. He is the ultimate ungendered modern *homme fatal* with the only difference between his unleashing violence and the classical *homme fatals* is their sexual romantic life

In fact, he is mentally ill, so perhaps his love life does not matter within his health conditions that's why he is always muting his emotions and reason and driven by his madness. The Joker is held by internal forces to his criminality, which means that the absence of self-control is the reason behind his crimes. *The Dark Knight's Joker* is a megalomaniac persona with no will to change since he is enjoying it.

On the other hand, *The Suicide Squad's Joker* is the victim of himself, his love and of his Jokerism. he could not find a way out of the two, so he was fatal to himself before killing anybody else. To sum up, I tried to fill the scholarly gap of seeing the Joker character as a modernized *homme fatal* though each version of the films shows a different persona. This did not forfeit the reality that the Joker is indeed an attractive psychopathic criminal that puts him in the same category of film noir criminals.

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AMIRA RIHAB SAIDI

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# **INTERVIEWS**



*Contemporary Theatre Directors  
About the Art of Directing and Theatre Pedagogy*

**Interview series by Ștefana POP-CURȘEU<sup>1</sup>**

*In order to have a view as broad as possible on contemporary theater making, including theatre and directing pedagogy, I thought of a few questions to be answered by theater professionals, answers that would give a consistent image of the state of facts and of future openings for theatre/stage directing.*

*I wondered if the complex definition given by Stanislavsky more than a century ago, at the very beginning of the director's era, or at least, parts of it, are still valid. This is why I'll start with it:*

"The director must not only know how to analyze the play, how to advise the actors on playing, how to use the sets the scenic designer gives him, but the director must know how to observe life. He should be equipped with the maximum possible knowledge of other fields. Sometimes this knowledge comes as an immediate result of the needs of a particular play, but it is better to store it up. One can accumulate one's observations specifically for the play, but one should really train oneself to observe life and put one's observations on the shelf of the subconscious. Later on they will stand the director in good stead. [...] I used to answer that a director is a matchmaker who brings together the playwright and the theatre and when the play is successful he brings happiness to both. Later on I used to say that a director is a midwife who brings to birth a performance, the new creation of art. As the midwife gets older she sometimes becomes a sorceress who knows a great deal. By the way, midwives are very observing in life. But now I think the role of a director is growing more and more complex. Politics is an integral part of our lives now. This means that the director's horizon includes the government's structure, the problems of our society. It means that we, directors of the

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theatre have much more responsibility and must develop a broader way of thinking. A director cannot limit his role to being a medium between author and audience. He cannot be just a midwife merely assisting at the birth of the performance. The director must be independent in his thinking and must arouse with his work the ideas necessary to contemporary society.”<sup>2</sup>

*I thank my colleagues for their diligence and for finding time to share with us their thoughts and professional beliefs. The respondents have been listed in an alphabetical order.*

### ROBERTO BACCI



(Theatre director, Italy, born 1949)

1. *Quel est d'après vous le rôle du metteur en scène dans le théâtre de nos jours?*

Se poser des questions sur ce que peut être la relation acteur-spectateur au-delà de la “représentation”. Créer une crise de son propre rôle de “compositeur” de spectacles et faire de chaque expérience un laboratoire autour de la signification du mot *théâtre* lui-même.

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<sup>2</sup>. Nikolai M. Gorchakov, *Stanislavski directs*, trans. By Miriam Goldina, (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1954) 16-17.

2. *Comment vous situez-vous par rapport à la création collective au théâtre et comment se modifie l'attitude du metteur en scène dans le cas d'une telle expérience artistique?*

Pour avoir une création collective, il faut un temps de travail qui ne peut pas exister aujourd'hui. La tâche du metteur en scène est de partir à la recherche de l'œuvre à réaliser et toutes les composantes de l'équipe qui y travaillent (acteurs, techniciens, etc.) doivent se mettre à la disposition de cette recherche. La tâche du metteur en scène est d'éviter de faire de la "médiation" entre les différentes composantes, ce qui, dans une œuvre collective, devient inévitable...

3. *Considérez-vous que ceux qui affirment la disparition du metteur en scène en tant que facteur déterminant dans la création théâtrale ont raison?*

La figure du metteur en scène, depuis son émergence récente, a donné au "théâtre d'acteur" et à l'auteur dramatique un grand élan pour se renouveler dans les formes et le processus de la production artistique. La mise en scène de théâtre est plus complexe et aussi plus libre de la tyrannie du texte. Cependant, compte tenu de la crise du théâtre de représentation, qui se trouve désormais au seuil d'une habitude de consommation de spectacles, le metteur en scène doit se poser de nouvelles questions sur le rôle possible de l'acteur et du spectateur. Il doit penser à diriger un atelier de questionnements.

4. *Est-ce que la pédagogie théâtrale a été ou peu devenir importante dans votre carrière? Pourquoi ?*

La pédagogie est le moment et le lieu où l'acteur (ou celui qui aspire à devenir acteur) et le metteur en scène peuvent dialoguer non seulement sur les techniques de la scène, mais aussi sur l'essence, je dirais philosophique, de la manière dont le théâtre peut explorer sa propre nature et les questions qui y sont liées. Que peut chercher l'être humain par rapport à l'expérience définie comme *théâtre* ? La pédagogie est l'un des aspects les plus créatifs de la pratique théâtrale, et nous devons aller au-delà de la technique, qui prévoit déjà le type de théâtre auquel elle est destinée, qu'il soit institutionnel ou

privé. Les techniques, elles aussi, doivent faire l'objet de critiques et de réflexions, comme si elles cherchaient un moment de résistance au destin de l'élève attendu par le marché du spectacle. Ainsi, les écoles de théâtre doivent assumer la tâche de "laboratoires" de formation et d'écoles de questionnements.

*5. Est-ce que la très récente période de pandémie a apporté une reconfiguration, une réinvention de votre travail en tant que metteur en scène ? Dans quel sens ?*

En ce qui concerne la période de pandémie, je ne peux donner qu'une réponse très personnelle et non générale. Ce furent des mois très importants pour moi, notamment parce qu'ils étaient libres du théâtre et de ses obligations. J'ai pu écrire, lire et méditer, sur des thèmes et des sujets extra-théâtraux, ce qui m'a paradoxalement ouvert à une vision différente de la nécessité du théâtre et de ses perspectives possibles d'utilisation et de développement. Surtout, le fait de pouvoir m'arrêter m'a amené à reconsidérer la relation et le sens de la relation acteur-spectateur.

*6. Quels sont les conseils que vous donneriez à un/une jeune qui aimerait faire des études de mise en scène ?*

La chose la plus importante que je voudrais qu'il comprenne, en dehors de quelques suggestions sur la profession, serait de ne pas penser au théâtre du futur, mais au futur du théâtre. Parce que ce seront deux histoires différentes.

## RODRIGO FRANCISCO



(Theatre director, Portugal, born 1981)

*1. Quel est d'après vous le rôle du metteur en scène dans le théâtre de nos jours?*

Je partage un peu de la vision de David Mamet sur le conseil qu'il donne aux metteurs en scène sur la meilleure façon de diriger ses textes : il faut qu'il arrive à la salle de répétitions, qu'il donne le texte aux acteurs, et qu'il parte dehors pour fumer ses cigarettes. J'ajouterai aussi une blague sur un grand metteur en scène roumain – Alexandru Dabija – qui m'a été racontée par les comédiens de la troupe du Théâtre National de Cluj: quand il dirige un comédien sur scène, il l'appelle à sa table de répétitions, il lui passe quelques Lei, et il le prie de faire le meilleur possible...

*2. Comment vous situez-vous par rapport à la création collective au théâtre et comment se modifie l'attitude du metteur en scène dans le cas d'une telle expérience artistique?*

Je ne sais rien de la création collective dans le théâtre. Je sais qu'il y a eu ce mouvement dans les années 60, dans le cas de groupes comme le Living Theatre, mais sincèrement je ne connais pas des exemples d'aujourd'hui qui soient vraiment intéressants. Bien sûr qu'il y a des groupes qui s'annoncent comme des structures de création collective, mais je ne sais pas si ça sera

vraiment le cas, ou si, par contre, il y a toujours de « grands démiurges » cachés derrière l'étiquette de la création collective. Je crois même que, en ce qui concerne le théâtre, l'expression « création collective » est un peu un oxymore.

*3. Considérez-vous que ceux qui affirment la disparition du metteur en scène en tant que facteur déterminant dans la création théâtrale ont raison?*

Absolument ! Peter Stein m'a avoué une fois qu'il est devenu metteur en scène parce qu'il aimait le théâtre, mais il n'avait aucun talent pour faire du théâtre. Et alors il a choisi la seule profession dans le théâtre pour laquelle il ne faut avoir aucun talent – ça veut dire, la profession de metteur en scène. Je me revois beaucoup dans cet exemple. Moi aussi, j'aime le théâtre, mais je n'arrive qu'à être, dans les répétitions, une espèce de police du trafic, organisant dans l'espace les entrées et les sorties des comédiens. Avec l'invention des feux, je crois qu'on peut renvoyer les metteurs en scène en dehors de la salle de répétitions, pour fumer leurs cigarettes.

*4. Est-ce que la pédagogie théâtrale a été ou peu devenir importante dans votre carrière? Pourquoi ?*

Je n'ai jamais étudié le théâtre d'une façon théorique. J'ai fait mes études de Littérature Portugaise et Anglaise, en même temps que je travaillais déjà dans une troupe de théâtre. Ma relation avec cet art a toujours été assez pratique, alors, je ne peux pas répondre à cette question.

*5. Est-ce que la très récente période de pandémie a apporté une reconfiguration, une réinvention de votre travail en tant que metteur en scène ? Dans quel sens ?*

Aucune réinvention. C'était un tout petit, drôle de moment dans nos vies, qu'on veut oublier le plus vite possible.

*6. Quels sont les conseils que vous donneriez à un/une jeune qui aimerait faire des études de mise en scène ?*

En tous les cas, quand un jeune vient vers moi et me dit qu'il veut travailler dans le théâtre, la première chose que je lui dis, c'est d'oublier cette bêtise. La seconde, c'est d'essayer d'entrer au conservatoire/à l'université et de se mettre à étudier.

## EUGEN JEBELEANU



(Theatre director, Romania and France, born 1989)

*1. Quel est d'après vous le rôle du metteur en scène dans le théâtre de nos jours?*

Personnellement, je crois que le rôle du metteur en scène aujourd'hui est d'accompagner le travail d'une équipe, d'être à l'endroit du chef d'orchestre, et de faire en sorte que chacun et chacune des personnes impliquées dans le projet soient au mieux de leur potentiel. Et cela, à l'aide du metteur en scène qui doit être là pour faire briller les gens autour de lui.

*2. Comment vous situez-vous par rapport à la création collective au théâtre et comment se modifie l'attitude du metteur en scène dans le cas d'une telle expérience artistique?*

Je ne conçois le théâtre que comme un art collectif, et je ne crois pas qu'un questionnement de la hiérarchie entre les personnes qui constituent une équipe serait impossible, parce qu'on a dépassé l'ère où le metteur en scène se trouve au centre de la création, et finalement on se met tous à égalité et on essaye de construire ensemble. Donc pour moi le théâtre est un art collectif, et je dis cela du point de vue du metteur en scène que je suis... mon attitude change juste parce que je suis celui qui autorise, mais je n'ai pas besoin de prouver mon autorité par la violence, la colère ou la revendication de mon statut supérieur dans une hiérarchie traditionnelle.

3. *Considérez-vous que ceux qui affirment la disparition du metteur en scène en tant que facteur déterminant dans la création théâtrale ont raison?*

Je crois que la place du metteur en scène est importante dans la création et je ne crois pas que c'est une espèce en voie d'extinction, je ne crois pas qu'on assiste à la disparition du metteur en scène. Et si c'est le cas, si c'est la disparition d'un genre de metteur en scène tyrannique et dictateur à laquelle on assiste, alors je me dis que c'est une bonne chose et je préfère assister à son enterrement et faire le deuil de ce metteur en scène-là, pour laisser apparaître un autre metteur en scène d'aujourd'hui, plus attentif à ses collaborateurs, à la scène, et surtout au spectateur et aux problématiques qu'on ramène sur le plateau.

4. *Est-ce que la pédagogie théâtrale a été ou peu devenir importante dans votre carrière? Pourquoi ?*

L'enseignement est essentiel, oui. Et puis je crois qu'il y a un grand problème en Roumanie, dans les théâtres d'État surtout, mais aussi un manque dans les projets indépendants que je vois, qui vient de l'absence du dramaturge, de la dramaturgie et je crois que c'est à cet endroit-là qu'on pourra faire évoluer les choses, s'il y avait une sorte de vigilance et d'intérêt pour construire des spectacles avec l'idée que la dramaturgie est celle qui donne la clé et la base d'un projet théâtral.

5. *Est-ce que la très récente période de pandémie a apporté une reconfiguration, une réinvention de votre travail en tant que metteur en scène ? Dans quel sens ?*

La pandémie a tout questionné, mais je crois que de toute façon les artistes doivent être dans un permanent mouvement de quête, de réinvention, et la pandémie n'a fait que ralentir un peu le rythme, malheureusement pour le reprendre ensuite d'une façon encore plus rapide. Je crois qu'on a pris le temps de se poser des questions sur l'utilité du théâtre pendant cette période, mais on a perdu ensuite aussi le sens de sa nécessité, car on recommence à courir dans tous les sens pour atteindre un objectif quelconque, je ne sais pas lequel mais qui ferait de l'art un objet de divertissement. Je crois que peut-être ce qu'il faut garder de cette pandémie, c'est l'action de ralentir.

6. *Quels sont les conseils que vous donneriez à un/une jeune qui aimerait faire des études de mise en scène ?*

Alors, je n'aime pas donner des conseils, mais je crois que chercher, se chercher, voir, connaître, voyager, découvrir, ce sont des choses essentielles pour un metteur en scène d'aujourd'hui, qui ne peut plus rester dans sa bulle, à créer des spectacles dans sa tête, pour son petit milieu et pour le plaisir de l'art. Un jeune metteur en scène d'aujourd'hui serait un artiste responsable, qui se préoccupe du monde dans lequel il vit, le questionne, le confronte le contredit si besoin est, et s'intéresse à faire bouger les choses, dépasser les limites et se concentrer, retourner à l'essentialité de théâtre, comme je disais auparavant, et cela vers un théâtre profondément politique qui questionne et creuse notre actualité et le monde dans lequel on vit.

### ADINA LAZĂR



(Theatre director, Romania, born 1987)

1. *Which do you think would be the place and the role of the theatre director in nowadays performing arts?*

I see the director as being more of a facilitator these days. The old boundaries that existed between the artists involved in a theatrical production have shifted, becoming more malleable and blurred. Hence, the director has

lost/ is in the process of losing his/her god-like status. It is my opinion that, in the post dramatic era, the focus has migrated from the glorification of a single person to viewing the overall working process and recognizing the merit of the whole team in the said process.

The director must oversee the harmonious blending of the ideas belonging to the persons involved in the creative mechanism. He/she must create a fertile ground for everybody to be able to come fourth with the best one has to offer.

*2. Do you agree with the voices that claim the disappearance of the theater director as the determinant factor in contemporary and future theatrical creation? Why?*

I consider this to be an overstatement. Although I personally support the idea of a collective creation, I find it necessary for someone, in this case the director, to assume a coordinative role. In the absence of an overall vision, carefully steering everybody's ideas towards unity there is the risk of getting stuck in the realm of what I call endless possibilities.

*3. What piece of advice would you give young people who want to study theatre directing?*

The most important piece of advice that I would give to someone taking up directing is one that was given to me by Mihai Măniuțiu when I was his student: before staging a play, take some time to analyze the city, the inhabitants and what the theatre has to offer (infrastructural and people wise). It is important to produce something relevant that will make an impact on the community, while you put to good use the theatre's resources.

Secondly, I would advise not to take on the BIG plays just for the sake of staging a notorious play. Do so, only if it "speaks" to you. Theatre directing is a mean of expression. Always ask yourself "what do I want to express with this staging?"

## ANDREI MĂJERI



(Theatre director, Romania, born 1990)

*1. Which do you think would be the place and the role of the theatre director in nowadays performing arts?*

I think the answer to this question is an ever-changing one, both at the general level of the theatrical guild and at the particular level of the artist. After nine years of doing professional theatre, I still find that the best definition of a director is that given by Aureliu Manea, who saw him/her as an “engineer of attention”. What this attention falls on, more on aesthetics or message, depends on one’s sensibility. So, multiple places and multiple roles.

*2. How do you feel about devised-theater and how is the theater director’s attitude changing in this case?*

Theatre itself is a collective creation, regardless of the director’s degree of autocracy. I’ve also worked in devised theatre, but mostly I’ve worked with ready-made teams of state theatres, which I’ve tried, here and there, to destabilise in order to access skills outside their comfort zone. Over time,

I learned to listen more, to leave room for creativity, not to show (which I did extremely rarely), but to challenge the co-creators of the performance to walk in the same creative direction with me. I look at collective creation with a lot of interest, but also with some misgivings about the training and ability of some artists to coordinate masses.

*3. Do you agree with the voices that claim the disappearance of the theater director as the determinant factor in contemporary and future theatrical creation? Why?*

I've been hearing this idea since I first got involved in theatre more than 10 years ago. It's certainly much older. No, I don't think so. Tastes change, new themes emerge, arts adjacent to the stage emerge, but as far as I can see, theatre directing endures. It's changing (and it should) on a much more subtle level, feminine directing is becoming much more visible (which is wonderful) and also previously unaddressed themes are emerging, themes that had been unfairly banished to the low art area.

*4. Was theater pedagogy important or could it become so in your professional career? Why?*

It could become. Although I used to deny this area, believing it was important to develop as a practitioner, I now think more and more about whether I can and how important it is to pass on what I've learned over the years. So yes, it's a question. I'm seriously thinking about it more and more. I don't know to what extent I could fool young students, though... because I'm a more direct, trenchant nature, and universities seem to have a completely different logic, that of numbers. This is where I oscillate.

*5. Did the recent pandemic period lead to a reconfiguration or a reinvention of your work as a theatre director or not? Could you give details?*

I'd like to say yes, but I think it happened on a much more subtle level. I've been leaning more towards writing, both academically/theoretically (completing my PhD) and creatively (writing plays). I'm more interested in themes I hadn't previously tackled, such as mental health, co-authorship, co-production, etc.

6. *What piece of advice would you give young people who want to study theatre directing?*

To a young man or woman who would like to start studying theatre directing, I would say to go to the theatre as much as possible, to the point of no return, to see everything and to learn to detect those moments when intuition works, in order to bait it when it doesn't. I'd also tell him/her that it's a field of many humiliations, of a generalized precariousness, of long-range thinking. And if all of the above seems too hard, think about the fact that it's actually infinitely harder, because you have in all of these contexts, to stay in dialogue with yourself.

### RADU NICA



(Theatre director, Romania, born 1979)

1. *Which do you think would be the place and the role of the theatre director in nowadays performing arts?*

I believe that the director's position of almost supreme authority, which he gained during the 20th century, is strongly questioned in a period that is intensely relativizing any form of single and immutable hierarchy, but

the practice of performance creation confirms that there is still a need for an outside authority to look in from the outside and have decision-making powers, and that there must be a common point of reference for the creative team, even if all these things are no longer represented by a single person vested as such with quasi-full powers. In short, even if the director (especially the male director) is increasingly contested, the directorial function in a performance is something that cannot be bypassed without negatively impacting on the quality and coherence of that performance.

2. *How do you feel about devised-theater and how is the theater director's attitude changing in this case?*

I think devised-theatre is a good sign and it is in line with the increasingly evident democratisation of the social contexts in which we live. It was clear that a 2,500-year-old quasi-stable hierarchy spectacularly usurped in less than a century by the director (seen in some cases as the sole author of the show) would give rise to a movement of opposition that was appreciably equal to the force initially displaced. I believe that the director cannot ignore this phenomenon and needs to self-question, reinvent, adapt – especially in relation to his power relation to the rest of the creative team.

3. *Do you agree with the voices that claim the disappearance of the theater director as the determinant factor in contemporary and future theatrical creation? Why?*

As is results from my answer to the first question, I believe that those who postulate this are either in a hurry or unconnected even to collaborative practices, which, however anarchic they may be in terms of the desire to abolish any form of oppressive authority, need an instance that detaches itself from the artistic product, judges the whole with some objectivity and makes decisions. This function is, in my opinion, *sine qua non*. So even if the director, as he was understood in the 20th century, disappears (although I don't think so, I just think we are going through a natural period of relativisation of his status), directing will only die when theatre dies.

4. *Was theater pedagogy important or could it become so in your professional career? Why?*

It has been since the beginning of my career. In my case, it has also had a formative character for the way I understand how to practice the directing profession and I try with each generation of students to let myself be influenced and challenged by their tastes, concerns and ideas, but also to share with them the experience I have gained in theatres over the years. In my case, it has to do, I think, with the fundamental need to transmit something from this very particular form of self-knowledge and knowledge of the world that only theatre offers. As an aside, I firmly believe that authority and respect in relation with the students can be gained primarily through theatrical experience and practice (as diverse and valuable as possible) and through the professional validation offered by the theatrical guild.

5. *Did the recent pandemic period lead to a reconfiguration or a reinvention of your work as a theatre director or not? Could you give details?*

It has been a reconfiguration for all of us in one way or another. Some preferred to wait for the pandemic to pass without doing anything, arguing (with valid arguments in some cases, but in others only as a good excuse for self-sufficiency) that theatre cannot take place outside the audience in real time in front of the performing actors, and some others (and we were fewer) who tried to show their creativity through hybrid formulas, questioning the very basic laws of theatre. I think the second position was less comfortable and more ungrateful. I wonder what would have happened if we had never returned to a certain normality: would theatre have died? Or just a (good) part of theatre artists?

6. *What piece of advice would you give young people who want to study theatre directing?*

First of all, he/she must be 100% convinced that he/she wants to pursue this profession, that he/she permanently feels the need to express him/herself in *this* way, that he/she cannot imagine life any other way. If that's not the case, I don't think it's worth the effort – it's a very hard environment to break into, and it's perhaps even harder to maintain or evolve over the years, which is basically true for all artists.

**GAVRIIL PINTE**



(Theatre director, Romania, born 1961)

*1. Quel est d'après vous le rôle du metteur en scène dans le théâtre de nos jours?*

Après l'avènement du metteur en scène dans le paysage théâtral, il y a eu des moments et encore plus des cas de suprématie, voire de dictature, du metteur en scène, tout comme il y a eu des moments et, encore plus, des cas de « démocratisation » de l'équipe de création, mais je crois qu'aujourd'hui nous n'assistons pas à un changement essentiel de la place et du rôle du metteur en scène dans l'art du théâtre. La façon de travailler et l'approche de certaines mises en scène ont changé, mais je crois que la place et le rôle du metteur en scène restent ce qu'ils sont depuis des décennies.

*2. Comment vous situez-vous par rapport à la création collective au théâtre et comment se modifie l'attitude du metteur en scène dans le cas d'une telle expérience artistique?*

Je considère que les représentations théâtrales sont une création collective. Mais si nous appelons « création collective » les cas où la mise en

scène est collective ou le rôle du metteur en scène est assumé par l'ensemble du collectif artistique du spectacle, alors je crois que les résultats réussis (ceux qui ont un sens théâtral) ne sont possibles que dans des cas rares et isolés et ne peuvent pas devenir une pratique courante, aussi séduisante que puisse paraître la « démocratisation » du théâtre pour certains. Si le metteur en scène fait partie de projets visant une telle « création collective », je ne sais pas vraiment quels devrait être son attitude et le sens de sa présence.

3. *Considérez-vous que ceux qui affirment la disparition du metteur en scène en tant que facteur déterminant dans la création théâtrale ont raison?*

Il me semble que non. Parce que les problèmes qui ont rendu l'apparition du metteur en scène nécessaire n'ont pas disparu, ne disparaissent pas et ne peuvent être résolus par quelqu'un d'autre. J'ai regardé des spectacles où la part du metteur en scène était surpassée par des idées/solutions managériales ou idéologiques; les résultats étaient si médiocres qu'ils ont, en fait, crédité le besoin même d'un metteur en scène.

4. *Est-ce que la pédagogie théâtrale a été ou peu devenir importante dans votre carrière? Pourquoi ?*

J'ai été diplômé d'une école de théâtre, avec une spécialisation en théâtre, j'étais un acteur, je jouais. En tant qu'acteur, j'ai mis en scène deux spectacles. J'ai été aussi enseignant à l'université dans le cadre du département de théâtre, travaillant avec de futurs acteurs. Et pourtant, quand cela a été possible\*, j'ai passé l'examen de spécialisation en mise en scène théâtrale, j'ai été admis et j'ai suivi les cours, cinq ans. C'est pourquoi je pense que j'avais besoin de me « former » en tant que (futur) metteur en scène. La quantité de métier que l'on peut « voler » et la quantité qu'un autodidacte peut accumuler, aussi assidu soit-il, je considère que cela n'aurait pas été suffisant pour moi.

(\* En Roumanie, de 1981 à 1990, la mise en scène était étudiée uniquement à Bucarest, le soir (cours du soir) ; pour être admis à ces cours du soir, il fallait être employé à Bucarest ou dans un rayon de je ne sais combien de kilomètres autour de Bucarest – le jour au travail, le soir à l'université. Mais Bucarest était une « ville fermée », pour avoir un emploi à Bucarest, il fallait avoir une carte d'identité de Bucarest donc vivre à Bucarest... pratiquement, il s'agissait

en fait d'une université exclusivement réservée aux résidents de Bucarest et à ceux qui avaient des combines et des relations et, qui plus est, des relations qui pouvaient fournir la preuve que vous aviez un emploi ou viviez (même si cela n'était pas vrai) à Bucarest.)

5. *Est-ce que la très récente période de pandémie a apporté une reconfiguration, une réinvention de votre travail en tant que metteur en scène ? Dans quel sens ?*

J'ai travaillé à deux spectacles pendant la pandémie, une combinaison entre le « en ligne » (surtout pendant la période de préparation, du travail sur le texte) et le « en présentiel » (pendant la période de réalisation effective), mais cela ne signifiait pas (dans mon cas) reconfigurer ou réinventer mon travail de metteur en scène.

6. *Quels sont les conseils que vous donneriez à un/une jeune qui aimerait faire des études de mise en scène ?*

D'abord, je lui dirais de faire autre chose. S'il laisse tomber, cela veut dire qu'il n'avait pas de vocation. Mais s'il n'y renonce pas, alors... Je lui dirais peut-être que beaucoup de choses peuvent être apprises. Je lui conseillerais peut-être de s'instruire (maintenant, grâce à internet, nous avons accès à des spectacles et même à des répétitions que nous ne pouvons pas voir en vrai, pour diverses raisons ; et cet accès, jusqu'à récemment, était difficile ou même impossible), car il faut se garder d'inventer des choses qui ont été inventées depuis longtemps.

Mais je lui dirais aussi d'être attentif à ce qui lui arrive, à ce qu'il découvre personnellement dans ses répétitions, dans ses propres spectacles, car ces découvertes personnelles peuvent devenir essentielles pour façonner une poétique de la mise en scène. Je lui conseillerais peut-être de surprendre son public, mais de manière justifiée, car s'il ne surprend pas, il devient ennuyeux, et s'il le fait sans justification, il est un imposteur. Je lui conseillerais peut-être aussi de se méfier des scénographies décoratives et lui demanderais gentiment (j'en suis sûr !) de ne pas faire de spectacles illustratifs (qui se bornent à illustrer le texte/le drame).

## LETA POPESCU



(Theatre director, Romania, born 1989)

1. *Which do you think would be the place and the role of the theatre director in nowadays performing arts?*

It depends on what kind of theatre we are talking about, the roles vary, the working methods are different, sometimes the director is a coordinator of ideas, an editor of ideas, sometimes he is the one who imposes the direction. I can't give a general answer about the role of the director today, I think that's what theatre critics are good at. I can talk about my role as a director within a team.

I would say that I feel more comfortable in the "classic" role of the director, the "old style" coordinator of the whole team so as to make a performance that starts from my inner need. I am not a "new style" collective creation director, although I have a portfolio of shows signed in this way.

The theatre performance is intrinsically a collective creation in which a group of people with different professions work together with the same target: the making of the performance. But who gives the performance its purpose? This is where the difference between 'old style' and 'new style' comes in. The old-style purpose is given by the director. And when I say purpose I mean direction, line, atmosphere, everything.

In the case of collective creations “in the new style”, the theme on which a performance will be built is decided from the beginning. Then texts are written, the concept is thought up together, ideas are put on the table, debated, voted on and decided on together. But this really happens in consolidated groups and I don’t know of such a thing in Romania, or maybe there are two such places but I’m not putting my hand in the fire for it.

As I don’t have a stable group to work with and I don’t have a wide range of talents (I’m only good at directing and maybe at writing a little), I’m an old-style director, i.e. I have the power of decision: I propose (in different contexts) a theme, an idea, a text or I work together with a playwright and I take the team on my way. It is sometimes said that the director is a “guide” but also that we can “guide through the darkness”. But we don’t know everything either, and we search, and we can set off if not from point zero, then from point 0.1. The classical director doesn’t go off into the dark without a luggage, without an intuition, without a plan and variations of plans. In the end, it is the director who leads. But because we are in a sensitive age, in a time when we react offensively to authority, we confuse the director with a despotic ruler. Let’s remind ourselves from time to time that, however seriously we take it, theatre is a sort of a game. And that, if you look at the children when they are playing, you will see that one or another of them will suggest: “Let’s say I was the father”. It’s the same with directing: “Let’s say I was the leader and you came and did this and that”. Through this agreement, that yes, we do this together, the game, meaning the theatre, the rehearsals become a space of pleasure in which the roles of power disappear, leaving room for the “unwritten contract” in which we do together what we know best and then invite strangers to watch what we have done.

*2. How do you feel about devised-theater and how is the theater director’s attitude changing in this case?*

The theatre performance is a collective creation. But with variations: there are collective creations coordinated by a director in his or her own image, and there are collective creations without a director (but not without directing) in which the role of director is taken over by a well-established

group of artists in which the roles are interwoven towards a common goal. But in the absence of a group that shares the same values, the same creed, the same quests, there is no collective creation without a director. That's why we, directors, can't go into theatres to make collective creations, devised theatre in the new style. It's a contradiction. True devised theatre can be done with a troupe you belong to. Otherwise we make our job as coordinating and leading directors of all functions in the theatre. In 6 weeks of meetings, nobody does any collective creation. It's a kind of directing that's slightly more open to what everyone has to say.

3. *Do you agree with the voices that claim the disappearance of the theater director as the determinant factor in contemporary and future theatrical creation? Why?*

I don't know what the director's disappearance means and what exactly it refers to. The debate is not new to me, but not something that scares me either. I mean that the totalitarian director, yelling at actors to jump off the rail and hang in the air for a few more seconds, has to disappear. And together with him will disappear many theatrical creations. Then others will appear, then they will disappear again, and so on. This dynamic of theatre belongs to it, it is something specific to it. Theatre is a living thing, it changes with the world, it can't stay frozen somewhere. It's also embarrassing when it does.

So the director can finally disappear... because directing will never disappear. Directing is the red thread of any kind of performative expression/theatrical creation. Directing is the decision, directing is the attitude, directing is the combination of all factors put together in a second of performance or an 8 hour show. Whether the decision is made by one man, or whether it is put to a vote, or whether it is chosen by pulling out of a hat, or whether it is well thought out by a group of people, or by one singleperson, it's all perfectly equal. Directing will not disappear, but the director can.

Another point in the debate with the disappearance of the director is the one I mentioned above, I'll repeat myself a little: I feel that generally there is a hatred of the director as of any kind of authority, and this is because the

director is invested with an authority. I'd like to settle things right: the roles are very clearly divided, and the director without the actor equals zero. The actor without the director will survive, but not without a direction (unless he directs himself). But if in a rehearsal room an actor refuses to carry out a direction, the game is over. There is no authority in the director. The director is himself just a convention.

4. *Was theater pedagogy important or could it become so in your professional career? Why?*

I'm at the stage where it can become. I don't know why. I love theatre and I want to pass it on. Not my theatre but theatre with all its billions of possibilities. I'd like to know that I've given a hand in developing theatre in different directions.

5. *Did the recent pandemic period lead to a reconfiguration or a reinvention of your work as a theatre director or not? Could you give details?*

No. Unfortunately, not. I say this sadly because I wanted to have an epiphany or two and fall in love with the online side too, and find something new, be part of the change. Nothing happened to me. On the contrary. I felt that theatre is valuable in its living, authentic form. I told you I was old-fashioned. Yet I try not to be dusty. I mean, we all know that Romanian theatre is full of dust. Both on the creation side and on the audience side. And it's boring. And it's *lame*, that is: pathetic. Theatre can easily become lame. The period during the pandemic and after the pandemic has reinforced these convictions for me.

6. *What piece of advice would you give young people who want to study theatre directing?*

To get to work! 😊

**ELI SIMON**



(Theatre director, USA, UCI, born 1957)

1. *Which do you think would be the place and the role of the theatre director in nowadays performing arts?*

I can only answer for American directors, of course. The director is seeking to clarify the relevance of the play to modern audiences. This is especially true when making a bridge, for example, between Shakespeare and a world that has been so altered by Covid and the Social Justice movement. How does this play speak to us now? What is our intended take-away? How are we moved by themes that were relevant then and are still resonant now? What do we learn from this play, these actors in the here and now? The American director is still the organizing force behind the entire production and concerned with the design of the show, casting, staging and all elements of performance.

2. *How do you feel about devised-theater and how is the theater director's attitude changing in this case?*

My feeling about devised theater is that it must be founded on some kind of training technique. This is very often a movement based in America, following in the footsteps of Anne Bogart and her development and deployment

of Viewpoints. But it can also be improvisational in nature. The main point is that the company is thoroughly trained in techniques that bind them as one, and give them a viable means of expression. Without this, the devised work often is not grounded in a performative reality and it turns to mush.

3. *Do you agree with the voices that claim the disappearance of the theater director as the determinant factor in contemporary and future theatrical creation? Why?*

In my experience, there will always be someone that makes the final call. You can say that's the Director or you can say it's the lead actor, or the stage manager, or even the head of your theater board, but someone has to have the final say. What stays in the piece and what is left out? If you leave this to the group, there will often be disagreement, acrimony, and ultimately lesser works of art. Within every group, someone becomes a leader. I call that person the director.

4. *Was theater pedagogy important or could it become so in your professional career? Why?*

Yes. It's always been important and remains so. We have to know where we've been in order to determine where we are and where we are headed. This is the purpose of pedagogy. It creates a foundation for the work and a context within which new works can be created. The truth is that nobody is creating a work that is completely "stand alone." We are always borrowing ideas from other writers, directors, actors, designers, companies, performances, training techniques. It's important to know where your work originated, how it came to be what it is now, and who is influencing you.

5. *Did the recent pandemic period lead to a reconfiguration or a reinvention of your work as a theatre director or not? Could you give details?*

I learned about creating films and live performances that could be viewed remotely. I did not want to learn about this and never imagined that I'd be creating Zoom shows. I mostly hated directing on Zoom although our performances were received positively and kept our company connected with our audiences and supporters. As soon as we could safely return to live

theater viewed by live audiences, we did just that (last summer's New Swan season). I do not miss creating "pandemic plays." Many of my beliefs were fortified by the pandemic: There is nothing as powerfully moving to humans as participating in live theater – whether you are performing or in the audience. A synergy is created between performer and spectator that cannot be replicated through computers. Zoom is isolating – actors could not get their timing just right due to the lag in sound. And performing in isolation is nothing like being in a dressing room with the company, then preparing backstage, then performing together on stage.

The upside of the pandemic is that I reached out to performers around the world and learned about their approaches to Shakespeare and language. We created a series of films – *All The World's A Stage* – featuring actors performing Shakespeare in their own language and also in English. We talked about translation and we learned so much about culture, language, and theater abroad.

*6. What piece of advice would you give young people who want to study theatre directing?*

My advice: Do not study directing alone. Read books. Go to plays. Watch movies. Visit museums. Talk to artists great and small. Study psychology. Find out what motivates people. Be aware of politics, political movements, and what's happening locally and globally. Stay as open to input as you can. Think about what is theatrical in an arrangement of furniture. Everything you look at can be a source of inspiration. Pay attention to sounds, music, and how it affects you. Learn to be in the moment.

And figure out what you have to say. No easy task. As much as you look outward, look inward too. Figure out who you are and what's important to you.

Make friends. Surround yourselves with artists that will support you and that you can support. Learn to treat people with respect. You'll get the best of your company when you sincerely treat them as you would want them to treat you.

**TOMPA GABOR**



(Theatre director, Romania and Hungary, born 1957)

1. *Which do you think would be the place and the role of the theatre director in nowadays performing arts?*

In the history of modern performance, ever since the emergence of directing as a profession in its own right, recognised as an art, it has always been, and continues to be, not so much about staging a play, but about expressing a vision of the world, expressed in the conception of a theatre performance. The director is the author or co-author of a play today, but he is also a possible animator within a company of actors and continues to be, in my opinion, the central axis of the theatrical Idea. The director ensures the unity of the stage work: stylistic unity, unity of vision, unity of language, and as such he/she is the main author of the theatrical performance, however much some may deny it.

2. *How do you feel about devised-theater and how is the theater director's attitude changing in this case?*

There are very few examples (they exist but they are very few) where we can talk about a collective theatre direction. A collective creation, of course, not only in devised theatre... each element, each artist who participates in the

creation of a stage act, of a theatre performance, and who is therefore part of the creative team, contributes creatively to it. The problem is that someone always has to assume the idea, the conception, the main thought of a work, someone who coordinates or subordinates all the other elements. And then, of course, we have a creation in which each element is an organic part of the work of art and so we can say that every theatre performance is a collective creation; but there are very few examples where we can see a conception that belongs to a collective made up of several creators. There are, of course, examples, but collective creation does not actually exclude the presence and importance of direction in theatre or film, where it is even more visible.

3. *Do you agree with the voices that claim the disappearance of the theater director as the determinant factor in contemporary and future theatrical creation? Why?*

I think these are theoretical-speculative tendencies. I would like to see examples. If we look and list the most important contemporary theatre performances, they are by great masters or young directors... I can't believe in this so-called disappearance. It's not a reality. Of course the director can step back or go into hiding, but he doesn't disappear. Because the theatre performance is not about the director, he should not be as a person at the centre of a performance. At the centre is the idea that comes from the vision he/she has of the world in the first place, expressed through specific, theatrical means.

But I don't know of any examples, and I've seen quite a few shows and worked in over 20 countries, but I haven't noticed that the disappearance of the director is a dominant phenomenon. Everywhere you look in German theatre, from Ostermeier to Stefan Kaegi to Milo Rau, there are very different directors with very different styles, and we are talking about current theatre, the most important creations in the world of contemporary theatre. Krystian Lupa, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Romeo Castellucci, but also young people... look what is happening in Romania: Eugen Jebeleanu, Gianina Cărbunariu, Radu Afrim and so many others, so everything that is important, in 99% of cases in the theatrical world, is linked to the name of a director, who obviously does not create a stage work alone, but is there and puts his personal print on the performance.

And audiences continue to be interested by these directors' creations. I don't know where the director has no importance at all, but yes, maybe in Central Africa, in places where the director hasn't even appeared yet, yes, in a tribal society or an archaic community. Nor in traditional oriental theatre... directing is not so important in forms like No, Kabuki, Kathakali, they are inherited creations, they are passed on as a form, and a form that has not evolved by negating what came before, as it happened in European culture. In western culture, every new trend was born as a reaction to what came before, whereas in Oriental culture there is this continuity. Of course, now another phenomenon has appeared, that of commercialization and Americanization, or of the attempt to Americanize Oriental theatre, but there you have a devaluation of the theatrical act and so you don't need a director for that...

Of course there are shows where the creation is devised, but maybe the direction is devised... because we see that there are already driverless buses and subways, so... this is the digital and automatized world, but also a dehumanized world.

So I personally, walking around the world, I haven't had that experience, I mean I haven't noticed that the trend of the disappearance of the director is a major one or characteristic of our times.

*4. Was theater pedagogy important or could it become so in your professional career? Why?*

First of all, I believe that in art education there is no stronger, more effective and better model than the relationship between master and disciple, mentor and student. This is why I am convinced that the Bolognese system is harmful to art education. It can create a kind of system like that of the doctors in spite of themselves, in which in the art of theatre or in theatre education, those who have never set foot on the stage teach acting, those who have never staged a major theatrical performance in their lives teach directing. It's the equivalent of what would happen if someone who can't play the violin taught violin. That's why I have also withdrawn from the education system in Romania and in Europe in general, because this system ends up putting the professor in the foreground instead of the student. So it

is more important to have a department where you have to have a number of hours, there is a very strict bureaucracy, some schemes that actually cannot be applied to art education.

But in the United States, where I thought, artistic excellence is equivalent to a PHD. So you're not going to ask Itzhak Perlman to write a PhD so he can teach violin. And in the same logic, Victor Rebengiuc shouldn't have been asked to get a PhD to teach acting. We just need to take advantage of and learn from what they are practically doing. Now, we can take a look back in time: when I was a directing student in Bucharest, where I had as teachers Cătălina Buzoianu, Liviu Ciulei, Dinu Cernescu, who were among the most remarkable directors, and before that Penciulescu, Esrig, who had their own working groups, at that time, Octavian Cotescu, Marin Morau, Olga Tudorache, Amza Pelea, Sanda Manu, Dem Rădulescu, Beate Fredanov were the teachers in Acting, and their assistants were Florin Zamfirescu, Ion Caramitru, Ovidiu Schumacher and so on. So after the classes, the students would go to the performances and they would breathlessly follow how these extraordinary artists did their work on stage.

Well, these things are disappearing, and in fact it is a universal phenomenon, superficiality dominates both school education, where for example during the 12 years of school you do not acquire a real general culture even if you take the Baccalauréat. Everything is extremely superficial, and the requirements are also extremely superficial, so that a young person graduating high school knows neither geography, nor history, nor literature, nor mathematics, nor anatomy. In some schools they don't even teach anatomy, for example, my daughter, who graduated a music high school, never studied anatomy. Impossible! We must learn that all these disciplines are complementary and are an important tool in our efforts to understand the world, to understand natural phenomena and so on. Neither can art be made by someone who is only interested in literature and has no idea... let's say, what the capital of Denmark is. It's unacceptable.

There was a recent study showing that the level of intelligence (not to mention the level of culture) has dropped extremely sharply all over the world... Well, I think I was passionate about directing education because I had some extraordinary teachers. Liviu Ciulei was my teacher for a year

and a half when our other teacher had some family and health problems, and Ciulei took us on in the following way: besides coming to some of our rehearsals and talking about a lot of things with him, he allowed us and gave us this very great chance to participate in his rehearsals of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. From the first reading to the premiere. Well, it was a great lesson not only of theatre, but of life and culture in general. A philosophy of culture. We were passionate and we saw then how important it is to have masters.

For me, education is a dialogue. Going to the United States where I taught for 15 years, and actually built a new directing curriculum - I had the liberty to do it - I also learned a lot. I had some very open and curious students... (coming from high school or undergraduate studies - meaning that there you don't have to choose yet what you're going to do: whether you're going to do theatre or medicine or philosophy - because only after that comes the choice with the Master's degree that 3-year MFA), and I think what we can do and what I've largely succeeded to do is to open up some horizons.

Because it is not true that nothing can be taught in art. There are some voices even among us, acting teachers who, in a very harmful way, propagate the fact that acting cannot be learned and cannot be taught. Which is also immoral because if one has this belief, he/she should not take a salary for actually not teaching acting. Unfortunately, these things can be seen somehow in the low quality of most graduates, especially in directing, where there is not much of a well-defined program or structure, but also in acting... only there, things can be learned again.

I had the great joy to invite Vlad Mugur in the 90s and he did 5 shows at the Hungarian Theatre in Cluj, and these 5 shows were a real second school for the actors of that time, Zsolt Bogdan's generation. In the 90s I started teaching, I had a directing class, I organized the admissions and it went very well, but after that came the imposition of this system and bureaucratic methods, because of which the teachers had to have a certain number of hours and I couldn't invite anymore the best specialists of the various disciplines, and this, to the detriment of the students. And I'm not interested in that, not in this kind of education.

5. *Did the recent pandemic period lead to a reconfiguration or a reinvention of your work as a theatre director or not? Could you give details?*

I myself did not stop working at all. I've put on shows in various countries starting with Portugal, Luxembourg, I've even taught in the United States, during the pandemics, but that it was not face to face but online. Of course, these forms of festivals that were online, or performance screenings, were forms that somehow aimed to save the crisis situation, with all those restrictions that included many violations of human rights, of freedoms and even of the constitution. But I didn't stop, I don't believe in a theatre that is not live, in a theatre where there is no direct encounter between the audience and the actor. I still believe that theatre is a unique living art, in which this meeting in a common space is essential and that without this exchange of energies and this solidarity in the same place where a true communion between spectator and actor is formed, theatre is not possible, Here is the strength or the main argument of the art of theatre.

Of course, for different reasons, all sorts of formulas have been invented in cyberspace... I don't believe in the virtual world. The virtual world dehumanizes... at least in art. Of course technology has its advantages and brings all kinds of benefits, but not in theatre. The moment I see young people becoming addicted to these tools of digitalisation, mobile phones, laptops, social media, and so on... it's terrible. I'll give you an example I've given before: a colleague of my daughter's from high school came to visit her, and I asked her how the weather was. And she looked at her cell phone and said, "It's cloudy." But I said, "Look out the window, it's really nice outside, it's sunny!" but then she looked at her phone again and said, "No, no, it's cloudy!" So she believed what the phone said more than what she saw with her own eyes, a very frightening thing because it totally alienates you from reality, from nature and maybe some people have this purpose or scenario to totally abolish the socialization of mankind... I don't know if they will succeed but they maybe will, to the extent that we allow ourselves to be manipulated and have neither the courage to stand up to an official or mainstream wave, nor the courage to keep searching for the truth.

6. *What piece of advice would you give young people who want to study theatre directing?*

First of all, I would tell him/her to read a lot, and not only plays, literature, novels, poems, essays, to go to exhibitions, to watch classic films, to listen to music, to strengthen and develop his/her general culture. It's very important because in this way one is accumulating some much-needed knowledge.

Gorceakov writes in his book *Stanislavsky Directs*, that he was walking with Stanislavski and that at one point he asked him, "Master, but what does a director need to know?" to which Stanislavski replied that he needed to know everything. And he was annoyed and said, "What do you mean, everything?", and Stanislavski didn't answer any more and they continued their walk, after which he suddenly asked Gorceakov. "Did you see what a drama occurred when I passed for a few minutes by two young people, a man and a woman?" "No," he replied, "I wasn't paying attention." "Well how," says Stanislavsky, "you have to pay attention, to notice reality!" And they continued their walk. And a little later Stanislavski stops again and asks him, "Have you read the article in Pravda about such and such a situation in China...?" And to his negative reply: "Well, how could you not have read it, you have to read the newspapers every day..." So yes, young people have to walk around with their antennae open, to know what's going on in the world, because the director is not the one who puts on plays but is a "guide in the dark" as Peter Brook says. That's a beautiful definition.

And they have to read. The fundamental readings of mankind i.e. the Bible, the Mythologies of the world...

And they shouldn't choose the directing profession after failing medicine, mathematics, biology or because they do not have the patience to learn! Don't think that a director doesn't have to do anything. It's extremely hard and there's this continual insecurity because you can never rely on what you've done before. On the contrary, you have to forget and start from scratch with blank sheets of paper.

And don't chase success, that word needs to be eliminated somehow. Embrace failures as failures. Don't try to explain them away in the sense of finding an excuse, or a culprit; because we learn most from failure.

And they should go and see as many performances and if they can, and there are still great actors and directors who let them, they should go to as many rehearsals as possible. And do creative exercises: visual memory, composition skills, seeing in space, thinking, observing conflicts in everyday life and so on...



*Régisseur-Topeur dans Le Roi Lion :  
Entretien avec Sébastien Fèvre*

**Alice DEFACQ<sup>1</sup>**



Assistant Director and Casting Director Sébastien Fèvre,  
French Stage Manager and Show Caller.

Titulaire d'un Master Arts de la Scène à l'Université Paul Valéry de Montpellier, Sébastien Fèvre débute professionnellement en 2005 comme assistant à la mise en scène sur *Un Violon sur le toit*<sup>2</sup>. Par la suite, il multiplie

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<sup>1</sup>. University of Tampa Florida, USA; [alice.defacq@gmail.com](mailto:alice.defacq@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>. Les références de ce *musical* et de tous les autres se trouvent en bibliographie.

les spectacles et alterne les responsabilités. Celles-ci vont d'assistant metteur en scène à régisseur, en passant par topeur<sup>3</sup> et assistant de casting. Son répertoire déjà bien riche comprend aujourd'hui plus de trente spectacles tels que *Hairspray*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Avenue Q*, *Chicago* et *Le Fantôme de l'opéra*<sup>4</sup>. Grâce à sa polyvalence, ses aptitudes et ses nombreuses contributions, Sébastien Fèvre contribue à populariser en France « un genre qui mêle allègrement art et commerce, divertissement et réflexion, comédie et tragédie, chant et danse » (Perroux, 2009: 8), *alias* le *musical*<sup>5</sup>.

En novembre 2021, le théâtre Mogador rouvre ses portes avec *Le Roi Lion*. Tous les animaux de la savane, dont les célèbres Simba, Timon et Pumbaa, s'installent de nouveau sur la scène du Mogador qui les avait déjà accueillis en 2007. Quoique très pris par les représentations, Sébastien Fèvre a eu la gentillesse et la disponibilité de répondre à nos questions et de nous parler de son travail. L'entretien qui suit, réalisé le 16 mai 2022, est l'occasion d'apporter un éclairage sur ce qui se passe en coulisse. Sans plus attendre, plongeons-nous dans l'univers caché du *musical* en compagnie du topeur Sébastien Fèvre. Alors, top départ !

*Vous êtes actuellement régisseur-topeur sur Le Roi Lion. Pouvez-vous nous présenter votre métier ?*

**Sébastien Fèvre** – Mon travail consiste à superviser le spectacle tant au niveau technique qu'artistique. Pour ce faire, je donne les *cues*<sup>6</sup> lumières, les *cues* machinerie ou encore les tops, qui sont tout simplement des ordres.

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3. Traduction française de *show caller* : « he leads all of the audio-visual technicians and engineers in directing video, lighting, camera, slide shows, speakers, music, musicians, DJ, dancers, and performers » (<https://thefullpike.com/show-caller-services/>; consulté le 2 juin 2022).

4. *Musical* d'Andrew Lloyd Webber (musique) et de Charles Hart (paroles et livret) qui date de 1986. *Le Fantôme de l'opéra* devait se jouer le 13 octobre 2016 à Mogador, mais l'incendie survenu dans un local technique en septembre de la même année contraint le théâtre parisien à déprogrammer le spectacle.

5. Nous utilisons le terme anglais *musical* qui est l'abréviation du *musical comedy*, du *musical play* et du *musical theater*. Les Francophones disent généralement *comédie musicale*, or il serait difficile d'accoler cette étiquette à *Sweeney Todd (thriller musical)* ou à *A Class Act (jukebox musical)*.

6. « The command given to technical departments to carry out a particular operation. E. g. Lighting Cue, Fly Cue or Sound Cue » (<https://www.theatre crafts.com/pages/home/topics/sound/glossary/>; consulté le 28 mai 2022)

Ils peuvent aller du simple top pour les comédiens de chanter, au top pour les techniciens de lancer le décor. Dans la mesure où toutes ces indications sont indispensables au bon déroulement du *musical*, elles doivent être données avec précision. À l'évidence, les gens ont la fâcheuse tendance à croire que c'est facile de toper, mais c'est fort méconnaître la nature de mon métier. En effet, les tâches d'un régisseur-topeur sont multiples : connaître parfaitement le plateau, gérer les rythmes du spectacle, jouer le rôle d'intermédiaire entre la partie technique et la partie artistique, contrôler son stress et ses émotions, collaborer avec le metteur en scène, et entretenir une relation professionnelle avec les artistes, les techniciens et les machinistes. Dans un sens, je suis un peu comme un chef d'orchestre parce que je dois coordonner le jeu des acteurs avec celui des techniciens.

Concrètement, quand je suis dans ma cabine de topage, je suis multitâche : j'ai un œil sur l'écran de la scène et sur tous les points stratégiques en infra-rouge ; j'ai un casque où j'écoute ce qui se dit au niveau technique et un autre dans lequel j'entends les échanges qui pourraient éventuellement m'interpeller ; j'ai également un talkie-walkie qui me permet de contacter, en parallèle si besoin, le *front of house*<sup>7</sup> ; et je suis bien évidemment en contact avec le chef. De ce fait, comme j'ai plusieurs points visuels et de communication, je suis enfermé dans une sorte de bulle. À chaque représentation, je me divise donc en autant de parties pour comprendre ce qui se passe dans tous les départements et dans toutes les caméras.

Par ailleurs, chaque spectacle résonne différemment car l'énergie et la respiration des artistes, les titulaires comme les doublures, divergent d'un soir à un autre (et c'est ce qui fait l'attrait de mon métier !). Lorsque les comédiens sont un peu plus fatigués, mon travail en est directement impacté parce que je dois être plus alerte. En effet, vu que je donne le tempo du *show* au niveau technique, il faut que je sois plus vigilant et plus attentif. En un mot, plus concentré. À l'inverse, lorsque les artistes sont trop vifs, ils se mettent à accélérer le spectacle. Du coup, je dois les suivre pour respecter le temps de représentation.

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7. « In the performing arts, front of house is the portion of a performance venue that is open to the public. In theatre [...], it is the auditorium and foyer, as opposed to the stage and backstage areas » (<https://www.definitions.net/definition/front+of+house>; consulté le 7 juin 2022).

En quelque sorte, je respire avec eux parce que je les accompagne dans leur souffle et leur gestuelle, tout en suivant le côté technique et sécurisé du spectacle. C'est à la fois enrichissant et épuisant !

*Vous venez d'évoquer que la collaboration avec le metteur en scène faisait partie de l'une de vos fonctions. Est-ce que votre travail consiste à poursuivre, dans une certaine mesure, sa ligne de pensée ?*

**Sébastien Fèvre** – Oui, absolument. Mais il est clair que mon travail varie selon les metteurs en scène. Par exemple, j'ai collaboré à plusieurs spectacles avec Jean-Luc Revol (metteur en scène) et avec l'habitude, j'ai appris à me calquer sur son rythme et à suivre son énergie. De ce fait, je me sens plus détendu parce que je connais – quelque part – sa vision. C'est très cadré et je sais où il va. Mais lorsque je travaille avec des metteurs en scène qui ne sont pas à l'aise, ma concentration est d'autant plus accrue. Je ne dirais pas que je suis moins en sécurité, mais plutôt que je suis deux fois plus vigilant. En effet, s'ils ne sont pas clairs dans leurs directives, je dois être capable d'envisager des plans B. Ce genre de comportement peut être déstabilisant pour toute l'équipe parce ce que rien n'est jamais figé. Mais cela fait partie du métier ! En cas de soucis, donc, il faut que je fasse confiance à mon instinct pour rattraper les éventuelles erreurs. Dans un sens, la cabine de régie – qu'on appelle aussi le *calling desk* ou le *calling booth*<sup>8</sup> – est un peu une tour de contrôle : nous sommes les capitaines du vaisseau et si nous ne voulons pas aller au *crash*, nous devons tout de suite savoir où nous allons pouvoir atterrir.

*Lors de la mise en scène d'un musical, influencez-vous les choix de traduction des adaptateurs ?*

**Sébastien Fèvre** – Je ne dirais pas que j'influence leurs choix, mais plutôt que je participe aux répétitions afin d'aider à trouver ce qui pourrait fonctionner le mieux. Lorsqu'on me sollicite, je donne mon avis. Si ça marche,

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<sup>8</sup>. « Il existe deux types de régies : sur scène et en salle. Les régies sur scène se trouvent en coulisse et la cabine est une petite tour avec des écrans et un micro. Quant aux régies en salle, elles font face à la scène et la cabine est non seulement plus grosse, mais aussi hermétiquement fermée » (communication personnelle avec Sébastien Fèvre, sur Skype, le 20 juin 2022).

tant mieux ; et si ça ne marche pas, tant pis ! Ainsi, lorsque les créateurs demandent aux adaptateurs de changer des phrases jugées inadéquates, ils doivent revoir leur travail. De là commence un travail de *brainstorming* : nous réfléchissons ensemble et nous cherchons des solutions qui transmettraient des effets comparables. Toutes les opinions sont donc prises en compte ce qui fait que nous sommes, dans une certaine mesure, contents d’amener une pierre à l’édifice. De ce fait, notre optique reste toujours la même : emmener les spectateurs vers des émotions similaires.

Quand on monte un *musical* type Broadway et qu’on doit l’importer dans la langue du pays, nous sommes confrontés – entre autres choses – au problème des références culturelles. Fréquente, l’absence de référence n’est cependant pas la seule réponse. Voici deux exemples auxquels nous avons fait face sur *Le Roi Lion*. Dans l’acte II, quand Simba, Nala, Timon et Pumbaa reviennent dans la Terre des Lions, Timon dit : « Talk about your fixer-upper. Well, Simba, if it’s important to you, we’re with you to the end! »<sup>9</sup>. Cette réplique, qui renferme le nom de l’émission de télévision *Fixer Upper*<sup>10</sup>, a fait débat. Dans la mesure où les metteurs en scène voulaient que nous gardions, à cet endroit-là, une référence culturelle, nous avons proposé plusieurs choses. Nous avons d’abord pensé à remplacer *Fixer Upper* par Valérie Damidot<sup>11</sup>, mais cette possibilité nous a posé deux problèmes. Premièrement, Valérie Damidot n’a rien à faire dans le Rocher des Lions ! Et deuxièmement, comme la référence est un peu trop datée, elle n’aurait pas parlé à tout le monde. Nous l’avons donc laissée tomber. Ensuite, nous avons pensé à évoquer Stéphane Plaza<sup>12</sup>, mais nous n’étions pas non plus convaincus. D’ailleurs, depuis quelques années déjà, ce genre d’émissions n’existe vraiment plus en France. Conscients que la recherche d’un équivalent risquerait de ne pas trop passer, nous avons tout simplement opté pour la suppression. La réplique est devenue : « Mais c’est entièrement à rénover »<sup>13</sup>. C’est efficace et ça va droit à l’essentiel.

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<sup>9</sup>. *The Lion King* (1997) : *musical* au livret établi par Rogers Allers et Irene Mecchi. Musique d’Elton John *et al.*. Paroles de Tim Rice *et al.*

<sup>10</sup>. Émission de télé-réalité présentée par Chip et Joanna Gaines, de 2013 à 2018.

<sup>11</sup>. Animatrice de télévision connue pour avoir présenté l’émission *D&CO*, de 2006 à 2015.

<sup>12</sup>. Agent immobilier, animateur de radio et de télévision notamment connu pour ses deux émissions *Recherche appartement ou maison* depuis 2006 et *Maison à vendre* depuis 2007.

<sup>13</sup>. Traduction de Stéphane Laporte, *Le Roi Lion*, version de Paris – 3 février 2022 ; p. II-7-113.

Deuxième exemple. Dans l'acte I, un grand rideau bariolé apparaît dans la chanson *I Just Can't Wait to be King* (*Je voudrais déjà être roi*), interprété par Simba, Nala et Zazu. Dans le *book*<sup>14</sup> anglais, ils disent que ce rideau ressemble à un magasin de déco. Cette référence culturelle a provoqué l'échange des idées. Nous avons d'abord pensé à la substituer par le Marché Saint Pierre<sup>15</sup>, mais cela faisait trop parisien ; et ce n'était probablement pas assez connu sur tout le territoire français. Nous avons donc abandonné. Ensuite, nous avons songé à la remplacer par la Foir'Fouille<sup>16</sup>, mais là encore cela ne convenait pas. Puis un jour, sur le ton de la blague, j'ai dit : « On dirait un rideau de chez GiFi<sup>17</sup> ! ». Ce remplacement culturel a rapidement plu au metteur en scène, nous l'avons testé et cela a marché !

*Vous avez testé la blague, c'est-à-dire ?*

**Sébastien Fèvre** – Avant les représentations officielles d'un *musical*, nous avons les *previews*<sup>18</sup>. Ces avant-premières sont essentielles car elles nous permettent, par exemple, de relever les erreurs techniques, d'inscrire les problèmes de placement des artistes ou encore d'observer les réactions des spectateurs. C'est donc à ce moment-là que nous avons testé ma petite blague sur GiFi ! Le public a tellement rigolé que nous avons décidé de la garder.

Mais ce n'est pas toujours aussi simple ! En effet, quand le public ne réagit pas comme le metteur en scène le souhaite, nous proposons autre chose et nous la jouons aux *previews* suivantes. Comme je l'ai mentionné précédemment, notre objectif reste le même : trouver la meilleure version possible afin de

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<sup>14</sup>. « Le *book* est ce qu'on appelle le "livret" en français. Mais si les livrets d'opéra sont généralement l'œuvre d'un seul librettiste, dans le monde du *musical* les compétences sont réparties, et souvent l'auteur du *book*, c'est-à-dire du texte parlé, n'est pas l'auteur des *lyrics*, soit les textes des chansons » (Perroux, 2009: 231).

<sup>15</sup>. Quartier dans le 18<sup>e</sup> arrondissement de Paris où se trouvent des magasins dédiés au tissu.

<sup>16</sup>. Magasin de décoration, de l'équipement de la maison et spécialiste de la fête.

<sup>17</sup>. Produits à prix bas vendus dans un magasin de décoration.

<sup>18</sup>. « Pendant les semaines initiales de représentations d'un nouveau spectacle (création d'un *musical* original ou *revival*), la presse n'est pas encore conviée car les auteurs et l'équipe de production (metteur en scène, chorégraphe, costumier, etc.) opèrent des ajustements en fonction des réactions des premiers spectateurs. Ces avant-premières ouvertes au public (à un tarif moins élevé que la normale) s'appellent "*previews*" » (Perroux, 2009: 232).

servir au mieux le texte et d’être le plus efficace. Il faut avouer que j’ai souvent la chance de travailler avec des metteurs en scène et des adaptateurs qui promeuvent l’échange des idées. Ils sont ouverts à toutes propositions sous condition qu’elles restent dans l’esprit du *musical*. Même si elles ne sont bien évidemment pas toutes faisables, elles permettent toutefois d’en déclencher d’autres. Somme toute, il y a un vrai travail d’équipe et un vrai échange pendant le processus de production. Cela fait toute la richesse de mon travail !

*En parlant du Roi Lion, Pierrick Geais écrit : « cet incroyable bestiaire, c’est la force de ce spectacle né il y a 24 ans à Broadway, et qui n’a depuis quasiment pas changé »<sup>19</sup>. Quels sont les changements auxquels le journaliste fait référence ?*

**Sébastien Fèvre** – Pour être tout à fait précis, il y a eu trois saisons du *Roi Lion* à Paris : en 2007-08, 2008-09 et 2009-10. Entre la première et la deuxième saison, c’est-à-dire entre 2007-08 et 2008-09, le spectacle a été monté en 2009 à Las Vegas dans l’hôtel de luxe Mandalay Bay. Mais le *show* a été raccourci ; il ne durait plus que 90 minutes, sans entracte, pour permettre aux spectateurs d’aller plus rapidement aux machines à sous. Trois aspects ont ainsi été coupés : (1) le numéro musical *The Morning Report* (*Le rapport du matin*), interprété par Zazu ; (2) une partie de la chanson *The Madness of King Scar* (*La folie du roi Scar*) dans l’acte II ; (3) et un bridge musical dans *Can You Feel the Love Tonight?* (*L’amour brille sous les étoiles*). Suite à ces réductions, ils se sont rendus compte que le *musical* était beaucoup plus rythmé. Par conséquent, ils ont décidé de l’appliquer partout, et ce à partir de la saison 2. Ainsi, Paris a été la première ville à produire *Le Roi Lion* en appliquant les changements effectués à Las Vegas. D’ailleurs, c’est cette version plus légère du *musical* que nous jouons actuellement au théâtre Mogador depuis 2021.

Autre changement intéressant. Dans *Le Roi Lion*, de nombreuses images circulaires apparaissent sur scène. En effet, le concept de base de Julie Taymor (metteuse en scène) était celui du cercle, de l’infini et de la répétition. Voici trois exemples probants : (1) le spectacle s’ouvrait avec l’image du soleil ; (2) le rocher sur lequel Mufasa présente son fils Simba au monde animal sortait

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<sup>19</sup>. <https://www.vanityfair.fr/culture/article/avec-le-roi-lion-au-theatre-mogador-broadway-rugit-de-nouveau-a-paris> (consulté le 7 juin 2022).

de scène en faisant un tour sur lui-même, soit comme un cercle ; (3) et une danseuse poussait une sorte de charrette sur laquelle était monté un mécanisme. Ce mécanisme consistait en un enchevêtrement de roues qui se mettaient en mouvement sur l'action de la danseuse ; et sur ces roues étaient fixées des gazelles. Quand la charrette était en mouvement, le mécanisme se mettait en marche et donnait l'impression que les gazelles étaient en train de faire des bonds. Ainsi, lors de la première saison du *show*, soit en 2007-08, Stéphane Laporte (adaptateur français du *Roi Lion*) avait rendu la chanson d'ouverture *Circle of Life* par *Le cercle de la vie*. Même si cette traduction littérale permettait d'être en accord avec la vision de Julie Taymor, elle avait toutefois essuyé quelques critiques. En effet, les spectateurs ne comprenaient pas pourquoi ils ne retrouvaient pas sur scène la version française de la chanson du dessin animé, à savoir *L'histoire de la vie*. Dès lors, quand le *musical* fut reproduit à Paris en 2021, nous avons beaucoup discuté du sort de cette chanson : *Le cercle de la vie* ou bien *L'histoire de la vie* ? Et c'est la sortie en salle du *remake* en animation 3D du *Roi lion*, le 16 juillet 2019, qui nous a plus ou moins guidé dans notre choix. Étant donné que les chansons du dessin animé de 1997 y étaient présentes, dont l'incontournable *L'histoire de la vie*, nous nous sommes presque sentis contraints de la garder. Au final, nous avons abandonné *Le cercle de la vie* au profit de *L'histoire de la vie*, afin de répondre aux attentes des spectateurs.

Suite à ces transformations, Stéphane Laporte a naturellement dû revoir son texte. De plus, il faut savoir que le *book* original avait été remis au goût du jour et que certaines expressions datées avaient été remplacées.

*Le book anglais a été actualisé, mais pourquoi ?*

**Sébastien Fèvre** – Diverses raisons ont entraîné le changement, si léger soit-il, du *book* anglais. Dans l'acte II, par exemple, lorsque Rafiki revient sur sa liane, Timon demande : « And who's the monkey? »<sup>20</sup>. Le terme *monkey* était jugé trop insultant et ne pouvait plus être utilisé sur scène pour s'adresser à une personne de couleur noire. Il est vrai que les spectateurs sont aujourd'hui plus attentifs à ce genre d'attaques, surtout suite au mouvement *Black Lives*

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<sup>20</sup>. *The Lion King* (1997) : *musical* au livret établi par Rogers Allers et Irene Mecchi. Musique d'Elton John et al. Paroles de Tim Rice et al.

*Matter* et à la mort de George Floyd en mai 2020. Dès lors, « And who's the monkey ? » a d'abord été remplacé par « And who's Tarzan ? ». Mais là encore, c'était inadapté. Du coup, par soucis du politiquement correct, c'est juste devenu « And who's the pendulum ? », que Stéphane Laporte a littéralement rendu par « Et donc, c'est qui, la pendule ? »<sup>21</sup>. En définitive, le *book* est revu et rectifié parce que le monde change. Les mots sont repensés et remplacés pour éviter de heurter certaines sensibilités.

*Pourrions-nous dire que Le Roi Lion est un revival ?*

**Sébastien Fèvre** – Oui et non. Quand *Le Roi Lion* fut produit à Paris en 2007, le sol de la scène du théâtre Mogador a été détruit et entièrement refait pour le produire dans sa version lourde. Par exemple, il a fallu tout creuser pour accueillir l'énorme Rocher des Lions, qui sortait de la scène en spirale. Le décor était colossal : il y avait des plateformes partout et les événements venaient dans tous les sens. C'était un grand spectacle de Broadway ! En 2010, le théâtre Mogador a ensuite produit *Mamma Mia!* Le *show* requiert lui aussi un décor spécifique, à savoir un sol pavé de style grec et une jetée en forme de serpent. Dans la version d'origine de Broadway et de Londres, cette jetée se trouvait sur une plateforme élévatrice. Mais dans la mesure où le système du spectacle précédent, celui du *Roi Lion*, était encore sous la scène, il aurait été compliqué de concilier les deux systèmes et de fermer le théâtre plusieurs mois pour travaux. Donc, après *Le Roi Lion* en 2010, toute la partie mécanique et structurée du *musical* a été retirée et le kit de tournée a été adopté. Ce système est moins invasif dans la mesure où tout est au sol. Concrètement, ils ont posé un plancher de base sur lequel est venu se poser le plancher de scène spécifique des différentes productions qui ont suivi. De ce fait, si dans d'autres productions de *Mamma Mia!* en résidence, comme à Broadway ou à Londres, la jetée était effectivement sur une plateforme élévatrice, à Paris, nous avons un kit de tournée et la jetée venait par le fond de scène.

Ainsi, quand *Le Roi Lion* a fait son retour au Mogador en 2022, le plancher de scène a tout simplement été posé sur le sol basique du théâtre. Le Rocher des Lions n'est désormais plus plein, mais télescopique ; il est

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<sup>21</sup>. Traduction de Stéphane Laporte, *Le Roi Lion*, version de Paris – 3 février 2022 ; p. II-6B-111.

toujours aussi majestueux et il apparaît au même endroit. Certes, la plateforme est différente, mais les costumes, les musiques, les chansons et les lumières sont inchangés. Ça reste *Le Roi Lion* !

*Vous avez été assistant à la mise en scène sur Un Violon sur le toit et régisseur-topeur sur Le Roi Lion. Quelle distinction pourriez-vous faire entre ces deux métiers ?*

**Sébastien Fèvre** – Pour faire simple, l'assistant à la mise en scène travaille dans la partie artistique alors que le régisseur opère forcément dans la partie technique. Même si chacun d'eux remplit des fonctions différentes, ils travaillent toutefois ensemble pour faire en sorte que le spectacle soit comme le metteur en scène le désire. Au risque de schématiser quelque peu, l'assistant à la mise en scène intervient dans le travail du metteur en scène et l'aide à mettre en place sa vision ; il est un peu comme son extension. Quant au régisseur, il facilite la mise en œuvre technique du spectacle en donnant par exemple les *cues* lumières, les *cues* machinerie et les tops.

Il existe une nette distinction entre le régisseur de scène à l'opéra et le régisseur de scène au théâtre (celui qui travaille dans le milieu musical) : sans trop faire de réductions, le premier va prendre sa partition, s'assurer que les chœurs sont bien en place et donner aux chanteurs leurs entrées ; tandis que le deuxième ne va pas trop toucher à ces aspects. Il va plutôt faire la lumière et le son, ou encore bouger le décor même si c'est plus du ressort du machiniste. De ce fait, les cartes sont un peu brouillées dans le *musical*. En effet, même s'il y a des régisseurs lumières, des régisseurs plateaux et des régisseurs sons, le régisseur est à la limite le patron de la scène. Il est vraiment le « garant » de la bonne tenue du *show* en coulisse puisqu'il gère tous les occupants qui sont autour de lui, c'est-à-dire tous ceux qui viennent de différents départements comme les machinistes, les habilleuses et les artistes. De ce fait, il a un œil sur tout et il veille à ce que tous les éléments rentrent au moment où ils doivent rentrer. En fin de compte, le régisseur de *musical* doit connaître les conduites de chacun et il doit pouvoir suppléer en cas de problèmes. De plus, lorsqu'un metteur en scène n'a pas d'assistant à la mise en scène, ce qui est tout de même assez rare, il se rapproche tout naturellement du régisseur qui comprend le plateau et qui voit comment il peut faire.

Le régisseur s'occupe donc de la logistique du spectacle alors que l'assistant à la mise en scène cherche à concrétiser la vision du metteur en scène.

*Ma dernière question porte sur Bons Baisers de Broadway. Comment est né votre intérêt pour la mise en scène ?*

**Sébastien Fèvre** – Pour tout vous dire, mes premiers pas dans le métier de metteur en scène sont arrivés un peu par hasard. C'est en réalité l'association la Clef des Chants qui m'a proposé de produire *Bons Baisers de Broadway* en 2017. Cette association milite pour la promotion et la diffusion de l'art lyrique dans l'ensemble du territoire du Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Elle promeut toutes les formes, comme l'opéra et le *musical*, et elle sensibilise le public au domaine lyrique. Ainsi, lorsque j'étais l'assistant à la mise en scène d'Olivier Bénézec sur *Le Tour d'écrou* de Benjamin Britten en 2011, la Clef des Chants a vu que j'étais plutôt à l'aise pour expliquer et montrer la mise en scène aux enfants. En effet, comme vous le savez certainement, *Le Tour d'écrou* met en scène les deux jeunes Miles et Flora. Mais la législation française ne nous permet pas de les avoir tous les jours. De ce fait, je les remplaçais quand ils étaient absents et je leur transmettais les informations quand ils étaient au théâtre.

Connaissant mon intérêt pour le *musical*, la Clef des Chants m'a contacté quelques mois après pour savoir si je souhaitais produire *Bons Baisers de Broadway*, une petite forme d'une durée de 90 minutes avec deux personnes et un pianiste. Le projet m'a tout de suite intéressé et j'ai accepté ! J'avais quelques directives et un cahier des charges bien précis : le *musical* devait être en français, 90% des tubes en anglais et le décor devait être facilement transportable. Grâce à ce petit format, nous avons pu le jouer dans de multiples lieux improbables et parfois même inattendus : dans un bus scolaire transformé en scène de théâtre, dans des cours d'école, en prison, ou encore dans des petits hangars aménagés en espace culturel.

J'ai très vite appris que même si la petite forme constituait une contrainte de taille, elle ne pouvait pas m'empêcher d'en tirer le maximum. J'ai alors mis en place un décor qui soit modulable, c'est-à-dire qu'il puisse se monter et se démonter en une journée, qui réponde aux spécificités techniques et financières

données, qui conserve le même profil de configuration, et qui fasse rêver. Les spectateurs en prenaient plein les yeux et ils avaient même l'impression d'avoir voyagé. Au-delà du chant, de la danse et des comédiens, il y avait effectivement des beaux costumes à paillettes, des claquettes et des jeux de lumière avec les néons. Tout ceci pouvait éventuellement rappeler New York et Times Square. Ainsi, ma volonté première était d'offrir au public un *musical* qui fasse un peu comme carte postale tout en renfermant les principaux codes d'un show de Broadway.

*Bons Baisers de Broadway* a tellement bien marché que nous avons duré trois saisons ! Depuis sa création, la Clef des Chants n'avait jamais fait autant de spectacles et l'association ne pensait même pas miser à ce point-là sur ce *musical*. Je pense donc avoir fait un bon travail et j'avoue que pour ma première mise en scène, je suis fier du succès rencontré. C'était une très belle aventure et, si l'opportunité se représente, je le referai avec plaisir !

*Un grand merci pour cet entretien, Sébastien Fèvre. Grâce à vous, nous sommes entrés dans les coulisses du musical !*

Propos recueillis par Alice Defacq,  
le 16 mai 2022 sur Skype.

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# **PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS**



## *Do Roma Communities Only Get to Deal with Suffering?*

**Book Review: *Roma Heroes II. Five European Dramas* Kindle Edition by Independent Theater Hungary Rodrigó Balogh (Author), M. Drăgan-Z. Moldovan-L. Ceterchi-M. Lukács (Authors), Richard R. O'Neill (Author), J. Nikolić-R. R. Seidović (Authors), Igor Krikunov (Author), Rodrigó Balogh (Author) Format: Kindle Edition. September 28, 2021.**



This volume is a sequel to the first *Roma Heroes* anthology of monodramas and contains stories from five different countries. The chamber dramas bring us to Germany, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine, and into the virtual theatre world: a play created online was also included in the book.

Although in the current conjuncture one can feel the effort made in various forums to ensure equal opportunities for different ethnicities, however, the book *Roma Heroes II* is only the second volume in the world containing plays related to Roma culture. It should be made clear from the outset that the endeavour to provide space for a marginalised culture is understandable. But the value of a work is not and cannot be given by the simple fact that the participants, the creators belong to one ethnic group or another. It should be stressed that, although there are differences in value between the plays in this volume, the editors of the book do not fall into the trap mentioned in the commentary above. The plays are interesting, with subjects that are often familiar to people of any ethnicity, but which in the case of the Roma take on new nuances. Equally true is the fact that sometimes we wonder how this problem is even a problem. The answers, at least in part, can be found in the plays in the volume.

The first play, *Who killed Szomna Grancsa?* is written by four authors. Ceterchi Liana is an actress and theatre director. She has worked with both state and independent theatres. She graduated from „I.L. Caragiale” Institute of Theatrical and Cinematographic Arts in Bucharest. She is general manager at the Teatrul pentru Puțini. Mihaela Drăgan is an actress and playwright who lives in Bucharest and works in other several countries. Since 2014 she is the cofounder of the Roma feminist theater company Giuvlipen. Mihai Lukács is a stage director, performer, theorist. His last performative practices talk about the relationship between the Roma people and the gadje, public humiliation, sexual liberation, faith and exclusion, forced evictions and homelessness. Zita Moldovan, as a graduate of the Faculty of Theater and Television in Cluj, co-founded in 2006 the Giuvlipen Theater Company. During her 15-year career, she has been actively involved in the Roma feminist and antiracist movement, working as a theater trainer in Roma communities and in various campaigns for Roma rights.

Their play, *Who killed Szomna Grancsa?*, is based on the true story of a Roma girl who committed suicide after her parents stopped sending her to school, and explores the many complex reasons behind the tragedy. Their theatrical approach is a direct challenge to the more simple version of events told on Romanian television – that a young woman died because her parents,

from one of Romania's traditional Roma communities, denied her an education. The play instead explores the other daily pressures she had faced: anti-Roma racism in Romanian schools, rural poverty, women's oppression in Romanian society at large.

The next play, *European Family*, is written by Richard O'Neill with six co-authors. Richard O'Neill is an internationally acclaimed performance storyteller, author and playwright. He was born and brought up in large traditional, fully nomadic Romani gypsy family, travelling throughout the North of England and Scotland. His roots are also to be found in the coal mining communities of the North East having family members who worked down the pits. This co-cultural upbringing is reflected in his creative work.

The other authors had also an important contribution to the conception of the play. Sebastiano Spinella is an Italian musician, art-educator, clown, actor. Sonia Carmona Tapia, who studied a Bachelor fine arts in theatre in the USA, started in 1996 her own independent theatre company. Bohórquez. Jaime E. Vicent is a Spanish writer and television director based in Seville. Márton Illés is a trainer, dramaturge and operational manager of the Független Színház. Lucia Lakatos is a student of sociology at Corvinus University of Budapest, trainer of Független Színház Magyarország.

*European Family* is about members of a Roma family, who are living in different parts of Europe when the lockdown associated with the Covid-19 epidemic begins. They can only communicate on video chat and must face losses and challenges in their isolated lives. Conflicts and secrets are also revealed. It seems that only magic can help. The story is based on real stories that the Roma people faced during the time of the lockdown in diverse countries of Europe and also the personal stories and improvisations of the artists who created this text together from their home countries connected only by the internet and their common passion for theatre.

*The Leader* takes us from the present back to the time of WW2. The author is Igor Krikunov (1953), who was an actor. He died on May 11, 2021 in Ukraine.

*The Leader* takes place during the Second World War, and presents a Roma community whose leader makes every possible effort to save his people from impending death. This play was written in memory of the Roma victims of WW2. *The Leader* does not only tell about the Roma and is not

exclusively for the Roma. The play depicts the inner life of people and reflects on the battle of good and bad powers. There are positive stories about feelings, right actions, self-sacrifice, since love and sympathy can serve as a refuge in the most difficult times, too.

*Kosovo Mon Amour* takes us to another war, that ended not long time ago. Yashar and his wife, Elvira are running a pub in Kosovo during the South Slavic war. The hate campaign against the nations creates more and more corruption, violence and absurd life situations among people who are relatives and once were friends but became sworn enemies of each-other all of a sudden. The play illustrates a society suffering from propaganda of hatred, nationalism, lies and manipulation in a shocking way. *Kosovo Mon Amour*, subtitled „war tragicomedy“, tells the fate of a Romani family trying to escape to Western Europe from Kosovo in 1999.

The text has two authors. Jovan Nikolić (born Belgrade, 1955), is a Serbian Romani writer, currently resident in Germany. His parents moved around Yugoslavia, following his father's work as a musician. Nikolić moved to Germany following the NATO bombing of Serbia. Ruždija Russo Sejdović is a poet, dramaturge, translator and activist who was born into a Čergarja family in the Ubli settlement near Podgorica, in the then Yugoslav Socialist Republic of Montenegro in 1966. In 1989, he emigrated to Germany.

*Village Day* is written by Rodrigó Balogh (1978), who graduated in 2001 at the Shakespeare Academy of Dramatic Arts in Budapest. He worked at Roma and non-Roma multiethnic companies. He has written and directed numerous performances for disadvantaged young people.

Lápos can be any village in Hungary today: with inhabitants who struggle for their daily living, better or worse, but they are lovable residents. Misery-tourists visit the “village day” every year and the participants of the gastro-theatre performance meet real human tragedies in the pokey but inventive village. How much chance does a Gypsy woman have if she raises her child on her own without any opportunity to work? Where is hope when the biggest goodwill turns the most important people of our lives against us? What is needed when we take the road of unscrupulousness because we cannot get out of the woods? Where is the boundary between humanity and inhumanity? Similar questions arise when we read *Village Day* and imagine a very real, impoverished world.

Volume two of the *Roma Heroes* series therefore contains plays that talk about the problems faced by an ethnic group found throughout Europe. It seems that this minority is everywhere exposed to suffering, either because of miserable living conditions or because of the lack of basic rights. Although the fate of the Roma – as shown in the two volumes of *Roma Heroes* – in different parts of Europe is not identical, or even similar, it can be said that in general this ethnic group is suffering in most of Europe. But the question arises whether there are really no positive moments in the lives of these people, or whether no great deeds worthy of being recorded and made known to the world are linked to the name of any Roma? In a future volume I would like to read as well about humour, great deeds, people integrated smoothly into society, into a society made up of mosaics of different minorities.

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## *The After-Pandemic International Meetings in Cluj*

### **Book Review: *Festival and performance review of the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the International Meetings in Cluj, at the The National Theatre in Cluj (September 28<sup>th</sup> - October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022)***

You would think that the 2022 Cluj-Napoca theatre festival, taking place in the flesh after a two-year hiatus provoked by the pandemic, would be a celebratory event, but theatre like so much in our high-strung early-twenty-first century life has dropped down the rabbit hole of the new crisis: an unjust and barbaric war waged on Ukraine. Not only are Romanians geographically neighbouring Ukraine but also, as local people in Cluj have told me, they identify strongly with the Ukrainian determination to remain independent and free, having themselves fought within living memory to regain independence from tyranny. Therefore, with the single-minded focus that has characterized Romanian festivals at least since Michael Billington reported (in *The Guardian*) on the Bucharest Theatre Festival in 2003, much of this week's program is devoted to producing, reading, or talking about theatre in the context of contemporary historical liminalities that affects identity. The theme of this 2022 festival is, indeed, "**Identities.**"

#### **Militarized Identity: Plays by Ukrainian Authors**

The opening day brought up the central theme with a moving reading of contemporary documentary scripts titled "Wartime Theatre", (*Teatru în vreme de război*), scripts blended into one continuous performance by Ukrainian playwrights Natalia Blok, Tetiana Kitsenko, and Natalia Vorobjit. It is directed by Ionuț Caras and translated into Romanian by Raluca Rădulescu.

The introductory play is the most savagely direct, and is documentary in style. A saxophonist who, it turns out, is a Ukrainian refugee housed in Cluj, set the scene by producing the alarming sound of an ambulance – or it might have been a bomb threat warning – on his instrument as we filed into the Euphorion Studio Theatre that is nestled within the west wall of the Cluj National Theatre. The stage displays a scattering of naked or bandaged body parts hanging from the wings. The reading begins with a play in which the reader is seated inside a wood-framed cage of barbed wire, a photo of three toddlers stuck into a corner. They are her three sons, now grown, who have been caught in or near the city of Kiev and with whom she gradually loses contact as the bombing worsens. The mother’s monologue describes how her husband had been offered the chance to flee the country by car with his three sons ahead of the bombing, but at the last minute something goes wrong – she doesn’t know what – and the four remain in Kiev. The traumatic anxiety in the wife/mother’s voice is palpable and contagious. Afterwards, the author of the piece, Natalia Blok, informed us that the piece is autobiographical, and that it was an act of therapy to write it; she now knows that her sons are safe, and she is herself residing in Switzerland.



**Fig. 1:** *Teatru în vreme de război [Wartime Theatre]*, production of The National Theatre in Cluj, photo by Nicu Cherciu

The series of staged readings ends with a play I summarized on this *Plays International & Europe* website<sup>1</sup>: Vorozhbit's *Take Out the Rubbish, Sasha*. The drama (which needs editing) concentrates on the living, mingling happy memories of a dead husband/stepfather Sasha with the ongoing extremely affectionate relationship between mother and daughter. It starts with the preparation of the funeral meal for soldier Sasha and continues until the two women greet their resurrected Sasha, again called off to battle. The psychological aspect of the drama, involving the inability to accept the physical disappearance of a loved one, combines with the symbolic image of the eternal Ukrainian soldier fighting to defend his homeland; this lends the piece a peculiarly surrealistic perspective.

There is an eerie echo in *Take Out the Rubbish, Sasha*. The echo involves the frequency of the word "frică", meaning "fear" in Romanian. The ever-presence of fear permeated Matei Vişniec's play *On the Sensation of Resilience When Treading on Dead Bodies* directed by Răzvan Muresan that was featured in the 2018 Cluj Centennial review<sup>2</sup> and in *Porn* by Andras Visky which Muresan directed in the 2019 festival<sup>3</sup>, and it was a leitmotif in *The Mirror*<sup>4</sup>. For some reason, this word "frică" stands out when spoken on stage in Cluj, and characters talk about that emotion frequently, even in comedies.

The second performance invoking the horrors of the Ukrainian war that I saw was directed by one of the two Cluj National Theatre's artistic directors, Ștefana Pop-Curșeu. Staged in the Cluj Art Museum, with a 16<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholic altar from Jimbor, Brașov County in the far background visible through open doors, the drama titled *Survivor's Syndrome* begins with two young men playing a game with oversized wooden blocks, the names of ruined Ukrainian cities imprinted on certain of the long rectangular blocks they built up into a structure which collapsed ultimately. Then, the recitation begins, outlining what it was like to endure days of bombing. It is a poetic stream-of-conscience text that starts *terre-à-terre* with lines such as, "We used to go to the cinema, drink beer, and eat nuts ....

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<sup>1</sup>. <https://playsinternational.org.uk/ukraine-staging-readings-of-plays/>

<sup>2</sup>. See: <https://playsinternational.org.uk/cluj-napoca-centennial-theatre-festival/>

<sup>3</sup>. See: <https://playsinternational.org.uk/national-theatre-of-cluj-napoco-together-dana-rufolo/>

<sup>4</sup>. See: <https://playsinternational.org.uk/in-the-mirror-national-theater-of-cluj-napoca/>

Our life now is a graveyard of all the plans we had before.” However, the interior monologue progresses, becoming increasingly self-interrogating: “The body does not need to know everything. Let it think it is alive.” And “Fear makes us slaves. But we have lost our fear. They want to turn us into zombies, but it seems that our nation understands that we have to preserve our identity and treat it like a treasure, because being human is not being a zombie.”



**Fig. 2:** *Sindromul supraviețuitorului [Survivor's Syndrome]*, production of The National Theatre in Cluj, photo by Nicu Cherciu

*Survivor's Syndrome* is by the young Andriy Bondarenko who, in the discussion which followed, “Theatre in Limit Situations”, states it is the result of him sitting down to describe in words exactly what he had been feeling during the bombing of his city when he was solitary and in hiding. The former block builders turn into narrator and character, with the narrator telling the story while the character moves about in a limited space, or sometimes lies

down, wearing a silver neutral mask that effectively kept the beautifully poetic text neutral, as if hanging in space – a story of terror, hope, and endurance for us all.

To continue the list of events dedicated to the war: The third readers' theatre performance was *Maidan Inferno* by Neda Nejdana staged by Tudor Lucanu on 30 September, and the lecture given by George Banu on 2 October. The noted French-Romanian author and professor (Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris 3) George Banu, gave a lecture on "Wartime Theatre and Politics". Beginning with the premise that "theatre transforms an immediate experience into an aesthetic experience", Banu referenced examples from literature, film, and theatre that deal with the "re-representation" of war through evoking its visceral effects – starting with World War One and Henri Barbus's personal account and the ironic *The Good Soldier Švejk* by Czech writer Jaroslav Hašek. He asks how theatre translates war, and concludes that one way is through the portrayal of excess, for example excess blood, as in the 2006 blood-saturated productions *Macbeth* directed by Jürgen Gosch and *The Oresteia* directed by Michael Thalheimer.

### **Identity and social injustice**

There is no doubt that I was among the most enthusiastic of admirers when the show "Hang Up, Calls Waiting" (*Nu mai ține linia ocupată*) by Alexandra Felseghi ended; I've worked on a street theatre project about trafficking of women, the theme this play tackles in a sensitive and not overly stereotypical way, and know how difficult a subject it is to dramatize effectively. Others in the audience were entrenched in a critical aesthetic perspective and were therefore less enthusiastic. However, I personally believe that the use of a red garbed chorus of women who denounce the perpetrators of sexual violence with resonating Brechtian fervour and the image of a rose suspended from the heavens that shifts in colour are effective scenography (designer Andreea Tecla), and the actors are compelling. Applause goes to the director Adina Lazăr for giving dramatic form to the problems of sexual abuse and sexual trafficking. With so many other problems assailing our societies, this issue has taken the back burner.



**Fig. 3:** *Nu mai ține linia ocupată*, production of The National Theatre in Cluj, photo by Nicu Cherciu

Two tales intertwine in “Hang Up, Calls Waiting”. The first is the drama of a pregnant teenage girl Andreea, sensitively portrayed by Diana Buluga, who has become the plaything of her absent mother’s boyfriend and his gang of criminal friends. The young girl is placed by the hospital in a safe place for women but naively, and fatally we fear, she returns to the older man on the whiff of a promise to found a family – only to be instantly set upon again by his gang who consider her as fodder for scorn and abuse of all kinds.

The second tale is that of a girl who disappears when she hitchhikes home, as she often did with her parents’ approval, after shopping. The most touching moment in the play is when the parents of the missing girl visit the safe place having heard that Andreea may be their daughter, and when they realize she is not and turn to depart, Andreea runs up to them, beseeching to be taken in place of their missing daughter. If only emotional transfer were that easy! The play reveals the terrible need a young person has to attach to someone and to feel loved by them. The complicity of the police -in this case the policeman himself has a criminal mindset – shows the complexity of the

problem of abuse – even worse, it shows how intractable the problem is when the policeman glibly dismisses the social worker’s complaints by telling her the nonsense that whatever you don’t die from makes you stronger.

Another drama evoking women’s rights, *The Competition (The Casting in Kursk) (Audiția)* written by the Russian Alexander Galin and directed by Ionuț Caras, is a humorous and sarcastic look at the lack of protection for the weak in Russia. It shows the problematic of women trusting and believing the lies they are told. Several Russian women are competing in a talent show orchestrated by a Japanese businessman where the winners will be sent to his nightclub in Singapore – a mythical land in their eyes, where they imagine they will be loved and admired, though we know full well that their function is bound to be more functional. The problem the play attempts to resolve is that these women have husbands, albeit rather indifferent ones, and the denouement is a series of clever repositionings in the couples that finally lead to restored harmony. Nonetheless, two fatherless girls, the youngest of the lot, will compete, believing their skills are finally recognized; their alcoholic mother (Irina Wintze) knows better but says nothing.



**Fig. 4:** *Audiția*, production of The National Theatre in Cluj, photo by Nicu Cherciu

In its call for empathy for the ordinary people who have no special talents, *The Competition* is an excellent choice for the “Identities” festival. It reminds us of the universality of the problem of social injustice. And of the problem of excessive naiveté.

### **Ancillary Talks, Panels, and Events**

The 2022 Cluj-Napoca Theatre Festival was remarkably balanced and can easily serve as a model for other and future theatre festivals around the world that are not only performative but which choose to explore the interface between theatre and society. Intellectual interventions and conversations between artists and audience members were integrated into the program on nearly a daily basis.

The well-known Romanian TV producer and theatre critic Marina Constantinescu lectured on her love of theatre [*Theatre, Mon Amour*]. On October first, internationally acclaimed Romanian author Matéi Vişniec gave a poignant autobiographical talk on how coincidences that can only be termed ‘good luck’ magically helped him to develop as an innovative and courageous author; the talk is titled “Dramatic Writing and the Motivations of Contemporary Playwrights”.

Also, several books on Romanian theatre history were launched: firstly, Cristina Modreanu’s *Teatrul ca rezistență. Oameni de teatru în arhivele Securității* [*Theatre as Resistance. Theatre People in the Archives of the Stasi – the Secret Police*] from Polirom Publishing House, praised on national radio by Adrian Cioroianu for proving that “in communist Romania there really was resistance through culture”. It is a book which in my opinion can’t get translated fast enough into English<sup>5</sup>.

Critic and professor Liviu Malița presented his book *Să nu privești înapoi: comunism, dramaturgie, societate* [*Don’t Look Back. Communism, Dramaturgy, Society*] from Cluj University Press. Additionally, UK-based Romanian academic

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<sup>5</sup>. Read the review of Modreanu’s *A History of Romanian Theatre from Communism to Capitalism* at <https://playsinternational.org.uk/?s=Modreanu>.

Jozefina Komporaly presented the only book published directly in English: *Plays from Romania. Dramaturgies of Subversion* from Bloomsbury's Methuen Drama series<sup>6</sup>.

The academic and question-and-answer side events incorporated into the festival involved the audience and offered opportunities to probe behind the scene. They contributed to the seriousness of purpose in the eleventh International Meetings in Cluj, devoted this year to *Identities*.

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<sup>6</sup>. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/plays-from-romania-dramaturgies-of-subversion-9781350214286/>