

*Teatrul Journal, between Norms and Emancipation.
The Years of the “Thaw” and Those of the New “Freeze”*

MIRUNA RUNCAN¹

Abstract: *Teatrul Journal*, dedicated to both professionals, and devoted spectators, appeared in 1956 following the so-called “thaw”, which took place in the part of Europe controlled by the Soviet regime after Nikita Khrushchev’s secret report at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. As we know, this “secret report” highlighted the horrors which took place during the decades dominated by Stalin, incriminated his “cult of personality”, and promised a certain openness in the fields of science, culture and arts towards communicating with the West, as well as loosening the chains of censorship. This phenomenon was felt, in a more or less discrete way, at all levels of the Romanian society; and for the theatre domain, the sign of this change of politics was the launch of the *Teatrul* journal, under the patronage of the writer, playwright and aesthetician Camil Petrescu². This paper (which is part of a wider research dedicated to theatre criticism discourses in the communist period) looks at the relation between party orders and the editorial policy taken on by or imposed on the journal from its birth (April 1956) to the new „freeze” wave (1958-1960).

Keywords: Theatre, Theatre criticism, Politics, History

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1. Faculty of Theatre and Film, Babes-Bolyai University Cluj. runcan.miruna@ubbcluj.ro. Translated from Romanian by Camelia Oană.
 2. Camil Petrescu (1894-1957) was a novelist, literary theory author and playwright. He was the Manager of the National Theatre of Bucharest between 1938-1939 and a member of Romanian Academy from 1947.

Keywords, editorials, and debates

In the first two years, the structure of *Teatrul* Journal was quite fix, testifying on a rather narrow and intra-professional photofit of the audience, despite the statements of intent within the first (unsigned) editorial, probably written by the critic Horia Deleanu, the first editor-in-chief. Consistent with the times, this editorial, modestly entitled “*Cuvânt de început*”³ (Foreword) is scattered with praise for the party’s care towards the artistic movement, with committing references⁴ to tradition and to the recommendations of the report of the second congress of the Romanian Workers’ Party, from which the author chooses a critical sentence about dramaturgy and its underdevelopment; this shows that, despite the apparent thaw, the priority of theatre and film play and scriptwriting, as established by Stalin at the beginning of the 30s, was still unquestionable. This is obvious in the insistence of both editorials, essays, and theatre reviews of the time to revive issues regarding drama, in a period fully dedicated to debates on theatre directing. Noticing - probably, with a programmatic end - that theatre criticism did not always consistently fulfil its objective “responsibly and based on solid theoretical training”, the editorialist concludes firmly with a watchword containing the very commitment about the broad view that the journal should take on: “The problems around theatre do not concern a small, elitist group only, but the problems of all workers, of the people, of the state”⁵.

In reality, the journal is mostly intended for people in the theatre field, whether artists, critics or cultural journalists: the levels of the new publishing construction were organized in the shape of a funnel, from the complex/s haping essay, whose role is to showcase (both ideologically, and artistically) the hegemonic direction, to the level dedicated to debates, then moving on

3. “Cuvânt de Început [Foreword],” *Teatrul*, no. 1 (1956): 3–5.

4. “The traditions in our theatre must first and foremost be understood and exploited. To this end, *Teatrul* takes on the task of regularly publishing memoirs, letters, archive documents, studies and historical articles, all of which are to modestly contribute to learning our theatre history, as well as to getting acquainted to and expanding universal theatre history, which was less accessible to the general public until now.” “Cuvânt de Început [Foreword],” 4.

5. “Cuvânt de Început [Foreword],” 4.

to a rich space for reviews, which were much more comprehensively analytic and detailed than weekly cultural newspapers or magazines would have allowed. Lastly, the next level rather focused on short comments, acting as a kind of a theatre “press review”, including quotes from other reviewers, usually organized as notice boards: “Dos and Don’ts”. This same - somehow sprightly - level also included news from abroad, predictably dominated by socialist countries, or referring to communist-leaning Western authors/artists (the first edition contained a translation of Jean Paul Sartre’s opinions on French theatre, as taken from an interview after his visit to Moscow). Over the first years, an overwhelming majority of these news “from abroad” were summaries of articles, news pieces or interviews published in cultural magazines in “sister” (communist) countries.

The interesting thing is that, until towards the end of 1957, the editions of the monthly journal only rarely seem to be built around a dominant theme: also, one can find but rare keywords which are meant to direct, ideologically and/or aesthetically, a more or less substantial part of the criticism discourse. Certainly, in the first nine editions, we can trace the more complex essayistic reflections dedicated to the debate on directing (and implicitly on *re-theatricalization*), that *Contemporanul Magazine* - which I broadly described somewhere else - began in March⁶. It is just as interesting to see that in certain editions the editorial is, in fact, double or triple. For months, the editorial on the first pages, whether signed by Deleanu or not, was followed by substantial essays by Camil Petrescu, the official president of the editorial board, initiator and spiritual patron of the journal, as the representative of theatre art in the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania⁷. Here, sometimes in barely disguised irony, the Academy member resumes older ideas about the relation between text and performance, and of course, about directing⁸ and its major importance, about theatre authenticity, etc. His essays are talkative-playful in

6. Miruna Runcan, *Teatralizarea și reteatralizarea în România. 1920-1960*, 2nd editio (București: Liternet Publishing House, 2013).

7. The spoken word of the time spread the (otherwise very plausible) legend that the writer was very irritated by the Party appointing some politruk as editor-in-chief to supervise him.

8. Camil Petrescu, “Despre unele probleme. Funcția primordială a regizorului în teatru (ca și în film),” *Teatrul*, no. 1 (1957): 7–11.

tone, but lack direct references to the points discussed in *Contemporanul* or even in the pages of the journal he patrons, giving the impression that the aesthetician-playwright followed the debate from the outside, from his own watchtower, and spoke so as to first and foremost highlight the fact that he was one of the few legitimate links between the past and the present (and thus, that young bellicose directors did not discover anything important). As a drop of timid rain announcing a virtual de-Stalinization, in the second essay, dedicated to theatre efficiency and artistry, the master did not shy away from mocking an anonymous Party activist, who also knew very well that “workers only want to see this in theatre” or that they “don’t want that at all!”⁹

Over all these years, the feeling that, despite all the clear signs of partial thaw, the young journal is hesitant regarding the relation with the political power is also strengthened by the presence - on rather normative positions - of other quills, of various ages, but assuming responsibility roles or fully affirming themselves as ideological activists working in a theatre and therefore keeping an eye on where it’s going and making sure it doesn’t derail. We thus find expository essays with an air of second-class editorials by Andrei Băleanu¹⁰, Margareta Bărbuță, Simion Alterescu¹¹, Paul Georgescu¹², Horia Bratu¹³, Eugen Luca¹⁴, etc., while the proper editors and collaborators who are not registered with the party (I.D. Sîrbu¹⁵, Șt. Aug. Doinaș¹⁶, Mira Iosif, Valeria Ducea, Ecaterina Oproiu, etc.) are only allowed to write reviews, not

9. Camil Petrescu, “Despre unele probleme. Eficiență și măiestrie artistică,” *Teatrul*, no. 2 (1956): 7.

10. Andrei Băleanu (n. 1931), theatre critic, party activist, chief of the cultural department of *Scânteia*, the Workers (then Communist) Party’s organ, 1956-1969. He emigrated to Germany in 1985.

11. Simion Alterescu (1921-1995, Israel) theatre critic and historian, Worker’s Party official, intendent of the Ministry of Arts (1957-1951), editor at *Contemporanul* magazine (1948-1952), professor at the Theatre Institute.

12. Paul Georgescu (1923-1989) literary critic and writer, in the 50s he was a prominent activist of the PMR Central Committee’s Agitprop section.

13. Horia Bratu, theatre critic, party activist. In 1969 he left Romania for Israel.

14. Eugen Luca (1923-1997, Israel) theatre and literary critic, party activist

15. I. D. Sîrbu (1919-1989) novelist, playwright, theatre critic, journalist.

16. Șt. Aug. Doinaș (1922-2002) poet, literary and theatre critic. He was a member of Romanian Academy (1990-2002)

draw directions. I believe this strategic trajectory is symptomatic, as at a closer look, it puts Camil Petrescu in an ever odd-dramatic position in his last years of life: fully surrounded by bigger or smaller bosses who condescendingly allow him to have opinions, even vaguely acid.

For example, since the foreword of the first edition mentioned the criticism about the development of playwriting expressed during the second congress of the Romanian Workers' Party, Margareta Bărbuță¹⁷ (who at the time worked for the Theatre Department within the Ministry of Arts) published an extensive and highly critical essay on this topic, tenderly entitled "Letter to a theatre manager". As an expert, i.e. as a censor who was also in charge of approving stageable plays and theatre repertoires, she tries to shake a certain self-sufficiency away from the system, marking in fact post-Stalinist orders to refresh playwrighting and set it free from silly patterns:

We are still in the phase of promoting amateurish, green, often poor works, only played because they deal with current topics, not because they contain precious ideas, necessary to educate spectators. But you and I [*the generic manager*, n.n.] both know very well that spectators aren't touched or easily convinced by dummies blurting out watchwords, delivering moralizing decisions or behaving justly.¹⁸

Imperceptibly, the text of this mischievous article aimed at criticising poor and watchword-like playwriting turns into a real indictment of managers who merely reject poor plays, not working with their authors at all, or settle for waiting for good plays to fall into their hands from the sky. The text became a kind of official manifesto for "liquidating the passive

17. Margareta Bărbuță (1922-2009) Romanian theatre critic, in her youth she worked as a consultant at the Ministry of Culture. It's worth mentioning that, throughout her entire life, Margareta Bărbuță had a tireless career as literature and drama translator and theatre critic; after 1989, she became the secretary of the Romanian branch of the International Theatre Institute (ITI), hosted in a small room on the first floor of the UNITER (Romanian Association of Theatre Artists) villa. A rather honorific title, which nevertheless says a lot about the evolution of her relationship with the theatre world between the 50s and the events in December 1989.

18. Margareta Bărbuță, "Scrisoare către un director de teatru," *Teatrul*, no. 1 (1956): 58.

attitude” of institutions and literary managers, who were complacent in simply ticking off topics without any pressuring playwrights (in a friendly manner, inviting them to work alongside the artistic council, or going to factories and farms together with the theatre team): because some writers, to be honest, “have grown accustomed to the soft cushions of armchairs and the comfort of villas¹⁹ in Sinaia”²⁰. The revolutionary combative attitude of the text thus follows the same rhetoric as party meetings, which became current practice, clearly contravening the urge for artistic/aesthetic professionalization which it apparently intended²¹.

As I mentioned on another occasion²², in March 1957, the press introduces in the public discourse - most probably, as a reflex of party meetings taking place in the factories around the country - one of the few keywords of the soviet “thaw”, i.e. combating *dogmatism*, which together with the “personality cult”, will for a short while enter the active (partisan) vocabulary of the time. The so-called “thaw” within the USSR space, which surfaced both before, but especially after Nikita Khrushchev’s “secret report” of 25 February 1956²³, corresponds to a new political stage, synonymous with

19. After being nationalized, the villas of the former aristocracy, surrounding the Royal Palace of Sinaia, transformed in ‘creation houses’ dedicated to writers, painters, musicians etc. authorized by the Party, who benefited of consistent residencies, entirely supported by the State.

20. Bărbuță, “Scrisoare către un director de teatru,” 58.

21. It is worth mentioning that, at that time as well as later on, the position of the Theatre Department within the Ministry was a mere interface, separating the arts environment from the control deck, i.e. the Political Office of the Romanian Workers’ Party, with its propagandistic department. One can therefore imagine that “dressing theatre managers down” directly reflected similar reproaches towards the Theatre Department itself and its clerks, who did not work attentively and closely enough with playwrights before giving them the right to stage certain rather inept, although “aligned” texts. This way of sending the aggressive-normative message top-down, through the Ministry’s censor-clerks continued, with specific nuances, from decade to decade until 1989.

22. Miruna Runcan, “Arguments for a Historical Examination of the Discourse of Theatre and Film Criticism,” *Studia UBB Dramatica* LXII, no. 2 (2017): 9–22, <https://doi.org/10.24193/subbdrama.2017.2.01>.

23. The report was so secret that, starting March, it had become a text which was to be processed during party and Komsomol meetings all around the great Soviet empire; it was also published in the United States in March. In the USSR, it wasn’t officially published until 1989. In Romania, it also remained unpublished.

exposing Stalin's horrors, liberating hundreds of thousands of innocent people from camps, and a certain relaxation of relations with the outside, that is with Western countries and their culture²⁴. Consequently, the same relaxation is felt in arts and education: the chains of ideological censorship were relatively loosened, the leaders of the central and local creation unions who were formerly favoured by Stalin were replaced by moderate people, especially renowned artists, the imperative of the "socialist realism" gradually becomes less important, while avant-garde tradition comes back, etc.

In the case of Romania, the "secret report" is engulfed by thick haze, but factories, schools, universities and collective households instantly incriminate, in endless meetings, the "personality cult". Institution titles including the name Stalin itself, as well as the names of "the living heroes of the working class", such as Gh. Gheorgiu Dej, Chivu Stoica, etc., and sometimes even those of the dead heroes, were changed (for instance, a cinema in Bucharest changed its name from I.C. Frimu, becoming *Lumina/The Light*). Quite quickly, even the great statues representing the "big boss" disappeared from Bucharest and the rest of the country. Cultural debates started becoming more consistent, though, to be fair, they did not touch politics or ideology. This wake even includes the debate on theatre directing and "re-theatricalization", at the same time as other less fruitful debates organized in cinema, in the Arts' and Composers' Unions, etc. The setting up of the *Teatrul* journal is also the result of the same process (at a fluctuating pace, regional cultural magazines and publishing houses will follow, as part of an undeclared decentralization programme; however, this was never a release from the lashing of central censorship).

On dogmatism, no proper incriminating debate arises regarding the negative influences of imposed ideology over the culture and arts field, much less about "socialist realism", although we may assume there were debates on dogmatism behind closed doors, in party meetings, at the worker's youth organisations or in political education and in creation unions, as well as in culture institutions or editorial boards. The effects of these probably formal - if not downright confusing - debates are almost invisible in the cultural media. Actually, during this time, the top level of leading institutions

24. William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (London: Free Press, 2004), 283.

experiences few changes, mostly at inferior levels, in an attempt to “rejuvenate” the apparatus²⁵ - the inquisitorial position of Leonte Răutu²⁶ and his close ideological circle remains unwavering. This is certainly explained by Gheorgiu-Dej's reluctance to the Soviet thaw and to Khrushchev himself. Firmly set on not giving up the least bit of the power he had earned and consolidated through a highly controlled apparatus, Dej only showed formal gestures of adaptation to the thaw, then using the Hungarian Revolution as a repression and a cleansing weapon against the last illegalists inside the country; and, in relation with the USSR, as a pressure/blackmail factor to obtain strategic advantages (the retreat of the soviet armies, the dismantling of SovRoms (Soviet-Romanian industrial corporations), relatively independent industrial development strategies policies compared to Comecon directives, etc.).

However, a shadow of the discussions on *dogmatism* emerged in the discourse of theatre criticism on the occasion of a polemics between theatre reviewers - very interestingly, the majority of those who took the floor were people from inside the apparatus, whether for a long time or rather recently, some of them writing constantly criticism, others more sporadically²⁷. The concept of dogmatism was not defined, nor was its application in criticism discourses clarified, as the debate - including S. Damian, Vicu Mândra, B. Elvin, I.D. Sârbu, Horia Bratu, Radu Popescu, Eugen Luca and others - lamentably stranded on the sands of taste reasons about an author or another, a performance or another.

Nevertheless, 1956-1963 saw two recurrent topics, evidently following party guidelines, in culture magazines and most especially in the *Teatrul* journal: one related to the functions and the functioning of national theatres

25. Such as the critic Paul Cornea becoming the director of the Theatre Department within the Ministry of Culture, a position from which he discreetly observed and managed the revolt of young directors at the Theatre Professionals' Conference in December 1956.

26. Leonte Răutu (1910-1993) was one of the most powerful (and hated) figures in the propaganda sector of the Communist Party. He was the deputy chief of the Agitprop department of the Politburo (1945-1950) then its chief till 1965. Member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, he was deputy prime minister supervising education (1969 to 1972) and, from 1974 to 1981, President of the Ștefan Gheorghiu Political Studies Academy.

27. For a short description of this discussion, see Runcan, “Arguments for a Historical Examination of the Discourse of Theatre and Film Criticism,” 11–12.

(protracted by that related to the “profile” of theatres in general), and another (obsessive one) regarding playwriting. It is worth noting that, as we will see, despite the fact that the tone, the issues and the editorial policy changed every year according to political orders, these changes did not directly reflect the pressure coming from the Party. There is only one exception, in 1958, dedicated to “*revisionism*” - which we will tackle separately. Otherwise, the two recurrent themes seem to emerge and resume “naturally”, from the editorial board’s initiative. But, especially in the case of playwriting, their reconsidering is indissolubly related to the reports and analysis of the Theatre Professionals’ (National) Conferences and, particularly, they are very well reflected by all cultural publications.

Probably born in the comet tail of the January 1957 Theatre Professionals’ Conference - which actually concentrated the debate on “re-theatricalization” -, the February-March 1957 investigation into the National Theatre (especially that in Bucharest) is an indirect response to the accusations made by the young theatre director, on that occasion, against the repertoire and staff policy of the Bucharest National Theatre, the most prominent of the theatrical companies in the country. The respondents in the issues of March and April 1957 were not critics, but voices of important theatre artists, some of them true patriarchs: Ion Finteșteanu²⁸ and Marietta Sadova²⁹, both professors at the Theatre Institute, the directors Victor Bumbăști³⁰ and the younger Mihai Berechet³¹ and lastly Ion Marin Sadoveanu³², who had recently been appointed as the institution’s director, after the removal of the cultural activist Vasile Moldovan. The artists involved did not defend, on the contrary, they accused the repertoire and artistic downfall (mainly at the level of team

28. Ion Finteșteanu (1899–1984) was a theatre and film actor, professor at the Theatre Institute.

29. Marietta Sadova (1897-1981) was an actress and theatre director, professor at the Theatre Institute.

30. Victor Bumbăști, theatre director at the National Theatre from Bucharest.

31. Mihai Berechet (1927-1991) Actor and theatre director at the National Theatre Bucharest.

32. Ion Marin Sadoveanu (1893-1964) was a novelist, playwright and famous theatre historian, professor at the theatre Conservatory (after 1948 Theatre Institute). From 1926 he was appointed inspector of the theatres, being subsequently promoted to inspector general and in 1933 director general of the theatres and operas till 1940. He was the general manager of the National Theatre of Bucharest (1956-1958)

heterogeneity), while also focusing on the difficulties resulting from the fact that, for almost a decade, the institution's building at Majestic/ Comedia was unsuitable: although modified and consolidated, it was still too small and completely unfit for big productions (Finteşteanu ironically referred to the Studio hall built by Rebreanu at some point in the past as the venue between "vegetable stalls in the Amza Square")³³.

Perhaps this investigation would not have been worth mentioning here, as long as the journal's theatre critics or the critics-collaborators did not intervene, should its visible homogeneity not signal two issues that interfered with the editorial policy of *Teatrul* - and indirectly with the movement limits of the "opinion freedom" indicated by the party in this illusory moment of thaw. We are first and foremost referring to the "re-professionalization" movement which existed in almost all types of cultural and economic activities within the territory controlled by the Soviet Union, Romania included: in the sense that non-professional activists retreated towards the margins, giving an edge to specialists assimilated by the party or to declared "comrades". In the small debate mentioned here, this is the case with the critical coalition of artists, with the party's permission, against the former director-activist whose position had already been taken by a prestigious man of theatre - historian, writer, playwright - of the old generation, who already had the experience of managing the same institution in 1938-1940 (assisting Camil Petrescu). It is noteworthy that the artists' reactions were not the cause of Vasile Moldovan's dismissal, and their "courageous" and acid commentaries came after this.

On this transient terrain, important things were said, I believe, whether openly or covertly, for a nuanced overlook at the internal situation of the National Theatre, especially if one takes into consideration the combative attitude of the young generation of directors within the debate about directing, which had ended (just two editions before, an article by Sorana

33. The traditional building of the National was bombed in 1944 by the Germans and was demolished around 1951. The institution, who owned two halls, one on Victoria Boulevard, the other the Amzei Square, near a vegetable market, moved in the smaller building of former Comedia Theatre, one hundred meters down the boulevard.

Coroamă-Stanca³⁴ had been dedicated to the very “Functions of a National Theatre”). For example, Finteşteanu, Sadova or Bumbeşti highlight that artists of the elite collective of the National Theatre either left for other theatres, some actors attracted by the opportunity of promotion, or were at some point flooded by actors from commercial theatre; even if some of the new comers were talented, they had a totally different stand on training, prestige, work style. Of course, there is a (rather muddy) hint about the 1948 integration of Sică Alexandrescu’s³⁵ group - along with its leader³⁶ - of Comedia Theatre into the team of the National Theatre, when, after the National, Comedia Theatre filled the gap left behind by the bombed great hall. Moreover:

... the most serious thing is that Ion Şahighian - the only director who continued the tradition of the National Theatre and of our great director, Paul Gusty’s school - was removed, in his years of maturity, from the collective alongside which he had grown and trained.³⁷

And for this to be even clearer, it was Finteşteanu who said the bizarrely iconoclastic sentence: “Our success in Paris should not get us heated to incandescence”³⁸, given that Sică’s tour with *A Lost Letter* by I.L. Caragiale was treated with entire pages in the daily and cultural press, reports and interviews in the news and - the highest reward - the performance was filmed and scheduled for broadcasting in cinemas throughout the country. The fact that, in the National Theatre, a kind of a mute riot was stirring against Sică

34. Sorana Coroamă-Stanca (1921-2007) theatre and television director, playwright.

35. Sică Alexandrescu (1896-1973) theatre manager of multiple commercial companies between the two world wars, also theatre director. In the communist period he was theatre director at the National Theatre, and was awarded the titles of Emeritus Artist (1952) then People’s Artist (1963).

36. On this topic, see Miruna Runcan, “The Coronation of the Accompanying Comrade. Sică Alexandrescu – A Case Study,” *Studia UBB Dramatica* LXII, no. 2 (2017): 87–114.

37. Ion Finteşteanu, “Deziderate,” *Teatrul*, no. 2 (1957): 43–44. NOTE: Still, Ion Şahighian was then the manager and first-director of the Army Theatre (currently, Nottara Theatre), where he had gone together with his friend, actor George Vraca.

38. Finteşteanu, “Deziderate.”

Alexandrescu is also (politely) confirmed by Victor Bumbęști³⁹, who praises the former theatre entrepreneur for the quality of his comedies, all the while scolding him (like certain other critics had done, but in a muffled manner) for the dramatic fiasco with *King Lear* (in fact, Sadova too refers to this failure covertly⁴⁰).

The second reason why this first draft debate about the National Theatre is important from the viewpoint of the relations between political guidelines and critics' discourse is that the interventions - especially that of Finteșteanu and the more sensible one by young Mihai Berechet - introduce a broader theme, which will be resumed many times, and which, over the following decades, will also include theatre criticism, i.e. the topic of each theatre's *specific profile*, which should have first and foremost be reflected (the eternal goal) in their repertoires. Although, for the classic Finteșteanu the solution could only come top-down (through the providential person managing the theatre, i.e. I.M. Sadoveanu at the time), the issue of looking for and possibly finding a specific voice for the theatre companies remains not just open, but, as we will see, recurrent.

The freezing thaw - revisionism, partisanship, and other storms

As we know, in the case of Romania (but not only, things seem to have been similar in the USSR and other satellite countries too after the Hungarian Revolution), Khrushchev's thaw was pulsating, re-freezing every now and then because of the tribulations in the communist block's internal and/or external politics. In our particular case, the first signs of a storm after the short spring were felt as early as 1957 – when Ștefan Aug. Doinaș and I.D. Sîrbu, both editors at *Teatrul*, were arrested, the first in February, and the latter in September: their evidently unbalanced sentences (Doinaș one year, Sîrbu seven!) for “omission to denounce” the discussions in intellectual circles regarding the Hungarian Revolution; in 1958, Ioan Negoiteșcu, not an employee, but a mere collaborator of the same journal, was also arrested. But the actual guillotine in the field of theatre criticism only fell loudly in the spring of 1958.

39. Victor Bumbęști, “Remedii,” *Teatrul*, no. 2 (1957): 50.

40. Marietta Sadova, “În așteptare,” *Teatrul*, no. 2 (1957): 48.

If in March and April the first articles in each edition were already normative-like, solemn interventions, like party meeting speeches, signed by the usual artists or critics within the party circle who normally made such statements (Costache Antoniu, Al. Pop-Marțian, Florin Tornea, Valentin Silvestu, Margareta Bărbuță, etc.), the issue of May 1958 abruptly opens with an unsigned editorial (for a while, these unsigned editorials had disappeared) entitled "Theatre and Partisanship"⁴¹. As in other communist countries, the ideological base marks a programmatic return to Leninism, after decades dominated by keywords from Stalin's speeches, but this does not stop the unknown author to pertinaciously evoke the unbreakable norm of socialist realism. Starting from another anonymous remark - i.e. the objective of theatre is "enjoyment" - made during the Theatre Professionals' Conference which took place the previous year, proletarian wrath unfurls:

"Because, as it was proposed (as a panacea in our theatre art), this enjoyment manifestly hidden and implied the invitation to get back to a so-called purity of the artistic act, to an artistic creation "freed" from who knows what oppression of realities, of life, of our political beliefs and orientations (all these apparently adjoining, foreign to beauty...) (...) That is why the theory of art-enjoyment quickly received a necessary, firm response. And the discussions of the conference went on, in the name of realist-socialist art, for its further development."⁴²

The author combs through both theatre's placid repertoire policies, and the obsessive issue of the insufficient development of original playwriting, often accused of being superficial or ill-willed (we will come back to this later on), as well as the tendency to import somewhat fashionable Western texts (of course, not those of *theatre of the absurd*, incomprehensible and decadent, branded in a whip swish). All the issues highlighted in the text shall be extensively discussed by the journal's editors or collaborators throughout its pages and resumed in subsequent editions. The return to Leninist sources is sharply raised on almost half a page, declamatorily threading quotes from the works of the father of the Soviet Revolution.

41. *Teatrul* no.5, May 1958, p. 3-6. In Romanian, the term loosely translated from Russian is "*Partinitate*", an attitude manifestly reflecting the fidelity to the communist Party.

42. *Idem* p. 3.

Although “... we are not aware of anyone consciously, deliberately casting doubts or disobedient opinions in our country”, the author harshly turns to the political experience from the “Short History of the Central Committee of the CPSU” (referring to Lenin’s vituperate texts against the “renegade Kautsky”), extracting - probably from daily documents sent by Moscow to satellite countries - the new keyword of that stage: *revisionism*.

Nevertheless, the wind against revisionism beats strongly in certain countries and circles from abroad. It’s not a far-reaching wind. Discreetly and mischievously, it finds its way into pure consciousnesses, as its poisoned lash touches the very foundation of our art: the need to have the artistic work guided by the party and the realist-socialist method of artistic creation. (...) Once again, among us, there are no such voices of dangerous Marxism ‘virtuosos’. Still, since revisionism even recrudesces in other places, since the fight against revisionism is as necessary as the fight against open class enemies, we must strengthen our belief that our art, as valuable and lasting as it is, owes everything it has to the party’s guidance.⁴³

In order for the return signal to the rhetoric before the “thaw” to be clear, the above editorial was followed by a substantial extract from the equivalent editorial of the Moscow soviet *Teatr* magazine no. 5, published a month before and signed by a certain M. Gus⁴⁴, who of course reiterated and commented, in a disciplined and enthusiastic manner, on a myriad of cited Leninist texts from the beginning of the 20th century. This was followed by an extensive review by Florin Tornea⁴⁵ of a performance produced by The Workers Theatre CFR Giulești, based on the debut text of the playwright Liviu Bratoloveanu, *Zile de februarie (February Days)* - a fresco-play dedicated to nothing other than the legendary 1933 railwaymen strike. The mere placement of this performance analysis right after the editorials, and not in the broad section traditionally dedicated to dramatic reviews, aims at positioning Bratoloveanu’s play and the performance of the Giulești Theatre as a “partisan vision” model.

43. *Idem* p. 6.

44. M. Gus, “Arta și democrația,” *Teatrul*, no. 5 (1958): 7–12.

45. Florin Tornea, “Valoarea umană și evocarea revoluționară,” *Teatrul*, no. 5 (1958): 13–18.

Nevertheless, it is for the ideologue-critic, Eugen Luca⁴⁶ to exemplarily strike the new circumstance dramaturgy, which is intended as “aligned”, but is simply cliché or, more subtly, intentionally harmful. Texts staged in various theatres in the previous season - completely buried nowadays, such as: *Microbii (The Germs)* by Dan Negreanu, *Secretul doctorului Bergman (Doctor Bergman's Secret)* by Frederic Vinea, *Flacăra vie (The Open Light)* by Ștefan Tita and Liviu Floda, or *Visul nopților noastre (Our Nights' Dream)* by Ana and Eugen Naum - are quite rigorously demolished.

If in June only the editorial - again unsigned - is full of indications regarding “Playwrights and the New Communist”, the July edition overall is a kind of a destructive mix of criticism and self-criticism. It opens with no less than three editorial texts dedicated to/resulting from the annual Theatre Professionals' Conference⁴⁷. At the time, the director Mircea Avram was in charge of the Theatre Department of the Ministry. In the Conference report, on which the cited article is largely based, he ceremoniously speaks about the “danger of liberal attitudes, conciliatory towards bourgeois ideology and its agents within the field of arts”, which signals that if revisionism didn't seem present in the Romanian artistic movement, new keywords were found to become targets in the game of intention processes – in this case, the barbarous *împăciuitoarism (conciliatoriness)* towards the former bourgeois classes).

At the beginning, we triumphantly find out that, for the first time in our history, the 1957-58 season opened, as ordered, in *all* theatres around the country with original Romanian plays. No less than 36 plays are thus counted, of which 17 absolute premiers! However, this blown-up figure is narrowly exceeded by the performances based on soviet texts, also a professional obligation of all theatre institutions, given the forty's anniversary of the October Revolution: 39 premiers “represented by 28 titles”. Still, the praise only goes on for one page, while the rest of the material is dominated by condemnations.

A prominent place between reproaches, related to poor playwriting and the texts' lack of orientation, is taken up by what subsequently became

46. Eugen Luca, “Pretextul actualității,” *Teatrul*, no. 5 (1958): 19–24.

47. “Consfătuirea oamenilor de teatru,” *Teatrul*, no. 6 (1958): 3–12.

the “Ana Novac trial”⁴⁸ – unmasking the weaknesses and (at that time, insinuated only) the ideological toxicity of the play *Ce fel de om ești tu?* (*What Kind of a Person Are You?*), written by the young author whose début, with another play, had been very well received over the previous years. We will come back to this episode of professional execution, in its way typical of the communist re-freeze.

Still, in comrade Avram’s article, the red flag about closing (once again) the windows facing Western Europe comes from his harsh criticism against the two theatres that dared to introduce Jean Anouilh’s benign melodrama *Invitation to the Castle* “besides the plan” (i.e. eschewing censorship, an option no longer possible from then on).

This ideologically wrong play, whose main aim is to present the ‘humanism’ of capitalism, promoting class reconciliation and trying to distract people from the true face of capitalism, was chosen by our main stage and by one of our best theatres to complete their repertoire.

For things to be even clearer, the Theatre Department director wrote a (preventive, we would say) charge-sheet against the more or less fashionable Western dramaturgy, which the Party believed to be harmful and unrepresentative of the social issues of the time, and which was programmatically shut off (for only two or three years, to be honest, as we will later see, when discussing the aesthetic resynchronisation processes).

48. Ana Novac (Zimra Harsányi), 1929-2010, wrote in Romanian and later French. Having survived Auschwitz, in the 50s, many writers and critics of the time regarded her as a fresh voice, based on her début with the play *Familia Kovacs* (*The Kovacs Family*). Yet, the 1957 publication and staging of the play *Ce fel de om ești tu?* (*What Kind of Person are You?*) at the Municipal Theatre (nowadays, Bulandra), whose subject was the consciousness processes of an engineer regarding the abuses committed by some party-member plant colleagues, turned the writer into the perfect scapegoat in the re-freeze campaign triggered by Gheorghiu-Dej’s regime following the Hungarian Revolution. The press condemned the play, and the writer was thrown out of the party and of the Writers’ Union. (This is not the only case, as many Hungarian or Hungarian-Jews writers and journalists of the time, especially former Communist Party members from the underground period 1921-1944, were also deported). In 1956, she emigrated to Hungary, then to West Berlin and from there she moved to France in 1968, where she published several novels, prose and memoirs collections).

But plays foreign to our ideology, which stem from current dramaturgy in Capitalist countries, the morass of bourgeois ideology, have no place on our stages. Whether they approach the total decomposition - into hatred and disgust - of humans, or the desperate wait for a debatable solution, as it happens in Samuel Beckett's dramaturgy; or the sexual issue, elevated to a primordial philosophy, as in Tennessee Williams and other American playwrights' works, or about mystic solutions, as it happens in the case of Italian playwrights such as Diego Fabbri and others, or attempting to completely bypass any social issues (...), this playwriting spilling from country to country within the capitalist camp, losing its national traits, actually expresses the disorientation of a class of intellectuals who has lost its true purpose.⁴⁹

In view of the fact that in Romania the *Glass Menagerie* only saw the limelight in 1960, at the Municipal (Bulandra) Theatre, and that nothing by (the now classic) Beckett, nor by (the nowadays almost forgotten) Catholic playwright and script writer Diego Fabbri was staged in our country until this conference, the above diatribe seems rather aimed at clipping the wings of potential theatre managers, literary secretaries and, most especially, directors who may have gotten an idea to ask for the plays of these - quasi unknown in the country - authors to be included in their repertoires, under the pretext of a possible connection between their repertoire offer and Western dramaturgy. Should we consider the frenzy of staging Tennessee Williams over the following decades and the great success of the films based on his plays which entered the Romanian market in subsequent years, the sad irony of the above-mentioned party directives now becomes evident (and the mere enumeration of the first two undesirable authors indirectly sounds like an invitation for curious theatre artists who had had enough propaganda to get to know them).

In reality, the fact that Beckett was mentioned next to Williams may have an immediate explanation: probably unsuspecting of the reasons behind the new interdictions which were to be stated during the conference, just one edition earlier, in June, the *Teatrul* journal had published a rather

49. Idem, p. 8.

extensive essay by the comparative literature professor Vera Călin, in which she discussed *Waiting for Godot* over several pages, timidly acknowledging that the “author is talented and the dialogue disturbing; we are still rational enough to observe the play’s Kafka-, Camus-, and Sartre-like echoes.”⁵⁰ However, using reviews of the time and negative quotes by Sean O’ Casey, the emblematic Western communist playwright of the time, Vera Călin finds Beckett morbid and incomparable to a world undergoing a full socialist reconstruction process. The essay also briefly, but not without substance, analyses *Endgame*, but also *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Williams, as well as *Requiem for a Nun* by Albert Camus (the writer had recently won a Nobel Prize). Cautious, despite showing her knowledge of the field, as well as plenty analytical fineness, in the end, the author concludes:

We are used to talking about such ‘disintegrative’ literary works as if they were decadent productions. Reading the above-mentioned dramas, we become terribly aware of the moribund character of this literature. (...) Their authors do not even try to promote the honour, the constructive and noble side of humans. Their funeral message doesn’t quietly slip, but is ostentatiously proclaimed, as it represents the quintessence and extreme potentiation of the vision on life in a crepuscular world.⁵¹

It is not very clear to what extent Mircea Avram referred to Vera Călin’s article when he chose to nominate Beckett and Williams to illustrate the Western dramas that Romanian theatre art should keep away from. Instead, the report openly accused *Teatrul* journal of “seriously lacking” the ideological guidance for theatre people, thus failing to fulfil its mission. The journal wouldn’t have “taken a combative stance towards the unhealthy phenomena in our theatres” and, although harshly criticised in *Scânteia*, it didn’t show any sign of reforming. Actually, starting with the following editions, the editorial box disappeared, and Horia Deleanu – party’s cultural activist who, after only two years, was considered to be too assimilated into the conciliatory intellectualism of the theatre field - was removed as the chief editor of the monthly publication.

50. Vera Călin, “Anxietate și neant. Pe marginea unor piese ale Apusului,” *Teatrul*, no. 6 (1958): 27.

51. *Idem*, p. 30.

As we witness, the terrorism of keywords - *revisionism*, *reconciliation*, *cosmopolitanism*, "*passive attitude*", *negativism*, and soon *practicality* (referring to an attitude focusing on professional arguments, which tend to elude/prevail compared to ideological commands), almost all of them taken/loaned from terms in the soviet vocabulary of the time - quickly took over speeches about theatre. All these terms and phrases functioned as bullets shot at the new forms of 'deviation' from party guidelines, incriminating both artists, and institutions, from theatres and their management, to theatre criticism itself, in this case, the country's only academic journal in the field. They were used in a disciplined manner (which is, after all, related to self-criticism) in many expository writings or (more rarely) dramatic reviews signed by critics themselves, whether employees or collaborators.

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Let's thus speak about some illustrating examples regarding the immediate consequences of party commandments' direction related to criticism practice. To this end, I have chosen two of the targets established in the 1958 spring and summer editorials, on which Mircea Avram's July report insists too: the partisanship of playwrights, i.e. the "Ana Novac case" and "decadent" Western dramaturgy.

The case of Ana Novac has vaguely been summarized in other cultural studies dedicated to the Gheorghiu-Dej regime⁵². The factual haze around it can be explained through the very military-style public speeches published in the media of the time, which is fairly odd considering that, in the myriad of memoirs published after 1990 (including the translation of her own memoirs from French), the precise explicative references are rather insufficiently detailed. It's clear though - from the viewpoint of the few authors mentioning the case, and from that of Ana Novac herself⁵³ - that in

52. Ana Selejan, *Literatura în totalitarism 1952-1953* (Sibiu: Thausib, 1995), 143; Cristian Vasile, *Viața intelectuală și artistică în primul deceniu al regimului Ceaușescu. 1965-1975* (București: Humanitas, 2015).

53. Ana Novac, *Frumoasele zile ale tinereții mele*, trans. Anca-Domnica Ilea (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 2014).

the winter of 1958, her play *Ce fel de om ești tu?* was almost randomly chosen as a scapegoat for implementing the new keywords in theatre: conciliatoriness, revisionism, and negativism.

Ana Novac, a Jew born in Dej, was deported to Auschwitz when she was 11 and miraculously survived, but like many others, lost her entire family. Until her emigration in 1965, she only wrote in Romanian: prose, essays, articles and two theatre plays, *Preludiul* and *Familia Kovacs*, appreciated by authorities and critics alike. The latter even won her the State Prize one year before the press campaign and her ideological execution. Her third play, *Ce fel de om ești tu?*, was included in the repertory of the Municipal Theatre's 57-58 season and was proudly announced by actress-manager Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra⁵⁴ in an article published in the Theatre journal in October⁵⁵. It premièred on December 24th. In March, an unsigned finger-pointing article was published in *Scânteia* (the Party's daily journal), reproaching the bleak atmosphere of the play, its lack of ideologic orientation and its negativism. The article did not actually discuss the factual, circumstantial arguments of these accusations. Dutiful and obedient, Florin Tornea, the most aligned reviewer of the *Teatrul* journal, most certainly following an order, dedicated an article to this "case" in the April editorial, which focused on partisanship. It was not a review per se, but an ideological critique typical for that time, which did not convey any information about the play's action, place, narrative and characters. However, we do find out that:

54. Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra (1973-1961) famous theatre and film actress, born into the aristocratic old family Sturdza, who had a consistent education and had an academic degree in literature and philosophy. For choosing an artistic carrier, she was rejected by her family. She married Tony Bulandra, also a well-known actor and, in association with other important colleagues from their generation, they took over the independent Davilla Company in 1914, and transformed it in the most famous private theatre in Romania. Even if all the partners were related in and administration council, Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra was the real executive manager all along. From 1948 till her death she was the general manager of the Municipal Theatre Bucharest (named after her since then).

55. Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra, "Un bogat și valoros bilanț," *Teatrul*, no. 10 (1957): 17.

On the one hand, Ana Novac leaves the impression that the world she captures is no longer divided into classes. That in this world, the class struggle - with all its complex aspects - has ended and, with it, the negative influence on mentality, psychology, and morality of the class enemy. (...) These features of disarmed, disabused and helpless psychologies specific for the small bourgeois spirit turn in their full frailty against socialism, against the working class and against the party. (...) taking your only hero, who understands the perspectives that the party calls and urges towards, to the abyss of losing these perspectives, to distrusting them, distrusting the party and the class he belongs to: could the play send a more perspectiveless message?⁵⁶

As bizarre as it sounds, Florin Tornea is still lenient and indulgent to the author, adding in the next paragraph that he trusts her power to reform, probably not yet knowing the national dimension of the finger-pointing processes, all of which were justified through the keywords above. After Mircea Avram's July report presented at the Theatre Professionals' Conference, it is Margareta Bărbuță's turn to try to derail the reasons why the party believes that, in a record year from the point of view of performances based on current Romanian plays, playwrights wrote a lot of poor texts and that some topical plays were actually harmful. After incriminating recent plays which "seem" to highlight the bourgeois or landowner's drama, an entire paragraph is, to this end, dedicated to Ana Novac's play.

For instance, one could not deny that Ana Novac's *Ce fel de om ești tu?* is drawing a conflict. But the purposes of this conflict are totally wrong. The play unjustly and artificially sets the economic construction, the very base of the socialist construction, against individual interests elevated to foremost requirements. The author believes that their upholder, Toma, represents the frontrunner of the party; nevertheless, in his actions and ideas, the politically short-sighted character is not only far from having such a quality, but also refutes it. Instead, the very character promoting the interests of building socialism and putting the interests of the majority before the individual, i.e. Ianoș Madaraș, becomes the target of

56. Florin Tornea, "Responsabilitatea dramaturgului," *Teatrul*, no. 4 (1958): 6.

confusing critique. The play thus turns the balance of power in our reality upside down, so that the unfolding of events sows mistrust in the possibility of meeting our objective, as well as confusion and scepticism, instead of contributing to the strengthening of new forces and to mobilizing masses to build socialism.⁵⁷

As we can see, no summary of the play is provided this time either, but only an allegoric record of the plot and the names of two characters, with no indication whatsoever of their status, biography or nature. In 1957-1958, the journal doesn't bother to publish any review about the performance staged at the Municipal Theatre (which is drastically and evidently unfairly scolded for its repertory in another unsigned editorial in July, entitled "Ideological Orientation and Theatre Practice"; the aim is most probably to shake the armchair of the manager Luciei Sturdza-Bulandra, which nevertheless doesn't happen). In fact, Ana Novac went through an unmasking finger-pointing trial for negativism and conciliatoriness; it seems she refused to admit she was guilty and to engage in self-criticism, and as a result, she was excluded from the party and her State Prize was withdrawn - which evidently implies she lost her right to sign and publish anything else.

Her name is only mentioned in a subsequent issue of the journal within the context of a review by the bellicose young critic Mira Iosif, concerning a debate published in the *Tribuna* magazine of Cluj, dedicated to the problem of contemporary theatre: an inquiry to which established directors, actors and playwrights respond⁵⁸. The journal gets a good whole-paragraph scolding for including the author's viewpoint in its investigation, as a response to the accusations from *Scântea*, which incriminated the negativism and conciliatoriness in her play:

It's very curious and incomprehensible that the intervention of Ana Novac found a place in the pages of *Tribuna* magazine. Criticised on countless occasions for the harmful and false perspective underlying

57. Margareta Bărbuță, "Spiritul de partid și eficiența mesajului," *Studia UBB Dramatica*, no. 7 (1958): 23.

58. Mira Iosif, "De ce dibuiri și echivocuri? Întrebări pe marginea unei anchete a revistei *Tribuna*," *Teatrul*, no. 8 (1958): 48-51.

the play *Ce fel de om ești tu?* instead of explaining her mistakes by adopting a self-criticising stand, the author chooses to resist and oppose criticism. Trying to retaliate in a hidden polemic manner to the main critique against her in the *Scânteia* magazine, Ana Novac's reply is a new manifestation of her erroneous positions. By transposing the problems of creation into the field of "pure" passions, she openly promotes "the autonomy of art"; while the ostentatious statement that the connection between the artist and the present is to be done "by taking on all its limits, inconvenience and risks" is an insidious hint, remind the well-known theory about "the absolute freedom of creation" or about the "gratuitous game" of art.⁵⁹

On this tone, the Ana Novac "case" is definitively closed, shutting the window, which was barely opened two years before, in the hope that creation would vaguely be liberated from the tight chains of absolute control over socialist realism. However, as we will see in the chapter dedicated to the evolution of discourses on theatre aesthetics, these *corsi e ricorsi* about what art is and about the limits of creativity will reach much further than this case - which still remains fully exemplifying.

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As far as the timid attempts to freshen the repertoire and the new party targets regarding decadent dramaturgy are concerned, things are very clear - at least for about a year and a half: the class enemy hides behind the smallest details, i.e. we are witnessing a heavy-handed re-stalinization throb. Sixty years later, some critical interventions on this topic either look very sad, or downright hilarious.

In the very issue of July, in which the report of chief Mircea Avram incriminated the staging of Jean Anouilh's *Invitation to the Castle* in two national theatres, as well as the theatre of the absurd - totally unknown in Romania, the journal's editors and collaborators very enthusiastically detailed these faults, as a hidden self-criticism. Trixy Staicu (a critic who,

59. Idem, p. 50.

over the following decades, reconverted to translating prose and plays, mainly from English) dedicated an entire essay to trends in French playwriting, combining both the former avant-garde represented by Jean Genet, and the philosophic absurd path, represented by Beckett, Ionesco, etc.

... we are dealing with texts (...) which aim at 'kicking' spectators (as foreseen by Ionesco) and getting them out of their normal balance. (...) By renouncing a few essential elements of current dramaturgy, the 'avant-garde' replaces them with an abstract, surreal type of writing. (...) In fact, Ionesco spells this out loud in *Victims of duty*: 'I dream of an irrational theatre', or more explicitly, a theatre in which the writer's oneiric vision fuses heteroclitic elements through an unusual alchemy, with a view to suggesting what he calls 'the odd character of reality'.⁶⁰

With the above-analysis (and many similar others) in mind, somewhere in the background, we notice the kind of rusty effort, resulting in cold perspiration, put up by these journalists (otherwise, some of the few people whose reading was up-to-date in a closed and well-controlled environment), who take on the task of stigmatizing certain playwrights - as dictated from higher forums - even if the just had revelations about some "unusual alchemy of heteroclitic elements". Still, to remove any doubt, the author quickly reaches a definite conclusion, directly derived from Mircea Avram's report:

We are simply talking about a new (and at the same time trite) literary diversionism, a kind of distorting literature, of prestidigitation (...) ... the much-trumpeted "avant-garde" literature, as it is called, is the literature of a dying class within a loose society. (...) It is understood that this literature cannot meet the requirements of anything making up the bulk of Romanian artistic creation.⁶¹

In the same July issue, Florin Tornea wrote a demolishing review of Anouilh's "*Invitation to the Castle*" (this storm in a teacup, actually), a real tour de force in an attempt to treat a banal, absolutely harmless text as

60. Trixy Staicu, "Paris 58 și cavalerii iraționalismului," *Teatrul*, no. 7 (1958): 58.

61. Idem, p. 61-62.

dangerous, because it wasn't properly oriented from a political point of view; in August, the conclusions of the Theatre Professionals' Conference were drawn in a self-critical, unsigned text, which even cited Ioan Masoff, the literary secretary of the Bucharest National Theatre, who engaged in self-criticism for recommending the play to be staged.

Nevertheless, in the same issue, Radu Lupan (anglicist, critic and essayist, publishing house manager and director of External Press division of the Ministry of Culture, well-known translator of works by G.B. Shaw, E. Hemingway, Durrenmatt, Dos Passos, Faulkner, Updike, Joyce, etc.) vigorously stepped into the incriminating campaign against Western playwriting with an essay entitled "The Mystical Solution to Western Drama".⁶² Directly connected to the time's party rhetoric, which was programmed to invent dangers and enemies beyond the Iron Curtain, the essay focused on a sharply rising (imaginary) trend, i.e. the trend of encouraging the staging of "irrationalism, mystic or fideistic agnosticism", and clever formulas for the "opiate of the masses". Today, it seems truly funny how Radu Lupan mixed - clearly betting on the reader's ignorance - names of authors representing totally opposed cultures and ideologies, from openly leftist authors, such as Andre Breton or Graham Greene (whose works Radu Lupan was just translating or had already translated, such as "The Quiet American" was published exactly in 1958, and "Our Man in Havana" was printed in 1960 at the publishing house he was running) to Mircea Eliade (whose essay "Mythes, Reves et Mysteres" had just been published in 1957, with absolutely no connection to this discussion; thus, willingly or not, Lupan made an unsolicited confession about his dubious readings). Of course, his anti-mystic criticism would also target the catholic playwright Diego Fabri, who was mentioned in the Conference report, and whom nobody had heard and would not later hear about in Romania; and surely, the Nobel Prize winner Albert Camus, whose *Requiem for a Nun* was fully distorted so that it could fit into Procust's mystical bed. The time distance from the publication of the essay confers nearly grotesque meanings to this stunt, as both Graham Green's *Sanctuary*, and Camus' *Requiem* are actually dramatizations after

62. *Teatrul*, no. 8, 1958, p. 62-67.

William Faulkner's micro-novels, from which Lupan would translate the - critically acclaimed, of course - short story collection *The Bear* in 1964, and *Light in August* in 1973.

A very similar lunge was done by Radu Lupan (who I only use here as a - not at all isolated - example of the successive twists and turns brought to the criticism diagnostic, depending on the topics induced/imposed by the party leaders) in an essay published in the September issue. This time⁶³, the target was strictly Eugen Ionesco, charged not only for his recent celebrity on the stages in France and abroad, but most especially for his pretentiousness of philosophically theorizing his position. This time too, the context introduction is a display of erudition, with ironical references to F. Alquié's *Philosophy of Surrealism* (1956) or to Gaëtan Picon's *History of literature* (1956) - thus showing that the top party members dealing with culture were allowed to read recent books, impossible to be found in libraries or bookshops. The essay is important not for - diagonally and accusingly - getting Romanian readers acquainted with some of Ionesco's plays (against the grain, it "summarizes" *The Bald Soprano*, *Victims of Duty*, *The Chairs*, *The New Tenant*), but mostly for the numerous citations from the recently published (in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*) essay "*Expérience du théâtre*" (February 1958).

From Ionesco's perspective, all realist theatre is lapsed because of the 'ideology' it expresses; the only plays destined to last are those which are outside of time - of their time, of course. (...) But the playwright doesn't stop there. (...) He continues that 'exaggeration dislocates reality. Dislocation, disarticulation of language too'. This is how a reactionary ideological position - stemming from misunderstanding and negating the situation, from supporting the autonomy of consciousness (in this case, of 'imagination' and 'dreams') - can't help but introduce a profoundly disaggregated element. Renouncing 'ideology' (...), renouncing a work's sense aimed at expressing reality, a work of art's social and historical commitment, trying to get beyond reality, Ionesco can only reach the disintegration of artistic expression, which was what got him to writing anti-plays, anti-theatre.⁶⁴

63. Radu Lupan, "Antiteatrul lui Eugen Ionesco," *Teatrul*, no. 9 (1958): 67-72.

64. Lupan, 68.

The entire essay is full of excerpts from Ionesco's article in NRF, and it is enough to remove the negative forms of verbs and the references to the mandatory ideology from Lupan's comments to obtain an - in fact - quite good and solid analysis welcoming a new Western author. Considering all this, I dare to imagine that the effect of this article was twofold: on the one hand, the text ticked his statutory obligation to demonize Ionesco, as ordered from above. Still, on the other hand, it worked as a teaser, an appetizer stirring the curiosity and the dreams of Romanian readers/theatre people; this can also explain the fervour with which the mature directors who emerged from the re-theatricalization would, only six or seven years later, start a real socialist race to stage Ionesco. In fact, I honestly believe that the author of inter-conflictual *NO* essays (1934) would have found this open-end argumentative centrifuge extremely funny:

Thinking that the world of dreams is real, that human ideas, feelings, wishes - in general, the 'imaginary world' - only come from their conscience, investing them with absolute autonomy is being unable to understand reality. But, behind this inability of understanding reality lies the intention of deforming. Art based on such principles can only be a type of art doomed to disintegrate, decompose. And what other meaning can one find in renouncing 'the principle of character identity and unity' for a 'dynamic psychology', that is for the plot and character's oneiric lability? What does 'contradictory in non-contradictory' mean other than the disappearance of the borders between truth and absurd, logical and irrational? What else is the meaning of these obscure myths about the meaning of the human destiny in society, about the futility of social life, about human beings' impossibility to give sense to their existence?⁶⁵

At this point, I take the liberty to promote the (working) assumption (though not as a joke) which we will try to discuss in further research: in the medium and long term, the effort to blow up recent Western aesthetic trends works against the propagandistic wishes/intentions of the leaders - whether they wanted to or not, some critics-activists who had responsibilities in cultural institutions, as much as they seemed to bring down doors, they actually opened windows. As political marketing experts say, "bad advertising is still advertising".

65. Lupan, 72.

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MIRUNA RUNCAN is a writer, a theatre critic and a Professor PhD of the Theatre and Film Faculty at "Babes Bolyai" University Cluj, Romania. Co-founder (with C.C. Buricea-Mlinarcic) of Everyday Life Drama Research and Creation Laboratory (awarded with a three-year National Grant for Research in 2009). Author of *The Romanian Theatre Model*, Bucharest: Unitext Publishing House, 2001; *The Theatricalisation of Romanian Theatre. 1920-1960*, Cluj: Eikon Publishing House, 2003; *For a Semyothics of the Theatrical Performance*, Cluj: Dacia Publishing House, 2005; *The Sceptical's Spectator's Armchair*, Bucharest: Unitext Publishing House, 2007; *The Universe of Alexandru Dabija's Performances*, Limes Publishing House and Camil Petrescu Foundation, Bucharest 2010; *Bunjee-Jumping. Short Stories*, Cluj: Limes Publishing House, 2011; *Enlove with Acting: 12 Actor's Portraits*, Bucharest: Limes Publishing House and Camil Petrescu Foundation, 2011; *Signore Misterioso: An Anatomy of the Spectator*, Bucharest: Unitext, 2011; *Theatre Criticism. Where to?* Cluj University Press, 2015; *Odeon 70 – An Adventure in Theatre History*, Bucharest, Oscar Print, 2016; *Theatre in Dioramas – The Romanian Theatre Criticism*, vol I, 1956-1964, Bucharest, Tracus Arte Publ.