

Using Archive Work in Live Stage-Directing

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Abstract: This paper will present in a narrative form the documentary and the creative process followed by four young theatre directors while studying at the University of Arts from Tirgu-Mures as part of their master class program in Theatre Directing. Firstly, the reader will be familiarized with one of this master class curriculum's assignments designed by Theodor-Cristian Popescu: to deliver a performative essay using as a starting point one famous Romanian theatre performance. Secondly, this presentation will record, for each of these students, the path from documents and archives to their exam/performance. The purpose will not be to evaluate or investigate the artistic value of these products. The focus will be guided towards the students' approach while accessing archive documents and the transformations of all these materials in an artistic concept.

Keywords: 1960s and 1970s Romanian theatre performances, master class curriculum, Theodor-Cristian Popescu, University of Arts from Tirgu-Mures, performative essay.

The master class conducted by Theodor-Cristian Popescu at the University of Arts from Tirgu-Mures was tailored thirteen years ago. This MA in Theatre Directing was designed using as main guides the active principle and the dialogue (with and between contemporary artists). Its central pillars are the debate and the research skills specific to any postgraduate program. As Theodor-Cristian Popescu states, 'this course was designed so that the only meeting when the students attend in a passive manner is the first one: then the teacher reveals the curricula and are listed the first two assignments. All

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the other meetings consist in a dialogue based on the students' assignment submissions'². Among the topics approached by the program's curricula one can find subjects such as culture and the world we live in (using as a starting point Mario Vargas Llosa's *Notes on the Death of Culture: Essays on Spectacle and Society* and Will Gompertz's, *What Are You Looking At*) or assignments where playground space is the main focus point (the secret memory of a non-theatrical space³). As I have stated above, another principle that guides these courses concerns the dialogue between contemporary artists. As a result, one assignment revolves around understanding and initiating an artistic dialogue with a contemporary theatre director⁴. This task assumes the study of a theatre director's work, understanding hers or his point of view and, afterwards, staging a text (usually a non-theatrical text) using the artist's lenses. Other two challenging tasks aim to staging a dream⁵ and a text using principles specific to popular theatre.

Among all these assignments lays one that assumes dealing with archives and past documents – the performative essay:

The performative essay's theme is not to reconstruct in a precise manner the original performance, but to face us (and this is precisely what the essay assumes) with the student's commentary regarding the studied object. Using traces discovered in an anthropological manner – searching through publications, audio and/or video records, photos, sketches, witnesses, critical reviews - at a primary level, the author of the essay must make us aware of the performance's impact upon its contemporaries. At another level, the student must detect the legacy

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2. Theodor-Cristian Popescu, *Dinăuntru. Un curs masteral de regie a teatrului contemporan și o selecție de articole* (Bucharest: Eikon, 2018), 16.
 3. The task of this assignment is to generate an artistic concept around a non-theatrical space that has a powerful secret memory, and to design an imaginary performance that should reveal this hidden memory. The goal of this task is to raise awareness regarding the actual characteristics of a space: its dimensions, its materiality and the main achieved skill is how to see/look at a space, specifically, as theatrical playground/space.
 4. Also, part of this principle are the seminars and the workshops where national and international artists are invited.
 5. This assignment has a fixed time duration (usually eleven minutes and eleven seconds), and one of its goals is to make the student aware of how to control the scenic time. Another goal concerns the relation with the spectator (this theme is designed just for one spectator), and the settling of the sensations in the center of this theatrical endeavor.

passed by this ancestor: what and in what way she or he contributed to the development of the Romanian performance practices. The added difficulty of this assignment resides in the fact that the student is presenting all this material in the form of a new performance, an essay performance about another performance, and not using the form of an essay presented usually at a colloquy.⁶

The topic described above has been part of this MA in Theatre Directing curricula only since 2014. Since then, the assignment has been staged by two classes of students. It is a task that has more than one goal. One of its objectives is to create a bond between theatrical practices and practitioners carrying a mythical aura, and the present. Another objective is to understand the tradition of Romanian theatre and what it assumes to work in such a tradition. Using the same principles that guide the program – precisely, the dialogue with the other – this assignment aims to add its contribution in discovering and unzipping the heritage of the past.

The students' part of the 2014/2015 class were presented a list of four renowned Romanian theatre performances: *As You Like It*, by William Shakespeare, directed by Liviu Ciulei (1961), *Five sketches/ The Bald Soprano*, by I.L. Caragiale and Eugène Ionesco, directed by Valeriu Moisescu (1965), *Rameau's Nephew* by Denis Diderot, directed by David Esrig (1968), *The Government Inspector*, by Nikolai Gogol, directed by Lucian Pintilie (1972). None of these performances survived on a video recording. Therefore, the students had to access other type of archives and documents in order to present on stage their performative essay. This is the precise point where the second part of this paper begins: recording, in a narrative form, the path from documents and archives to their exam/performance.

Andrei Elek's Ciulei essay

Andrei Elek's exam had as a starting point Liviu Ciulei's performance *As You Like It*. This famous Romanian performance had its premiere in 1961 at Municipal Theatre (Bulandra Theatre, today). Ciulei's performance marked an important achievement: it was itself a testimony that the process of re-theatricalization has been established. *As You Like It* was well received by a

6. Popescu, *Dinăuntru*, 31.

part of the Romanian theatre critics. However, an article written by Mircea Alexandrescu for *Teatrul* magazine carries a different opinion. As a response, three months later, Liviu Ciulei defends the performance in an article of his own. Considering all these reactions, a round-table is organized by the same magazine and its results published the next year⁷. Therefore, today we have archived a written critical dialogue regarding Ciulei's performance.

Andrei Elek chose as the location for his *Ciulei essay* the Painting Hall at 'Ioan Slavici' Classical Theatre Arad. Formerly, this place served as workshop for painting theatre sets. Choosing this location, the student made a direct connection with Liviu Ciulei - not just a famous Romanian theatre director, but also an architect and set designer who, in 1956, advocated for the *The Theatricalization of Theater Painting*. Nowadays, the Painting Hall serves as a place for rehearsals. It is a hall with many and large windows. This aspect was also important, as the exam/performance started at sunset and, while it unfolded, the windows captured the night rising.



Fig. 1: Andrei Elek, *Ciulei essay* – performative essay using as a starting point *As You Like It*, directed by Liviu Ciulei, exam/performance, Theatre directing master class, 2014/2015, University of Arts from Tîrgu-Mureş. Photo by Cosmin Ardeleanu

7. For more information about this performance's impact, see Miruna Runcan, "Cum vă place," *Dicționarul Multimedia al Teatrului Românesc* 1 (July 15, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.47383/DMTR.01.33>.

Liviu Ciulei's performance did not survive on a video recording. This proved to be a difficult task in solving the assignment. The main and probably the most desired source of documentation was missing. Therefore, Andrei Elek had to search through different archives. The performance survived on some photos. Part of this photos were printed on large mesh canvases that covered the hall's windows (see Fig. 1). Another important source of documentation proved to be Liviu Ciulei's own written thoughts about theatre, scenography and theatre directing. Andrei Elek selected the following sources: Liviu Ciulei's articles entitled *The Theatricalization of Theater Painting* (1956), *Criticism in the service of the text or parade of criticism* (1961), excerpts from the album entitled *with thoughts and images. Liviu Ciulei director, actor, set designer, architect* (2009). A selection of this once written thoughts was present in the exam through the actors' voices. The actual presence of the listed magazines and albums was sensed by the audience: one could see Liviu Ciulei's album or the old *Teatrul* magazines in the hands of the actors. On a TV screen were projected parts of the TV show *Înapoi la argument* – a dialogue between Liviu Ciulei and Horia-Roman Patapievic (those parts regarding *As You Like It*). The soundscape of the exam/performance consisted in numerous materials: the voiceover from the documentary entitled *with thoughts and images* (a TVR production); the radio theatre performance *As You Like It*, directed by Liviu Ciulei and Elena Negreanu; an actor's voice recorded while reading from Ciulei's 1961 article; live music (a soloist playing a flute). To all these archive documents, Andrei Elek added two important sources that centered his artistic concept: the round table initiated by *Teatrul* magazine, and *As You Like It*, William Shakespeare's text. These two sources were read, played, and interrogated by the actors. Wearing old epoque costumes (inspired by the surviving photos) and the actresses walking barefoot, the cast tried sometimes to recreate Ciulei's performance using as a starting point Shakespeare's play or its radio version. Sometimes, the actors, adopting Ciulei's postures and gestures that appeared on TV screens, tried to recreate on stage, in order to understand it, his creative and directing process.

Framed by fragments from the roundtable organized by *Teatrul* magazine, Andrei Elek's concept targeted to make us understand Liviu Ciulei's performance and its impact upon contemporaries mainly through

the reactions aroused through Romanian theatre critics and theatre directors. This was also a starting point for those layers of the exam/performance that researched and tried to understand (actors and director as a group) the impact of live music, the use of simple or elaborated costumes, the space and light (natural or constructed) as parts of the powerful stage image.

Gabriel Petre's *Moisescu reloaded*

Gabriel Petre's exam/performance had as a starting point a performance directed in 1965 by Valeriu Moisescu, *Five sketches/ The Bald Soprano*. It premiered at Teatrul Mic (The Small Theatre), while Radu Penciulescu was the theatre's manager. The performance combined Caragiale and Ionesco's texts in an artistic concept that suggested the existence of a long tradition in Romanian literature regarding the absurd humor. Valeriu Moisescu's artistic work flamed some theatre spirits. The Romanian theatre director⁸ was accused of promoting anti-realism and even anti-nationalist attitudes. Among his prosecutors, one can find the playwrights Paul Everac and Aurel Baranga. Despite these hostile reactions, the performance survived for many seasons. It even toured in Sarajevo, at a theatre festival.

Valeriu Moisescu's performance was not available on a video recording also. Gabriel Petre selected for his artistic concept several archive documents: *The persistence of memory*, by Valeriu Moisescu – a book that gathers information about his theatrical works; a radio broadcast celebrating Moisescu's theatrical activity, directed by Costin Manoliu (containing interviews not only with the Romanian theatre director, but also with some of his actresses and actors); an audio interview with Olga Tudorache's recollections about Teatrul Mic's performance at Sarajevo Festival of Small and Experimental Stages; excerpts from an article published in August 1965 in *Teatrul* magazine, entitled *Decada în dezbaterile oamenilor de teatru. Între textul dramatic și viziunea regizorală* [*The Romanian Playwrights Decade debated by theatre people. Between the dramatic text and the theatre director's perspective*]; Caragiale's sketches and Ionesco's play;

8. For more information about Valeriu Moisescu and his theatrical endeavor, see Maria Manolescu Borșa, "Valeriu Moisescu," *Dicționarul Multimedia al Teatrului Românesc* 1 (July 15, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.47383/DMTR.01.17>.

a dialogue with professor Miruna Runcan. In addition, Gabriel Petre had the chance to meet Valeriu Moisescu and talk with him about *Five sketches/ The Bald Soprano*.

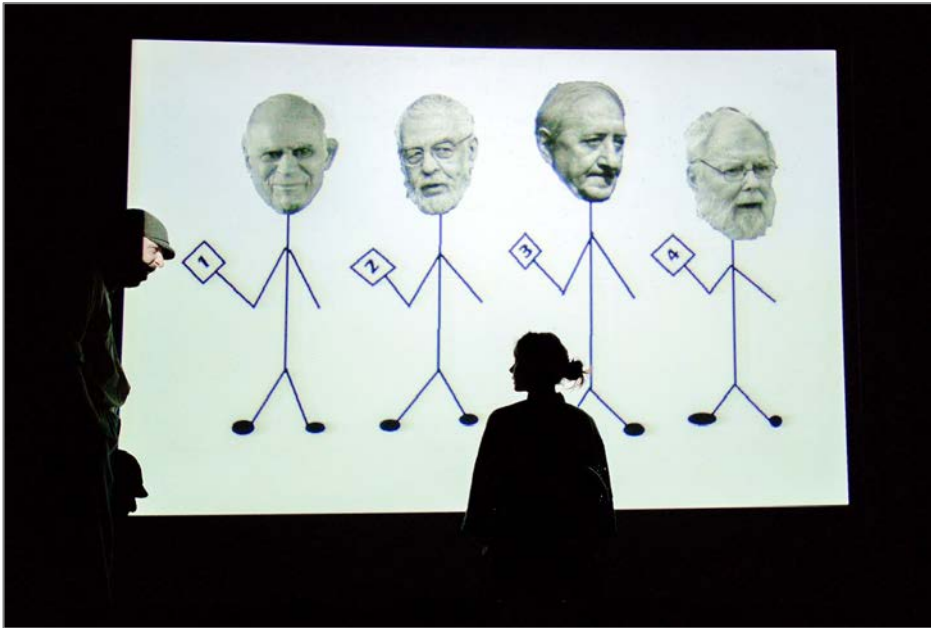


Fig. 2: Gabriel Petre, *Moisescu reloaded* – performative essay using as a starting point *Five sketches/ The Bald Soprano*, directed by Valeriu Moisescu, exam/performance, Theatre directing master class, 2014/2015, University of Arts from Tirgu-Mures. Photo by Cosmin Ardeleanu.

The student chose as a location for his exam/performance Studio Theatre (University of Arts' theatre). Gabriel Petre opted for a studio atmosphere; therefore, the public was placed on stage. The resulting theatre space had a more intimate feeling. This choice was in direct connection with a part of his artistic concept. In his *Moisescu reloaded* exam/performance, Gabriel Petre aimed to face us with the performance's impact and also to offer a sample of how censorship and prosecutors could affect any theatre performance in communist Romania. Therefore, in the exam's script he mixed parts of Caragiale and Ionescu's plays (using the same order for the text as Moisescu

did) with Aurel Baranga and Paul Everac's remarks regarding *Five sketches/The Bald Soprano*. In addition, he added Valeriu Moisescu's concept and artistic arguments for combining Caragiale and Ionesco (these arguments were selected from Moisescu's book). Also, the dialogue with professor Miruna Runcan served as a starting point for a new character, the young Daniela, a girl who likes to spend time with her older friends (Liviut, Valerică, Davidel, Luci) and who wishes, someday, to write a book about re-theatricalization and Romanian theatre. The young girl is present at Moisescu's theatre examination process and questioned about her friends and their distinctive theatrical features (Fig. 2). Olga Tudorache's recollection about Teatrul Mic's tour at Sarajevo Festival of Small and Experimental Stages was part the exam's soundscape. This moment served as the reenactment of the performance: Gabriel Petre's actors tried to recreate the moment mentioned by Olga Tudorache – the actors passing through audience on their way backstage, after the first part of the performance ended, and the unexpected applauses they received. Part of the exam's script was also a poem by Radu Vancu, included here as a tribute for Valeriu Moisescu's wife, Mihaela Juvara, whom Gabriel Petre met while at Moisescu's home, and who died while he was preparing this exam. *Moisescu reloaded* became a theatrical landscape where the audience was invited, together with the actors, to understand Moisescu's performance, and to grasp its theatrical and political context.

Adi Iclenzan's untitled exam

Rameau's Nephew, directed by David Esrig (1968) was assigned for Adi Iclenzan's exam/performance. David Esrig's performance, originally set to have its premiere at Comedy Theatre, met its audience at Bulandra Theatre starting 12th of May 1968. The performance gained a mythical aura. Part of this status owed its numerous representations (the production runned hundreds of times) and also to its unexpected effect that a very highly intellectual work would capture the public opinion's attention⁹.

9. For more information about this performance's impact, see Miruna Runcan, "Nepotul lui Rameau," *Dicționarul Multimedia al Teatrului Românesc* 1 (July 15, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.47383/DMTR.01.41>.

Adi Iclenzan chose as the location for its exam/performance Asociația K'arte's art gallery, a small exhibit place, set in the central part of Tirgu-Mures. One of the gallery's walls (facing George Enescu Street) was actually a window wall. Therefore, a glance from the street could capture inside the gallery. One could see the works of art exhibited on gallery's walls (Fig.3). The choice for this location was in direct connection with the performative part of the exam and those performance art pieces usually set in art galleries (such as some of Marina Abramović's performances).



Fig. 3: Adi Iclenzan, *untitled exam* – performative essay using as a starting point Rameau's *Nephew*, directed by David Esrig, exam/performance, Theatre directing master class, 2014/2015, University of Arts from Tirgu-Mures.

Photo by Cosmin Ardeleanu.

No video recording of Esrig's performance survived. Therefore, the archive material used by the student consisted in reviews, a series of photos, witnesses (including an email exchange with David Esrig), Diderot's text adapted by Gellu Naum and a heavy philosophical book, Hegel's, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In an email exchange with David Esrig, Adi Iclenzan was set on the

following track: in order to understand the performance, he should read Hegel's tractate. As the theatre director mentioned, it constituted the philosophical ground of the performance and the most important material used in building the actors' presence on stage. The reviews mentioned Gheorghe Dinică and Marin Moraru's exceptional acting skills, and the photos revealed Ion Popescu Udriște's ingenious set design using numerous mirrors on stage. A meeting in Cluj with professor Miruna Runcan (also a member of the production's audience) directed the information in the same direction: *Rameau's Nephew* was about the stage presence of two fabulous actors. The information gathered from video or written interviews with David Esrig translated mainly the theatre director's conception about theatre and directing. Therefore, the student focused on Diderot's text, using pieces of the information collected from these various sources mentioned above.

Diderot's text revolves around two different life philosophies: the intellectual and the hedonist, the rich and the poor, the spiritual and the material, the artist and the philosopher, and so on. The exam's concept was based on this matrix of dualities (on an abstract level, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* could be resumed in the same analogous terms: two different forces that, together, reveal the face of the truth). Knowing that he can't find two fabulous actors and the allocated time was not nine month of rehearsals, Adi Iclenزان chose to work for a month mixing two student-actors (an actor and an actress) and two non-actors (a male director and a female critic), in order to generate that alive presence so specific to Esrig's production. All the philosophical talks in Diderot's text took place at Régence Caffé, while eating and drinking. Therefore, part of the exam's concept was a rectangular table filled mainly with fast-food products (as the exam was set on a fast-forward rehearsals process). The four performers set at the table, eating, drinking, and talking. A game was invented as part of the exam's concept. Spread on the table, one could also see all the pages from Diderot's text. One of the actors randomly picked a page. She or he started to read that page, using the tone of his or hers assigned character (the intellectual or the hedonist, the rich or the poor, the artist or the philosopher). After the entire page was read, one of the actors picked a theme using as a starting point the ideas from the read part of the text; then a debate started. The debate revolved around two different points of view advocated by the four performers. When the topic tired out (the debate could last half an hour, an hour if necessary – no limit

was set) another page was selected. The game carried on as long as the art gallery's opening hours. The audience was set a time for the exam/performance. When the audience entered the art gallery, the four performers were already involved in their debate. The public left the performers debating.

Andrei Raicu's *Wonderful*

Andrei Raicu's exam/performance had as a starting point probably the most polemic Romanian theatre performance, Lucian Pintilie's *The Government Inspector*. Set to meet its audience at Bulandra Theatre at the end of September 1972, *The Government Inspector* was performed only three times before it was forbidden by communist authorities¹⁰. This moment marked an important turning point in our theatre's history: not only that this was Lucian Pintilie's last performance in Romania, but it also set the beginning of a dark period for theatre and culture in communist Romania.



Fig. 4: Andrei Raicu, *Wonderful* – performative essay using as a starting point *The Government Inspector*, directed by Lucian Pintilie, exam/performance, Theatre directing master class, 2014/2015, University of Arts from Tîrgu-Mureş.

10. For more information about this performance's impact, see Miruna Runcan, "Revizorul," *Dicţionarul Multimedia al Teatrului Românesc* 1 (July 15, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.47383/DMTR.01.45>.

Andrei Raicu chose as title for his exam the same word that ends Pintilie's book, *Bricabrac*. The word itself is linked with a story told by the Romanian director. While abroad with his film *Sunday at Six*, one of the viewers, after he slept during the entire screening, looked Pintilie in the eyes and exclaimed: 'Wonderful!' The exam's location was Studio Theatre (University of Arts' theatre).

Like all the former, Lucian Pintilie's performance did not survive on a video recording. Andrei Raicu designed his directing concept based on the following archives: surviving photos, reviews, witnesses (he met Victor Rebengiuc and Virgil Ogășanu), the performance's booklet, Alina Tudor-Pavelescu and Laura Dumitru's book, *RCP and intellectuals in the first years of Ceausescu régime 1965-1972*, and Lucian Pintilie's *Bricabrac*. That famous party meeting where *The Government Inspector* was banned served as the exam's script. Andrei Raicu found the meeting's main characters and their discourses in a document published with the support of Romania National's Archives. The dialogue was augmented with pieces from *The Government Inspector's* sequel. This play was published in the performance's booklet.

The photos revealed parts of Paul Bortnovski's set design. Together with Cristi Niculescu, the light designer, Andrei Raicu recreated Bornovschi's walkaways using light. The stage area spread a courtroom atmosphere. The set design had as a central piece a rectangular table, sited in the middle of the stage. At the table, gathered numerous characters from Pintilie's performances and films: among others, Khlestakov from *The Government Inspector* (Bulandra Theatre, 1972), a dwarf from *Turandot* (Théâtre National de Chaillot, Paris, 1974), a female character from *Jacques or Obedience* (Théâtre de la Ville, Paris, 1977), Norica from *Terminus Paradis* (1998). All these characters came to judge their creator and his creative process. These characters also tried to understand why *The Government Inspector* was banned. As part of this process, the characters mentioned above restaged some of those sequences that supposedly banned the performance: the scene in which the inspector is received by the local authorities and is served with bread and salt; the scene where the mayor washes and, by accident, splashes some audience members. From time to time a mysterious character ordered the characters to change the course of their stage action. It might have been Pintilie, the director who created that

famous government inspector who changes trajectories in an unknown small town. A camera captured the action on stage and projected in on the brick walls behind the table.

In the first part of the exam, the action was very theatrical. The lights, the smoke, the lanyard microphones – all indicate a classical performance. For the last part of his exam, Andrei Raicu chose to get closer to the performative part of his assignment. The fourth wall was broken. Using as a starting point Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector's* sequel, he devised with the actors a stage debate containing their opinions about Pintilie, his renowned performance, theatre's mission, the audience, acting and Romanian theatre.

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