

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

Interview series by Ștefana POP-CURȘEU¹

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

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

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

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

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

ROBERTO BACCI



(Theatre director, Italy, born 1949)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RODRIGO FRANCISCO



(Theatre director, Portugal, born 1981)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EUGEN JEBELEANU



(Theatre director, Romania and France, born 1989)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ADINA LAZĂR



(Theatre director, Romania, born 1987)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ANDREI MĂJERI



(Theatre director, Romania, born 1990)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RADU NICA



(Theatre director, Romania, born 1979)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GAVRIIL PINTE



(Theatre director, Romania, born 1961)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETA POPESCU



(Theatre director, Romania, born 1989)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To get to work! 😊

ELI SIMON



(Theatre director, USA, UCI, born 1957)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TOMPA GABOR



(Theatre director, Romania and Hungary, born 1957)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And audiences continue to be interested by these directors' creations. I don't know where the director has no importance at all, but yes, maybe in Central Africa, in places where the director hasn't even appeared yet, yes, in a tribal society or an archaic community. Nor in traditional oriental theatre... directing is not so important in forms like No, Kabuki, Kathakali, they are inherited creations, they are passed on as a form, and a form that has not evolved by negating what came before, as it happened in European culture. In western culture, every new trend was born as a reaction to what came before, whereas in Oriental culture there is this continuity. Of course, now another phenomenon has appeared, that of commercialization and Americanization, or of the attempt to Americanize Oriental theatre, but there you have a devaluation of the theatrical act and so you don't need a director for that...

Of course there are shows where the creation is devised, but maybe the direction is devised... because we see that there are already driverless buses and subways, so... this is the digital and automatized world, but also a dehumanized world.

So I personally, walking around the world, I haven't had that experience, I mean I haven't noticed that the trend of the disappearance of the director is a major one or characteristic of our times.

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

First of all, I believe that in art education there is no stronger, more effective and better model than the relationship between master and disciple, mentor and student. This is why I am convinced that the Bolognese system is harmful to art education. It can create a kind of system like that of the doctors in spite of themselves, in which in the art of theatre or in theatre education, those who have never set foot on the stage teach acting, those who have never staged a major theatrical performance in their lives teach directing. It's the equivalent of what would happen if someone who can't play the violin taught violin. That's why I have also withdrawn from the education system in Romania and in Europe in general, because this system ends up putting the professor in the foreground instead of the student. So it

is more important to have a department where you have to have a number of hours, there is a very strict bureaucracy, some schemes that actually cannot be applied to art education.

But in the United States, where I thought, artistic excellence is equivalent to a PHD. So you're not going to ask Itzhak Perlman to write a PhD so he can teach violin. And in the same logic, Victor Rebengiuc shouldn't have been asked to get a PhD to teach acting. We just need to take advantage of and learn from what they are practically doing. Now, we can take a look back in time: when I was a directing student in Bucharest, where I had as teachers Cătălina Buzoianu, Liviu Ciulei, Dinu Cernescu, who were among the most remarkable directors, and before that Penciulescu, Esrig, who had their own working groups, at that time, Octavian Cotescu, Marin Morau, Olga Tudorache, Amza Pelea, Sanda Manu, Dem Rădulescu, Beate Fredanov were the teachers in Acting, and their assistants were Florin Zamfirescu, Ion Caramitru, Ovidiu Schumacher and so on. So after the classes, the students would go to the performances and they would breathlessly follow how these extraordinary artists did their work on stage.

Well, these things are disappearing, and in fact it is a universal phenomenon, superficiality dominates both school education, where for example during the 12 years of school you do not acquire a real general culture even if you take the Baccalauréat. Everything is extremely superficial, and the requirements are also extremely superficial, so that a young person graduating high school knows neither geography, nor history, nor literature, nor mathematics, nor anatomy. In some schools they don't even teach anatomy, for example, my daughter, who graduated a music high school, never studied anatomy. Impossible! We must learn that all these disciplines are complementary and are an important tool in our efforts to understand the world, to understand natural phenomena and so on. Neither can art be made by someone who is only interested in literature and has no idea... let's say, what the capital of Denmark is. It's unacceptable.

There was a recent study showing that the level of intelligence (not to mention the level of culture) has dropped extremely sharply all over the world... Well, I think I was passionate about directing education because I had some extraordinary teachers. Liviu Ciulei was my teacher for a year

and a half when our other teacher had some family and health problems, and Ciulei took us on in the following way: besides coming to some of our rehearsals and talking about a lot of things with him, he allowed us and gave us this very great chance to participate in his rehearsals of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. From the first reading to the premiere. Well, it was a great lesson not only of theatre, but of life and culture in general. A philosophy of culture. We were passionate and we saw then how important it is to have masters.

For me, education is a dialogue. Going to the United States where I taught for 15 years, and actually built a new directing curriculum - I had the liberty to do it - I also learned a lot. I had some very open and curious students... (coming from high school or undergraduate studies - meaning that there you don't have to choose yet what you're going to do: whether you're going to do theatre or medicine or philosophy - because only after that comes the choice with the Master's degree that 3-year MFA), and I think what we can do and what I've largely succeeded to do is to open up some horizons.

Because it is not true that nothing can be taught in art. There are some voices even among us, acting teachers who, in a very harmful way, propagate the fact that acting cannot be learned and cannot be taught. Which is also immoral because if one has this belief, he/she should not take a salary for actually not teaching acting. Unfortunately, these things can be seen somehow in the low quality of most graduates, especially in directing, where there is not much of a well-defined program or structure, but also in acting... only there, things can be learned again.

I had the great joy to invite Vlad Mugur in the 90s and he did 5 shows at the Hungarian Theatre in Cluj, and these 5 shows were a real second school for the actors of that time, Zsolt Bogdan's generation. In the 90s I started teaching, I had a directing class, I organized the admissions and it went very well, but after that came the imposition of this system and bureaucratic methods, because of which the teachers had to have a certain number of hours and I couldn't invite anymore the best specialists of the various disciplines, and this, to the detriment of the students. And I'm not interested in that, not in this kind of education.

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

I myself did not stop working at all. I've put on shows in various countries starting with Portugal, Luxembourg, I've even taught in the United States, during the pandemics, but that it was not face to face but online. Of course, these forms of festivals that were online, or performance screenings, were forms that somehow aimed to save the crisis situation, with all those restrictions that included many violations of human rights, of freedoms and even of the constitution. But I didn't stop, I don't believe in a theatre that is not live, in a theatre where there is no direct encounter between the audience and the actor. I still believe that theatre is a unique living art, in which this meeting in a common space is essential and that without this exchange of energies and this solidarity in the same place where a true communion between spectator and actor is formed, theatre is not possible, Here is the strength or the main argument of the art of theatre.

Of course, for different reasons, all sorts of formulas have been invented in cyberspace... I don't believe in the virtual world. The virtual world dehumanizes... at least in art. Of course technology has its advantages and brings all kinds of benefits, but not in theatre. The moment I see young people becoming addicted to these tools of digitalisation, mobile phones, laptops, social media, and so on... it's terrible. I'll give you an example I've given before: a colleague of my daughter's from high school came to visit her, and I asked her how the weather was. And she looked at her cell phone and said, "It's cloudy." But I said, "Look out the window, it's really nice outside, it's sunny!" but then she looked at her phone again and said, "No, no, it's cloudy!" So she believed what the phone said more than what she saw with her own eyes, a very frightening thing because it totally alienates you from reality, from nature and maybe some people have this purpose or scenario to totally abolish the socialization of mankind... I don't know if they will succeed but they maybe will, to the extent that we allow ourselves to be manipulated and have neither the courage to stand up to an official or mainstream wave, nor the courage to keep searching for the truth.

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

First of all, I would tell him/her to read a lot, and not only plays, literature, novels, poems, essays, to go to exhibitions, to watch classic films, to listen to music, to strengthen and develop his/her general culture. It's very important because in this way one is accumulating some much-needed knowledge.

Gorceakov writes in his book *Stanislavsky Directs*, that he was walking with Stanislavski and that at one point he asked him, "Master, but what does a director need to know?" to which Stanislavski replied that he needed to know everything. And he was annoyed and said, "What do you mean, everything?", and Stanislavski didn't answer any more and they continued their walk, after which he suddenly asked Gorceakov. "Did you see what a drama occurred when I passed for a few minutes by two young people, a man and a woman?" "No," he replied, "I wasn't paying attention." "Well how," says Stanislavsky, "you have to pay attention, to notice reality!" And they continued their walk. And a little later Stanislavski stops again and asks him, "Have you read the article in Pravda about such and such a situation in China...?" And to his negative reply: "Well, how could you not have read it, you have to read the newspapers every day..." So yes, young people have to walk around with their antennae open, to know what's going on in the world, because the director is not the one who puts on plays but is a "guide in the dark" as Peter Brook says. That's a beautiful definition.

And they have to read. The fundamental readings of mankind i.e. the Bible, the Mythologies of the world...

And they shouldn't choose the directing profession after failing medicine, mathematics, biology or because they do not have the patience to learn! Don't think that a director doesn't have to do anything. It's extremely hard and there's this continual insecurity because you can never rely on what you've done before. On the contrary, you have to forget and start from scratch with blank sheets of paper.

And don't chase success, that word needs to be eliminated somehow. Embrace failures as failures. Don't try to explain them away in the sense of finding an excuse, or a culprit; because we learn most from failure.

And they should go and see as many performances and if they can, and there are still great actors and directors who let them, they should go to as many rehearsals as possible. And do creative exercises: visual memory, composition skills, seeing in space, thinking, observing conflicts in everyday life and so on...

