

# DRAMATICA

STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI

1/2017

To be, or to  
take arms against a sea of troubles, and arrows  
of outrageous fortune, or not to suffer the question: whether 'tis nobler in the slings  
and by opposing end the mind the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to  
suffer them? To be, or not to be: that is the question: whether 'tis nobler in the  
mind to take arms against a sea of outrageous fortune, or not to suffer them?  
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arms against a sea of troubles, and arrows of outrageous  
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nobler in the slings and by opposing end the  
mind the slings and arrows of  
outrageous fortune, or to suffer  
them? To be, or not to  
be: that is



*To be, or not to be: that is the question: whether 'tis nobler  
in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous  
fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by  
opposing end them?*

**NARRATIVE STRUCTURES  
IN CONTEMPORARY  
PERFORMING ARTS**

**STUDIA  
UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI  
DRAMATICA**

**1/2017  
March**



# STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI DRAMATICA

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**EDITORIAL OFFICE:** 4th Kogălniceanu Street, Cluj-Napoca, Romania,

Phone: +40 264 590066,

Web site: <http://studia.ubbcluj.ro/serii/dramatica>,

Contact: [studia.dramatica@ubbcluj.ro](mailto:studia.dramatica@ubbcluj.ro)



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**STUDIA UBB EDITORIAL OFFICE:** B.P. Hasdeu no. 51, 400371 Cluj-Napoca, Romania,  
Phone + 40 264 405352, [office@studia.ubbcluj.ro](mailto:office@studia.ubbcluj.ro)

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### *Narrative Structures in Contemporary Performing Arts*

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## **STUDIES AND ARTICLES**



*La création contemporaine,  
entre héritage du postdramatique et narration scénique*

EMILIE COMBES<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *Contemporary Play Creation, Between Postdramatic Legacy and Scenic Narrative.* Although plays used to be organized by narrative structures since the antiquity, the calling into question of those structures in the mid-20th century made more and more difficult the logical construction of the narrative. In addition, the evolution of the producer's functions and role, the common made creations development, the use of intermediality have deeply altered the way of considering the narrative modes. The present-day theatre which is more diverse within its aesthetics and ways of performing evicts the text and the fable. The performances benefit from this eviction and propose split or various processed based narratives. By studying three hybrid representative plays from the contemporary theatre – *Blockbuster* by Le Collectif Mensuel, *Le Vivier des noms* by Valère Novarina, and *Donnez-moi donc un corps!* by Sarah Oppenheim –, it is intended to first understand the role that the text still has, to identify the “vestiges” of a classical narrative structure, even if it is disarticulated and only works by juxtaposition and interlocking. As the contemporary plays minimize the text influence compared with other scenic media expressions, whether it is by the use of intermediality or visual, sensible theatre, the postdramatic aesthetic legacy and the functioning of the new narrative techniques used will then be studied. These statements will lead us to evaluate the impact of these shows on the audience and to wonder how it can be invested in the play.

**Keywords:** Contemporary theatre, *Blockbuster*, collectif Mensuel, *Le Vivier des noms*, Valère Novarina, *Donnez-moi donc un corps !*, Sarah Oppenheim, performance, narrative process, visual postdramatic theatre, intermediality.

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1. Université Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, France et Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, France.  
e2.combes@free.fr.

Aristote, dans sa *Poétique*, définissait la fable comme l'ensemble des actions accomplies. Brecht, lui, considérait que « c'est la fable qui permet d'analyser la réalité et les enjeux de la fiction au théâtre »<sup>2</sup>. Les fables sont agencées par des structures narratives, organisent la trame, et proposent des séquences d'événements selon une temporalité identifiable. Depuis le théâtre d'avant-garde au milieu du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, les structures narratives ont considérablement été remises en cause, notamment chez des dramaturges comme Beckett ou Arrabal. La structure cyclique du récit, le brouillage de la fable, le mélange des genres et des registres rendent de plus en plus difficile la construction logique du récit. De plus, l'évolution du rôle du metteur en scène, l'émergence de modèles collectifs de création et l'utilisation de l'intermédialité au cours de ces dernières années ont également modifié le regard porté sur les structures narratives. Le théâtre contemporain est multiforme, diversifié dans ses pratiques et ses esthétiques, « bouge, se déplace, entre en dialogue avec d'autres formes artistiques – danse, arts plastiques, musique, vidéo, performance, etc. – [...] ce qui contribue à brouiller les territoires entre les arts »<sup>3</sup>. Bien souvent, suivant les leçons d'Artaud, le théâtre contemporain évince le texte et la fable au profit de performances qui assument les histoires avec une plus grande ouverture. Selon Patrice Pavis,

La difficulté de raconter, voire de donner cohérence à un texte dans une époque de déconstruction, conduit bien des meneurs de jeu à abandonner toute tentative de raconter une histoire par crainte de simplifier la réalité. Seuls ceux qui se demandent encore, ou de nouveau, quel sens l'auteur s'est efforcé de construire, seront capables de raconter une histoire et de construire le spectacle sur la structure narrative qui en résulte.<sup>4</sup>

Dès lors, nombre de questions surgissent au regard de ces nouvelles créations, tant cette « mise en question des assises du théâtre, paradoxalement, revivifie son processus fondateur, soit la théâtralité en tant que matérialité expressive »<sup>5</sup>, et renouvelle les structures narratives. A travers une sélection de trois spectacles hybrides ou à points de vue multiples, représentatifs de la création contemporaine – *Blockbuster* du collectif Mensuel, *Le Vivier des noms* de Valère Novarina, et *Donnez-moi donc un corps !* de Sarah Oppenheim,

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2. Chantal Dulibine, and Bernard Grosjean, *Coups de théâtre en classe entière*, (Créteil: Scérén-CRDP, 2004), 109.

3. Marie-Christine Lesage, "Théâtre et intermédialité," *Communications*, no. 83 (2008): 141, doi:10.3406/comm.2008.2483

4. Patrice Pavis, *La mise en scène contemporaine* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2008), 233.

5. Ibid.

créés en 2015 et 2016 – nous tenterons de saisir quelle place le texte occupe encore dans la performance, mais surtout quelles techniques narratives sont employées par les metteurs en scène. Il s’agira également d’apprécier quel est l’impact sur le public et l’engagement de ce dernier face à ces créations.

### **Vestiges du texte et d’une parole dramatique**

Les créations contemporaines alternent entre mises en scène de textes préalablement existants et écriture de plateau, héritière du théâtre postdramatique. Dans ces dernières, le texte fait partie de l’ensemble du processus théâtral mais ne le précède pas, et la création s’étend à des formes dont le texte est quasiment absent. Il s’agit donc de voir quels seraient les « vestiges » d’une structure narrative, propre à structurer l’action dramatique, dans l’ensemble des spectacles de notre étude. Quelle importance le texte écrit occupe-t-il et comment est-il mis en scène ?

Les membres du Collectif Mensuel élaborent leurs propres textes et leurs propres adaptations : l’écriture scénique constitue une part importante de leur processus de travail. Ils proposent un théâtre hybride, entre art vivant et cinéma, dans lequel ils intègrent d’autres disciplines artistiques pour générer un théâtre composite et communicatif. Nous y retrouvons aisément une structure narrative, dans la mesure où les comédiens, en doublant des scènes extraites de productions de l’industrie du cinéma, restituent un récit clair, bien que parodique. Afin de rendre la fable lisible sans effort, chaque personnage récurrent est aisément identifiable, car chaque personnage est attribué à un acteur. C’est le principe du détournement et l’appropriation par les comédiens de scènes cinématographiques, qui permettent aux spectateurs de rire de situations sérieuses, où la parodie constitue à la fois un instrument de libération et de contestation. Selon le Collectif, il s’agit de rendre au théâtre sa force critique afin d’éveiller l’attention du public sur le monde, par le biais de la fable.

Chez Valère Novarina en revanche, le texte mis en scène existe au préalable dans la pièce écrite. Habituellement, le théâtre accorde une prédominance à la deuxième personne sur la troisième pour signaler l’imitation des dialogues naturels. *Le Vivier des noms* alterne entre récits des personnages à la 3<sup>ème</sup> personne, adressés au public, et scènes dialoguées. Lorsque le personnage s’adresse au public, il s’agit plus d’un texte narratif que d’un texte dramatique. Le cadre de l’action est fixé dès le début par un personnage qui ouvre la pièce, une position narrative subjective. La « Créatrice » – campée par



Agnès Sourdillon – énumère et décrit, telle une didascalie vivante, avec une minutie excessive et espiègle, les lieux et les décors absents que le spectateur devra lui-même imaginer en le superposant à celui qui est présent. Sorte de Prologue moderne qui lance l'intrigue, et qui s'assure en frappant l'air qu'il n'y a pas de quatrième mur. Puis entre l'Historienne, incarnée par Claire Sermonne, et l'histoire commence. Comme une voix *off*, mais présente sur scène, elle conduit l'action, et il ne s'agit plus de faire voir une réalité absente, mais d'appeler – L'Homme qui..., La Femme à..., L'enfant..., Celui qui... – et ainsi de rythmer les scènes. Durant toute la pièce, elle indique qui entre, qui sort, qui est présent, énumère les nombreux noms de ceux qu'on voit, ou qu'on ne voit pas. Sorte de prêtresse qui suscite ou ressuscite une présence, elle nomme les choses, convoque devant le public des personnages qui après quelques mots, un chant, retournent au néant. Mais si cette dernière établit un lien entre les différentes scènes de la pièce, la narration demeure fragmentée et discontinuë. Selon Genette, les histoires juxtaposées ne permettent pas de définir les « critères objectifs de l'œuvre ». Selon lui, « il arrive que la structure de l'œuvre rende impossible de décider quel niveau de fiction est primaire et lequel est second »<sup>6</sup>, ce qui renforce la confusion du récit.

Pour *Donnez-moi donc un corps !*, Sarah Oppenheim est partie d'un corpus de textes littéraires. Les corps mouvants des acteurs – Jonathan Genet, Fany Mary, et Jean-Christophe Quenon – se créent, se défont et explorent quelques chemins de métamorphoses. Leurs parcours sont pensés comme une variation à partir d'extraits des *Métamorphoses* d'Ovide, auxquels se mêlent d'autres textes de Rainer Maria Rilke, Georges Rodenbach, Fernando Pessoa, Franz Kafka, Milan Kundera, Gwenaëlle Aubry. Certains de ces textes sont restés sonores, et sont restitués sur scène par la parole, d'autres ont en revanche nourri l'inspiration des acteurs et de la metteur en scène, sont devenus silence, mais ont laissé une trace dans l'image visuelle et esthétique. Pour éviter le long monologue du récit, Sarah Oppenheim a imaginé de nouveaux modes d'énonciation et a dramatisé le récit en scindant la voix du narrateur en trois instances, les trois figures présentes sur scène. Nous suivons le parcours de ces trois êtres mouvants, multiples, sujets aux métamorphoses. Solitaires, ils sont traversés par d'autres récits que les leurs, d'autres êtres, réels ou mythologiques. Ainsi, la Femme, fuyant les regards, s'affranchit du monde des reflets et retourne à une nature mythique, celle de la forêt. Femme-cerf, lointain souvenir d'Artémis, d'Echo – qui hante la forêt de son chant – ou encore de Daphnée, elle fait corps avec l'écorce de l'arbre avant de disparaître dans la brume et de rejoindre les souvenirs des métamorphoses contées par Ovide. L'Homme, qui ne cesse

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6. Gérard Genette, *Nouveau discours du récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), 57.

de scruter son reflet dans l'eau et les miroirs, en quête de lui-même, porte en lui des bribes d'Apollon, d'Actéon, et de Narcisse. Il se met à nu, tente de revêtir diverses apparences, avant de se diluer dans la pluie. Enfin, un autre Homme est là, pour les observer, les raconter. Effeillant ses multiples visages, il collectionne en lui leurs traces, se fond dans leurs empreintes. Le spectacle joue donc de la variation, et le spectateur en apprécie la nouveauté dans les écarts qui séparent les différentes versions d'une même fable : celle que propose l'artiste, celle qui hante la mémoire collective.

Si nous retrouvons dans ces trois créations des « vestiges » d'une structure narrative et la présence d'un langage dramatique, il n'en demeure pas moins que son exploitation scénique, voire sa désarticulation, donne lieu à des formes narratives nouvelles et complexes par « emboîtement, démultiplication, ou renversement de l'intrigue et des éléments narratifs »<sup>7</sup>.

### Héritage du postdramatique

Il est fréquent que les adaptations modernes et les créations contemporaines jouent à brouiller les pistes :

Au lieu du souci de raconter une histoire [...], une suite d'effets, de mini-chocs, insistent sur le présent du jeu, comme si la perception présente primait sur la volonté de raconter et de signifier.<sup>8</sup>

Les performances scéniques actuelles renouvellent les formes postdramatiques, tant elles s'éloignent du modèle dramatique en déconstruisant ses constituants et réduisent le texte à un matériau parmi les autres éléments de la scène. Pour autant, s'éloigner du texte et de la fable exclurait-il nécessairement toute remise en cause d'une structure narrative ? Les trois créations que nous nous proposons d'étudier proposent de nouvelles techniques narratives, par le biais de l'intermédialité ou d'un théâtre visuel. Les créations scéniques contemporaines se situent dans la veine d'une esthétique théâtrale postmoderne, en réduisant l'influence du texte dramatique face aux autres moyens d'expressions scéniques : musique, éclairage, gestuelle. Comme l'annonçait Lehmann, le théâtre est entré « dans le siècle de l'expérimentation »<sup>9</sup>, en tentant de nouvelles expériences théâtrales. Le développement de l'écriture de plateau a également permis de replacer la notion d'écriture au centre du

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7. Françoise Rullier-Theuret, *Les genres narratifs* (Paris: Ellipses, 2006), 15.

8. Patrice Pavis, *La mise en scène contemporaine*, 234.

9. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Le Théâtre postdramatique* (Paris: L'Arche, 2002), 73.

processus de création, mais une écriture qui « use de matrices qui peuvent être plastiques, chorégraphiques ou transdisciplinaires », où la narration est assumée « par la mise en scène au sens large, c'est-à-dire par l'ensemble des médias constituant le spectacle »<sup>10</sup>. Le drame et sa narration demeurent en effet présents dans ces nouvelles formes qui ne se fondent pas sur le principe de l'action mais présentent plutôt une situation, un état.

### ***Blockbuster, la narration par le biais de l'intermédialité***

L'intermédialité et la fusion entre prestations vocales, jeu d'acteur, et utilisation de l'image cinématographique font émerger de nouvelles formes esthétiques et narratives. Différentes modalités du spectacle vivant se mêlent sur scène, et la performance prend soin d'effectuer un processus d'incarnation par une mise en corps, afin qu'il y ait du théâtre. Sur le plateau, un amoncellement d'objets, de caisses, de bouteilles, de bibelots de toute sorte et des instruments de musique font face à un classique écran de cinéma (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1:** *Blockbuster*, Collectif Mensuel, cliché de Goldo, 2016

10. Anne Monfort, "Après le postdramatique : narration et fiction entre écriture de plateau et théâtre néo-dramatique," *Trajectoires*, no. 3 (2009): §2, <https://trajectoires.revues.org/392>.

Manipulés avec dextérité par trois comédiens et deux musiciens, tous ces éléments permettent de réaliser le bruitage, le doublage et la bande son, en live, des séquences cinématographiques qui défilent sur l'écran. Le Collectif Mensuel reprend la tradition du « mashup », une association de plusieurs plans de films différents, afin de produire en direct un « blockbuster » inédit et parodique, réalisé à partir de 1400 plans-séquences puisés dans 160 films hollywoodiens. La performance tient dans le fait que les cinq acteurs suivent le déroulement des scènes et prêtent leur voix à des dizaines d'acteurs pour reproduire l'effet de fascination caractéristique du cinéma : on a beau savoir que le son est produit sur le plateau, on a l'irrésistible sentiment qu'il provient de l'image. Le Collectif propose un théâtre en quête de formes singulières et de moyens de récits propres, par l'exploitation de matériaux non dramatiques. Plusieurs niveaux diégétiques coexistent et interagissent : la fiction à l'écran, ce que raconte cette fiction, mais qui ne fait pas partie de notre univers, et le plateau. Outre la cohérence, créer des ponts entre ces univers multiples permet d'asseoir l'idée de l'interaction entre ce qui se passe dans le film, sur le plateau, et dans la conscience du spectateur. La musique, entre autres, oscille sur plusieurs niveaux diégétiques : une même musique peut être jouée comme si elle venait d'un poste de radio vu dans le film avant de s'étendre. Elle a dès lors une fonction narrative, et sort de la fiction pour atteindre un niveau extradiégétique.

### **Entrer en résonance avec le texte**

Novarina se plaît à déjouer les canons de la narration. Pas de fable, nulle histoire, mais des mots, des logorrhées articulées ou des monologues juxtaposés comblent le vide scénique et donnent corps aux personnages. Si le spectateur parvient à dégager les thèmes, les questions fondamentales, il manque une fable où un conflit arrive à son paroxysme, puis à sa résolution. Les noms et la langue, tels sont les véritables objets du spectacle. On aurait en effet bien du mal à résumer la pièce, ou bien dire de quoi ça parle : de jeux sur les sonorités et la prononciation, de rêveries sur les noms, de fascination pour les chiffres, de réflexion sur le genre des mots, de délires absurdes par la substitution de voyelles... Tout cela s'accumule sur scène, sans autre logique que celle de l'invocation litannique des mots, de l'exploration du langage, et de

son impact sur l'humain. Il n'est plus question de causalité et d'unité narrative. C'est dans l'atmosphère onirique, que la narration fragmentaire, la succession des scènes trouvent peu à peu du liant. Les séquences sont décousues, dépeignent des fragments de vie où les absurdités abondent : « Ma mère n'a pas eu d'enfants », « Taisez-vous un instant que j'entende ce que disent vos yeux »... Derrière le nonsense, c'est la dimension poétique et insolite du texte qui nous interpelle. La scène devient un espace ludique où le personnage, figure humaine multiple, se réinvente sans cesse par le biais d'un langage lyrique d'où émane une bouleversante intensité. Le nom, c'est déjà le théâtre, il fait surgir la figure humaine, esquisse rapidement une silhouette. Face au spectateur, le langage prend corps sur scène, agit, se répand, dans une pratique quasi performative de la parole. Voici qu'il paraît matériel, que les lettres sortent – littéralement – de la bouche des personnages, que le théâtre apparaît comme l'action du langage. Selon Novarina, la parole agit à travers l'espace, transgresse le plateau et touche le public. Le langage est une onde, un fluide de sens et de son. Au hasard des répliques, chacun vibre à son rythme, les rires se propagent puis s'éteignent, notre esprit se nourrit de la chair du verbe. Pour Novarina, le théâtre est un moyen d'entrer dans le corps résonateur de la langue. La langue est corps qui résonne, à la fois résonnant et résonance. Le théâtre sert à reprendre conscience que le langage agit en volume, dans notre corps, dans le corps de l'acteur, dans l'espace. Le dramaturge parvient à nous faire capter la profonde matérialité du souffle de l'acteur, l'énergie d'un langage créateur qui se déverse. Il renoue avec le sens originel du théâtre, lieu où l'on regarde, et nous fait contempler le langage, qui s'y fait visible. *Le Vivier des noms* serait alors ce réservoir où les mots meurent aussitôt qu'ils sont prononcés, où la langue proférée est semblable à une onde, diffuse, située hors de tout ancrage.

Ici encore, le mélange des procédés scéniques, par l'ajout du dessin et de la musique, constitue de nouvelles techniques narratives. La scénographie se limite à des dessins, reproduits sur de grands panneaux rectangulaires blancs qui dament le sol, comme des cartes qui forment un tapis de jeu, et qui seront parfois dressées à la verticale (Fig 2).



**Fig. 2:** *Le Vivier des noms*, V. Novarina, Cloître des Carmes, cliché de Pierre Grosbois

Novarina fait le choix d'un espace scénique presque vide qui oblige le spectateur à redéfinir le sens du texte à travers les éléments mis à sa disposition. L'espace ouvert et le jeu avec les panneaux permettent au metteur en scène d'entraîner le spectateur dans un univers énigmatique et mystérieux. Les figures humaines, animales, esquisses abstraites, qui émergent de traits minces, sont unies par leurs couleurs – rouge et noire, auxquelles fait écho le costume de l'Historienne – et leur style. À la manière des mots, la peinture est une matière, le dessin une écriture. Le dispositif de la narration est donc complété par une scénographie qui mobilise et déplace ces grands tableaux abstraits qui en viennent progressivement à barrer le plateau, à fermer l'espace, à suggérer des pierres tombales ou un mur. Ces éléments ne sont pas figés pour une contemplation muséale, ils s'intègrent à la narration et aux dispositifs scéniques. Le théâtre de Novarina, indissociable de la peinture, n'oublie pas la musique, en faisant intervenir dans la pièce l'un de ses plus fidèles collaborateurs, l'accordéoniste Christian Paccoud, pour rythmer et articuler les scènes et les prises de paroles.

## Créer le lien narratif par l'interaction scénique

Au lieu d'une dramaturgie de l'action et malgré l'identification du rôle des personnages, la première place revient dans le spectacle de Sarah Oppenheim à des séries épisodiques d'images qui, par des jeux d'écho et d'associations, créent une cohérence narrative. Ce nouveau mode narratif – en dehors du soutien qu'apportent le choix de l'espace, la structure temporelle, le choix des angles de prise de vues, l'introduction d'une bande-son – est avant tout engendré par le mouvement des corps et les actions qu'ils effectuent. Le mouvement des corps parle « un langage "ouvert" »<sup>11</sup>, moins prédéterminé, et qui laisse une plus grande liberté de réception. Sarah Oppenheim fait dialoguer les silences, les changements de rythme, les échos sonores et visuels, toutes les différentes composantes de la représentation :

Dès que le texte est incarné par un corps, une musique, un rythme, il ne s'appartient plus, il est comme transporté, il se met en écho avec tous les signes de la représentation, et de cette interaction naît la mise en scène. Celle-ci [...] empêche tout contact ou au contraire tisse des liens entre les éléments dialogiques et les autres composantes de la scène. Dès lors qu'il est ainsi placé dans l'interactivité de la scène, le dialogue éclate, il s'ouvre à la polyphonie.<sup>12</sup>

La particularité de ce spectacle tient également dans l'utilisation du silence comme ressort dramatique. La metteur en scène a réalisé avec ses comédiens un grand travail d'improvisation silencieuse et sur les rythmes pour parvenir à cette performance. Malgré l'absence de communication entre les personnages il y a une tension dramatique évidente dans la pièce. Selon Joël Pommerat, « avant les mots, il y a du silence, il y a du vide et il y a des corps ». Il « considère tous les éléments concrets sur la scène – la parole fait partie de ces éléments concrets – comme les mots du poème théâtral »<sup>13</sup>. La mise en scène de Sarah Oppenheim, proche du théâtre expérimental, joue sur les rythmes et les variations pour nous offrir un résultat visuel étonnant. *Donnez-moi donc un corps !* part directement du corps du comédien : un corps qui se dénude, s'examine, se dissout, se renouvelle, se masque... Ce

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11. Claudia Rosiny, Axel Nesme, "La narration du mouvement en vidéodanse. Modes narratifs d'une forme artistique intermédiaïque," *Littérature*, no.112 (1998): 86, doi:10.3406/litt.1998.1602.

12. Patrice Pavis, *La mise en scène contemporaine*, 99.

13. Marion Boudier, *Avec Joël Pommerat* (Paris: Actes Sud-Papiers, 2015), 22.

ne sont plus seulement les extraits de narration qui définissent l'intrigue. Le mouvement exprime aussi un récit, des actions, des sensations, et de manière complémentaire, la division de l'espace – qui oppose l'intimité de la chambre et l'extérieur avec la présence de la forêt – et la structure temporelle contribuent à véhiculer l'histoire. Nous sommes aussi profondément touchés par le grand travail réalisé à partir du bruit de l'eau, omniprésente sur scène (Fig. 3), et vectrice de mélodie : eau versée dans les bassines, gants qui gouttent, table qui ruisselle sans cesse, pluie... Les sons ajoutent à l'action une coloration émotive.



**Fig. 3:** *Donnez-moi donc un corps !*, S. Oppenheim, Théâtre du soleil,  
cliché de Luc Maréchaux

Par un jeu sur les quantités et donc sur les sons et les rythmes, Sarah Oppenheim crée une musicalité par le geste, grâce à la présence de l'eau. C'est ce va et vient entre son et scénographique qui constitue la trame narrative de l'ensemble. Accompagnée par le travail graphique de Louise Dumas, la metteuse en scène construit l'espace scénique comme une œuvre plastique, où elle associe chant, sonorités, et silence. Dans la lignée de Bob Wilson, et d'un théâtre très visuel, les lumières constituent un élément essentiel,



notamment grâce à l'omniprésence de l'eau et des miroirs sur scène. Dans un jeu de reflets, d'éblouissement, et de clair-obscur, elles nous permettent de voir mais créent aussi l'atmosphère, tout en structurant l'espace qui transforme la perception du spectateur au sein d'une esthétique touchante. Les jeux de lumière modifient l'appréciation de la perspective par l'utilisation des silhouettes et des objets qui se détachent sur un contre-jour, et sur lesquels le regard du spectateur est ainsi focalisé.

### **Renouer avec le spectateur**

Face à de telles créations, qui rompent avec les structures dramaturgiques et narratives habituelles, remettent en cause le primat du texte et trouvent d'autres biais afin d'assumer la fable, nous sommes en droit de nous demander comment le public peut s'investir et être impliqué dans de telles histoires. Tour d'abord, l'intermédialité – comme dans *Blockbuster* – est propre à créer un nouveau rapport entre le spectateur et la scène. Ce nouveau type de théâtre travaille la perception des signes, denses ou rares, simultanés ou lents, par le spectateur. Grâce à « l'espace de communion » entre l'acteur, réellement présent, et le public, Lehmann identifiait une rare occasion de toucher le spectateur. Dans notre « société du spectacle », chaque individu a accès, grâce aux différents médias, à une multitude d'informations qui l'envahissent mais auxquelles, restant passif, il ne répond jamais. Le théâtre pourrait alors renouer « le fil rompu entre la perception et l'expérience »<sup>14</sup> et ébranler un spectateur repu d'images médiatisées. De plus, l'« ici et maintenant » de la représentation permet d'affirmer des liens plus forts entre la fable et le réel, que s'il s'agissait d'une simple projection. Il y a dans l'immédiateté de la représentation une prise directe avec la réalité qui confère à la fable une vraisemblance. Il s'installe alors une connivence entre l'histoire, l'acteur et le spectateur, d'autant plus que lors des représentations de *Blockbuster*, les acteurs proposent au public de participer en prenant part au doublage d'une scène d'émeute – pour laquelle les acteurs ne seraient pas assez nombreux –, le rendant ainsi complice de la narration.

Les créations visuelles de Novarina et Oppenheim permettent de laisser la parole à la matérialité du langage ou à un corps invisible, celui à qui notre corps de surface, façonné et contraint par l'image que nous renvoie notre

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14. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Le Théâtre postdramatique*, 292.

miroir ou le regard de l'autre, laisse rarement se déployer. Les divers procédés du montage scénique offrent la possibilité aux spectateurs de s'investir au moins mentalement dans le spectacle théâtral. « Musique, acteur, espace, lumière, telles sont, selon la hiérarchie qui les ordonne, les nouvelles composantes fondamentales de l'art du théâtre »<sup>15</sup>. Leurs créations correspondent plus à un théâtre d'images, d'effets scéniques, qu'à un théâtre centré uniquement sur la parole des personnages. A la fois plus mystérieux, et plus près des spectateurs, il privilégie les signes d'une écriture dite « universelle » qui se livre à une exposition concrète des événements.

Comme dans le nouveau roman où le narrataire reconstruit et réinvente à partir d'une scène unique qui lui est présentée, le spectateur s'interroge sur l'avant et l'après et complète l'image fictionnelle de lui-même. La sensibilité de l'action lui ouvre une réalité autre.<sup>16</sup>

Le public, par la sensation, entrera autrement dans la fable qui ne disparaît jamais complètement, mais dont la fabrique est déplacée vers un mode expérimental, voire expérientiel.

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*ÉMILIE COMBES* teaches literature and holds a Ph.D in French Literature. Her studies are mostly specialized in Spanish dramatist's creation Fernando Arrabal but are also interested in theatrical poetics and compared analysis of 20<sup>th</sup> century dramatists. She teaches French and compared literature at Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle University on language plays within S. Beckett and F. Arrabal's work as well as modern theatre problematics about E. Ionesco, S. Beckett and F. Arrabal's work. Since 2012, she has been publishing various drama critics on the cultural events website *L'Intermède.com* of which she is director. She currently works on the publication of her Ph.D thesis: *Le théâtre Panique de Fernando Arrabal, science de l'essence de la confusion*, achieved at Paris IV-Sorbonne University and supervised by Prof. Didier Alexandre. During her PhD work, she took part to several conferences and communications: in 2014, December, during a Contemporary Art Festival, she has been giving a lecture entitled «Arrabal et le Panique» and has also published articles on this topic.

## *The Actor in the Storytelling School*

FILIP ODANGIU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This essay was born from a formative and revealing experience of the author's incidental encounter with storytelling. Seduced by the unsuspected valences of this phenomenon, the author has integrated the "tools of the trade" in his work as an acting teacher. The article's premise is that storytelling is an exceptional way of uniting the actor and the spectator in common action, leading to a more complex understanding of the world surrounding them.

**Keywords:** storytelling, actor's training, public, reception, exercises, narrative self

**Motto:**

*"Stories are templates,  
road maps to what it means  
to be a human being."*

Jan Blake

### I.

A picture is given: a wooden box with a golden chain hanging from it, having a golden key at the end. Or three items are given: a fishing net, a box, a veil. Or the following sentences are given: "A fisherman found his bride in a wooden box fished out of a lake.<sup>2</sup> They lived happily"; "one day, three veiled women promised the fisherman the supreme Happiness and he threw his wife back into the lake". Or the whole story of a fisherman who fell into temptation, missing the true happiness is given.

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1. Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. [filip\\_odangiu@yahoo.com](mailto:filip_odangiu@yahoo.com)

2. The examples are taken after "warm up" exercises used in storytelling and the subject is taken from the story told by one of the most prominent figures in the British storytelling, Jan Blake.

The data above represents only some of the possible departure points in the elaboration of a story. It can extend up to a few lines, a page or an entire book. But, even more significant is the fact that it can be *communicated* in seconds, minutes or a whole evening, depending on the will, the means and possibilities of the storyteller. What interests me the most in the following lines is the story-communicated orally, its fulfillment by *telling*, not the birth of the narrative as a written text.

## II.

My first experience with tales was thorough the miraculous stories narrated by a mother writer, concerned specifically with children's literature<sup>3</sup>. Later, in my adulthood, I re-encountered the storytelling world when my path, as an actor, was crossed with that of Ben Haggarty, a reputed British storyteller.<sup>4</sup> In 2013, a group of enthusiastic Romanian and English volunteers, initiated *Festivalul Povestilor din Transilvania (The Transylvanian Storytelling Festival)*<sup>5</sup>, during which Ben Haggarty was present in Cluj, where he held performances and workshops. On this occasion, I was asked by the organizers to make a simultaneous translation. I was unfamiliar with the scale of the "storytelling" phenomenon in the English contemporary culture and the tradition of Romanian folk stories and of the folk bards was little known to me, as well. I had heard grandparents in the countryside telling about how life used to be, but their accounts seemed to be often just a long tally of names, a ball reeling slowly, often containing typical situations and occasionally an unusual event.

Briefly, the invitation to work with a professional storyteller incited me. In the main hall of the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania in Cluj, which hosted the event, I was greeted by Ben Haggarty himself, a tall man, sober and elegant, with a well-knit body, a relaxed attitude, a bald head and a lively look. Without uttering too many words, Ben handed me a series of illustrations of a story about the devil who was fooled by the clever wife of a craftsman. An unusual atmosphere enveloped the whole story, the characters were ambiguous,

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3. Carmen Odangiu, *Jocul cu umbra, povestiri critice* (Arad: Editura Fundației Ioan Slavici, 1996).

4. Ben Haggarty, British storyteller, for further informations please check <http://benhaggarty.com>.

5. Despite the interest aroused among the public of Cluj and quality program of cultural events, the festival has had only two successive editions in the years 2013 and 2014.

their decisions unpredictable. Later, I realized that Ben was already challenging the storyteller in me. A few minutes later, we appeared together in front of an audience consisting of parents and children of all ages. Ben told the story in English and I followed the story line, translating it into Romanian. I was very careful to make the translation as truthful as possible, which was not difficult since Ben was telling the story in simple and straightforward words. It became increasingly clear to me that the narrator was trying to reach the public directly, bypassing the language barrier. Slowly, despite all my care to preserve the spirit of the original utterance, and though I knew I had to keep my presence in the background, the moment was transformed into an improvisational dialogue. We were two actors on a stage, I felt like my partner was eager to hear and “see” the story translated by me in a language unknown to him that he, however, wanted to “taste”. I was anxious to see the unfolding of the storyline (I did not know the story in advance). Gradually, an interesting theatrical exercise was on the go: I was there not only to “dub” the narrator, but found myself stimulated by him to contribute to the story, to even provide my own version of it.

Another surprising, element during the performance, was the behavior of the public which reacted as if it was witnessing a real theatre show. The spectators permitted themselves to be transported into the world of fiction, although the reception conditions were not very favorable to the installation of the theatrical illusion: the main hall of the museum, inappropriate for a theater event, had a disturbing echo; it was rather a foyer with visitors passing through; the buzz and animation of the children involved in other workshops in the adjacent rooms could be heard constantly, so the atmosphere was that of a street festival. And yet our representation has managed to impose its time and place inside this living and colorful tumult. At one point, the bustle and the parasitic noise stopped. That's the “magic of the story?” I found myself wondering. It is said that, during the performance, even in the most intense or agitated scene, any actor reserves 10% of his/her mind for the “outside gaze” – a small part of the actors attention is among the spectators, checking their “temperature”; he/she then uses this feedback for the adjustment of his/her performance.<sup>6</sup> It's not cheating, it does not mean “holding to the public”, it is just an indicator, a guide that implies Brechtian distancing, done with

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6. This split attention of the actor, during representation, was conceptualized by David Zinder and Viola Spolin using the notion of „No Motion“. David Zinder, *Body Voice Imagination: A Training for the Actor*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 101, 198-9 and 233.

caution. Thanks to this phenomenon, the actor in me discovered that, during the storytelling performance, I could not manage to distinguish adults from children. The quality of the audience's attention "caught" in the story was the same, regardless of age. Who or what produced this effect? Our interpretation? I do not think so, I did not do anything sensational. The story? No so, given that its subject, the devil fooled – for us, that we have the ingenious Ivan Torbynca<sup>7</sup> – was not unique. I was playing while, seeing that something miraculous was happening: *participation*. Very few shows that I had played in or seen before did generate the same kind of *communion*.

At the end of the event, I found that I was more energized than before it started, but, nevertheless, more confused: I could find no explanation for the strong impression left on the audience, which was applauding frantically, despite the maximum economy of means that we used in the performance. My interest in "the phenomenon of storytelling", steadily ever since, was born, therefore, from this acute dilemma, generated by the first performance in which I was a protagonist without me ever intending so.

### III.

Later, during the workshop Ben Haggarty held at The Transylvanian Storytelling Festival<sup>8</sup>, he suggested that, at the theater, the show takes place *in front* of the audience, while the storytelling performance takes place *within* those watching, inside their head and in their flesh and bones. What does this paradigm shift mean in terms of theatrical reception? One can get some clarification when referring to the much-discussed phenomenon of "identification". If we consider a play, there is a possibility that the viewer might identify with the characters and action, comparing them to his own biographical experience. If we look at the storytelling, however, one can notice a difference in degree of personal involvement. This difference, I think, is caused by different levels of "authorial participation". As Ben Haggarty said,

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7. Ivan Torbynca (Ivan Bag) is the main character of the homonym satirical story written by the Romanian writer Ion Creangă, published on April 1, 1878, in the journal *Convorbiri literare* in Iasi. The story has a theme with common origins in Romanian and European folklore. It recounts the adventures of the eponymous Russian soldier, who travels from the world of the living to Heaven and Hell, seeking immortality.

8. Ben Haggarty, "Fairytale for Grown-ups" (workshop, Storytelling Festival in Transylvania, Cluj, Romania, 21 March 21, 2013).

Popular vehicles of transmission – the verbal arts operate by "completion". You hear the words, you complete them with your own experience, everyone immediately becomes the owner on the content of the narrative in terms of the knowledge they automatically added to the story, it is an absolutely personal process, and therefore the film can never be as good as the book that inspired it, because we invested so much to make the story work for us; so the story is not a string of words, but it is something that *happens*, it's the plot, the action.<sup>9</sup>

When you see a show, the reception takes place, primarily, at an aesthetic level. But when you listen to a skilled storyteller, the aesthetic distancing is rivaled by the fact that simultaneously with the reception of the story, there is an automatic assumption of the action and of the characters. It is the imagination that makes this kind of participation possible. The imagination "takes off" from the very first words, as described by Gianni Rodari in his fundamental *Grammar of fantasy*:

... a word, randomly cast in mind, produces ripples on the surface and in depth, causing an infinite series of chain reactions, dragging along in its fall sounds and images, analogies and memories, meanings and dreams, in a move that involves the experience, the memory, the fantasy and the unconscious, which is complicated by the fact that the mind itself does not passively assist to the representation, but comes into action continuously, in order to accept and reject, to unite and to censor, to build and to destroy.<sup>10</sup>

Another explanation for the better degree of reception the story enjoys might be its presence in the everyday life, incomparable, quantitatively, with that of the theater. We do not go to the theater all day, not everyone has the histrionic gift, we do not "play a role" continuously, although, as suggested by the sociologist Erving Goffman, every social interaction is indeed a role playing<sup>11</sup>. Instead, most of our interactions with others are built on narratives. Significantly, Ben Haggarty opened his workshop with a playful challenge

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9. Ben Haggarty, "The Bearer-Beings': Portable Stories in Dislocated Times" (workshop, The Oxford Research Centre for Humanities, May 14, 2016).

10. Gianni Rodari, *Gramatica fanteziei. Introducere în arta de a născoci povești* (Bucharest: Editura Art, 2016), 13.

11. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 15th ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1990).



addressed to the participants. They had to throw, in an imaginary fountain, all the stories they could think about: from confessions between friends, to the stories of other peers, from the narratives provided by the media and by the advertising industry, to those propagated by politicians or those disseminated in the church. The conclusion was that everybody tells stories all the time: everything that happens to us every day, all you hear or see is sooner or later shared to others at the first opportunity, through a narrative material. Ben Haggarty demonstrated in his workshop, that even if the listener does not retell the stories he hears from others, the mere hearing transforms himself into a co-author.

Based on these realities already established by the aesthetic and psychological research, professional storytellers have gained, in recent years, a special status. In England, today, according to Ben Haggarty, there are about 600 professional accredited storytellers<sup>12</sup>. The storytelling range of actions is enwidening far beyond the cultural field. The storytellers are nowadays involved in projects that aim for a more effective communication with the public in various fields. A proof of this is the yearly organization, in Romania, of a highly professional gala, attended by writers, editors, producers, digital innovators, filmmakers, entrepreneurs and musicians, all among the best in their respective fields. *The Power of Storytelling. The Annual International Conference, Bucharest* is a very special event which, according to its website, "is a conference built around the idea that stories can change our worlds. The only one of its kind in Eastern Europe, it brings together superstar storytellers in all fields – from media, to arts, to business – to show the potential of stories to connect people, to heal wounds, to move to action, and to drive change."<sup>13</sup> The organizer's statement reflects Ben Haggarty's ideas held under the same creed: "stories are for everyone".

The democratic aspect of the storytelling phenomenon is not decreasing the quality of the material released. As suggested by British storyteller Jan Blake, a storyteller spends 90% of his/her time reading, searching, collecting, and "stealing" stories.<sup>14</sup> A really "good" story, says Blake, is the one that seizes you and forces you to share it to others. Along with the value of the

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12. Ben Haggarty, "The Bearer-beings."

13. "About the Conference," *The Power of Storytelling*, accessed April 4, 2017, <http://www.thepowerofstorytelling.org/about/>.

14. Jan Blake, *The Fisherman: A Tale of Passion, Loss, and Hope*, YouTube video, 18:25, from a lecture at TEDx conference, Manchester, February 14, 2016, posted by "TEDx Talks", March 29, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAV6eXaS6dk>.

narrative material, what matters is, of course, the availability of the audience, an idea which makes Ben Haggarty assert that "Live storytelling can only take place if the storyteller and the audience breathe the same air."<sup>15</sup> Here, Haggarty discusses the "tools of the trade" by which the storyteller, being active every second of the performance, "finds" the words (does not just deliver a memorized text); he translates what he/she "sees", what he/she experiences directly<sup>16</sup>; he can tell the story from different perspectives, he can spontaneously alternate the utterance tempo, depending on the atmosphere of the public etc.

#### IV.

As a teacher in the art of acting, I tried to identify the "tools" used in storytelling and to analyze their purpose. I concluded that many of them are common with those used by actors on the conventional stage, but also that there are others that develop some "specialized" qualities that are missing from traditional acting training. The craft of acting and that of the storytelling have much in common, but do not overlap perfectly. When Ben Haggarty mentions the *direct speech* (a "real" speech, that occurs in "real" time and through which, when adopted, the actor "incorporates the character, gazes at the world through the eyes of the character"), he implies what the actors call "assuming the role". The English storyteller suggests that he would adopt the *direct speech* (assuming the role) only in certain circumstances described below:

Whenever you get in direct speech, during the story, you actually deepen yourself in the world of the story and then something magical can happen. It may be a moment when the storyteller, tired after an hour and a half, chooses the most energetic character and "enters into that character" in order to refresh forces; then he can return to indirect speech, which is equivalent to a general reset.<sup>17</sup>

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15. Ben Haggarty, "The Bearer-Beings".

16. See Haggarty's interesting exposure related to "the mantic/shamanic aspect" of storytelling: the world described by the narrator can be updated, one can enter this world. Imagination makes the invisible visible, the incarnation of psychological forces. Words, the English actor concludes, are just a translation of *what happens* when the story is told. Ben Haggarty, "The Bearer-Beings".

17. Ben Haggarty, "The Bearer-Beings".

So the storyteller does not usually “play”, he doesn’t become a character, he doesn’t illustrate unless necessary, as a means of self-regulation. Actor and playwright simultaneously, the storyteller has a secret goal: to stimulate the imagination of the listener, inviting him to become a partner, co-author of the narrative. This ability to relate to the dramatic interpretation as a vehicle, as a mean of inviting viewers to collaborate seemed to me one of the most subtle acting lessons by which storytelling can help the preparation of the acting students.

Driven by curiosity to discover how this very special skill of storytellers can be cultivated, I proposed my students to continue the research begun in Ben Haggarty’s company. Further, I will present some of the exercises that gave satisfactory results.

We started from autobiographical facts: the students had to write, in only one day, a story inspired by their life or the life of someone they knew. Once drafted, the story had to be sent to a colleague who had to present it as their own, in front of the entire class at a predetermined time. The text of the story had not been memorized as we tried to avoid “premeditated” performances, lacking spontaneity. Along the presentations, the students had a series of revelations, both as authors of texts, and as performers: they had the feeling of recovering lost details of their own stories, though they were retold by someone who was not present at the original source-events.

In order to highlight and emphasize the fact that a story is a *living structure* which, through repetition, can become “virulent” and also in order to understand how the “oral tradition” works, I proposed another exercise, chosen from Ben Haggarty’s work. The students, in teams of four, A, B, C, and D had to exchange stories, following a predetermined route (see fig. 1).

In the first phase, A tells a story to B; B tells a story to A; C tells a story to D; D tells a story to C.

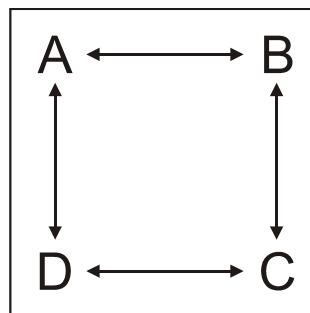


Fig. 1: Team dynamics in the story exchange exercise

In the second stage, A tells to D the story heard from B as if it was his story; D tells to A the story heard from C as if it was his story; B tells to C the story heard from A as if it was his story; C tells to B the story heard from D as if it was his story, etc. In the end, the actor A is getting back his real story retold three times! The transformation his own story has undergone, passing through the filter of three different storytellers, is always spectacular, remaining, however, within verisimilitude.

Ben Haggarty, admitting that storytellers are true “walking libraries”- some of them knowing hundreds of stories - asks rhetorically: “How can people remember so many stories and details?” Then he gives a surprising answer, proving that the story is somatic, is understood through the body: “Through repetition, the story melts into you: the fundamental functions in orality come from the body, one is *repetition* - very important -, the second is the composition of the three elements, Jo-Ha-Qyu.” The following mentioned are *alliteration*, *assonance*, *rhyme* and *rhythm* all coming throughout the body. Each time, Haggarty concludes, “we are slightly different, changed by the previous repetitions”<sup>18</sup>.

Another exercise with surprising results is the one in which one actor tells a story to his/her partners, and they, in turn, come before the public and retell the same story as if it would belong to each of them. The audience’s task is to identify the original author. Not infrequently the richness of details and the degree of involvement in the story made the real owner of the story seem unreliable!

The presentation of a well-known classical or folk tale in an invented language (gibberish), usually turns this seemingly easy and fun exercise, into an opportunity to explore the actor’s intra- and inter-communication who, freed from the obligation to use intelligible words, ventures into the realm of pure sonorities, of nonverbal expressions, always discovering original and fresh ways to transmit the story coherently and emotionally.

We have to admit that, in many cases, beyond the enthusiasm of the students, the purpose of these exercises – that is to reach a form of storytelling stripped of histrionic ambitions and “fireworks”, to no longer tell the story as a string of words, but to actually make it *happen*, to *act* - remains an elusive goal, especially in a short timeframe. But on the way, students learn many useful and critical things for acting. First, we get to train the “imagination muscle”; then the students start to become aware

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18. Ben Haggarty, “The Bearer-Beings”.

of how culture is transmitted. It is not about the transmission of written texts, but as Haggarty said, the story is about images, facts, ownership, and creation.

Secondly, through storytelling, memory and attention to detail are encouraged/coached. "Distant Analogies" and "Random Talk"<sup>19</sup> are names of exercises suggested by the Israeli director and pedagogue David Zinder, based on the creative imagination games invented by the futurist artist Filippo Tomasso Marinetti: the students, using improvisational collaboration, have to recount a fictional event of the recent past, an event about which they actually do not know anything. The story is born as the actors are telling it, mutually stimulating their imagination. One of the most important aspects that these exercises contain is the creativity/improvisation tandem. The storyteller's dramaturgy takes place spontaneously, live, his words "are born in the mouth" as the Dadaist Tristan Tzara said.

One of the two fundamental works of Keith Johnstone, the "father of improvisation", is entitled *Impro for Storytellers*, although it is not about storytelling, but rather about theater-sports and about unleashing the creative improvisational powers of the performer. In the last paragraphs of the chapter on spontaneity, Johnstone's thoughts formulate what could be a storytelling profession of faith: "Where do ideas come from anyway? Why should I say 'I thought of it?', or 'I thought of an idea', as if my creativity was something more than the acceptance of gifts from an unknown source?"<sup>20</sup>

## V.

When you tell a story or listen to one, you often get to understand the world better. On the other hand, the story can mean running away from reality when it becomes unbearable (in times of war, for example). Escaping through storytelling can be much powerful than watching a movie, a play or even reading a book, says Ben Haggarty. In the story they create together, both the teller and the listener, are accomplices, even if they are not aware of it. They *act* together, entering the world of fiction. Eventually, the story works, as stated in the motto of this essay, like a map of what it means to be human.

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19. David Zinder, *Body Voice Imagination: A Training for the Actor*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 177, 182 and 188.

20. Keith Johnstone, *Impro for Storytellers. Theatre sports and the Art of Making Things Happen* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 73.

The neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux, in his book, *Synaptic Self: How our Brains Become Who We Are*, on the assumption that identity is characterized by dynamic and fluidity, concludes that “who we are” largely depends on the linguistic interpretation of our experience translated into tales (“stories”) that we tell ourselves about ourselves and our place in the world. These “stories” make up the “narrative self”<sup>21</sup> (Le Doux 2002: 271,272) (or “autobiographical self”, according to A. Damasio). It contains assignments, mental constructs, imaginary scenarios that we develop continuously. LeDoux warns that the stories that constitute the “narrative self” or “autobiographical self” may enhance or limit the creative capacity of the human being.

In Romania, which we find today being caught in a turbulent process of redefinition of its social identity, the storytelling culture for grown-ups could experience a renaissance, due to at least two factors. On one hand, there is the emerging phenomenon of devised performances, especially in the private theatres.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, one can easily notice the unprecedented proliferation of theatrical performances in which actors come in proscenium and directly address the audience. Until recently, video projections were invading the visual universe of performances, and so does the microphone placed on the stage today become a theatrical topos both in private and in state subsidized theaters. The “phenomenon” of ubiquitous microphones on stage seems to be a symptom of a need that I sincerely hope will soon be answered by the emergence of Romanian storytellers.

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21. Joseph Le Doux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Viking, 2002), 271--72.

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**FILIP ODANGIU:** Born in 1976 in Timisoara, Filip Odangiu is one of the promoters of a new approach in the Propaedeutics of the actor's art, based on exploring the mechanisms of imagination and metacognitive. He made his undergraduate studies at Timisoara (painting) and Cluj (acting), where he took a doctorate in Theatre in 2013, with a thesis dedicated to the formation of the actor. He obtained his Master in Philosophy of Culture and Performing Arts at the Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj, where, since 2003, he teaches acting and improvisation. His work, besides didactic, includes several directions: acting, theater directing, stage design, fine arts, journalism.

## *Implementing Devised Theatre with Teenagers: Methodology and Design*

IULIA URSA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The paper presents our pedagogic approach for implementing device theatre principles in working with teenagers. These principles converge to our research of the innovative concepts in the pedagogy field that emphasizes the role of the spontaneity and improvisation in the teaching process. This way of exploring the Drama Art allows to the subject-students to discover and to become aware of their most intimate thoughts and to integrate them into an artistic message. The defining principle of our pedagogic approach is the construction from the perspective of a finite artistic product which should be the transmitter of a message born from a personal stake, intimate, emulated in the consensus of the member of the group. In this way it is provided an adequate motivation of participants having a well-defined common goal. Also following this approach there are created pertinent occasions for accessing the training specific to the actors<sup>2</sup>.

**Keywords:** Teenagers, education, pedagogy, didactics, methodology, creativity, improvisation, devised theatre.

Teaching requests exploring experimental didactic activities, new and diverse, in developing workshops for Drama Art. Adapting the teaching process to the cognitive, physical and emotional particularities specific to teenagers the use of the Devising Theatre means is inevitable. As outlined in a previous paper<sup>3</sup> our actions aimed developing a method for teaching Drama Art in vocational high schools.

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1. "Octavian Stroia" *Choreography and Dramatic Art High School, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, PhD candidate at the Theatre and Television Faculty, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. iuliaursi@yahoo.com*
  2. Article translated from Romanian by Leonard-Cristian Pop.
  3. Iulia Ursa, "In Search of a Didactic Method for the Study of the Actor's Art by Teenagers," *Studia UBB Dramatica LVIII* (1/2013): 125-130.



The result of our initial research represent a formula based on procedures inspired from various theatre methods, adequate to our approach of building moments in which the subject-students can explore the process of expressing scenically a message personal and with real stake. In his book, *The Actor and the Target* Declan Donnellan remarks the existence of the message profoundly human contained in any artistic act: „... even the most stylized master piece talks about life and the more the life in a master piece the biggest the value of the work.”<sup>4</sup>

Our methodical approach converges in the sense of the research of the innovative concepts in the pedagogy field that emphasizes the role of the spontaneity and improvisation in the teaching process. This way of exploring the Drama Art allows to the subject-students to discover and to become aware of their most intimate thoughts and to integrate them into an artistic message.

The main particularity of this way of approaching the pedagogical method for exploring the Drama Art considers the stake put in game by the subject-student himself. His actions are directed towards a target with a personal stake, “when we act we tell stories”<sup>5</sup> therefore he doesn’t play merely a role but he is the teller of his own story, is the messenger. of his own manifest he is the creator of the role that can tell his story or the story carrying the message he wants to convey to the others.

## **General Aspects of the Method**

### *The principle of the collective message*

The defining principle of our pedagogic approach is the construction from the perspective of a finite artistic product which should be the transmitter of a message born from a personal stake, intimate, emulated in the consensus of the member of the group. In this way it is provided an adequate motivation of participants having a well-defined common goal. Also following this approach there are created pertinent and inevitable occasions for accessing the training specific to the actors.

For developing such a product, there is stimulated the original composition generated by an idea or feeling born from “impulses, dreams and emotions” of the members of the group. The process is similar to the one of the original

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4. Declan Donnellan, *The Actor and the Target* - Romanian version (București: Unitext, 2006), 16.

5. *Ibid.*, 185.

project presented by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau in the chapter dedicated to *Original Composition* from the work: *The Viewpoints Book: a Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*<sup>6</sup>.

We can observe also similitudes with what it is identified as Devising Theatre, i.e. the method of performing without a text and with the collaborative participation of the entire team in all the aspects of the development of the performance.

Convergent to these currents and methods it is positioned the method of *auto-courses*, specific to the pedagogy of the theatrical creation of Jacques Lecoq presented by him in his work: *The poetic body: a pedagogy of the theatrical creation*.<sup>7</sup> *The auto-courses* represent a form of exploration outside of course hours of what has been learned during them. They benefit from the total freedom offered by the absence of the pedagogue and the support of the group that participates actively to the creative process and its evaluation from the constructive perspective of the feedback. This way of organizing and doing the activity it is retrieved in our approach also.

### *The principle of the heterogenic means for generating the material*

From the perspective of how the teaching activity is structured and it takes place this method of theatre implies the teacher to be open towards the permanent adaptation and diversification of adopted procedures.

In the *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance*<sup>8</sup> related to Devising Theatre it is made reference to the ways of generating the material, ways diversified that can include from theatrical exercises and improvisations to writing, drawing, filming, research and discussions.

Similarly, in the *Viewpoints*<sup>9</sup> technique, the material collection stage, it is found the same generosity in accessing as much sources as for creativity stimulation as possible. In this respect it is suggested the process to be approached from the perspective of accumulating of materials coming from the universe of: complementing arts (visual arts, music, dance etc.); diverse techniques (video, audio etc) or ordinary areas (food, domestic objects etc.).

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6. Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition* (New York: Theatre Communication Group, 2005).

7. Jacques Lecoq, *Corpul poetic: o pedagogie a creației teatrale* (Oradea: Artspect, 2009), 105.

8. Paul Allain and Jen Harvie, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance - Romanian version* translated by Cristina Modreanu and I.T. Todoruț – (București: Nemira, 2012), 312-315.

9. Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, *The Viewpoints Book*, 160.

Going further in the direction of this way of generating the material and building the specific universe it is to be mentioned the non-limitation characteristic of the accessed dramatic genre. In this way as outlines also Augusto Boal in the rules of the drama specific to *the Theatre of the Oppressed*<sup>10</sup>, it can be accessed any genre from realism to symbolism but less surrealism and irrealism.

### *The principle of collective creation*

From our pedagogic perspective this is a principle of the method with the purpose of exploring the entire approach from the stand point of the importance of coexistence and cooperation of the team and the free creation.

In *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance* it is outlined the aesthetic role of the *Devising Theatre* resulted from his functioning mode by questioning the usual hierarchy from conventional theatre: the script, the director the result.<sup>11</sup>

Subject-students can access a complex experience regarding the dynamic of the theatrical group and individual's functions in this group. From this perspective the co-lucrative proceedings we propose are retrieved within the phenomena of transposing the creative accent from the area of the ludic in case of improvisations in area of directing, drama, technical direction etc. in case of collective moments specific to the method of auto-courses of Jaques Leqoc.<sup>12</sup>

### *The principle of the side coaching*

"Side coaching is the process of giving direction to actors when they are involved in working on a scene. The suggestions are usually simple and may take the form of actions, emotions, playing styles, concepts or other forms of suggestion which the actors take and utilize in the scene. The actors must keep the scene going and are to react instantly to the coaching."<sup>13</sup>

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10. Augusto Boal, *Games for actors and non-actors* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 242.

11. Paul Allain and Jen Harvie, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance* - Romanian version translated by Cristina Modreanu and I.T.Todoruș – (București: Nemira, 2012), 312-315.

12. Jacques Lecoq, *Corpul poetic*, 105-107.

13. June 1th, 2016, <http://broadwayeducators.com/side-coaching-exercise-for-actors-how-to-use-it-benefits-for-actors/>

It is created this way a new dynamic of the relationship pedagogue-student and the delimitation of the role of the pedagogue who this time cannot be assimilated to a director. He has the purpose of tuning the activity of the group within the theatre workshop by determining the process of creativity stimulation. From our research perspective the way in which the activity of the animator is positioned in *the Theatre of the Oppressed* is ideal for being extrapolated into the role the pedagogue-coordinator has in our pedagogical approach. In this way the pedagogue-coordinator of the theatre workshop should commit to a dialectic attitude; he is a generator of questions<sup>14</sup>. Using as main didactical method the different perspectives, he coordinates the direction of the actors both the subjects approached (content of the scenes) and the technical solutions for their scenic transposition. In his didactical approach the coordinator of the theatre workshop should avoid manipulative attitudes, statements or unilateral decisions regarding the individual activity of the subject-students as regarding the group as a whole.

### *The principle of the theatrical intrinsic creativity*

Our pedagogical approach is based on the axiom of the existence of the theatrical intrinsic creativity specific to the human being. This postulate it is retrieved within the majority of the analysed theatrical methods but it is particularly explored and developed by Viola Spolin and Augusto Boal.

From Viola Spolin's perspective every individual is a potential theatrical creator: "Everyone can act. Everyone can improvise. Everyone who want can act and can learn to become apt for the stage"<sup>15</sup>. In the same way Augusto Boal observes pertinently the essence profound human of the theatrical language. Substantiating *the Theatre of the Oppressed* Augusto Boal outlines: "...is theatre in the most archaic application of the word. In this usage, all human being are actors (they act!) and spectators (they observe!). They are spect-actors."<sup>16</sup>

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14. Augusto Boal, *Games for actors and non-actors* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 262.

15. Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theatre – Romanian version* (București: U.N.A.T.C. Press, 2008), 49.

16. Augusto Boal, *Games for actors and non-actors* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 15.

### *The principle of using theatre as didactic method for knowledge*

The influence of the theatre on pedagogy is an area explored and developed since forever the pedagogic valences of the theatre being one of the underlying reasons for this art's development. In modern times we assist to the theatre substantiation as didactic method specific for teaching literature or even exact sciences.

This principle it is found in most theoretical works of great theatre practitioners. From our perspective Augusto Boal has an adequate positioning in this respect; he is substantiating his method as follows: "Theatre is a form of knowledge. In the same time it should be a mean for transforming the society. Theatre could help us to build our future instead of waiting it."<sup>17</sup> Specific to the Boal method it is the harmonious union of pedagogic and artistic valences of the theatre in view of developing of an ideal social model of the individual who can express publicly his opinion and who can, through his contributions, to influence the future of the society to which he belongs.

In a complementary approach Viola Spolin explores the play and theatrical improvisation from the perspective of pedagogical valences on the facilitation of intuitive knowing of the immediate reality through spontaneity stimulation: „The objective on which the player should concentrate constantly and toward which should directed any action creates spontaneity. Spontaneity triggers personal freedom and the entire being awakes from the physical, intellectual and intuitive perspective."<sup>18</sup>

### *The play-exercise method*

The main specific didactic method used in our pedagogical approach within the Drama workshops was the training method based on exercises and play: we experimented the introspective valences of exercises developed for the exploration of the personal universe specific to subject-students so that to combine afterwards this approach with interactive valences specific to theatrical playing done within the group.

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17. Augusto Boal, *Games for actors and non-actors* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 16.

18. Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theatre – Romanian version* (București: U.N.A.T.C. Press, 2008), 52.

We adopted in this respect the exercises-and games proposed by Augusto Boal in his fundamental work: *Games for actors and non-actors*. Exploring the system created by Augusto Boal we noticed similitudes between his conception regarding the meaning of theatrical act and its educational values and the goals proposed by our pedagogical approach.

The method has been developed in order to develop the specific theatrical activity's scenic competencies of actors and non-actors. It is composed of a series of exercises, games and drama forms that function within a construction interactive and dynamic.

Integrating and exploring Stanislavski's research Augusto Boal succeeds in creating a series of exercises and games meant to prepare actors and non-actors for developing the structures specific to *The Theatre of the Oppressed*, *The Image Theatre*, *The Forum Theatre* and *The Invisible Theatre*.

Adopting the Stanislavski's theory Boal starts from the hypothesis of the necessity actor's de-mechanization preparing him for the specific process of impersonating the character. This System<sup>19</sup> supposes 3 implementation steps:

1. De-mechanization of the actor – here we have 5 categories of exercises and games:
  - Re-establish muscular functions for feeling what we touch (general exercises, walking exercises series, massage exercises series, integration games series, gravitation exercises series);
  - Senses development (blind man series, space exercises)
  - Listening what we hear (rhythm exercises, melodic exercises, sounds and noises series, exploring breathing's rhythm, development of inner rhythm)
  - Seeing what we watching (mirrors series, sculptor's series, puppets' series, image games, masque and rituals games, imagining object etc)
  - Senses memory (reconnecting memory with emotions and imagination)
2. Exercises for animating and optimizing rehearsals (applicable for any play)
3. Exercises for facilitating the process of impersonating the character.

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19. Augusto Boal, *Games for actors and non-actors*, 29.

These exercises can be found also within other methods in similar or different forms; in this respect we can exemplify the existence of the recognizable series of exercises generically named *The Mirror* which we have identified also in Viola Spolin's method, first chapter dedicated to exercises from her work: *Improvisation for theatre*.<sup>20</sup>

The proposed exercises have been selected because of the polyvalence of the objectives touched all of them as they are efficient methods for warming-up, for knowing the member of the group and for animating the relationship among them and last but not least as they are an excellent way for developing for accessing and developing the imagination of the subject-students.

The method of exercises and games has been used during our entire pedagogical experiment and it was efficient both in conducting the drama workshop and in developing the main steps for building the final scenic product. In this respect the exercises and games have been selected for their specific and the compatibility with the target proposed. For example the same exercise can be used in the warm-up stage and as a starting point in the stage of generating the script or an act.

### *The Improvisation Method*

Improvisation is the gravitational point of the Drama workshop.

Detailing the way in which improvisations developed during the intervention with the experimental group delimitate themselves several particular characteristics can be outlined.

In this type of project, the main function of the improvisation is to generate authentic scenic material, acceptable from the drama and aesthetical point of view for the final performance. Accomplishing this function improvisation is modelled by the main principles and technical aspects of the method

For a start it can be outlined the characteristic of the autonomy in regards with a given script. Not having a script as base for our approach participants can choose various improvisation topics function of the general idea of the target message.

From a different perspective there are no pre-established conditions regarding the number of participants; it can be individuals, couples or groups.

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20. Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theatre*, 110-111.

Referring to the characteristic of verbal or nonverbal communication methods within improvisations there is the freedom of accessing the convenient variant from the standpoint of aesthetic expressivity or legerity with which each individual can develop on of the variants.

### *Practical Implementation*

Our method implementation followed the three stages specific to the construction of an original project as they are presented in the Viewpoints<sup>21</sup> method:

1. Concept definition – topic identification;

This is the defining stage for the way of conducting the activity later on. The topic should be interesting, acute and actual for all group members and it should motivate them.

2. Writing stage;

This stage targets the identification of those stories, events, news, characters that can illustrate the chosen topic. It supposes writing scripts but doesn't exclude oral presentation.

3. Scenic transposition;

This is the biggest stage and consists of building the scenic moments which will compose the finite product. In this stage it will take shape the structure and the staging modality. The main exploring methods used in this stage are exercises - games and improvisation.

Each workshop was conducted following a pattern relatively constant and developing several specific moments:

- Preliminary stage for preparing the space and specific costume;
- Warming up through specific exercises;
- Exercises with objectives correlated to the three stages of general development of the project (exercises for de-mechanization of the body, exercises for generating the topics to be explored through improvisations);

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21. Paul Allain and Jen Harvie, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance* - Romanian version translated by Cristina Modreanu and I.T.Todoru – (București: Nemira, 2012), 408.



- Improvisation module on topics proposed and consensually adopted by group members (image of the topic; improvisations by individuals, by couples or group);
- Exercises specific for animating the rehearsals;
- Discussions and conclusions (subject-students will take notes in their work journals).

The project took place 24 weeks meaning 24 drama workshops. At the end of this module students presented an original performance of 30 minutes on one day from the teenager life outlining the types of human interaction specific to this age; the parent-child relationship; the teacher – student relationship, teenager-group; lover couple.

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*IULIA URSA is an Actor's Art teacher at the Octavian Stroia Choreography and Dramatic Art High School, Cluj-Napoca. Starting 2011 she has been a doctoral student at the Faculty of Theatre and Television, "Babeș-Bolyai" University. Research topic: Methodology of teaching the Actor's Art in artistic vocational high school. She is involved in the didactic and research activity in the field of the theatrical education for teenagers.*

## *Tribunal Plays and Verbatim Theatre*

RĂZVAN MUREȘAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The paper's aim is to offer an overview on a diverse and dynamic phenomenon, as documentary theatre in Britain, with accents on two of the most visible directions, that it follows on the last decades: verbatim and tribunal theatre. Since the mid '90s, a period dominated by apathy and detachment, these formulas have been proving their efficiency, on the one hand, by investigating and researching some current, urgent, national and international topics, and on the other hand by calling new strategies for addressing and engaging the audience. Meanwhile these practices based on "the truth" that comes from documents and interviews generate particular questions about the relationship between ethic and esthetic, between objective and subjective, between real and fictional. Documentary theatre, and particularly verbatim theatre deals with a dilemma: how to create a theatrical viable experience, without distorting the documentary source?

**Keywords:** documentary theatre, verbatim, tribunal plays, ethic, public inquiry, Peter Cheeseman, Tricycle Theatre, David Hare, Max Stafford-Clark.

In the arsenal of political theatre, the documentary has become in recent decades, a formula increasingly frequented by playwrights and directors, when they survey events or topical issues, national or local histories, aspects of communities or marginalized groups. Documentary theatre (also known as "dramaturgy of the real", "fact-based theatre", "non-fiction theatre", "theatre of testimony", "docudrama") is, according to Patrice Pavis, "the theatre that only uses as texts, documents and authentic sources selected and 'edited' according to the playwright's socio-political thesis. [...] Instead of fabula and fiction, there are used sources organized according to their contrastive and explanatory

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1. *Theatre and Television Faculty, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. razvanmuresan@yahoo.com*

value".<sup>2</sup> The first manifestations on this direction take place in the 20s, in Brecht's and Piscator's works, and also in Russia, through theatrical productions of workers' groups known as "sinaiaia bluza" ("blue blouse"). Documentary material, taken usually from press, is dramatized in the form of short scenes, interspersed with musical interludes, pantomime, dance or movement, together with sound effects, puppetry and shadow theatre, projections of images or movies. Used, mainly with propaganda purposes, but also to educate and inform, this kind of shows is spreading in the early 30s in western Europe and the US, where, as the "living newspaper", are produced on a large wide program of arts funding, called the Federal Theatre Project.

In Britain, documentary theatre begins with "living newspaper" kind of performances, made under the influence of the American model, by Unity Theatre and Theatre Union companies, both made up mainly of amateur actors, tributary (at least in a first phase) to communist ideology, but innovative in their aesthetics. The presence of a commentator/ narrator, the episodic structure of scenes, simultaneous setting, visible setting changes, are some of the innovations brought by these companies. Unity Theatre, during the four decades of its activity, deals with the topics of the moment (strikes, Suez crisis, revolution in Hungary), inserting in the screenplays press articles, or contributions from witnesses. Theatre Union has a short existence, but most of the members of the company and the leader Joan Littlewood will establish, after the World War, Theatre Workshop, whose name is related to the show *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (1963), a crucial moment in the history of British theatre. The success of production will be part of the increasing interest for documentary, and also for collective works, the first examples being *US* (1966), directed by Peter Brook and *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1973) produced by John McGrath and Theatre 7:84.

But the most faithful disciple of Littlewood will be Peter Cheeseman, an innovative director, concerned to find a theatrical language through which he can put the artist close to the community. At the beginning of the 60s, Cheeseman works with Stephen Joseph and with the company managed by him, Studio Theatre, that for a while, runs its activity in a public library in Scarborough, where from their performances turn into long tours through the industrial areas where there were no theatres. The two artists promoted a unique formula for that moment, arena or "theatre in the round", placing

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2. Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre*, trans. Nicoleta Popa-Blanariu and Florinela Floria (Iași, Fides, 2012), 397.

the audience all around and as close to the stage as possible. In 1962, the team locates in Stoke-on-Trent<sup>3</sup>, transforming a former cinema into the first theatre in Britain with an arena stage. This stage architecture was the most suitable for Cheeseman for a natural and truthful and also dynamic acting, the first step for a real connection with the audience. It is also a setting that offers a great freedom for being highly creative: “in the proscenium theatre one spends a lot of time organizing movement, whereas in the theatre in the round there is virtually a limitless possibility for the actor to move at equal access to each other. In the circle everybody is equal and everybody has equal access to each other”.<sup>4</sup>

In more than three decades of work for the Stoke-on-Trent, Cheeseman manages to have a devoted team, composed of multidisciplinary performers, able to perform a diversified repertory, from classical plays to contemporary playwrights, mainly local writers, Peter Terson and Alan Ayckbourn. The second step was to look for topics in the history of the community and that way were created documentaries, but also a completely new method of writing dramatic text. Like archaeologists discovering the past, the director, the playwright and the actors explore oral histories in the area, record them (at the beginning with equipment from BBC), then put them into lines and lyrics for songs, following a self-imposed rule: “the material used on stage must be primary source material... If there is no primary source material available on a particular topic, no scene can be made about it [...] You can't write a documentary - it's a contradiction in terms. You can only edit documentary material”<sup>5</sup>. It is a collective creation, both in terms of primary sources, and in the selection and editing. Documentaries ensure that “a multiplicity of voices are heard”, and the collective work “tends to preserve the contradiction of viewpoint inherent in every historical event”<sup>6</sup>. The shows in the first years, *The Jolly Potters* (1964) or *The Knotty* (1966), focus on economic and cultural decline of some areas of the UK and offer “a somewhat romantic vision of a kind of ‘green’, pre-industrial, past in which local communities really had been communities”.<sup>7</sup> Being accessible and attractive for a large

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3. Town in Staffordshire County, a mainly industrial area located in the West of England.

4. Gabriella Giannachi (ed.), and Mary Luckhurst (ed.), *On Directing: Interviews with Directors* (New York, St.Martin Press, 2014), 31.

5. Attilio Favorini, *Memory in Play: From Aeschylus to Sam Shepard* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 82-83.

6. *Ibid.*, 83.

7. Derek Paget, *True Stories? Documentary Drama on Radio, Screen and Stage* (Manchester: M. University Press, 1990), 71.

audience, songs have a key role giving a distinctive style, and also make the connection between scenes and the passing from a narrative moment to another. The shows performed at Stoke-on-Trent will become, in a while, a distinctive genre, also taken by other regional theatres, as an alternative to Londoner centralism and as a way of positioning on the cultural map. From 1964 to 1973, *New Theatre Magazine* identified nearly seventy documentaries on local issues in different theatres outside the capital city<sup>8</sup>. It was ultimately what Peter Cheeseman wished: “what is interesting to me is the specificity of each culture, of each ethnic group: what interests me in documentary theatre is the celebration of difference”.<sup>9</sup>

Derek Paget analyzes in an article, in 1987, Peter Cheeseman’s productions and introduces the term “verbatim”, a term which defines a method for writing a text, “firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with ‘ordinary’ people, done in the context of research into a particular region, subject area, issue, event, or combination of these things. This primary source is then transformed into a text which is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material in the first place. As often as not, such plays are then fed back into the communities (which have, in a real sense, created them), via performance in those communities”.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, verbatim is not a form, but a technique through which documentary record is written “word by word” in a play or in a performance. The term is specific to the British culture, being less used by practitioners or theorists in other countries.

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In the '90s, documentary theatre returns in a completely new formula at Tricycle Theatre in London, through tribunal-plays that reassemble controversial investigations. The productions take the form of real trials, with actors playing the roles of witnesses or those serving justice and rely exclusively on witness, statements and other information recorded during the investigations. Most productions are the result of a collaboration between Richard Norton-Taylor, a journalist at *The Guardian*, the author of studies that investigate abuses, corruption or cover-up of public institutions, and Nicolas Kent, the

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8. *Ibid.*, 72.

9. Gabriella Giannachi (ed.), and Mary Luckhurst (ed.), *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*, 34.

10. Derek Paget, “Verbatim Theatre: Oral History and Documentary Techniques,” *New Theatre Quarterly* III (12/1987): 334.

director of these shows and the artistic director at Tricycle Theatre. Relying on the theatricality of justice and on topics with “weight”, they revive a formula launched in the sixties by Piscator, who puts on stage *In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer*, written by Heinar Kipphardt based on the investigations related to possible anti-American actions of the famous physicist and *Die Ermittlung*, written by Peter Weiss, about the Nazis’ trial involved in crimes of Auschwitz. For Nicolas Kent, “the tribunal” from Tricycle “restores theatre’s ancient role as part of the democratic process”.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike his predecessors who use the documentaries only as a source of inspiration, Norton-Taylor keeps strictly the details of the official documents, (including grammar mistakes), respects the chronology of the procedures, operating only selection and editing, as he mentions in the introductory note of the play *Colour of Justice*: “the transcripts of the inquiry amount to more than eleven thousand pages, which I have distilled into about a hundred – less than one per cent. Inevitably I have had to make brutal choices about which witnesses and which exchanges to include”.<sup>12</sup> The text is, therefore, the result of some strategic decisions and drama comes without distorting the truth, through a narrative that must be logical and coherent, as there is a vast documentary evidence and sinuous procedures. Such productions may have a much greater impact than fragmented information, difficult to follow, provided generally by the media, and the structure and the form close to that of television programs, allowed that the majority of these shows to be broadcasted on TV and achieve impressive audience.

*Half the Picture* (1994), the first play in a series of tribunal-plays is a dramatization of a public inquiry that investigates the involvement of the members of government in the illegal export of weapon components for factories in Iraq and is based on the testimonies of 87 politicians and civil servants. The performance, powerful and intense, shows a mechanism with broad ramifications that the official investigation had failed to dispel, but at the same time, shows the force that documentary theatre can have. It was the first play performed at the Parliament of Great Britain. *The Colour of Justice* (1999), considered by *The Guardian* as “the most vital piece of theatre on the London

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11. Dominic Cavendish, “Theatre: And nothing but the truth,” January 26, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-and-nothing-but-the-truth-1045299.html>.

12. Richard Norton-Taylor, *The Colour of Justice: Based on the Transcripts of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*, (London, Oberon Books, 2012), 6.

stage"<sup>13</sup>, deals with the issue of racism in British society and especially in state institutions. In 1993, a black student is killed by six white men, the police fail in proving their guilt, and eventually the two investigations end without any result. The suspicions about the way how investigations were made, determine another inquiry led by the Ministry of Justice, whose final report highlights major deficiencies in the activity of police, racism, incompetence and corruption.<sup>14</sup> The whole story is presented in two and a half hours of performance, a plea for truth, which proves itself that it was not just a polemic intervention, but turned the whole case "from being a black family tragedy to being a British tragedy".<sup>15</sup> The next performances also had a great impact: *Justifying War* (2003) analyzes the suspicious death of a military expert, who suggested the involvement of the premier's advisers in "manufacturing" documents to legitimize the war against Iraq; *Bloody Sunday* (2005) is based on the longest investigation in the history of British justice, a research that examines the events in 1972, when thirteen protesters in Northern Ireland were killed by security forces<sup>16</sup>; *Tactical Questioning* (2011) investigates the circumstances of the death of a prisoner from Iraq, during the interrogation led by British soldiers.

But the great merit of this kind of tribunal drama is that it takes us behind closed doors and exposes the way in which a cataclysmic event like *Bloody Sunday* occurred. It also shows that in theatre nothing is as hypnotic as fact.<sup>17</sup>

The course of action is minimal, but few details carefully directed, make the whole process to be alive and natural. Evasive answers, emotions, contradictory claims and everything related to the "ritual" of the courtroom is restored in a cinematic realistic register and this authenticity blurs the boundaries between real life and theatre. In the end, there aren't any conclusions,

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13. Susannah, Clapp, "Here is racism in all of its subtle shades", January 24, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/jan/17/race.world>

14. The trial will be completed only in 2011, when two of the original suspects are found guilty and sentenced.

15. Nadine Holdsworth (ed.) and Mary, Luckhurst (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 160.

16. The investigation started in 1998, was completed in 2010 and contains over 900 testimonies. The final report established the guilt of British troops, that used firearms unnecessarily.

17. Michael Billington, "Bloody Sunday", January, 24, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/apr/12/theatre>

the audience, as the jury, evaluate or have to complete what is said and what is hidden in these testimonies and evidences. Not coincidentally the light in the room remains permanently on. "To a certain extent, it's interactive," says Kent. "The audience can't be as passive as they would normally be. They can't say, 'Sit back and entertain me.' They have to listen, they have to bring an inquiring mind".<sup>18</sup>

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Documentary theatre is redefined in the early 2000s, a period dominated by *in-yer-face* theatre and, surprisingly, this happens precisely in its epicenter at the Royal Court. A first example is the play *A State Affair* by Robin Soans, directed by Max Stafford-Clark, about the events in a small town, where, during two decades, a community of workers is replaced by one of unemployed and drug addicted. The new documentary theatre departs from the formulas applied by Tricycle Theatre, as the pre-existing material is replaced in most cases by interviews, surveys or information taken directly from the source, using largely Peter Cheeseman's methods from the 60s. The selection and the montage are preceded by a journalistic phase, of investigating the subject, and the playwright has a major freedom in creating the performance.

The second collaboration between Stafford-Clark and Robin Soans is *Talking to Terrorists* (2005), the result of a process that lasts for about one year and is based on the interviews of 29 people who have some connections with the phenomenon of terrorism, current or former members of paramilitary groups from Ireland, Africa and Middle East, victims of terrorist attacks, experts and mediators in conflicts, politicians, diplomats and a psychologist specialized in this matter. In the text their identities remained anonymous, but some characters are identifiable with real people. For example, in the play, there "meet" a former member of the IRA, the author of the 1984 terrorist attack on a hotel in Brighton and one of its victims.

The interviews had two stages, each meeting between the actors and the interviewed people took place with the presence of the playwright and were based on the questions created by him and by the director, the actor having the freedom to ask about other aspects that he considers necessary.

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18. Liz Hoggard, "Out of crises, a drama", January, 26, 2017, at <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/mar/27/theatre>



Note that, in most cases, the interviews were not recorded, but written, which relativize the idea of verbatim, of reproducing “word with word” the original. At the end of this period of research, the structure of the play was set and the 29 roles were given, each of the eight players getting at least three. Then came the writing phase itself (ten weeks), the playwright wrote a first draft of the text from the records and the observations of each member of the team.

During rehearsals the actors reconstituted answers using information get during the interviews, the director’s requirement being “to render as accurate a recreation as possible”.<sup>19</sup> Mainly, it is an improvisation exercise as Stafford-Clark says: “it makes you dependent on the actors’ imagination”<sup>20</sup> and “the script would be filtered through their memory in a rather curious way”.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the playwright “constantly adapting, adding and subtracting”<sup>22</sup>, suggesting a contribution from the actors, even if the initial research prevails. Also, in some cases, the “original” was considered lacking of “theatrical viability”, and the actor made his role in another direction. As the actors testify, in shaping the characters, besides information provided in interviews, matter a lot the direct observation, the empathy with real “characters” and other aspects of their lives noted through informal talks. Therefore, we can say that both the text and the characters are the result of selection and choices, of a negotiation between accuracy and theatricality. “About 70% of the script stayed as it was at the beginning of rehearsals, and 30% was added or changed depending upon what we had discovered and the conversations we’d had”.<sup>23</sup> The ultimate goal is not an imitation, a faithful copy of the original, but a “filter” rather subjective that aims to obtain a psychological truth rather than the accuracy of content as even Stafford-Clark mentions: “I make no claim to the absolute authenticity of it, but it is true to the spirit of it.”<sup>24</sup>

The approach to the verbatim theatre of David Hare, one of the most important contemporary playwrights, is not accidental, if we consider the constant concern of his work since the early 70s - searching for ways and means, in order to engage the theatre in the realities of the public or political

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19. Tom Cantrell, *Acting in Documentary Theatre* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 31.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 41.

22. Ibid., 31.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., 54.

areas. In the play *The Permanent Way* (2003), he brings into question the privatization of the British Railways, a process spread over a period of more than ten years, which has proved to be a failure with catastrophic consequences: a series of rail accidents with dozens of dead people and hundreds of injured. The text consists of interviews with survivors, railway workers, investigators, engineers, but there are also the voices of those who took advantage of the change, bankers, politicians or businessmen. The play is an acid critic to the hypocrisy and incompetence of politics, to the giant bureaucracy behind this privatization, but also an evidence about the collapse of a myth, almost two centuries old, which led to the construction of the modern British state. "This is a drama that stirs indignation and pity in equal measure, political theatre that transcends the old conflicts between Right and Left to condemn the whole mindset and attitudes of those allegedly running our nation's affairs. It is, by a mile, the most significant and revealing new play of the year. If you want to understand why Britain isn't working, you need to see *The Permanent Way*".<sup>25</sup>

In the next play, David Hare went further in experiencing the verbatim theatre, presenting one of the most disputed topics of the recent history. In *Stuff Happens*, he creates a detailed reenactment of epical dimensions (over forty characters and almost three hours length), of the events that led to the American-British military intervention in Iraq (2003), using both materials taken from television shows, speeches, press conferences or public debates and fictionalized lines, from "behind closed doors" of the meetings between various officials of the two countries - heads of state, diplomats, ministers and military commanders. The approach is intended to be an objective one and it even appears formulated at the beginning of the play, where it is stated that it is a "historical play" and that "the events within it have been authenticated from multiple sources, both private and public. What happened happened. Nothing in the narrative is knowingly untrue".<sup>26</sup> This intention is reflected in the construction of the text, a constant debate between the pros and the cons of the war, between the visible face of politics and the dark one, between the public interest and the personal ambitions, the last being often the catalysts of decisions. The play is not an analysis or an aesthetical comment about the international politics, but rather an austere, unsentimental revisit of a moment

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25. Charles Spencer, "Why Britain isn't working", January 24, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3606779/Why-Britain-isnt-working.html>

26. David Hare, *Stuff Happens* (London, Faber and Faber, 2013) 5.

considered to be the most important in the history of Britain since the Suez crisis. It avoids giving answers or drawing conclusions, but it suggests, on the one hand, the lack of solutions to terrorism and on the other hand, the degeneracy of the British politics dominated by “second-class leaders of a second-league nation”.<sup>27</sup> Although it is relatively equidistant, the play draw the most virulent reactions such as those expressed by a member of the Conservative Party: “*Stuff Happens* is the most blatant subverting of art for the purposes of crude propaganda since that of Leni Riefenstahl”.<sup>28</sup> Many critics noted that there was an unclear border between reality and fiction, but Hare’s answer was blunt: “We had to change a certain amount that people had said. The area that a playwright operates in is always the difference between what people say and what they mean. So some of the speeches are direct reportage, if I felt the direct reportage was very powerful. Others are speeches that effectively I have written but which I feel represent what the person wanted to say, and by and large people have been pleased to say. The illusion is that I’m not present, but it’s an illusion. I work like an artist, not like a journalist”.<sup>29</sup>

If David Hare’s way of working, as Max Stafford-Clark’s, involves a negotiation with the original material and with the verbatim technique, opposite, Alecky Blythe, the artistic director of the company Recorded Delivery, uses a different method. She creates the plays starting from interviews that are edited but are not written. The show is rehearsed and played with the actors wearing headphones through which they hear the edited material and reproduce not only the words, but also the voices footprint, including pauses, hesitations, coughing.<sup>30</sup> The use of these devices is announced early in the show, it is integrated into the stage action, and when there is dialogue, the actors connect their headphones to the same device. This is ultimately a Brechtian way of distancing, determining the audience to understand that the actors rather transmit a message, than they identify with it. The debut play, *Come Out Eli*, presents an event that happened in 2002, when Eli Hall, a young man chased by the police, takes a hostage and closes himself in a flat. It comes then the longest siege in the history of the British crime, completed

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27. Aleks Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation. British Theatre Today* (London, Methuen, 2011), 74.

28. Ann Widdecombe, “For or against”, January, 13, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/sep/03/theatre.iraq>

29. Michael Mangan, *The Drama, Theatre and Performance Companion*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 202.

30. See <http://www.recordeddelivery.net/about.html>.

after 16 days, when the victim manages to escape and the attacker commits suicide. Blythe uses a collage of interviews, some taken even during the siege, others soon after, from those who watched the event from the street, to show how a divided community becomes united in a common goal, summed up in the words: "Eli, come out!." With his show from 2008, *The Girlfriend Experience*, Blythe proves that the verbatim theatre can also be very funny, even if it deals with a "serious" theme, as prostitution. It provides a complex, "up to date" image, surprisingly far from the usual stereotypes. There isn't illegal immigration, weird and violent employers, sexual slavery or drug addiction. Sometimes, the atmosphere "was almost Beckettian with its real-time waiting for the phone to ring, and bleak cycles of boredom and silence punctuated with paid-for sex".<sup>31</sup>

The verbatim theatre proliferated both in the mainstream area, and on the fringe stage, occupying a more visible place, and comparing it to the 60's it is a movement from the local in the national. This expansion is directly related to the high skepticism expressed by the society towards the political class, the public institutions and the media, the desire to find the truth on some issues that seem to be hidden and a growing interest, even an obsession, for the "real" proved by the proliferation of reality-show productions. As the playwright Robin Soans was mentioning, the credibility is one of the main arguments: "the audience for a verbatim play will enter the theatre with the understanding that they're not going to be lied to".<sup>32</sup> These plays, beyond the purpose they have in informing and educating, should not be seen as an extension of journalism or a substitute for the media: "verbatim drama, at its best, is aesthetically indistinguishable from high art [...] it can move and stir us as profoundly as any fiction".<sup>33</sup>

The verbatim theatre which includes a diversity of approaches and practices, is "among the most innovative experimental dramaturgies of the turn of the millennium"<sup>34</sup> and "now occupies the territory once claimed by

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31. Andrew Haydon, "Theatre in the 2000s," in *Modern British Playwriting: 2000-2009* (London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013), 48.

32. Richard Norton-Taylor, "Verbatim plays pack more punch than the papers", January, 24, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/oct/22/richard-norton-taylor-verbatim-tribunal-plays-stephen-lawrence>

33. Michael Billington, "V is for Verbatim Theatre", January, 24, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/may/08/michael-billington-verbatim-theatre>

34. Elisabeth Angel-Perez, "Language Games and Literary Constraints," *Contemporary British Theatre – Breaking New Ground* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 79.

works of the imagination".<sup>35</sup> Some important playwrights were oriented towards the documentary territory with varying degrees of involvement. Mark Ravenhill, for example, in *A Life in Three Acts* (2009) makes explicit clarification from the very beginning: "Hello, I'm Mark Ravenhill. I'm a playwright. In the past few weeks, I've been talking to the performer Bette Bourne about his life. We've divided our conversation into three parts. A life in three acts. Tonight is part one. We'd like to read you edited transcripts of our conversations".<sup>36</sup> David Hare continues the series of experiments based on interviews with the play from 2009, *The Power of Yes*, whose subtitle is enlightening: "a playwright trying to understand the financial crisis." "The Author" appears as a character, commentator and interviewer, in this "verbatim meta-play, a reflection upon the technique mediated through that very technique".<sup>37</sup> The same theme is also approached by Lucy Prebble in the multiple-awarded play, *Enron* (2009), based on numerous documents related to the scandal that surrounded the collapse of a giant corporation from the energy area.

Unlike, Davery Anderson, the author of the play *Blackout*, first acted at the National Theatre in 2008, refuses the association with verbatim theatre suggested by a part of the media: "I wrote this play, but the story isn't mine. It belongs to a young man from the east end of Glasgow who allowed me to interview him about his life... I went away with several hours of audio recordings from our conversations, which I then edited into a short narrative. This is not to say that the following text is a verbatim transcript - although most of the words are his rather than mine. The play that emerged is a fictionalized account of the events surrounding the crime this young man committed, told with a fair amount of creative license and, crucially, with certain key details left out".<sup>38</sup>

In the 2000s, the documentary appears in the whole British stage and can be found both in small studios, but also at the National Theatre or in West End, in traditional places or in unconventional ones, in physical theatre companies or at the Royal Court. The debated themes are the most various, from urgent ones, disputed and of national interest, to personal or

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35. Michael Billington, "The best shows of 2011", January, 24, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/dec/04/best-theatre-2011-michael-billington>

36. Mark Ravenhill and Bette Bourne, *A life in Three Acts* (London: Methuen, 2011), 3.

37. Marie Hologa, *Cases of Intervention. The Great Variety of British Cultural Studies* (Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 212.

38. Davey Anderson, *Blackout* (London, Samuel French, 2009), vii.

local ones, generally neglected by television or press. The texts are made by one person or collaboratively, and are produced with minimal resources or in the shape of musicals with impressive scenography. The documentary material appears on stage in the most various formulas, from juxtapositions of interviews, to combination of real and fictional, from simple editing through cuts and permutations, to collages, where alongside the spoken text, appear recorded voices, sounds, images. The production of the company DV8, *To Be Straight With You* (2008), brings together the dance-theatre, the film, the animation and the text in order to explore the issue of homophobia. Alecky Blythe has conducted hundreds of hours of interviews on the streets of Ipswich, where, in 2006, five prostitutes were killed, then, together with the musician Adam Cork, has turned them into a musical story, both tragic and filled with humor. *London Road* which premiered at the National Theatre became, in 2011, one of the most successful shows, subsequently turned into a film.

Documentary plays become the prevalent form for important topics offered by external politics: *Guantanamo – Honor Bound to Defend* (2004) by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo, a play made of letters and interviews with prisoners and their relatives, along with public speeches of politicians; *Fallujah* (2007) by Jonathan Holmes, consists of testimonies of atrocities committed during the military intervention in Iraq; *Motherland* (2008), where Steve Gilroy gathers stories told by mothers, daughters, sisters or girlfriends of soldiers who attended, some of them died or were injured, in the wars in Northern Ireland, Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan; *Black Watch*, one of the most awarded plays in 2006, where Gregory Burke tells the story of a famous Scottish regiment involved in almost all armed conflicts in the last decades. Related to the conflict in Iraq, the team at Tricycle Theatre produced in 2007, surprising play *Called to Account*, a fictional trial for war crimes against Tony Blair, at that time still premier. The “investigation” was led by superior magistrates, while personalities from politics, journalism and academia were called to testify for or against, these interventions was recorded and then turned by Richard Norton-Taylor in text.

We find innovative formula in the work of small companies, as Cardboard Citizens, working with the Royal Shakespeare Company for the show *Pericles*, which includes, along with the classic text, personal stories told by a group of immigrants. In the show *The Caravan*, performed by the company Look Left Look Right, eight spectators are invited in a caravan and listen the experiences of those who were left homeless after floods in

2007.<sup>39</sup> Banner Theatre Company, with three musician-actors, perform hybrid-performances at the junction between theatre, video-art and concert. These are performances in which the text interacts constantly with songs, recorded voices or digital collages, composed of interviews, testimonies, graphics, animations. Called “video balades”, they are brought to live from meetings with small communities, from which they extract stories and experiences, and background music, rhythms and sounds. Music is central, a mixture of influences, styles and registers of the most diverse, a natural extension of interest in topics such as: exile, migration, ethnic dislocations. *Wild Geese* (2004), for example, tells “the stories of Irish nurses, Asian textile workers, Iranian refugees and Chinese cockle-pickers”<sup>40</sup>.

The term has become more flexible in the last years, having very often a confusing usage and tending to cover a wider range of theatrical productions. In some particular cases “the label” verbatim seems to be just a marketing strategy. Strictly, verbatim “is understood as a theatre whose practitioners, if called to account, could provide interviewed sources for its dialogue, in the manner that a journalist must, according to the code of ethics, have sources for a story”.<sup>41</sup> As more and more performances are based on “truth” transferred directly into the scene, the ethics of creative process for verbatim theatre is a frequent topic under discussion, especially in a contemporary society faced with instability and lack of authority of the document itself. What is real and what is true are not synonyms. The veracity of sources may raise questions, and then the way interviews were conducted, the editing process, “distillation” or “filtering” allow shadings of “reality” and can ultimately produce accents and even manipulation. In each case, the testimonies that come before viewers go through a process that can distort: from the original recording to the written text, then in rehearsals and in the performance. Problematic nature of these products extends beyond the allegations of selective editing, often mentioned, to the very nature of theater. Text undergoes constant revision from a rehearsal to another, from one show to the next, and the actor can not be twice the same, so it is impossible to remain completely faithful to the original.

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39. See <http://lookleftlookright.com/site/thecaravan/>

40. See <http://bannertheatre.co.uk/portfolio/wild-geese-20042006/>

41. Nadine, Holdsworth (ed.) and Mary, Luckhurst (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama*. (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2008): 154.

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**RĂZVAN MUREȘAN** is a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Theatre and Television of Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, theatre director whose activity includes more than 25 shows on Romanian stages. In 2016, he gets a PhD Degree in theatre, with the thesis "British Contemporary Stage. Experiment and innovation after 1945".

## *Devised Theatre – a Short Introduction*

**ALEXANDRA FELSEGHI<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The aim of the following article is to define the concept of devised theatre, as well as outlining a brief history, and providing a description of the main elements which constitute a collective performance. It also brings in discussion the member roles in a group that practices devised theatre, and the technique they use in creating a performance.

**Keywords:** Devised theatre, collective author, theatre, performance, independent theatre, actor – director relationship, contemporary theatre aesthetic, authorship.

I have always believed that any theme chosen by an artist as a starting point for a new performance will, in some degree, dictate a way of working and even its own rhythm of development, which needs to be taken into consideration. In the case of the devised theatre aesthetic, there is no clear recipe.

First of all, we cannot overlook the fact that each of the artists involved in a production have their own personality, and their own way of approaching the proposed theme. Secondly, after the improvisation and experimental level, there comes a moment when everything has to be framed in a fixed form. Thirdly, the devised theatre process allows everybody the possibility to defend their own ideas, to create within their idea framework, which creates the need for a mediator who can reconcile the imminent conflicts, to see the potential of development in some situations or to remove the dead weight from the project.

Each time, during the first stage of production, the team is involved in a brainstorming of ideas and images related to the proposed theme. These should be noted and tested, even if they most often represent firsthand solutions

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1. *Independent researcher. alexandra.felseghi@gmail.com*

that require either development or abandonment. However, it is absolutely necessary for this stage of “pruning” to exist, because it leads the team to a more profound and creative theme analysis.

What does “devised/devising theatre” mean? In a simple form, the concept can be defined as an original production, generated by a creative collective working process. The dramaturgical support does not precede the cultural product, which can be a theatre production or an experimental performance.

Often associated with the innovative and experimental, devised theatre productions have immensely developed the possibilities and the limitations of theatre shows and their perception, both from the practitioners’ perspective and the audiences’. In most cases, the artistic groups that practice devised theatre work are groups that love to experiment, that are constantly questioning the topic/ideology they want to explore, as well as creating new ways of thinking, and building new forms and structures.

Alison Oddey defines the “devised performance” concept as an answer and a reaction to the relationship between director and playwright, and also to the classical naturalism that

... challenges the prevailing ideology of one person’s text under another person’s direction. Devised theatre is concerned with the collective creation of art (not the single version of the playwright) and it is here that the emphasis has shifted from the writer to the creative artist.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, during the creative sessions between the members of a group that practice devised theatre, a new kind of subject understanding is born. Without excluding its intellectualism, the contact with the theme is, in the first phase, more organic; and this is due to the fact that improvisation is used as a main researching instrument. Keith Johnston evokes imagination and spontaneity as principal sources of improvisation. Both elements are based on a very instinctual level and, once passed through an intellectual analysis, they lose their freshness and creativity; more often, they are born effortlessly as a reaction to an external stimulus:

... unless we think it might be “wrong” ... Then we experience ourselves as “imagining”, as “thinking up an idea”, but what we’re really doing is faking up the sort of imagination we think we ought to have.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Alison Oddey, *Devising theatre: A practical and theoretical handbook*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 4.

3. Keith Johnston, *Impro* (London: Methuen drama, 2007), 80.

We cannot provoke the imagination by taking distance to the subject. It is “a muscle”, as Ariane Mnouchkine puts it, a muscle that has to be trained in school and in the rehearsal room. In order to provoke and test their imagination, to keep it permanently active, the practitioners have to be in the theatre situation all the time, not thinking outside of it.

Therefore, the approach that a group of devised theatre practitioners ought to have is to be meta-intellectual, instinctual and also, autobiographical. Most of this type of productions could be integrated in the field of “handmade theatre” as critic Cristina Modreanu puts it in her book, *Utopii Performative*.<sup>4</sup>

Narrative in its classical understanding is almost always ignored, to the benefit of the experiment, work-in-progress and improvisation connected to artistic contemporary conceptions. This does not mean that “devised theatre” or “handmade theatre”, as Cristina Modreanu calls it, ignores new technologies, relying only on the performers’ physical potential. This is a very complex technique, without an instruction manual, which appeals to all staging, acting or dramaturgic possibilities. Its complexity lies in its polyphonic structure.

As an independent form, devised theatre was born at the beginning of the 2000s, but as a structure it was foreshadowed 30-40 years before, by the “happening” events and the experiments of artistic groups in New York and London. One explanation of the phenomenon could be given by the fact that these two “centers” of artistic society were in continuous development, and had effervescence that can rarely be seen today. In an interview for Theatre Talk show, Richard Foreman and Willem Dafoe remember with a kind of nostalgia that Performing Garage gathered a real community of artists from different domains like music, theatre, arts, cinematography and so on, under its roof in Soho. Performative experiments were born in this interdisciplinary environment.

Between 1967 and 1980, Richard Schechner is the director of *The Performance Group* in New York, a company in which he is also a founding member. By trying to put into practice his theories about performance, Schechner gathers young actors and directors, like Spalding Grey and Elizabeth LeCompte around the idea of his company. The big challenge was to reconsider the communication between performer and spectator, giving it a more direct spin. As an example in

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4. Cristina Modreanu, *Utopii performative. Artiști radicali ai scenei americane în secolul 21* [Performative Utopias. Radical Artists of the American Stage in the 21st Century] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014), 166.

this respect, Schechner produced *Dionisus in 69* (1969), a performance that reinterprets Euripides' *The Bacchae*, keeping very little of the original text when all is said and done. According to the main artistic direction in the '60s, which followed the ritualistic potential of the theatrical act (as in the case of the productions by Brook, Mnouchkine, Grotowski, Şerban), Schechner succeeded to introduce elements of physical theatre and non-realistic actions in this "scheme", to the benefit of the script. Also, the appearance of nudes in the performance was an innovative and also scandalous act, through which the authors wanted to highlight the predominantly sexual message. "For many, *Dionisus in 69* produced a sense of democratic community-building and challenged taboos of self- and group-expression, especially sexual expression."<sup>5</sup>

Due to several tensions within the group, caused by matters of authority and vision, The Performance Group split in 1975, when Elizabeth LeCompte created *Wooster Group* along with Spalding Grey, Willem Dafoe, Kate Valk, Jim Clayburgh, Peyton Smith and Ron Vawter. Unlike the original group, *Wooster Group* gave up the ritualistic elements of the performance, and focused on the political side, more functional in their contemporary society. In addition, their shows combine classical texts and theatre elements with mass culture and taboos, by using the collage technique. Pioneer of devised theatre, *Wooster Group* continuously questions the place of theatre in society and, in trying to answer, finds different ways of expression to avoid cultural clichés.

Books read, books open, books turned inside out, texts cut apart, turned upside down; ... The trilogy, the epilogue, parts one and two, parentheses, exclamation point, a work-in-progress. Pull a quote from here, take that paragraph, take out the whole section (...) Collage is the aesthetic strategy at play.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, one can describe the working process of the *Wooster Group* productions. Their shows are original compilations and interpretations of famous texts, and also of contemporary issues of great interest to the whole world.

Another collage technique is the one practiced by Richard Foreman, who declares the following:

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5. Paul Allain and Jen Harvie, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 112.

6. Bonnie Marranca, "The Wooster Group: A Dictionary of Ideas," in *The Wooster Group and its Traditions*, ed. Johan Callens (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2004), 110.

I write a little bit every day and I end up with a huge stack of pages. And when the time comes to do a play ... I say: "let me find an interesting page." And I find the page and I see it's pretty good and look through the huge stack again. "What page can go with that?" I find another page and it seem to relate somehow.<sup>7</sup>

By the association of independent texts, Foreman creates a script that is the starting point for a performance. Obviously, the original script will suffer adaptations through the creative process. I believe that a script is a living organism that must provoke the taste for interpretation in the practitioners. The written text should be as adaptable to a specific performance as an actor that is looking to interpret a character.

Returning to the history of the devised theatre concept, critic Duška Radosavljević attests that: "Devising, therefore, must be understood by reference to its own context – as a term and a practice, it should be understood as belonging to a particular historical 'moment' in the UK"<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, from a historical point of view, the Belgrade-based critic locates the birth of devised theatre in the second half of the twentieth century in Great Britain, as a form of counter-culture, in opposition with institutional theatre. Similar practices were depicted in the works of Jacques Lecoq, Ariane Mnouchkine (France) or *Living Theatre* and *The Performance Group* (USA). In fact, even the artistic group founded by Peter Brook at *Centre International de Recherche Théâtrale* (CIRT) used devised theatre techniques.

Also, Radosavljević separates two perspectives from which devising can be understood: aesthetic-methodologic (which refers to the creative process, and to the script which is not pre-existent to the production) and political (as a revolutionary method, born under the auspices of a practice against the traditionalist ways of thinking in theatrical processes). In effect, no matter how apolitical an independent artistic group considers itself to be, their art will never be separated from politics. Independent theatre groups will always react to some restrictive political or social factors, either consciously or unconsciously.

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7. Richard Foreman, interview by Susan Haskins and Michael Riedel, *Theater Talk*, PBS, November 13, 2009, <http://www.cuny.tv/show/theatertalk/PR1011221>.

8. Duška Radosavljević, "Theatre-Making: The End of Directing as We Know It," in *Sfârșitul regiei, începutul creației colective în teatrul european / The End of Directing, The Beginning of Theatre-Making and Devising in European Theatre*, ed. Iulia Popovici (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2015), 189.

The devised theatre technique is a concept born inside independent theatre, as a result of social research, and of a substantial change in group dynamics. First of all, one can bring into discussion the authorship issue. Who is the real author of the artistic product? The actor is no longer a simple executor, and starts to play a very important part in the process, joining the “competition” for authorship, which was destined only for directors and playwrights in the past. His contribution is captured in the dramaturgical material he provides during the rehearsals.

Regarding dramaturgy, most devised theatre groups are using the collage technique. Through the use of this technique, the result will not be an independent script, but a dramatic and performative script that, without being transposed to the stage, might not have great fluency. But, ultimately, this is not the main reason of the written text; it just supports the entire performance.

In the essay *Theatre-Makers, Directors, and the Independent Theatre. The Founding Narrative*, critic Iulia Popovici points out the authorship matter, as follows:

Under the Romanian copyright law, directors and actors have a more limited form of copyright protection (they receive credit for their work), since they are ‘interpreters’, and the playwright is the only one having fully acknowledged copyright ownership.<sup>9</sup>

In Romania, due to the reminiscences of last century’s cultural policies, devised theatre is only beginning to manifest; we’re now starting to think about a “performance author”, not only about a “playwright” in a traditional sense. The first term covers a wider area, which can include the Actor, Director, Choreographer or Writer – all of whom can work together in the artistic process. Also, the performance will not be complete until it is presented in front of an audience, which will contribute their own perception to the representation. In this case, even the audience might become a co-author of the performance.

Thus, the playwright plays the part of Collective Memory, which records, adapts and rewrites – an act that is as spontaneous and unstable as the Searching. He does all of these things until the perfect form is found.

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9. Iulia Popovici, “Theatre-Makers, Directors and the Independent Theatre. The Founding Narrative”, in *Sfârșitul regiei, începutul creației colective în teatrul european / The End of Directing, The Beginning of Theatre-Making and Devising in European Theatre*, ed. Iulia Popovici (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2015), 231.

The dramaturg might spend hours in rehearsals just watching, listening, writing, possibly drawing and recording. While this quiet documenting and organizing of information might sound like a fairly dry and uncreative act, the dramaturg's creative imagination is very much involved in this ordering process.<sup>10</sup>

The director's part in the process is determined by the group's need to have a leader to point out the key-moments of the future performance, and to consider the main ideas; this position gives him deciding power concerning the options of the whole production. No matter how democratic a group might be considered, there will always be need for someone who can assume these responsibilities. Along with the dramaturg, the director is looking to establish the "game rules" in which the performers can unleash their creativity and to propose new goals and fulfill their personal tasks.

... if we were to draw a map of typical devising process, it might reveal a labyrinthine journey of blind alleys, dead ends, associative leaps, mysterious paths and links between passages.<sup>11</sup>

Radosavljević quotes Martin Puchner, who

... offers a classification of dramatic texts based on their levels of autonomy from the anticipated *mise-en-scène*, including:

- a) "dramatic text as instructions",
- b) "dramatic text as incomplete artwork",
- c) "dramatic text as a complete, finished object that can be read as any other piece of literature".<sup>12</sup>

First point refers to the situation in which a text is a starting point for achieving an artistic concept. The second can be interpreted as a work-in-progress. The third one concerns playwright works which were created following classical rules, and are part of any cultural heritage.

Regarding theatrical collective work, this kind of theatre is based on a matter of trust. The feeling of trust creates a total availability in the relationship between the ones involved, by giving up the conventional barriers, and working with others in a secured space, where nobody is being judged, but on the contrary, encouraged to propose new elements and situations.

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10. Cathy Turner and Synne K. Berhrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 176--77.

11. *Ibid.*, 171.

12. Duška Radosavljević, "Theatre-Making", 184.



In her book, *Ecologies of Theatre*<sup>13</sup>, Bonnie Marranca makes a very inspired analogy between Wooster Group's works and Pirandello's *Six characters in search of an author* – an analogy that can be generalized in defining the whole concept of devised theatre. In creating a performance, the authors always start from human resources and their personal biographies, from a pre-existent theme, from society, politics – or all of these combined, creating unlimited possibilities.

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*ALEXANDRA FELSEGHI is a theatre director and drama writer living and working in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. She is the co-founder of Create.Act.Enjoy independent theatre and film company, where she constantly practices and theorizes devised technique in theatre and performance. Since 2016, she is a PhD in performing arts at Babeș-Bolyai University. The title of her PhD thesis is A Foray into Independent Theatre – Performance and the Multiple Creator.*

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13. Bonnie Marranca, *Ecologies of Theater* (New York: PAJ Publications, 2012).

## *L'art du Halqa entre réalité et fiction chez Tahar Ben Jelloun*

**ABDERRAHIM TOURCHLI<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** *The Art of Halqa Between Reality and Fiction in Tahar Ben Jelloun's Works.* The tale occupies a place of choice in the stories of Tahar Ben Jelloun. It embraces the form of the narrative and takes its place. Thus it reinforces the fact a narrative can be narrated in a thousand ways. A polymorphic narrative that denies the linearity of classical narration. So, the use of the tale as a garant of the narrative at Ben Jelloun appeals to the Halqa as an art of the spectacle often practiced in public places, which belongs to orality and ancestral tradition: the storytellers of the public square Jamaà El Fna strive to tell the story of Ahmed-Zahra and often enter into dialogue and interaction with the audience. Thus, how is the staging of the narrative act and the communicative dimension of the narrative thanks to the convocation of the figure of the storyteller and the art of the Halqa? How is the emphasis on the dialectic of the real and of the imaginary, of the oral and written to criticize and unveil the social simulacrum?

**Keywords:** Tale, Halqa, story, oral, social simulacrum

La reconnaissance de l'art du conteur (le mot conteur en arabe est traduit par hakawati) comme art majeur semble une nécessité dans tous les pays. Raconter des histoires inscrit le patrimoine, la tradition comme un outil de compréhension du passé, du présent comme de l'avenir. Le conte est, avant tout, un court récit de faits réels et imaginaires, il est le plus souvent destiné à distraire et à stimuler l'imaginaire de par la narration des histoires invraisemblables. Parmi les écrivains qui accordent une grande place au dynamisme de la parole, à la tradition orale et au conte : Tahar Ben Jelloun. Né à Fès en 1944, il est l'écrivain maghrébin le plus lu à l'étranger.

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1. *Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, Université Sultan Moulay Slimane, Beni Mellal, Maroc.*  
tourchli@yahoo.fr

Poète, romancier, nouvelliste, essayiste, il fait partie de la deuxième génération des romanciers magrébins d'expression française, il est aussi l'un des fondateurs de la revue *Souffles* avec Abdellatif Laàbi, Mohammed Khair Eddine, Nisabouri et Loakira en 1966. Un ex professeur de philosophie, un auteur prolifique, on lui a décerné le prix Goncourt en 1987 pour son roman *La nuit sacrée*. Il fait de l'émigration, la folie, la femme, La polygamie, les marginaux, la religion, la sexualité, l'incarcération ses sujets de prédilection et ses textes s'apparentent à des romans-poèmes. Il se veut un écrivain public en se mettant à l'écoute des systèmes scripturaux occidentaux (symbolisme, modernité, surréalisme, Nouveau Roman) sans tourner le dos aux influences orientales, aux *Mille et une Nuits*, à l'oralité, au patrimoine culturel arabo-musulman. C'est, sans doute, ce qui place, d'emblée, son romanescque à la croisée de deux cultures. Son dernier roman, paru en 2016, est *Le Mariage de Plaisir*. Ses romans *Harrouda*, *La Prière de l'absent*, *L'Enfant de Sable*, *La Nuit sacrée*, *la Nuit de l'erreur*, *L'Auberge des pauvres*, *Le bonheur conjugal*, *Partir*, pour ne citer que ceux - là, racontent des scènes de la vie marocaine avec des personnages-voix, des porte-paroles, qui font l'itinéraire de l'errance et la quête d'une mémoire en dérive.

Dans les récits de Tahar Ben Jelloun, le conte est le garant du récit, il embrasse sa forme dans une trame romanescque qui allie l'oral au scriptural et qui fait du conteur cette figure matricielle, ce récitant transmetteur qui n'a pas besoin de décliner son identité devant une assistance figurante sur laquelle il invoque la clémence et la miséricorde de Dieu avant d'entamer son récit. Ceci dit, le conte chez Ben Jelloun demeure un véritable champ d'investigation sur le plan de la forme et du fond. Il appartient à l'oralité et puise dans « *le Halqa* »<sup>2</sup> en tant que patrimoine immatériel ancestral qui transmet la réalité socioculturelle dans tous ses états, de génération en génération. Il traduit on ne peut plus cette volonté de se démarquer du schéma traditionnel de la narration romanescque.

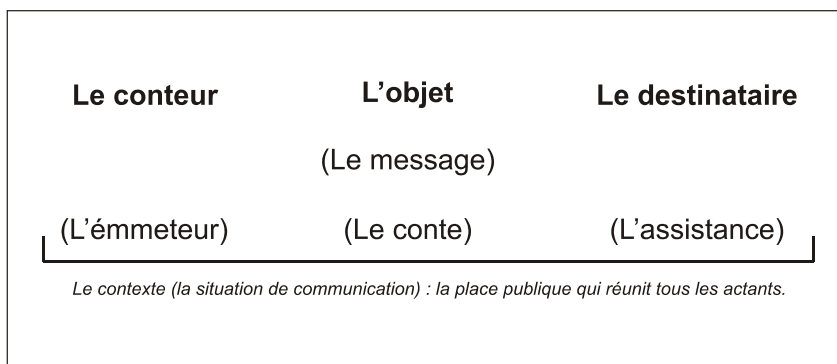
Ainsi donc, il serait légitime de se demander : comment se fait la mise en scène de l'acte narratif dans un romanescque qui se veut subversif de par la convocation du conte et de l'art du Halqa comme pratique orale ? La dimension critique du conte chez Ben Jelloun ne se manifeste-elle pas dans son pouvoir de produire une inquiétante étrangeté et de dévoiler par là les travers et les maux de la société maghrébine ?

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2. Le Halqa est une pratique orale au Maroc, comme dans les autres pays, c'est un art pour certains, un gagne-pain pour les autres, il se pratique dans les places publiques, les souks, par les conteurs, les aèdes, les acrobates etc, c'est aussi un art du spectacle et du récit par excellence.

## 1. Le conte comme mise en scène de l'acte narratif

La littérature orale s'inscrit dans un lien direct aux cultures dites traditionnelles et populaires, des conteurs paysans jusqu'aux poètes ouvriers de la révolution industrielle, des troubadours du Moyen Age aux conteurs de la scène la plus contemporaine. C'est aujourd'hui un art à part entière, à la fois autonome dans son développement et capable de dialoguer avec d'autres formes et d'autres arts : les arts du récit participent à la création du spectacle vivant et au maintien d'une continuité entre la tradition orale dans ses pratiques sociales, littéraires et les formes modernes d'accès à l'art et à la culture. Le conteur est, pour ainsi dire, une voix qui s'empare de la voix du narrateur dans le romanesque de Ben Jelloun, surtout dans *l'Enfant de sable*, roman qui illustre bel et bien cette symbiose entre les récits oral et scriptural. Il adresse des messages aux interlocuteurs en les incitant à agir, à parler. C'est ce qui inscrit l'action de conter dans une structure dialogique, une structure d'échange qui met l'accent sur « *la fonction communicative de l'acte de raconter dans l'interaction conteur-public* »<sup>3</sup>. Si le conte proppien exige du héros merveilleux l'élaboration d'un tas de fonctions pour réaliser son objet de désir, le conte chez Ben Jelloun est pris en charge par un conteur assis dans une place publique, qui fait des adresses à l'assistance, la manipule et l'incite à participer et à agir dans une situation de communication :



**Fig. 1:** La situation de communication

3. Marc Gontard, "Le récit méta-narratif chez Tahar Ben Jelloun," in *Tahar BenJelloun : stratégie d'écriture* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1993), 99.

Ainsi donc, un contrat s'établit entre le conteur et son auditoire. Ce dernier est, à chaque fois, interpellé par le truchement d'un discours déontologique et des expressions stéréotypes :

- « *A présent, mes amis* »<sup>4</sup>.
- « *ô mes amis ?* »<sup>5</sup>
- « *Eh bien ! si vous permettez, je vais me retirer* »<sup>6</sup>

Le conteur veille à organiser ses « *spectacles* » en plein centre de la place du souk, des rues et des lieux peuplés. Il contait presque quotidiennement. Chaque conteur est toujours à la même place et à la même heure et contait des histoires religieuses, des histoires à mourir de rire ou de peur. L'assistance regroupée en cercle autour de lui, les plus petits assis en tailleur et les grands debout derrière, reste tellement captivée par le déroulement des actions qu'elle en oublie le temps qui passe. Il tient parfois un instrument de musique qui lui servait à mettre en valeur un mot, une proposition ou tout simplement, d'une façon phatique, à éveiller et attirer l'attention de son auditoire.

Ce sont donc des moyens consistant à maintenir la suprématie du conteur mais qui génèrent une fonction médiatrice et une interaction entre les voix qui racontent et l'audience. Le récit oral est, donc, mis en exergue par la nature dialogique du conte, comme en témoigne la figure du conteur qui crée une « *performance narrative* »<sup>7</sup> d'après Marc Gontard. Tel est le cas de l'auditoire qui se montre fidèle au conteur Si Abdelamlek et rend compte d'un feed-back, d'une réaction euphorique. Le conteur se sert d'un tas d'arguments pour convaincre son public : le journal d'Ahmed, la métaphore du livre, les lettres échangées entre Ahmed et un correspondant anonyme sont des arguments d'autorité qui contestent le monologisme narratif traditionnel et se veulent des versions d'une histoire qui passe d'un conteur à un autre, d'une voix à une autre, du destinataire au destinataire. Si Abdelmalek, Salem, Ammar, Fettouma, le troubadour aveugle et l'homme au turban bleu sont des rhapsodes de l'énigme ; ils racontent une histoire qui se situe entre labyrinthe et sable, une histoire dérangement, voire insaisissable : « *Cette histoire a quelque chose de la nuit (...). Car cette histoire est aussi un désert* »<sup>8</sup>.

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4. Tahar Ben Jelloun, *L'enfant de sable* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 24.

5. Ibid., 65.

6. Ibid., 25.

7. Marc Gontard, "Le récit méta-narratif," 100.

8. Ibid., 15.

Le conteur se donne en aventurier, en un maniaque de la parole en vue de mener l'adhésion de l'auditoire, ses dires vacillent entre « *le délibératif* » et « *l'épidictique* » tout en déniait la fonction distractive du récit, un récit qui passe de l'écrit à l'oral devant une assistance figurante dans le Halqa où le conteur apparaît donc comme un transmetteur qui commence par la bénédiction de Dieu et par un discours déontologique dans une place donnée comme ronde où il y a la mise en scène de tant de paroles, de chants et de musique. De même, la place publique revêt un intérêt particulier dans la mesure où c'est un espace propice à l'art de « *conter* » et aux conteurs. La mise en spectacle de l'art du conteur est souvent marquée par l'accompagnement musical, à l'instar du griot (aède et poète bohémien dans la tradition africaine), le conteur frappe des coups sur son bendir (instrument musical) avant de reprendre son conte. L'espace artistique que portent les conteurs est souvent partagé avec des musiciens ou avec un espace musical que le conteur lui-même est capable de porter. Dans la tradition orale, la place de la musique reste d'une extrême importance. Aujourd'hui comme par le passé, elle permet de rythmer un récit, de lui donner des intonations supplémentaires, de renforcer un point de vue et de permettre au conteur comme à l'auditeur d'avoir des respirations.

La place forge donc le lieu de la scène, c'est le lieu où l'oralité engendre le récit et le monde se joint pour confirmer ou infirmer les histoires du conteur qui fait appel à l'écoute, prévoit les réactions de son allocataire en l'invitant à entamer la quête permanente de la vérité : « *Soyez patients, creusez avec moi le tunnel de la question et sachez attendre* »<sup>9</sup>. Nous sommes vis-à-vis d'un récit métaphorique qui ouvre la voie à l'intrusion et à la résurgence du conte : le narrataire devient conteur et le conteur devient narrateur dans le Halqa où tout est mis en scène pour convaincre l'auditoire. Plus loin, le Halqa est un laboratoire de contes, il permet au texte de s'auto-cadrer, de se théâtraliser et de s'oraliser.

L'oralité est, pour ainsi dire, activée par un être qui pratique son métier dans un lieu où l'auditoire est, en gros, un public qui ne sait ni lire ni écrire. Tel est le cas dans *l'Enfant de sable* où les pistes sont brouillées et la voix du conteur se joint à celle du narrateur dans un récit marqué par la coexistence de l'oral et du scriptural comme l'a souligné l'écrivain lui-même dans *Harrouda* : « *C'est un discours qui au fond ne s'écrit pas et ne peut s'écrire. Et pourtant cette*

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9. Ibid., 13.

*parole est devenue écriture* »<sup>10</sup>. Il est à noter aussi que nos souks et nos places publiques connaissent encore des scènes de contage mais pas avec la même fréquence d'autrefois. Nous n'oublions guère ces conteurs qui ont fait du conte leur gagne-pain et des souks leurs places de présentations. Chacun d'eux essaie de séduire son public en le conviant à un spectacle constitué de ses meilleures histoires, le plus souvent puisées dans les fameuses épopées arabes d'Antar de Saïf Dou Yazen, des contes millénaires des Mille et une Nuits, ou encore d'autres histoires de l'art oral universel, des fables animalières dont nous avons lu quelques-unes dans nos manuels scolaires, ou des biographies et des expériences de personnages historiques célèbres.

La logique narrative du conte chez Ben Jelloun montre, en fait, le rapport étroit entre l'oral et l'écrit, elle assimile le parcours qui se déroule du destinataire au destinataire à une quête, c'est un conte qui mobilise le renversement de rôle : le conteur devient un membre de l'auditoire et peut devenir conteur. Ce qui voue la structure cantique à la perturbation et à la déconstruction.

L'art du conte et du contage est un art de la relation, dans le sens de « *relater* », dans celui de *relier*. Il s'inscrit dans cette politique de la relation dont a parlé Edouard Glissant. Au-delà de cette première approche, nous pouvons constater que chaque conteur se définit aussi par son répertoire. Il porte un point de vue, un éclairage particulier, construit année après année, au fil de sa propre expérience, (n'oublions pas qu'au Maroc ainsi que dans les autres pays maghrébins et subsahariens, le conteur fait de son métier un gagne pain pour subvenir aux besoins de sa famille). Pour le définir, on peut pourtant faire apparaître quelques constantes :

- une adresse directe au public et art de parler.
- un répertoire spécifique.
- un refus de l'incarnation de personnage (si ce n'est celui du conteur).
- une formation d'autodidacte avec une capacité permanente et en direct à être l'auteur de ses propres paroles
- une capacité d'adaptation à l'espace.
- une bonne recherche préalable et une production orale d'images mentales.

Par ailleurs, la question d'échange, d'interruption de conteurs qui surgissent de la foule et qui se passent le relais du récit fait que la fable n'est jamais racontée jusqu'au bout dans une trame romanesque marquée par la réflexivité de l'écriture, qui demeure toujours en gestation et qui

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10. Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Harrouda* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 25.

corrobores ce que dit Robert Elbaz : « *Le texte raconte une histoire mais en même temps il raconte l'histoire de sa propre production* »<sup>11</sup>. L'assistance, et aussi le lecteur, sont amenés à coopérer textuellement pour être des destinataires modèles, pour combler les failles et comprendre les versions de l'histoire d'Ahmed. Dans la perspective romanesque de Tahar Ben Jelloun, parfois le conteur n'a pas de mémoire, c'est un conteur qui prend en charge le mandat narratif, qui s'immisce dans les histoires pour les abandonner après et créer le suspense et l'effet de surprise chez l'audience. Tel est le cas de Bouchaïb, conteur dans le roman *La nuit sacrée*, qui : « *est un conteur sans mémoire certes mais pas sans imagination (...) Il truffait souvent son récit de mots d'une langue inconnue* »<sup>12</sup>. L'assistance est liée au conteur réel ou fictif par un contrat qui n'est autre que le conte. Si le récit est l'intermédiaire entre le narrateur et le narrataire, le conte permet de tisser des liens de dépendance et de complémentarité entre le conteur et son auditoire et créer par la suite la tension narrative. Le conteur se donne en aventurier en un bon parleur en vue de mener l'adhésion de l'auditoire afin qu'elle prenne comme vraie l'histoire relatée et pour avoir un peu d'argent (la rétribution). Le conteur dans le Halqa et dans le romanesque de l'écrivain marocain témoigne d'une performance narrative : « *en affirmant accomplir un acte illocutoire sur la réalité duquel on ne saurait rien cacher, ni rien dissimuler* »<sup>13</sup>.

En bref, le conte et le conteur, qui agissent et qui puisent leur dynamisme dans les halqas, se donnent en spectacle dans les romans de Tahar Ben Jelloun. Ils sont mis en scène d'une manière à ce que l'auditoire soit convaincu de la véracité de l'histoire racontée. Au surplus, le Halqa reste, selon Ben Jelloun, un facteur qui contribue à augmenter le rôle de la parole dans un texte où le récit oral va de pair avec le dévoilement du simulacre social.

## 2. Le Halqa comme berceau de la critique sociale

Aujourd'hui, par leur participation à la construction du tissu social, les conteurs, raconteurs et *diseurs des choses très cachées*, pour reprendre une expression qui est très chère au poète sénégalais Léopold Sédar Senghor, sont souvent au centre de nouveaux espaces de vie. Ces fonctions sociales se

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11. Robert Elbaz, *Tahar Ben Jelloun ou l'inassouvissement du désir narratif* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 45.

12. Tahar Ben Jelloun, *La nuit sacrée* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 9-10.

13. Oswald Ducrot, *Le dire et le dit* (Paris: Minuit, 1984), 130.



sont toujours accompagnées d'une volonté artistique forte, capable de porter des histoires toujours en évolution vers ceux à qui elles sont destinées.

Il va sans dire que la convocation du conteur et du conte de la place Jamaâ El-Fna, place publique considérée comme un patrimoine universel à Marrakech, espace mythique des arts de l'oralité, du conte et du contage, s'inscrit dans la recherche d'un effet de réel. Notons, de passage, qu'il y a d'autres places publiques qui n'en demeurent pas moins connues au Maroc telles que la place Boujloud à Fès, La place de Lehdim à Meknes. En tant que scribe, qu'écrivain public et copiste, Ben Jelloun, de par ce retour aux éléments traditionnels de l'écriture, s'érige en un biographe du réel en se mettant à l'écoute du social, en critiquant la doxa :

*J'ai pris la liberté d'orientaliser les contes (...) Et j'ai choisi de les situer dans des pays arabes et musulmans, c'est aussi parce qu'il est temps de dire ces pays autrement que sous le signe du drame et de la tragédie.*<sup>14</sup>

C'est au Halqa avec tous ses ingrédients d'être cette voix populaire qui stigmatise la hiérarchie sociale et qui dévoile l'injustice. La multiplicité des conteurs dans *l'Enfant de Sable*, *La Nuit sacrée*, *La Prière de L'Absent* n'est, en fait, qu'une stratégie narrative qui relève de l'oralité maghrébine, d'une mémoire répétitive. C'est une célébration de la parole qui rend justices aux marginaux, à la femme avant de montrer les valeurs et les légendes maghrébines au lecteur occidental.

Mieux encore, le conteur, cette figure emblématique de la parole, est un porte-parole, un être qui change à chaque fois d'identité et de procédés argumentatifs : apostrophes, prétérations, répétitions sont autant de stratégies qui correspondent à la pléthore des voix dans la fable :

« Ô gens du bien »<sup>15</sup>

« Inutile de vous dire, ô mes compagnons »<sup>16</sup>

Donc, avec une instabilité identitaire des conteurs qui sont dans la majorité des marginaux, des êtres de la purulence (Si Abdelmalek, Salem, Ammar, Fattouma, le Troubadour aveugle) riment un réel altéré et le désordre d'une société injuste vis-à-vis de la femme. Toutes les histoires racontées devant une assistance fidèle et assidue se résument en une quête

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14. Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Mes contes de Perrault* (Paris: Seuil, 2014), 11-12.

15. Ibid., 13.

16. Ibid., 19.

de l'équilibre entre un réel immaîtrisable et une forme d'écriture évanescence. Ainsi, le télescopage des versions, la succession des conteurs traduisent une réalité vacante et mystérieuse. Le conteur – il faut le dire – est cet être qui zoome sur la société maghrébine, il met le doigt sur les dualités, sur les antagonismes et sur la femme en tant qu'un être proscrit, qui n'a qu'une seule mission : produire les enfants : « *La femme ne pouvait qu'acquiescer. Elle obéit à son mari, comme d'habitude* »<sup>17</sup>.

A la soumission de la femme se joint le malaise d'un père désenchanté par sa procréation : « *Sept, c'était trop, c'était même tragique, que de fois, il se remémora l'histoire des arabes d'avant l'islam qui enterraient leurs filles vivantes* »<sup>18</sup>. Dans la réalité comme dans la fiction, le Halqa demeure le théâtre qui met en scène les histoires des sans-voix, des êtres opprimés, des histoires qui relèvent de l'oralité maghrébine, d'une mémoire répétitive. C'est un hymne à la parole qui rend justice aux marginaux, à la femme avant de montrer les valeurs et les légendes maghrébines au lecteur mondial.

Le conteur profite de l'occasion pour entamer sa critique d'une société phallocrate, qui élimine le féminin au détriment de ce qui est viril. De même, la pratique religieuse chez l'homme est tournée en dérision par la multiplicité des conteurs, les hommes se sont engouffrés dans l'avarice et dans la cupidité. Ils ont même déformé les valeurs islamiques :

*Vous n'êtes pas sans savoir, ô mes amis et complices, que notre religion est impitoyable pour l'homme sans héritier (...) Le frère attendait la mort de l'aîné pour se partager une grande partie de sa fortune.*<sup>19</sup>

Le simulacre familial et par là social est mis en critique par le conteur qui sait, et avec lui le lecteur, que le nouveau-né est une fille. La pensée obscurantiste du père nous est dévoilée de par la croyance au charlatanisme et le défi de sa destinée : « *Le mari copulait avec elle lors des nuits choisies par les sorcières mais cela ne servait en rien. Fille après filles jusqu'à la haine du corps* »<sup>20</sup>.

Raconter, comme nous l'avons vu, n'égal pas uniquement vivre comme dans *les Mille et une nuits*, c'est surpasser le pouvoir séducteur du conte, sa fonction distractive, c'est raconter pour dire la différence, pour susciter le débat : « *Je ne raconte pas des histoires pour passer le temps* »<sup>21</sup>, dit Si Abdelmalek à

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17. Ibid., 23.

18. Ibid., 17.

19. Ibid., 18.

20. Ibid., 19.

21. Ibid., 16.

l'auditoire. L'assouvissement du désir narratif n'est pas une fin en soi mais c'est l'appel à l'interprétation, à donner un sens à l'histoire et à déchiffrer les énigmes de la société. La parole du conteur est d'une sagesse indéniable : elle a comme adjuvants la folie, le délire, la sagesse et elle est délocalisée, dérégulée et incohérente. Une parole magique qui rompt avec le réel, le dénonce, l'accuse et le met en crise. Le brouillage énonciatif, la voix polyphonique traduisent le démantèlement du discours officiel, réalisent la démystification des normes, désorientent le destinataire et miment la brûlure et le tatouage de la réalité maghrébine, une réalité qui est à l'origine du malaise du héros qui « *ne supportait plus le monde extérieur* »<sup>22</sup> et qui opte pour le repli sur soi.

*L'Enfant de Sable*, comme l'a mentionné à maintes reprises Ben Jelloun, est la reprise fictive d'un fais divers<sup>23</sup>, c'est l'histoire du détournement d'un destin : un enfant, né femme mais qu'on élève comme garçon, assume jusqu'au bout son identité masculine tout en suivant son itinéraire tragique et parabolique d'homme-femme et en gérant la dépossession réelle de la mère. Ben Jelloun brosse donc un tableau des plus ternes qui met en exergue le statut de l'homme et de la femme dans une société marquée par les codes sociaux rigides. Les épisodes du Hammam et de la circoncision, qui ont été relatés dans *Les Halqa de Jamaà El Fna*, étant caractérisés de manière dysphorique, condamnant certaines traditions qui confirment la castration, le voyeurisme et les tabous : « *C'était bien du sang : résistance du corps au nom, éclaboussure d'une circoncision tardive* »<sup>24</sup>. C'est là une tentative de remettre en cause le mythe du mâle, du fétichisme doxologique et du consensus social. Dans ce sens, Rachida Saigh Bousta de dire : « *La sexualité transforme la faiblesse de soumissions en pouvoir terrible qui dresse l'édifice du matriarcat sur la faillite du patriarcat* »<sup>25</sup>. Ainsi, l'image phallique du père est ruinée et l'accent est mis sur la rivalité des sexes. Lors de la scène de la circoncision, le père s'est coupé le doigt en guise de feinte. Il devient un complice et procède par une sorte d'autocastration.

Donc, la tradition, l'oralité sont perçues non pas comme un passé contraignant, mais comme une manière d'être, un processus par lequel se constitue une expérience vivante et adaptable, elles servent de miroir et de

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22. Ibid., 8.

23. Ben Jelloun s'est inspiré d'un fait divers égyptien qui relate l'histoire d'un être humain mi-homme, mi-femme.

24. Ibid., 46.

25. Rachida Saigh Bousta, *Lecture des récits de Tahar Ben Jelloun* (Casablanca: Afrique Orient, 1992), 125.

truchement pour porter un regard critique sur la société en leur donnant une image qui est la sienne, sur les comportements rituels qui fixent les relations entre les membres d'une communauté.

Force est de conclure que la convocation de la voix du conteur et du conte, du Halqa reste un choix parmi d'autres chez l'écrivain francophone Tahar Ben Jelloun. La fiction romanesque devient une sorte de laboratoire, un miroir pour créer un effet de réel en donnant vie et survie à une tradition orale, le Halqa en l'occurrence, en lui permettant de retrouver de la vitalité, de remplir ses fonctions distractive, dénonciatrice, critique et cathartique. Le recours au conte crée un effet de dynamisme dans la narration est l'écarte du carcan du roman classique. Il met en scène le récit et le condamne, à chaque fois, à changer de plan et de direction. Avec le recours au Halqa, la fiction et la réalité se joignent pour témoigner de cette volonté de décoloniser et de décroiser l'art romanesque, de mener en vrac les formes esthétiques provenant de la modernité occidentale et de la tradition marocaine. Le lecteur est convié à lire un récit informe, labyrinthique qui mime un réel altéré, contingent, un conte fragmenté, insaisissable que ponctue la métaphore et qui développe le stéréotype de la parole folle mais combien sage, celle des marginaux et des sans voix. Il est donc du devoir de tous ceux qui s'intéressent à la tradition orale (chants, contes populaires...) de repenser et de renouveler une bonne réflexion sur comment faire renaître les véritables mécanismes pour protéger le Halqa, cette importante partie de notre mémoire populaire qui, malgré l'invasion de la photo et des nouvelles techniques de la communication et de l'information, perdure. Néanmoins, cette multiplicité des conteurs, ce recours au Halqa chez Tahar Ben Jelloun ne traduit-elle pas une ténacité de démocratiser le récit et de faire face à une certaine crise narrative alors que l'ère du soupçon et de la mondialisation est venue au monde ?

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**ABDERRAHIM TOURCHLI** is a scholar and researcher at the faculty of letters in Beni Mellal, University of Sultan Moulay Slimane, Morocco. He is a member of the laboratory of researches in History, Patrimoine, Culture and regional Development. He is also the head of the French department and literature. His interests in research are: francophone literature, orality and narratology.

## *Notes on the Theatrical Offer in Contemporary Romania*

IVONA TĂȚAR-VÎSTRAȘ<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper is a note on the theatrical offer in Romania and it seeks to lay emphasis on some of the elements that are essential to the understanding of theatrical marketing in this geographic area. The focus is on the understanding and the definition of the theatrical product and on repertory construction. Furthermore, the article includes a series of economic analyses conducted in order to complete the theoretical examination, as well as case studies material to our research topic.

**Keywords:** arts marketing, offer and demand, theatre repertory, Romanian Theatre, cultural policy

### **What is the theatrical product now?**

The correct definition of the offered cultural product relates directly to the vision and to the strategy of the institution that produces it. The entire matter of product definition may seem at first a false problem, but we believe that many problems of marketing implementation stem from this apparently simple aspect. The difficulties (or alleged difficulties) attached to the definition of the product result from the specificity of arts. The classification – discussed at large – in terms of the criterion of “high art” and “popular art” does not seem to be “in vogue” any longer. At a closer look, we can see that there is no homogeneity in relation to the qualitative criteria that turn a product into a “good” or a “bad” one – and this is only natural. For this reason, the classification in quality groups of the theatrical products becomes a subjective, random matter and, in particular, it cannot become a multipliable standard methodology. This thorny issue is on the shoulders of those in

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<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. [vistras.ivona@ubbcluj.ro](mailto:vistras.ivona@ubbcluj.ro)

charge of the repertory policy, the human resources policy – which also means the selection of the collaborators, of guests, etc. The art director, i.e. the one who, by the nature of his/her activity, is in charge or should be in charge of the quality of the performances and of the theatre's products, must always be alert and always monitor the gradual development of the cultural-theatrical environment and of the institution's audience, with help from the ancillary departments.

Theatrical products may, however, be classified and defined by other characteristic, not necessarily in line with a rigid qualitative grid, but instead with the relation between the "quality" of the products and the "quality of reception". For this reason, the borders within which the theatrical products is found should be identified from the very beginning, if not even from the stage of drafting of the management project. An answer to the question "what is our product?" is required and, from then on, various working scenarios can be built. If the answer is "the stage play", the marketing operations shall orbit the related play. If, for example, the answer is "the repertory", the marketing operations are adjusted toward the assistance of this product. The very precise understanding of the offer is essential for the establishment of the marketing line that the institution will later follow. The interesting aspect is that one answer does not exclude the other, which, in the end, will lead to an entire marketing system that will integrate all the lines and the products undertaken as such.

In Romania, theatres "sell" plays, repertories and festivals. Of course, some institutions try to diversify the cultural offer and they seek to extend the idea of cultural-theatrical product. We are thinking here, first of all, about theatres that, apart from the so-called "traditional products", are offering to the audience creative workshops, thematic events, etc. and which augment their cultural offer by other methods than the production of plays as such. Most of the times, offers of this kind come from the educational area, either as programs for the young or as informative-educational programs for adults. Unsurprisingly, state institutions that have managed to propose such a program are in the sector of theatre for children and adolescents. We mention here the initiatives of Ariel Theatre of Tirgu-Mureș, Gong Theatre of Sibiu and Puck Theatre of Cluj-Napoca. In the independent sphere, the rethinking of the cultural offer is considerably more prevalent, since most of the times the independents' "repertory" is much more diverse in terms of the presented cultural products. The concerns with the diversification of the products, so

frequent in the independent environments, is closely linked with the competitive dimension of the Romanian cultural market. Another explanation relates to the “alternative” that the independents are trying to offer to the audience – which should ensure their steadier position on the cultural market. In his book *Surplus de oameni, surplus de idei*, Theodor Cristian Popescu clarifies the meaning of this alternative in Romania, but he stresses the ambiguity of the term and its different connotations, depending on the specific cultural environments.

In other words, alternative theatre is established in opposition to another type, without de-territorializing the latter; it is manifest in other areas; it generates its own separate festivals, it searches for a different language ...<sup>2</sup>

The author notes that, in countries such as Poland and Hungary, where independent theatre has been present since communism, the label “alternative” appears in close relation to the movement of independent theatre, but this is not yet valid across the whole former Eastern bloc.

But back to the definition of cultural products, we focus on Pierre Bourdieu’s approach that identifies in the book *The Market of Symbolic Goods* two types of opposing fields of production: the field of restricted production “as a system producing cultural goods (and the instruments for appropriating these goods) objectively destined (at least on the short term) for a public of producers that produce for producers” and the field of large scale production “specifically organized with a view to the production of symbolic goods destined for non-producers (“the public at large”) who may come from the non-intellectual fractions of the dominant class (“the cultivated public”) or from the other social classes.”<sup>3</sup> The differences between the two are the following:

In contrast to the field of large-scale cultural production, which submits to the laws of competition for the conquest of the largest possible market, the field of restricted production tends to develop its own criteria for the evaluation of its products, thus achieving the truly cultural recognition accorded by the peer group whose members are both privileged clients and competitors.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Theodor Cristian Popescu, *Surplus de oameni, surplus de idei* [Too Many People, Too Many Ideas] (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2012), 9.

3. Pierre Bourdieu, *Economia bunurilor simbolice* [The Market of Symbolic Goods] (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1987), 37.

4. Ibid.



Bourdieu's suggestion is also valid in the case of the Romanian field. The major difference is that, many times, producers do not have a strategy developed prior to the launching of the product, but the polarization between "large-scale production" and the "field of restricted production" is operated after the reactions of the market. And this is not always the case. Many state theatres in small localities rely on "large-scale production" made mostly of comedies, the staging of novels/stories that are included in the school-recommended literature or plays for children. All the aforementioned products share an important aspect, i.e. "box-office success", by having the target-audience come see the plays, with the help of the artist manager. In other words, pupils and kindergarten children are brought to see the performances by their school teachers, and the activity is perceived as a school, mandatory one rather than a voluntary one.

The finding of the cultural product's correct destination relates to marketing. One should not operate on the "art is good for you" principle, but instead on the "art is good" principle, in a way that should allow the cultural product to earn meaning in the potential spectator's lifestyle component<sup>5</sup>. The above-mentioned practice does not support such a perception, not at all. Most of the times, with these methods, young people miss the opportunity of a true meeting with theatre or with the theatrical product, precisely because of the identification of the artistic act with the school act. In such situations, the product offered by the theatre is the repertory as such rather than the play in itself. We will exemplify (table 1) by using the repertory of the "Elvira Godeanu" Theatre of Târgu Jiu, in the 2010-2011 season.

**Table 1:** Repertory of Elvira Godeanu Theatre, Târgu Jiu, 2011

	Play
<b>Premiere</b>	<b>Pleasure Train</b> - adaptation after I.L. Caragiale
	<b>Seventh Commandment</b> by Dario Fo
	<b>Storia de Tanti</b> (comedy) by Achille Roselletti
	<b>Nasta</b> – adaptation after Ms. Nastasia (G.M. Zamfirescu)
	<b>Comedy</b> by Ray Cooney
<b>Plays for children-Premiere</b>	<b>Mr. Goe</b>
	<b>Păcală</b>

5. Joanne Scheff Bernstein, *Arts marketing insights: the dynamics of building and retaining performing arts audiences* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2007), 27.

	<b>Play</b>
<b>Reruns</b>	<b>Me and my Girl</b> – director Achille Roselletti
	<b>Run for Your Wife</b> - director Cristian Ioan
	<b>Titanic Waltz</b> by Tudor Muşatescu
	<b>Leonce and Lena</b> - director Horațiu Ioan Apan
<b>Plays to be performed on request</b>	<b>The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War</b> by Matei Visniec
	<b>The Hatchet</b> by Mihail Sadoveanu
	<b>Lost Letter</b> by I.L. Caragiale

Source: elviragodeanu.wordpress.com

The offer of the Târgu Jiu theatre is oriented toward comedies, canonical writers and books that are read in school. The diversity of the titles is very weak, which limits the potential audience because of the repetitiveness of the offered genre of plays. Moreover, the cultural offer is made entirely of play performances and there is no other kind of cultural project that could complement the theatre programme. The principles on which the repertory relies cover the “classical taste” for theatre, but they miss the meeting with an audience that may also appreciate other types of theatrical suggestions. Of course, more often than not, the audience cannot foresee its own need of theatrical consumption, but, as mentioned in numerous circumstances, theatrical need is most of the times built gradually by the offer existing on the market. Or, it is precisely this construction of need that develops the potential audience and which, on the long term, could reach a degree of sophistication. Repertory structures like the one described above are typical of the institutions that rely on a preservation of the existing audience rather than on their development.

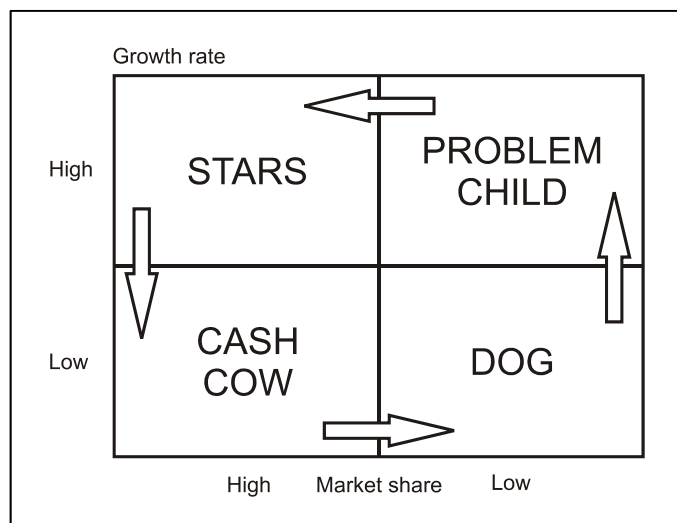
Many Romanian theatrical institutions continue to choose such conservative repertory fabrics, which led us to this track of research regarding a re-defining of theatrical products and their addressability. Since we are limited by the length of this article, we will not go further into details and other examples, but such examples to exist in Romania, particularly small theatres outside Bucharest. The amendment of the repertory policy is not simple, because, most often, the audience, already accustomed with another type of performance, will be at least skeptical when it comes to changes. For this reason, a reassessment of the “products” should anticipate such problems and offer reliable solutions that are shaped both on the audience’s specificity and on the research meant for the development of new audiences.

The repertory, analyzed from the viewpoint of marketing, is no more than the "line" of products of a company or, in other words, the company portfolio. An art organization will hardly ever be able to support or propose to the audience a single product; therefore, a set of products is needed; they will attend both to the purposes and objectives and to the needs and desires of the target-audience. Inevitably, we come to the distribution of the existing (constantly limited and exhaustible) resources depending on the multiple internal or external factors, such as the audience's demand, the life cycle of the existing plays, etc.

The product life cycle relates to the stages of development of the product on the specific market or on the market on which it was launched. Therefore, the stages are:

1. Product launch on the market
2. Growth – the market share increases and profit ensues
3. Maturity – the market share is large and it generates maximum earnings
4. Saturation – the market share decreases, but production is still profitable
5. Decline – the share drops drastically and the product is removed from the market or changed/updated

Most products, even those meant for wide consumption or those extremely sophisticated, go through this life cycle, despite the fact that their duration varies considerably. For example, bread has been in the stage of maturity for hundreds of years and whether and when the decline stage will begin are not known aspects. On the other hand, a computer, for well-known reasons, does not have a life cycle longer than several years. The marketer's responsibility is to establish the product's life expectancy and to find solutions for the extension of its presence on the market, preferably in the maturity stage. Therefore, marketing actions shall concern all the component of the marketing mix and, ultimately, will lead to a set of decisions undertaken by the company management. The most frequent model of portfolio management is the Boston Consulting Group Matrix, which classifies an organization's products based on the market share and on the market growth rate. We illustrate the matrix below:



**Fig. 1:** Boston Consulting Group Matrix

“Stars” are the products with a high market share on a market with a high growth rate, i.e. the products that ensure company profit and visibility. The “cash cow” is the product that stays on the market and that yield profit, but there are small chances of development because the market is decreasing. “The problem child” is the product that does not sell very well, but its market is expanding. Owing to its high potential, the “problem child” should be converted to a “star” by marketing and management measures. “Dogs” are the products with a low market share on a declining market. These products use up the company resources and, most of the times, they should be reevaluated. The Boston Consulting Group is summing up the matrix by the famous saying: “polish the star, milk the cow, educate the problem child and shoot the dog”<sup>6</sup>.

The aforementioned template applies very well to the repertory structure of state theatres, but it is equally valid in the case of independent initiatives. The point of reference should not be unique and it should not consider exclusively the earnings, but criteria based on the objectives and purposes expressed by each theatre may be formulated. Nevertheless, one should not exclude the option of an analysis on economic ground, because such a classification of the plays may lead to a sound distribution of resources.

6. Jim Blythe, *Esentialul în marketing* [Essentials of Marketing] (Bucharest: Rentrop & Straton, 2005), 28.

In other words, we need “stars” to support the “dog” that we cannot abandon because of extra-financial reasons; or the presence of the “dog” in the repertory generates artistic or educational added value and it should be kept within the most efficient parameters. The explanation for the keeping of a “dog” product in a theatre’s repertory should pertain to the sphere of audience construction and, thus, be justified by the organic growth of theatrical demand in a specific geographic space.

Some products respond to needs, while other products create needs. In art, products that cover both of the marketing directions are needed; subsequently, repertory theatre (most of the times subsidized by the state) should cover both types of product constructions, undertaking the effects/outcomes generated on the market. We say this because, depending on the selected repertory policy, a performing arts institution shall be found in a particular point on the spectators’ perceptual map.

In the case of the independent theatre, the definition of the product does not seem to be an equally intricate and urgent matter. For all intents and purposes, the reason is easily recognizable. The need to resist on the market prompts independent associations to update their products and to diversify substantially their cultural offer or, conversely, to identify a specific and well-defined target-segment and to create plays/cultural products exclusively for that group. The independent organizations’ marketing process is considerably clearer, even if frequently intuitive, and it manages to establish the “alternative” mentioned above.

For example, the Create.Act.Enjoy association of Cluj-Napoca created two product lines, i.e. a series for young people and adults and, separately, the production of stage plays and dance-theatre. The former focuses, of course, on the generation of the organization’s income and financial support, while the latter operates as an independent theatre initiative and it is financed from the income generated by the course offer. This model, whereby an association is able to generate its own income, is preferable, because this way the organization can support itself in the periods when locally, nationally or internationally awarded non-refundable financing is unavailable. The same principle applies to the operation of theatre-café. Two known examples are Bucharest’s Godot Café and Iași’s Teatru Fix. With independent theatre, the definition and clarification of product specificity become a mandatory activity, which, in the end, will generate the distinctive nature of each individual organization.

Another example, again from Cluj-Napoca, is the association Reactor de Creație și Experiment. Unlike the above models, the Reactor association did not develop a line of products able to generate substantial income that could support the current activity, beyond the non-refundable sources. We do note, however, the Mini-Reactor children’s programme that has considerable success and, unlike other projects of the group, has been constantly present in their offer. Ever since 2014, Reactor has been trying to create their own repertory and to build a permanent programme in their space. To ensure success in this sense, the initiators developed the so-called “platforms”, i.e. thematic umbrellas that are made of various cultural products/proposals. Table 2 emphasizes the components of Reactor’s programmes and their selected directions. The information is obtained from the official website of the association.

**Table 2:** The cultural offer of Reactor de Creație și Experiment, Cluj-Napoca, 2014

Platform name	Description
Professional REACTOR	“Here we organize and host workshops in various artistic fields. They seek to develop new skills and to allow the pleasant and productive use of spare time.”
Social REACTOR social	“This platform is steered by director Cristian Ban, to produce plays, projects and workshops of a social nature. The platform was launched in 2014 with the SubReflector project.”
Sound REACTOR	“We organize under this platform concerts performed by artists in very different fields, from folk music to experimental jazz. Thus, we try to uncover the music architecture of Cluj, we try to recover the contact with its creators and to enable the meeting between them and their listeners.”
HappeningREACTOR	“This platform is dedicated to Plastic Arts, Poetry and Film, and here we organize events such as exhibitions, vernissages, installations, film screenings, poetry reading, visual experiments. An important contributor and supporter of this platform is the photographer and professor Dorel Găină. The platform was launched in the 21 March “Seek a Reaction?” marathon, by the visual experiment Behind the canvas, a concept by graffer KeroZen, accompanied by Electroclown”
#TEENSPIRIT	It includes three performances: <i>Nu cred că o să îmi treacă vreodată</i> [I’ll never get over it], <i>Disparația</i> [The Disappearance], <i>În viitorul apropiat</i> [In the near future]

Platform name	Description
REACTOR	<p>“This is the main platform of Reactor de creație și experiment, which offers to the audience independent theatre performances.</p> <p>Apart from our own productions, REACTOR also becomes co-producers in the creation of projects proposed by various artists. The first collaboration of this kind was with the Reciproca Association, for the plays <i>Poker</i> and <i>9 din 10 [9 out of 10]</i>.</p> <p>With the same REACTOR platform, we seek to stage periodically other independent performances from Cluj, from the country or from abroad, in order to encourage the independent artists’ cooperation and communication.”</p>

Source: [www.reactor-cluj.com/2015](http://www.reactor-cluj.com/2015)

Each platform includes specific individual platforms. Therefore, apart from the “main” platform, which focuses on the production and co-production of plays, other directions complement the program and draw an audience as diversified as possible. At the same time, the “secondary” offer adds to the construction and loyalty-building of the audience for the main platforms.

In the independent field, the definition of the offered products is (to some extent) a solved matter, which, at present, keeps frequently afloat the non-governmental organizations. The fact that each independent organization is much more careful about the products they release on the market and cannot make many mistakes delivers specificity and a particular niche of action to each group.

### “Success” indicators

The test that any repertory proposal needs to pass is the confrontation with the audience institution and the results it generates by the sale of tickets and the theatre occupation rate. We submit below a presentation of the data obtained from the analysis and synthesis of information about the National Theatre of Bucharest, information from the Annual Activity Report for the 2013/2014 seasons. Again, like with the Târgu-Jiu “Elvira Godeanu” Theatre, classic titles and comedies are the most appreciated and most seen

plays. Of course, their share in the repertory structure is wider. When we analyze carefully the NTB's proposal, we can see that the portfolio theory and the Boston Consulting Group matrix do apply to some extent. The projects of the 9G Program, which support young artists, are at the end of the queue in terms of number of spectators and earnings. Of course, 9G plays are not stages in the Grand Hall of the theatre and, subsequently, the theatre occupation rate would help us complete the information below, but, unfortunately, we do not have data on this rate for each individual performance. Nevertheless, we believe that the information below (table 3) is sufficient for an indication of the main coordinates applied by the first stage of the country for the definition of the nation-wide trend.

**Table 3:** Premieres of the National Theatre of Bucharest, 2013

No.	Name of the play	Realized estimate	Receipts from tickets	No. of performances	No. of spectators	Receipt/performance	No. of performances required for amortization
1	The Man who Saw Death	163215	69400	20	1926	3470	47.04
2	Little Hell	212428	145590	26	4310	5600	37.94
3	The Inspector General	418298	261660	12	4803	21805	19.18
4	Fool for Love	218371	36180	15	1054	2412	90.54
5	Rumors	238998	79770	5	1482	15954	14.98

Several notes on the calculations of table 3. The data in the columns *Realized estimate*, *Receipts from tickets*, *Number of performances* and *Number of spectators* were borrowed from the (aforementioned) Annual Activity Report, and the columns *Receipt/performance* and *Number of performances required for amortization* were calculated based on this information. We need to mention that, in the column *Realized estimate*, we do not know the components of the costs per category, therefore we cannot state with accuracy whether, for example, the actors' salaries (fixed costs for the institution) were considered.



**Table 4:** Plays reprised in the 2013-2014 season, National Theatre, Bucharest

No.	Project name	Receipt from tickets	No. of performances	No. of spectators	Receipt/ performance
1	The Navel	887360	23	19389	38581
2	The Dinner Game	865970	20	15777	43299
3	The Idol and Ion Anapoda	349446	15	10016	23296
4	The Visit	193740	8	4315	24218
5	Molto, Gran' Impressione	76380	12	3852	6365
6	The Letter	129780	6	2981	21630
7	Five Women in Transition	96976	26	2614	3730
8	All My Sons	98986	7	2527	14141
9	The Cherry Orchard	81990	5	2216	16398
10	Scourge	107400	11	2136	9764
11	It's Still Alright	73660	22	2006	3348
12	Sânziana and Pepelea	31592	3	1776	10531
13	Master Leonida Facing the Reactionaries	94320	17	1718	5548
14	Lottery Tickets	57008	17	1579	3353
15	Sentimental Tectonics	45100	10	1298	4510
16	The Girl from the Rainbow	36464	20	1108	1823
17	TaRa TaTam	37494	8	1035	4687
18	Two x Two	35384	13	977	2722
19	Don Quixote	35750	2	803	17875
20	Saturday, Sunday, Monday	28776	9	795	3197
21	Cat Ladder	23264	18	709	1292
22	The Duel	19392	8	537	2424
23	The Boy in the Last Row	14642	5	452	2928
24	Coming Clean	2784	2	87	1392
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3423658</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>80703</b>	<b>267052</b>

Overall, for the year 2013, 365 performances are proposed, of which 287 performances are reprised and 78 performances of the plays produced in 2013. The receipts-to-investment ratio is 7-8%, and the number of spectators present to the related events is 94,279.

## Conclusions

In this article, we sought to obtain a picture as relevant as possible in relation to the theatrical offer in contemporary Romania, as well as to identify a trend of repertory structures, if there is any. Of course, the repertory analysis is also considering other repertoires than those described here for exemplification. We tried to provide examples from all the types of institutions present on the market, i.e. municipal theatres ("Elvira Godeanu" Theatre, Târgu Jiu), national theatres ("I.L. Caragiale" National Theatre of Bucharest), independent theatres (Reactor de Creație și Experiment, Cluj-Napoca), to show their particularities, if any.

However, beyond the picture shown by the case studies, an important aspect to be researched in greater detail is the definition of the theatrical product and the impact that such a reconsideration would have on the Romanian theatrical sector. The rethinking of the theatrical product/service (in the sense offered by cultural marketing) would be a first step taken for the revival of theatrical offers, but also the rebranding of Romanian theatres. Certainly, the study and the understanding of the theatrical offer are essential, but there should also be a counterpart, i.e. the research and understanding of the demand present in the market. Of course, we are in the field of arts and marketing continues to be product-oriented rather than customer-oriented, but the correlation of the demand with the offer or at least the outlining of the limits within which the two define each other should be established.

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*IVONA TĂTAR VÎSTRAȘ is a PhD Candidate at Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Theater and Television. Her main research fields interests regard cultural management and marketing, cultural policy, and theatre history. She is also an associated teaching fellow at the same institution.*

## *D'une dramaturgie circulaire à l'image de la conception orientale du Temps : Cas d'un drame historique persan*

**MARYAM MOMTAHEN FAKHRANI<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** *From a Circular Dramaturgy to an Image of the Oriental Concept of Time: Case Study of a Persian Historical Drama.* The present study invites us to discover a new narrative strategy in the way a Persian dramatist chooses to recount his historical drama. By creating holes or narrative obstacles over the moments of traditional topoi, he explodes the linear narrative and chooses a cyclical, even helical form to complete the fault of the initial narrative. The narrative form adopted broadly resembles a temporal and philosophical vision of history in its oriental approach, which is similarly considered cyclical.

**Keywords:** historical drama, cyclical narrative, cyclical time, philosophy of history

### **Introduction**

Pour progresser dans son histoire, un récit a besoin d'adopter une ou plusieurs stratégies narratives. Il peut s'avancer linéairement, débiter d'un point A et échouer dans un point B. Ce schéma rappelle le mouvement direct, sans méandre et droit vers le dénouement des drames classiques restant fidèles à une conception de l'unité de temps.

Or, nombreuses sont des stratégies qui veulent sortir des sentiers battus d'une méthode narrative traditionnelle. Raconter une histoire en flash-back, à rebours, la mettre en scène éclatée, par bribes et fragmentaire, la mettre en abyme, la cacher dans les interstices et le silence du récit, sont entre autres, de multiples méthodes d'innovation narratives qui rompent non seulement avec la continuité du récit mais aussi avec celle du temps.

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1. Université Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV, ED V, France. marian82mmf@yahoo.com.

Parmi ces nombreuses stratégies narratives, nous avons trouvé une d'assez singulière dans un célèbre drame historique persan : *La Mort de Yazdgard* de Bahrâme Beyzâ'i. Cette technique narrative procède par la constitution des perturbations, des vides ou des silences aux moments des topoï discursifs traditionnels. Le progrès narratif ainsi bloqué, il cherche des issues et substituts en se projetant sur des zones compensatrices, complémentaires, périphériques qui forment dans leur ensemble un cercle vicieux ayant toujours besoin d'un nouveau *cercle* pour compléter le récit initial.

Faire progresser le récit grâce à une narration circulaire et le choix de cette *forme* pour raconter son histoire, plonge ses racines dans un *fond* conceptuel cyclique, à savoir dans la façon d'appréhender le temps et l'Histoire. Reste à savoir comment la méthode narrative circulaire, voire spirale du dramaturge persan est-elle représentée dans le texte ? Conduit-elle à une certaine conception historique ou vision existentielle du dramaturge ? Et cette dernière retrouvaille aidera-t-elle la scénographie à se procurer d'une perception géométrique permettant de concrétiser le temps et l'Histoire d'après le modèle idéologique du dramaturge sur ces deux dernières instances ?

D'une démarche "poétique", entendu dans son acception la plus générale d'«étude des procédés internes du texte littéraire»<sup>2</sup> nous procéderons à s'interroger, autant que faire se peut, sur les techniques que notre drame met en œuvre et les éléments qui constituent cette forme présagée cyclique. La méthode poétique qui se réfère aux différents modèles théoriques qui intègrent l'analyse formelle dans leur démarche, y compris entre autres les approches narratologiques et sémiotiques, les derniers développements de la psychocritique et de la sociocritique, ainsi que les apports les plus récents de la linguistique de l'énonciation et des théories de la lecture, nous permet avant tout de nous focaliser sur l'approche amplement étudiée dans *Lire le théâtre* d'A. Ubersfeld<sup>3</sup>, à savoir la sémiologie du théâtre. Cette dernière spécialité favorise la possibilité, selon cette dernière, « d'établir le ou les systèmes de signes textuels » et de faire éclater ensuite par ces pratiques sémiotiques et textuelles le discours et la forme dominant<sup>4</sup> du drame.

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2. Vincent Jouve, *Poétique du roman* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), 7.

3. Anne Ubersfeld, *Lire le théâtre I* (Paris: Ed. Bélin, 1996), 8.

4. Ibid.

## I. D'une narrativité circulaire orientale-persane

L'espace de la représentation des pièces classiques, folkloriques et anciennes persanes se retrace avant tout entièrement circulaire. Jouer à même le sol, sans aucun décalage spatial (monter, à la limite, sur une estrade), occupant le même espace que le public, en son cœur et dans une aire de jeu circulaire, sans être cloisonné par un rideau, sont des caractéristiques de multiples genres traditionnelles du théâtre persan<sup>5</sup>. Dans cette sphère scénique, l'acteur principal de la scène ayant un monologue à déclamer prend le *centre* du cercle, déclame son discours et joue son rôle. Faute d'avoir une coulisse, il a tous les autres acteurs autour de lui, observant leur camarade de jeu, tels d'autres spectateurs de la représentation.

Occupant le centre de l'espace théâtral, de son univers, le temps est suspendu à son discours. Dramatiquement parlant, aux moments fréquents des monologues dans le théâtre traditionnel persan, le temps des *actions* est zéro, il ne s'écoule pas, il n'avance pas au profit du déroulement de l'intrigue et du cheminement vers le dénouement. Ces instants monologiques localisés sur le centre du globe scénique arrêtent le temps. Le centre du cercle scénique est d'autant plus le lieu de pétrification, d'ensablement du temps qu'il est rarement le lieu d'*action* : il est le temps de *discours*. Ainsi que le moment d'arrêt romanesque qu'est la description, le centre de la scène cyclique est le moment du silence des actes, du trou de l'histoire, de la pause des péripéties, il est le temps suspendu du *discours* et de la narration verbale.

Mais qu'est-ce qui se passerait si ce lieu où le temps est suspendu et l'action est nulle, où toutes les fonctions dramatiques sont livrées à la parole, si ce lieu du discours est occupé par un cadavre ? Muet et immobile, le cadavre situé au centre du cercle redouble l'effet du *temps zéro* de l'histoire, ce temps réduit à nul de l'action, mais aussi à zéro du discours. Et qu'est-ce qu'il signifiera si le cadavre est le corps inanimé du Roi des rois de la Perse antique, celui du juste dernier empereur perse avant l'ère islamique ?

C'est le cas d'un célèbre drame historique persan, *La Mort de Yazdgard*<sup>6</sup> (B. Beyzâ'i, 1980), écrit rien qu'un an après la Révolution iranienne de 1979. Un clin d'œil à l'Histoire répétitive de la fuite des Rois du pays, du basculement d'une dynastie et du bouleversement d'une ère historique pour en recommencer aussitôt ou presque une autre, semblable à la dernière. Une Histoire qu'à

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5. Bahrâme Beyzâ'i, *Théâtre en Iran* (Téhéran: Roshanegarâne va Motâlê'âteh Zanâne, 2004).

6. Le dernier Roi de la Perse avant l'Islam.

force d'être répétée dans le temps sur le même schéma de contingences historiques peut déjà non plus évoquer une forme cyclique, voire un cercle vicieux, qu'*a fortiori* une spirale sans fin.

Ladite pièce persane situe son histoire sur ce moment de rupture et de transition d'une époque à une autre, sur un moment où l'Histoire est arrêtée et attend son cours. Elle « se déroule au jour sans Histoire, au moment zéro, lorsqu'une époque est arrivée à son terme et une autre n'a pas encore commencé »<sup>7</sup>. Ce moment de silence de l'Histoire, porteur d'un nouveau cours d'incidents est d'autant moins messager d'une nouvelle ère menant aux changements radicaux dans la société qu'il est d'une façon spéculaire la répétition d'une unique forme monarchique. Et ce qui change, en fin de compte, n'est que le nom des dynasties tout en poursuivant une pareille trajectoire de la conquête, de l'avènement, du règne dans toutes ses vicissitudes, et finalement de la décadence et de la chute d'une dynastie substituée, peu de temps après, par une autre. Une vision qui rejoint largement la méthode à la fois inductive et rationnelle d'Ibn Khaldûn<sup>8</sup> qui a une vision cyclique et ternaire des événements historiques.

Pour lui, toute cité, tout royaume, tout Etat, connaît un temps de lutte porteur de stabilisation, un temps de stabilisation et d'apogée porteur de déclin, un temps de déclin avant-coureur de nouvelles luttes et remontées. [...] Ces cycles s'inscrivent au cœur des fissures des temps, celles mêmes de la destinée de la race humaine depuis sa création jusqu'à l'Heure dernière annoncée par Dieu.<sup>9</sup>

L'histoire de la pièce ici présentée peut donc calquer celle de tous les siècles allant de la fuite et de la mort de Darius III, dernier Roi de la première dynastie de Perse, jusqu'à tout contemporain de Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi<sup>10</sup>.

Le régicide de la pièce fait scléroser le temps, figer l'espace, fait un trou dans le cours de l'Histoire et le fait cesser de continuer. Le corps du Roi, comme il s'est dit ci-haut, occupe le centre de la scène théâtrale et marque de ce fait un double silence actionnel et énonciatif. Le centre, espace du discours monologique

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7. Zâvane Ghokâssiâne, *Recueil d'articles pour critique et présenter les œuvres de Bahrâme Beyzâ'i* (Téhéran: Âgâh, 1999), 72.

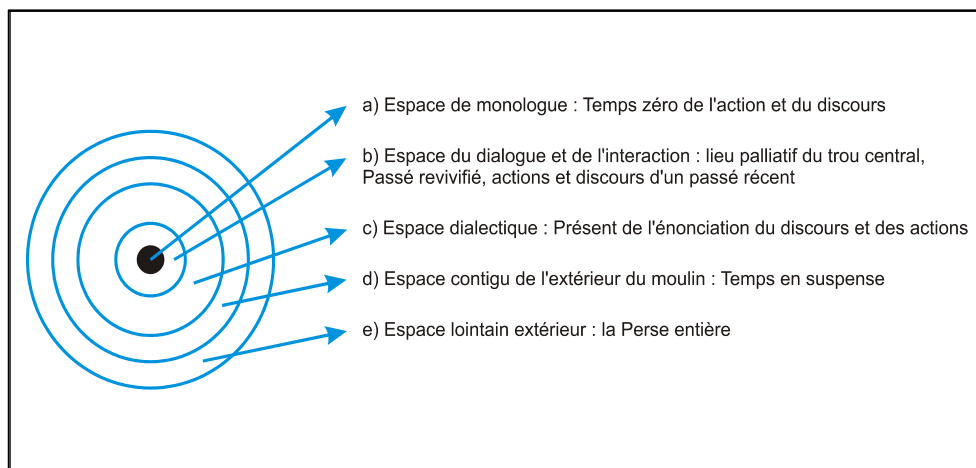
8. Historien et philosophe ifriqiyyen du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle.

9. Louis Gardet, "Vues musulmanes sur le temps et l'Histoire. Essai de typologie culturelle," in *Les cultures et le temps* (Paris: Payot, 1975), 240.

10. Réza Barâhéni, "Une question nommée la mort de Yazdgard," *Simiâ*, n° 2 (2007), 189-191.

étant *a priori* évacué de toute action, il en est, en l'occurrence, également vidé de toute parole. Ainsi doublement neutralisé, ce centre défectueux a besoin d'un nouvel espace palliant sa défaillance. Il trace, par conséquent, une orbite périphérique tournant autour du zéro central du cadavre du Roi. Une seconde zone cyclique enfermant les trois personnages principaux, la famille meunière accusée du meurtre, encercle la zone neutre. Ils ont pour fonction de remplir le silence discursif et actionnel de la zone stratégique centrale et raconter, pour se sauver la vie, la cause et le comment de la mort du Roi Yazdgard à leur moulin, l'unique lieu du déroulement de la pièce.

A l'image des meules de pierre tournant l'une sur l'autre, la première zone cyclique tourne dans une sphère circulaire plus grande qu'est celle où les protagonistes de second ordre ayant des rôles de déclencheur, de médiateur et de moteur de l'avancement du récit, ont à mener leur investigation auprès des occupants de la première zone. Les membres de l'armée poursuivant le Roi, les différentes couches favorisées aristocratiques de l'époque constituent les membres de cette troisième zone. En quête du Roi, le retrouvant assassiné dans le moulin, ils dressent une enquête imminente pour connaître la raison et le pourquoi de sa mort. Ils sont donc dans un rapport de dialectique à l'égard de la seconde zone qu'est celle des accusés présumés de l'acte, à savoir le peuple. A ces espaces circulaires pourraient s'ajouter les espaces contigu et lointain de l'extérieur qui pourront se figurer tels dans le diagramme suivant :



**Fig. 1:** Espaces de la narration



En effet, le non-fonctionnement de la première zone devenue non-opérationnelle et neutre aboutira au disfonctionnement ou au changement de fonctions narratives et actionnelles d'autres zones et finira par créer de nouvelles formes narratives que nous étudierons ci-dessous.

**Zone a) :** L'unique détenteur du discours politique, d'un discours exécutif et exécutant, le seul *monologueur* légitime du royaume, le Roi est inanimé, muet, mort au centre de la pièce.

**Zone b) :** Zone principale de l'interaction, de l'intrigue et du dialogue, elle se transforme en un espace palliatif pour combler les silences de la première zone, celle du monologue. C'est justement dans cette seconde zone que toute une série de nouvelles stratégies narratives sont mises en œuvre. Le Roi mort, ce sont ses accusés, les trois membres de la famille meunière qui vont le rejouer et cela dans sa forme la plus novatrice empruntée d'ailleurs aux formes les plus anciennes du théâtre folklorique. Ils ne racontent pas l'histoire de la mort du Roi par le biais de la forme plutôt occidentale du *flash-back*, par l'intermédiaire d'un retour en arrière sous une forme de réminiscence narrative. Ils ne *racontent* pas l'histoire comme des témoins du fait, ils ne sont pas des conteurs du passé, ils le *jouent*, ils le revivent et le mettent directement et par plusieurs narrations et changements de rôle en scène, ils se transforment en acteurs.

Ils s'arrangent à combler le manque du rôle du personnage mort entre eux, ils répartissent les rôles directement sur scène ou s'accommodent de le jouer d'un commun accord implicite, ce qui aggrave l'effet dramatique et élucide même les rapports conflictuels de la famille meunière. Dans la stratégie défensive pour se libérer de l'accusation du meurtre, les trois membres de la famille optant pour ne pas raconter, mais rejouer tout ce qu'ils ont vécu, chacun incarne le Roi deux ou trois fois. Par une simple distribution des rôles substitutifs, le dramaturge avance ingénieusement non seulement le premier récit, celui du comment de la mort de Yazdgard, qu'il donne également à voir le second récit, celui de la vie, des relations et de la psychologie des actants de la seconde zone, à savoir les personnages principaux de la pièce. Les exemples ci-dessous éclairciront cette stratégie narrative à double desseins de l'agencement des rôles :

1. Le Meunier jouant le Roi, son rôle vacant est livré à la Femme. La place de celle-ci restant à son tour vide, elle demande à la Fille de jouer son rôle pour pouvoir continuer d'expliquer la Mort en revivant le passé. Voici la réponse de la Fille à sa Mère devenue, en l'occurrence, le Meunier-Père :

- **Femme** : [...] Holà, fille, avance et fait la Femme du Meunier et dis ce que j'ai répondu. – **Fille** : [Riant] Moi faire la Femme du meunier ? Oh Meunier, fais-moi un peu une étreinte.<sup>11</sup>

Les rôles sont verbalement distribués selon le besoin narratif, la Femme ayant l'autorité procède à la mise en scène de l'acte. Une certaine psychologie des personnages et de leurs relations est, de surcroît, à entrevoir. La réplique de la Fille rappelant le complexe d'Œdipe, en plus de donner une idée sur la relation Mère-Fille de la pièce, mais étant assez hardie et impudique, fait aussi appel à la démente de celle-ci dont nous trouverons l'origine et raison dans l'exemple ci-dessous :

2) La Femme joue le Roi, la Fille et le Meunier jouent, en revanche, leurs propres rôles, ils ne substituent donc personne. Il est le plus long travesti, il se situe à la cinquième occurrence de substitution du Roi qui se répète neuf fois en tout. Il se place au juste milieu et de la pièce et des déguisements, il fait aussi l'acmé de l'intrigue, le point culminant des incidents du récit. Accablé par les ennemis, abandonné par les amis et alliés, étant à bout de ses forces et espoirs, et surtout terrifié de porter personnellement atteinte à sa vie, le Roi cherche l'indignation et la colère du Meunier par une série d'humiliations afin de pouvoir mettre fin à sa vie par l'intermédiaire de ce dernier.

L'humiliation de tout genre, mais surtout abuser de la Fille devant le Meunier et la Femme-Mère qui, n'oublions pas, joue dans cette scène le Roi-voleur. Scène d'humiliation du mari-père de la famille et celle de viol de la Fille, exécutées par le Roi mais incarnées par la Femme-Mère de la pièce, en plus de faire avancer le premier récit, celui du déroulement du meurtre du Roi, fait parallèlement progresser un second récit implicite, celui de la famille meunière. Et cela rien qu'en une simple et subtile *distribution des rôles substitués* : les protagonistes de la seconde zone jouent non seulement le passé récent de l'anecdote du meurtre du Roi, mais ils jouent également un passé lointain, une vie écoulée à travers de multiples trahisons et humiliations.

La seule stratégie ingénieuse de distribution intentionnelle et significative de rôle secondaire permet de tracer une petite histoire familiale à l'intérieur de la grande, au sein de l'Histoire en train de changer de cours. Un effet de l'histoire dans l'Histoire, un effet, donc, spéculaire de miroirs qui reflètent

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11. Beyzâ'i Bahrâme, *La Mort de Yazdgard ou Cérémonie du Régicide* (Téhéran, Roshangarâne va Motâlé'âteh zanâne, 1994).

les histoires minimes dans la grande. Un effet, aussi, de théâtre dans le théâtre par la procédure *d'enchâssement décomposé* qui consiste à comprendre plusieurs pièces intérieures qui "s'enchaînent les unes dans les autres sous les yeux d'un même spectateur, comme si elles constituaient un spectacle unique"<sup>12</sup>. Il peut mener le lecteur à chercher la raison de la mort du dernier Roi de Perse non dans l'Histoire, mais peut-être dans ces innombrables petites histoires passées sous silence et non-transcrites des petits, des marginaux, des oubliés et des laissés pour compte<sup>13</sup>, bref du peuple dans l'Histoire. Un peuple qui pour se sauver la peau de la menace de la zone c s'agite comme un beau diable, il *joue* pour raconter le passé, autrement dit, il occupe la zone stratégique de l'*action* et de la *parole*.

**Zone c)** Celle du conflit entre les personnages principaux de la zone b et les personnages secondaires de la zone c. Autant la seconde zone est celle de la revivification du passé et celle de la compensation du vide de la zone a, celle-ci est le lieu du présent scénique. Les occupants de cette zone sont des spectateurs de premier ordre des jeux de la famille meunière qui ne veut pas *raconter* ce qui s'est passé chez elle, mais le *jouer*. Encerclant la famille et sa sphère d'action, les poursuivants du Roi ont également à relancer la dialectique de question et de réponse, car nombreuses sont les occasions que l'autre camp, par peur, défi, précaution et tergiversation, refuse de narrer-jouer la suite de l'incident. Il est donc amplement l'espace du *discours*, d'*échange*, de *dialogue*, de la *parole* somme toute.

**Zone d)** Celle de l'extérieur contigu, celle par où le Roi, déclencheur de la perturbation initiale du récit est entrée, celle où les soldats sont affairés aux préparatifs de l'exécution de la famille accusée, celle également par où les ennemis-arabes surgissent. Elle est donc et avant tout l'espace de l'*action*, mais aussi celle de la menace, encerclant toutes les dernières zones jusqu'ici étudiées.

**Zone e)** L'effroi de l'attaque des ennemis qui *ruinent, incendient, se vêtissent de noir et vénèrent un Dieu si colérique*<sup>14</sup> a réduit la Perse, à l'instar de son Roi mort, au *silence*.

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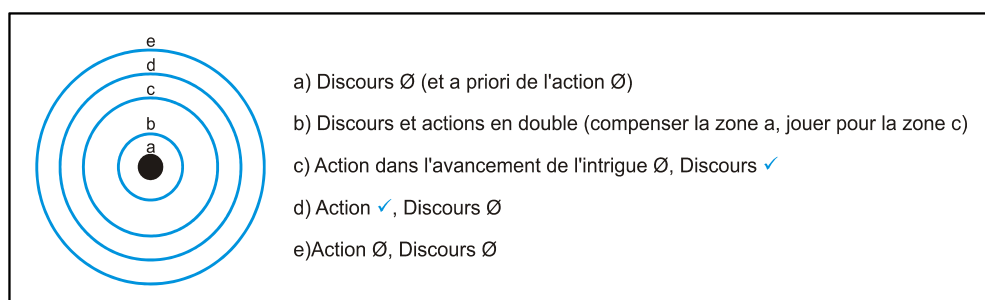
12. Georges Forestier, *Le théâtre dans le théâtre* (Genève: Droze, 1996), 93.

13. Florence Fix, *L'Histoire au théâtre (1870-1914)* (Rennes: Presse universitaire de Rennes, 2010), 27.

14. Bahrâme Beyzâ'i, *La Mort de Yazdgard*, 22.

Le non-fonctionnement de la zone centrale, lieu traditionnel de réflexion, de tiraillement intérieur, de lancement de défis<sup>15</sup>, bref lieu d'une narration *monologique* cause d'autant plus une série de disfonctionnements narratifs qu'il crée de nouvelles techniques narratives. Il cause pareillement une espèce d'éclatement du récit, une sorte de clivage du *discours* et de l'*action*. La zone intermédiaire, à savoir, la zone **b** assume la double fonction de charger le vide de la zone **a** par son *discours* et *action*, en même temps qu'elle fait sa décharge discursive et actionnelle pour convaincre les *actants* de la zone **c**. La zone **d** et la zone **e** font respectivement les instances éclatées de l'*action* et du *discours* néants.

Ce qui produit le schéma suivant :



**Fig. 2:** Nouvelles formes narratives

## II. Temps cyclique oriental

Passéiste, archaïque, oriental, le temps du drame étudié recoupe largement l'ancienne conception aristotélicienne, platonicienne même du temps, comme il suit ci-dessous :

Ni Platon ni Aristote ne croyaient à la continuité de l'histoire. Ils pensaient que des cataclysmes naturels, comme les inondations, éliminaient périodiquement non seulement toutes les sociétés humaines existant à la surface de la terre, mais aussi leur souvenir, forçant les hommes à recommencer le processus historique à partir du début. Selon la conception grecque, l'Histoire n'est pas linéaire, mais cyclique.<sup>16</sup>

15. Patrice Pavis, *Dictionnaire du théâtre* (Paris: Armand Colin), 216.

16. Francis Fukuyama, *La fin de l'histoire et le dernier homme*, traduit de l'anglais par Denis-Armand Canal (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 82.

Le temps dit cyclique ou circulaire est celui des sociétés "traditionnelles" désignant un temps qualitatif, concret, polychrone et vécu. C'est un temps reconnu « cosmo-bio-social », car :

Il est à la fois cosmique, biologique et social. Cette conception du temps est justifiée par la référence aux mythes et à une vision cyclique des événements. En effet, les acteurs sont convaincus qu'il y a un éternel retour des saisons et une répétition des mêmes individualités humaines dans l'enchaînement des générations.<sup>17</sup>

L'atemporalité de cette vision est d'autant moins dans la conception épicurienne de profiter du temps présent que l'homme est engouffré dans un cercle vicieux des mêmes causes et effets de ses défaites et déboires. Il vit tout le temps le présent, car son présent n'a rien de différent, de transformable que son hier ou son demain.

Dans les sociétés régies par une conception cyclique du temps, il n'y a pas de démarcation entre le passé, le présent et le futur, car, selon les acteurs, tous les trois s'interpénètrent. Le passé et le futur se fondent dans le présent et c'est également dans ce dernier que les acteurs vivent.<sup>18</sup>

Cette conception cyclique du temps calque, d'une certaine manière, l'idéologie du néant, le mythe de Sisyphe de tour éternel de la roue de l'Histoire sur elle-même. Temps traditionnel, temps classique, temps du Passé, temps oriental ou temps féminin par un métabolisme naturel cyclique, il s'aplatit et devient rectiligne et linéaire à partir de l'avènement de plus en plus influent des religions monothéistes et eschatologiques sur l'histoire humaine. La Raison divine veut que la genèse et le cosmos suivant un chemin transcendant, ait débuté quelque part et qu'ils finissent leur mission d'être à un point et temps précis. L'Histoire prend donc sens et orientation, elle n'est pas si absurde et chaotique qu'il ne semble dans son cours, détails et ensemble. Le temps passant, la nuance religieuse du temps perdant sa vigueur, ce qu'il reste de cette conception est sa linéarité logique, intentionnelle et progressiste.

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17. Matthieu Gui Ekwa, "Temps cyclique et temps linéaire," *Aspects sociologiques* 3, no. 1 (Mars 1995), 4.

18. Ibid.

Dans les sociétés régies par le temps linéaire, les acteurs font une nette distinction entre le passé, le présent et le futur. En effet, le présent est un point glissant continuellement sur la ligne qui va du passé au futur, transformant ce dernier d'abord en présent et ensuite en passé. Ce présent ne s'explique pas par le passé mais par l'avenir.<sup>19</sup>

Il n'est pas difficile de prévoir que l'auteur des lignes ci-dessus entend l'Occident comme tenant et habitant de l'idéologie du temps linéaire, par le fait d'importance que Celui-ci accorde au temps en général, au progrès et au temps présent comme déterminant de la vie du futur et par le sens unique et irréversible que le temps a. Malgré l'avènement multimillénaire des religions monothéistes en Perse, elle n'a pas pu, selon le dramaturge, dépasser de son ère cyclique et rentrée dans sa période linéaire futuriste, il faut donc chercher la cause ailleurs. La répétition du schéma circulaire du temps dans la pièce présente et à travers un schéma narratif circulaire étudié ci-haut signale au premier abord la stagnation vertigineuse multimillénaire de toute une nation et de toute son Histoire.

Monter dans le temps se fait donc dans le but de reconnaître mieux ce passé déficient répétitif, de régler ses comptes avec lui, de le franchir peut-être et d'ouvrir éventuellement une nouvelle page de l'Histoire. Les agents et les occupants de cet espace temporel sont captifs du Passé qui les fige et s'il ne les enlève pas avec lui, il les fait tourner autour d'eux ou bien à l'instar de la Fille de la pièce ils en deviennent aliénés.

Nous avons considéré pour la pièce de Beyzâ'i, une circularité comme forme, en nous fondant sur l'impossibilité qu'il envisage pour le progrès et l'avancement dans l'Histoire de son pays où un même schéma de la montée, du cours et de la décadence des faits historiques se reprennent à l'instar d'un cercle vicieux qui se répète dans le temps. Mais la question majeure qui se pose est de savoir pourquoi cette vision amère et pessimiste d'un cycle infini, d'un Retour Eternel en arrière, d'une stagnation pensée par le dramaturge iranien ? Quelles sont les causes de cette impossibilité de sortir du cercle vertigineux, marécageux du temps oriental pour s'acheminer vers un temps progressif prospectif linéaire occidental ?

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19. Ibid.

Selon certains philosophes, Hegel entre autres, les conditions autorisant la transition d'un peuple de l'ère *mégalthymique*<sup>20</sup> à l'époque *isothymique*<sup>21</sup>, se trouvent avant tout dans un "désir de reconnaissance" ayant changé de statut. Il se trouve dans une modification d'orientation du *désir de reconnaissance* qui ne concentre plus dans le désir d'être reconnu comme supérieur à l'autre (mégalthymia), mais désormais comme *égal* à lui (isothymia).

Pour s'échapper de ce schéma reproductif de serpent qui se mord la queue, le *dominé* (selon la terminologie de Edward Saïd dans son *Orientalisme*), a donc à se reconnaître en tant qu'identité digne et égale à cette instance *dominatrice*. Celle qui l'a depuis toujours considéré comme un Autre *inférieur*, comme une race sujette qui doit être *connue, définie et représentée* par la race dominante et supérieure. Le subordonné, selon cette instance, n'a ni le mérite, ni la capacité du "*self-government*" car c'est cette instance plus intelligente et en même temps plus puissante qui *le connaît mieux* qu'il ne se connaît lui-même, *elle en sait plus sur lui* qu'il ne le sait sur lui-même<sup>22</sup>.

D'où, en revenant sur le concept *isothymique* hégélien, la nécessité d'atteinte à une échelle de pensée élémentaire chez le peuple ("l'esclave", dans la terminologie de Hegel) : l'acquisition de son identité par le biais du *travail* dans son sens le plus large. Le fait de se *re-connaître* par et dans un *travail* physique et cognitif conscientisant permettant au dominé-esclave de l'Histoire de se voir situé au même rang d'égalité que son ancien maître-dominant. Travail manuel ou intellectuel permettant de requérir sa reconnaissance et dignité humaines faute de quoi il aura toujours besoin d'un tuteur, en l'occurrence un Roi patriarche, dont la perte l'amènera à chercher indéfiniment un autre comme successeur, protecteur et penseur.

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21. "Isothymia : 'Désir d'être reconnu comme égal des autres.'" Ibid.

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D'UNE DRAMATURGIE CIRCULAIRE À L'IMAGE DE LA CONCEPTION ORIENTALE DU TEMPS :  
CAS D'UN DRAME HISTORIQUE PERSAN

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**MOMTAHEN FAKHRANI MARYAM** is a PhD student in French literature at Sorbonne University and PhD student in Comparative literature (French-Persian literatures) at Tehran University.





## *The Cultural Afterlives of DADA*

ILEANA ALEXANDRA ORLICH<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** With his Dadaists friends, Tzara constructed in Dada an art based, like religion, on an interior play of conflicting emotions, soulful contradictions, and haunting echoes moving in auditory progression toward today's approximate culture. Beyond reinforced origins that incorporate such diverse influences as his native village or the fin-de-siècle Dandies, Tzara's approximate aesthetic conjures the self-separation of artistic sensibility that once consolidated the community of the early saints. The play *Tzara arde și Dada se piaptână: Fantoma de la Elsinore* (*Every Tzara Has His Dada: The Ghost of Elsinore*) by Ion Pop, Ștefana and Ioan Pop-Curșeu is an illustrative example of the cultural afterlives of Dada.

**Keywords:** Dada, Christianity, Dandyism, Levant, *Tzara arde...*, approximation

Marking the Centennial anniversary of Dada, the play *Tzara arde și Dada se piaptână: Fantoma de la Elsinore* (title of the Romanian language version) or *Every Tzara Has His Dada: The Ghost of Elsinore*. (title of its English version<sup>2</sup>), brings an innovative staging of the three martyr saints, Casdoas, Govdela and Gargal, foregrounded in traditional religious texts. According to theological sources, Gabdelas and his sister Kazdoa are, respectively, the son and daughter of the Persian Emperor Sapor who become Christian under the guidance of the faithful Govdela. The same religious circle also features prominently the martyr saint Dadas and Gargal, the wizard who converts to Christianity after witnessing the miracles wrought by Gabdelas's faith.

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1. Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA. [orlich@asu.edu](mailto:orlich@asu.edu).

2. The performance is a coproduction of the National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, The Faculty of Theatre and Television UBB Cluj and the Persona Association; its premiere was at the National Theatre in Cluj on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2016, and it was also performed at the Riverside Church Theatre, Columbia University, New York, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

In the play's ingenious context the authors imagined<sup>3</sup>, the three saints are reconfigured as radically de-socialized beings that dissolve the ideological limits of art and life in the double guises of Dadaists and floating angel souls. Consolidating the memory of the Dadaists through this transformative process that draws strength from Christianity, the play's Director, Ștefana Pop-Curșeu appears to grant both the Dadaists and the saints a peculiar afterlife, bigger than life and more expansive, extravagant, and generous.

Personified on stage by talented actors, Gargal, the wizard of the religious texts and simultaneously the Dadaist Marcel Iancu/Janko is interpreted by Rares Stoica; Gabdelas, intermixed with Govdela, metamorphosed on stage into Huelsenbeck is played by Cristian Grosu; and Kasdoa, the updated version of Casdoas and associated with Hugo Ball, acquires stage life through Cătălin Codreanu.



**Fig. 1:** The Angel, the three Saints and Tristan Tzara coming back from the dead

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3. The play is a collective creation, written by Ștefana and Ioan Pop-Curșeu with the outstanding contribution and help of the avant-guard specialist, Professor Ion Pop. See his article *De la théâtralité des manifestes dadaïstes*, in *Studia UBB Dramatica*, 2-2016, p. 9-18.

In the outstanding interpretation of Filip Odangiu, Tzara is the play's raconteur and quintessential Dada artist, a possible cvasi-descendant of the martyr saint Dadas, who reminisces the moments of the Cabaret Voltaire and Café de la Terrasse with lines bounced back and forth with the other Dadaists, Marcel Janko, Hugo Ball and Huelsenbeck. In English, Romanian, French or German, the play's textual references can be traced back to journals and manuscripts but are also borrowed from Shakespearean plays, *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, or *Macbeth*, Baudelaire, or Villon to suggest the troubled background, behind WWI's front lines, of Zurich in 1915-1916, and of a variety of moments that marked the Dadaists' and Tzara's lives and work.

Although absent from the stage until the very last moment of the play, the Christian martyr Dadas suggests a significant and powerful connection with Tzara, who becomes in the last scene the fourth Saint. Like the enthusiastic founder of Dadaism who gathered followers in the early days of the new century, Dadas set the tone for the series of conversions during the reign of Emperor Sapor and is thus implicated in the subaltern discourse of the play. Further, since the obscure origin of the word DADA continues to fascinate, the play confers a new spirituality to the Dadaist movement through the dramatic association with the holy Christian martyrs by suggesting a powerful connectivity between Dadaism and a homegrown Christianity organically integrated in the fertile soil of Tzara's motherland. As a saintly apparition, Kazdoa (the double of Huelsenbeck) pontificates with sublime affectation: "Tzara came up with the word Dada on 8 February 1916, at 6 in the evening. I was there with my 12 children when Tzara for the first time uttered this word which filled us with justified enthusiasm. This occurred at the Café de la Terrasse in Zurich *et j'avais une brioche dans la narine gauche*"<sup>4</sup>.

While sublimating the forefront figures of the Dadaist movement with the ancient Christian saints and the 12 apostles of Huelsenbeck's pronouncement, and relying on Tzara as its mouthpiece to provide a ludic backdrop for the afterlives of Dada, the play may also be seen as articulating the Christian crisis and cultural conflicts that mar the face of an endangered contemporary Europe assailed by migrants and confused by weak leadership.

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4. The play, yet unpublished, exists in manuscript format. All quotations from the play indicate page numbers in parenthesis.



Fig. 2: Saint Casdoas, Saint Govdela and Saint Gargal

More specifically, in the context of an ascending secularism coupled with a surging rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the association of Dada and Christianity may be viewed as an allegorical commentary on the relationship between European and Christian values reflected in artistic representation. By definition, Europe is essentially Christian, born and nourished in the spirit of Christian faith and values. As Horia Patapievici has recently noted in his *Partea nevazută decide totul*, “the political annihilation of Christianity in Europe, which has been going on for some time now as new religious denominations are favored, spells out the demise of Europe”<sup>5</sup> (my translation).

To be sure, the two Pop-Curșeu project a bittersweet play that makes one think about life as a *theatrum mundi* and about religion as a matter of artistic frenzy or consciousness in afterlife, not of God; however, the play

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5. “Anihilarea creștinismului în Europa în mod politic, cum se întâmplă de la o vreme încoace când se favorizează alte credințe, înseamnă dispariția Europei.” Patapievici, Horia-Roman. *Partea nevazută decide totul*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 2015. 127-167.

resonates with a sort of Dada-triggered transcendence that inspires the human mind to be more loving, more generous and accepting, less egocentric and politically engaged than it is in its current state.

The play's dramatic interest is clearly in the ingenious and vivid association of the three Dadaists and Tzara with their corresponding, resurrected Christian saints in a contemporary Europe heavily embroiled in governmental regulations and distorting policies. Could the saints be troubled by neglect and a destabilizing threat of an invasive political correctness and a resulting necroreligious system? Working along similar lines with Michel Foucault's argument that modern biopolitical governance is predicated on the institutional regularization of life and promotes in fact the state's "power and capacity to determine who will live and who will die," any state in Europe, past and present, may go as far as to stipulate that a citizen be punitively removed from the societal space.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, Tzara's legendary disruption of the social fabric allows for his association with other rebellious spirits like Hamlet's, a suggestion intended by the play's artistic director who titles the English version of her play with cultural insinuation as *Every Tzara Has His Dada: The Ghost of Elsinore*. Firming up the literary lineage that links Hamlet to Tzara, in the play's effortless movement across cultures and historical eras, young Tzara, like the celebrated Prince who feigns madness to escape punishment, falls back on the unlikely diagnostic of *dementia praecox* as a type of efficient insanity used in real life to escape mandatory drafting for military service in WWII:

Doctor R: Come in gentlemen. Mr. Samuel Rosenstock?...You have been asked to report for conscription. Are you fit for military service to the country? Are you aware that half of it is under occupation?

....

Doctor C: Let's see. (*reads excerpts from the report*) "The patient is unable to adopt a behavior that is oriented towards a precise goal, features serious memory and language disorders, catatonic states and cognitive dysfunctions...he claims, being convinced that he is right, to write coherently, even though the next sample of his texts speaks for itself..."

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6. Foucault, Michel. "Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976 trans. David Macey.

Dr. R (*to the other doctor*): It's clear, he's insane.

Dr. C: I don't think we need such soldiers.

Doctors R and C: The diagnosis is firm: dementia praecox. Goodbye." (19)

Further linking the play's text to *Hamlet*, Tzara's next outburst appropriates verbatim Hamlet's projection of madness as a mere cover for his plans to unmask the king's crime. "What they don't know is that I'm mad only from the East; when the wind does not blow, I can easily tell the difference between a hawk and a heron (19)", he declares by way of identifying himself with Hamlet, the character and his exploits in the larger theatrical frame. Like Hamlet, who used the theater to project his inward directed emotions in the actors' staging of the *Murder of Gonzago*, Tzara relied on performance in the early days of Dada to free his imagination fettered into the absurdity of conventions and to question and smash his Jewish cultural taboos.

In another humorous and innovative staging of his emotional kinship with Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, Tzara has his fictional attendant, Glauser, call him "Prince of Da" and thus leaves open the association of Dada/Tzara with Hamlet/Denmark as a suspended moment within the fluid nature of the Dada representation whose purpose is acknowledged in *Monsieur Antipyrine's Manifesto*:

DADA remains within the framework of European weakness, it's still shit, but from now on we want to shit in different colors so as to adorn the zoo of art with all the flags of all the consulates. We are circus ringmasters and we can be found whistling amongst the winds of fairgrounds, in convents, prostitutions, theatres, feelings, restaurants, ohoho, bang bang." (20)

Flowing next from the walls of Elsinore into an African Song that is in fact a phonetic poem, the Dada Dance entails a precise choreography that combines a rigidity of arms and simultaneous sauntering on stage as the Dadaists protest against various taboos; the chaotic shouting culminates with Tzara's pronunciations of Dada's objectives: "abolition of memory; abolition of archeology; abolition of prophets; abolition of the future; absolute and unquestionable faith in every god that is the immediate product of spontaneity [generating] a roaring of tense colors, and interlacing of opposites and of contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies: Life."<sup>7</sup>

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7. *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell. New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1951. 22



Fig. 3: Dada dance and manifestos

Unlike the troubled Prince's agonizing thoughts and murderous outbursts, however, Tzara's striking behavior is never a dark night of the soul; his gingerly trespasses are of a minor and pardonable kind, in the realm of the aesthetic imperatives of art, and could be seen as an excessively exuberant life that glides effortlessly, the way angels do, into the space of the Dadaists' afterlives. On stage, Tzara symbolically draws a cross on his coffin-like suitcases – a gesture of resurrection through art and performance that suggests Dada's breaking out of the Swiss space and journeying with veritable wanderlust not only to Paris and Berlin but into the movement's afterlife.

Much like Tzara who moved within the parameters of shock and surprise, Dadaism, the movement he created, was invented at the twilight of the Habsburg Empire as a manner of being, *a façon d'être* that did not depend only on its worldly, visible manifestation and its negative relation to the fin-de-siècle aestheticizing movements and ornament, but also, and greatly, on the challenges of the religious quest. In self-mocking tone, Tzara sees his role as "pointillizing in the clay in which the master artificer, God, has imprisoned his talent, amusing and angelic when it overwhelms the bourgeoisie (15)".





**Fig. 4:** Hugo Ball (C, Codreanu), Tristan Tzara (F. Odangiu), Maya Chrusiecz (S. Pop-Curseu), Marcel Ianco (R. Stoica) and Huelsenbeck (C. Grosu)

From its inception at the Café de la Terrasse, behind the war zone in a pacific Zurich that sheltered exiles, Dada aimed to jolt with a fist or an axe a complacent bourgeois world bored with its decadence, *l'art pour l'art* movements, Symbolism, the *Jugendstil*, and with Nietzsche's much hailed announcement of the death of God and the claim, in *Birth of Tragedy* (1870), that life could only be justified on aesthetic, not ethical grounds. As Hugo Ball humorously reminds us, "For me a revolution in the form of "art for art's sake" is not seductive at all. I want to know the direction in which something is heading."<sup>8</sup>

To draw attention to their own agenda, Dadaists wore clothing and devices that fashioned a literary style so outlandish that it seemed in the beginning not to be a style at all; it was, however, a dramatically loud and cluttered ensemble that made the movement's chief advocates heard beyond the sordid and dull fin-de-siecle, offering Tzara the chance to escape his

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8. Ball, Hugo. *Journal*, 30 June 1915, 60. 9

ancestors' narrowly circumscribed village of Moinești for the broad vistas of European culture. Behind the elusive surfaces of meaningless sounds without center or purpose Tzara introduced to a cheering crowd at the Cabaret Voltaire not so much a variety show filled with circus figures as a reimagined constellation infused with the sacred images of his native land: the shouting of Romanian peasants became the bizarre metaphors and word contractions of a form of specific art and the recognizable signs of a reinvigorating tradition that proposed to demolish the decrepit cultural matrixes of Europe's "exquisite corpse," as Andrei Codrescu, the fine cultural observer of the Levant, was to write in his interesting study, *The Posthuman Dada Guide: Tzara and Lenin Play Chess* (2009). By contrast with this culturally putrid world, Tzara's spirit foregrounded boldly the artistic body in motion, with the dubious artistic and social status of an approximate man liberating his soul from its material and social fetters in the Dada dance: *Une Dada dance bien connue consiste à mettre ses bras en l'air (épaule perpendiculaire au tronc et avant-bras perpendiculaire au corps) et à sauter en même temps* (20).



Fig. 5: The Dadaists at the Café de la Terrasse

In the play's English version *Every Tzara has his Dada*, Tzara is once again the approximate man who asks for the chance to go back to 1915, "even if just for an hour," to the glorious days when, dressed in a dandy suit, he was "an ex-communist, a cabaretist, a multi-linguist, a historicist, an exorcist, Mysticist, neo-chemist, contortionist, equilibriste, absintheist, accordionist, tragedianist, encyclopaedist, pornographist, blah-blah-blahist, felationist, sternocleidomastoidist," (3-4). Having triggered the dramatic movement of the play, Tzara's desire to revisit the past underscores not only a confessional note but also a desire to expiate in Dadaist terms, by adopting a new type of religious discourse fit for the afterlife but also in keeping with his Jewish tradition. Having staged Tzara in this theatrical production, Pop-Curșeu's play is likely to have found inspiration in the fertile tradition of Tzara's Jewish heritage that took the bawdy jokes, ludic songs, and shadow theatre of the shtetl to the theater, song and cabaret of Broadway and Hollywood. Against the musical background of Romanian music playing like spontaneous rap, in the play's third section *The Confession*, Tzara speaks about his father's death, the troubled relations between father and son, and the news of his father's death that reached him by way of a letter from his old friend, Ion (Bebe) Vinea. Shattered emotionally, Tzara has to fill the vacuum left behind by inventing his own theatrical space, the Dada.

Thrust into the world, Tzara imagines himself embarking upon an imaginary, mythical journey back in time that parallels that of Orpheus, or perhaps Dante. The first stop is at the Cabaret Voltaire, with Marcel Janko as the guide. Here is Emmy Hennings, selling bubble gum cigarettes and photos of herself in a seductively alluring role played with remarkable aplomb by Ștefana Pop-Curșeu. Her costumes provide something more than an ornamental surface of Dada line and contour as they resemble an alternative to the fin-de-siecle decadence and the traffic of clothes. Transformed into a living artwork, Emmy Henning's elaborate attire, like that of the caged bird beautifully enacted by Patricia Brad in another performance of the National Theatre in Cluj<sup>9</sup> becomes a measure of artistic expression and representation falling into the broad range of body artists and artistic innovation which the Dadaists projected at the Cabaret Voltaire.

Throughout the play, the actors' extravagant clothes capture with great finesse the impulse to aestheticize the body which Dadaism inherited from Dandyism and which turned them at once into priests and victims. As

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9. *Sânziana și Pepelea* by Vasile Alecsandri, directed by Alexandru Dabija, premiere October 6th 2013.

Baudelaire observed with prophetic accuracy in speaking about the dandyists, such “complicated material conditions to which they [Dandyists] submit, from an impeccable toilet at every hour of the day and the night to the most perilous feats of the sporting field, are no more than a system of gymnastics designed to fortify the will and discipline the soul.”<sup>10</sup> Supporting their elaborate game in similar fashion, the Dadaists fanciful clothing aimed to project a certain religion by physically inviting a process of socialization, what an 1893 journal of gymnastics called “a complete system of psychic, aesthetic and physical culture.”<sup>11</sup> It was, at the turn of the century, for Dandyists and for Dadaists after them, a “rediscovery of the body” as a reaction against “bourgeois respectability,” both an aesthetic and an ascetic ideal which the Dadaists embraced with the fervor of converts to their new religion. As Huelsenbeck exclaims in the play by quoting from Hugo Ball’s Journal, “Art aims to please the public with exquisite tastes” (7).



**Fig. 6:** Tristan Tzara arriving in Zurich in 1915, welcomed by Marcel Ianco

10. Baudelaire, Charles. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. trans. and ed. J. Mayne. London: Phaidon Press, 1964.

11. Quoted in Mark M. Anderson. *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle*, New York: Clarendon Press, 1992. 74

By the end of the Great War that has encroached the Dadaists behind the war zone, "Dada had broken out of the Swiss matrix. Paris was already full of Dada flyers, Berlin was also roaring dadaizing" (23), but Tzara was contemplating new shores. Unlike his friend Janko who went back to Bucharest, Tzara chanted in characteristically singular mode: "I've carried my country on my back" (24). The questions of identity, place and belonging translated into Dada and the quality of a dada life: contradiction, approximation, prodigality, resistance to definition.

He ended up in Paris, where the Dadaists had to make way for Breton and the surrealists. But the Surrealists were unable to heed the Dadaists who "wanted to make people better, to help them understand that the only brotherhood is found in a moment of intensity in which the beautiful is life focused on the height of a tightrope ascending towards effulgence" (*Faites vos jeux*, 24)

Could this sense of idealized brotherhood have prompted Tzara to join the horrors of Soviet politics and membership in the French Communist Party? Or was it the fear of fascism? Pop-Curșeu's play certainly flirts with the idea of a silly choice when their Tzara addresses Hugo Ball as "Comrade Guidencrantz" and Huelsenbeck as "Rosenstern" in yet another allusion not only to Hamlet's two meddling friends who end up badly but also to Queen Gertrude of the Shakespearean original who mixes up the two worthies as a direct reaction to their clownish identity. With the messianic expectations of Communism dampened by Khrushchev's 1956 invasion of Hungary, Tzara renounced membership in the party and, in the play's lineup, became linked with the murkiness of the Levant, which is suggested in Tzara's claim of "having been born in Constantinople" (26). For him, as for the Dadaists, borders were largely imaginary, or in any case the world was an extended Levant that translated into an eternity of connectedness separating the official, paper geography from aesthetic constructs.

To Saint Gargal's pronouncement that the Dada Movement died because of "the absence and refusal of ideology" or that the Dada Movement died in 1923, Tzara is offering a solid rebuke: "The whole world was Dada, take a look around you, dada is still alive today, self-dissolution propelled it into eternity" (25). Is this a Christian eternity? One is certainly inclined to feel that way given Radu Cernatescu's view that "Dadaism is revealed as the most violent mystical movement in the arts"<sup>12</sup> or the Dadaists' own claim in

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12. "Mistica dadaismului," <http://Radu-CERNATESCU.BLOGSPOT.COM/>. May 1, 2008.

Manifestul colectiv, "Dada soulève tous" of 1921 that "Dada existe depuis toujours. La Sainte Vierge déjà fut dadaïste."<sup>13</sup>

By attaching Christian ties to their claims, the Dadaists longed for transcendence in their art. This certainly appears to be the glue of Pop-Curșeu's play as the authors link the major Dadaists with the saints of the early Christian church now residing in the celestial realm and with Tzara knocking at Heaven's gate.

With Dada leaking out into today's world, would a revival of the interest in the aesthetic sublimation of Christian values unify today's Europe? This could certainly be a hidden message within the play. Tzara, the approximate man, lives in the present as much as in the past or the future. Mysticism and metaphysics are the popular forms of Dada now in vogue, particularly evident in the New Age, vegans, gluten free diets, Blue Whale games, churches, mosques, and so on. As the countries of Europe are besieged by migrants and terrorist plots, the resetting of the button to simple village wisdom embraced by Dada is suggested humorously in the play's Romanian title, *Tzara arde și Dada se piaptână*. Widely circulated in various Balkan countries, the proverb *țara arde și baba se piaptână* has a form of mystical currency with its reliance on the traditions of the Old and the New Testament that may just take Europe on its onward journey of faith posing as the afterlife of art in a reconfigured contemporary space.

Like Hamlet who casts his dying voice for the new Prince Fortinbras in a suggestive turn from Denmark's hierarchic sovereignty to the anticipation of the new, horizontally configured political structures<sup>14</sup>, Tzara marks at heaven's gate the representational field of Dada as the space of art in which sovereign and subject alike are inscribed. Dramatically, then, Dada allegorizes in Pop-Curșeu's intriguing vision the transition from modernity, where art and the artist are inseparable from the collective domain, to Dadaism's rationalized and effusive aesthetic space where the Dada artist emerges, even as he constitutes himself against the aesthetic, as *a contradiction* that our world will retain and cherish. With Tzara, the aesthetic is recast precisely as the collapse of the horizontal, or as transcending the reinforced horizontal into horizon, i.e., the discontinuity of Fortinbras's rule as a story of reinforced aesthetic origin which Tzara appropriates from Elsinore as his own self-inscribing character, the conjuring alternative of the inevitable shadow / artist of his own ordering and inaugural determination stacked on exclusionary and

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13. Manifestul colectiv, "Dada soulève tous" (1921), in 19:24, Ed. Daniel Stuparu.

14. Lupton, Julia. *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011, 89-91.

consolidating self-separation. Through Tzara, as the play's Christian setting suggests, the Dada artist evokes that quintessential aesthetic sensibility of the early saints afflicted with a narcissism prior to ego, indistinguishable from sociality and expressing a community in suspension.

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**ILEANA ALEXANDRA ORLICH** is President's Professor and Professor of English and Comparative Literature, as well as Director of Romanian Studies at Arizona State University. Her books include *Silent Bodies: (Re)-Discovering the Women of Romanian Short Fiction (2002)*; *Articulating Gender, Narrating the Nation: Allegorical Femininity in Romanian Fiction (2005)*; *Myth and Modernity in the Twentieth-Century Romanian Novel (2009)*. All from Columbia Press, New York. Also: *Avantgardism, Politics, and the Limits of Interpretation: Reading Gellu Naum's Zenobia (Paideia, 2010)*; *Staging Stalinism in Romanian Contemporary Theatre (2012)*. Among her translations into English are *Mara (Slavici)*, *Hanu Ancutei (Sadoveanu)*, *Tache de Catifea (Agopian)*, *Patul lui Procust (Camil Petrescu)*, *trilogia Hallipa (Papadat-Bengescu)*, and *Ciuleandra (Rebreanu)*. Her translations for the stage include *Travesties (Tom Stoppard)*, *Hamlet. A Version (from Russian with Mihaela Lovin) (Boris Akunin)*, and *Interrogation in Elsinore (Carlos Manuel Varela)*. Her book, *Subversive Stages: Theater in pre- and post-Communist Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria* is forthcoming from CEUPRESS, New York and Budapest.

**CREATION, INTERVIEWS,  
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## *Imagination and Empathy: Coalescence, Transfer and Embodiment*

CAMELIA CURUȚIU-ZOICAȘ<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Empathy calls for the ability to transform another's attitudes by a perceptive, cognitive and affective transposition. By its extraordinary capacity of generating images, of vitalizing performances and of turning them into certainties and beliefs, by its distorting quality (ensuring and enabling both the selection and joining of images that belong to the subject's previous experience and the generation of new images that are not matched in actual reality), the actor's imagination creates and projects in front of the spectator fictional, fantastic realities, which go beyond the perceptible reality, which provide alternatives to reality, by defying the borders of verisimilitude and by exploring not only the possible, but also the impossible.

**Keywords:** imagination, empathy, fiction, transfer, identification, belief, quasi-emotion, acting verisimilitude

### **Imagination and psychological mechanisms: Imagination mainstay of scenic outcome**

In *The Actor between Truth and Fiction*<sup>2</sup> the actor is defined from the viewpoint of Albert Camus who would compare the actor's situation with the one of the absurd man who, "while entering deeper and deeper lives that are not his, eventually carries them in real life and shapes his being on the appearances that he transfigures"<sup>3</sup>. Thus, Camus "translates in the existential sphere a trait of the actor's performing creativity: the latter's tendency to

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1. *Theatre and Television Faculty, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. camelia\_curutiu@yahoo.com*

2. Doina Dragnea and Andrei Bălăneanu, *Actorul între adevăr și ficțiune* [The Actor Between Truth and Fiction] (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1986).

3. *Ibid.*, 10.

make up a fictional character, by using the data of his real person. Because to be a performer is not only to be, it is first of all to create"<sup>4</sup>. This skill is owed to the actor's creative and imaginative faculties that manage to generate living characters and to paint fiction as reality, moreover creating beings that are "more alive than all the living"<sup>5</sup>. And even more real than those we can see in reality.

Therefore, in the art of the actor, imagination

becomes "a hand" held by imagination, which is continued by the little finger (sensations), the ring finger (perception), the middle finger (thought), the index (memory), and the thumb (affectivity and motivation). The personality is the power that gets the fingers together, gets them close to the imagination, clenches them into a "fist", gives them power or relaxes, weakens them, and everything that was earned could be lost. The imagination is the "clenching fist" or the "relaxed palm that lets everything slip through".<sup>6</sup>

Whether we talk about voluntary or involuntary imagination, about reproductive or creative imagination or about their techniques, about representation or the mental image, its relation with the other psychological processes, imagination is and will be a complex phenomenon that was, is and will be the object of numerous controversies, no matter the field of research or the perspectives from which this concept will be approached and defined.

Imagination has a fundamental role not only in human activity, but also and especially in the artistic effort, since it is the "clenching fist or the palm that relaxes and lets everything slip through"<sup>7</sup>; it selects and combines images picked from the previous experience, it generates and it recreates images that do not have a match in actual reality, it projects complex planes and fictional, fantastic realities beyond the perceptible reality, it foresees future by virtual realities, it provides alternatives and it defies the restrictions of reality, it approaches both the possible and the impossible, it creates hypotheses, it prepares and reveals sudden, original and innovative solutions, it creates certainties and beliefs. Imagination implants "the consciousness of alterity, of the possible."<sup>8</sup>

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4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 5.

6. Mielu Zlate, *Psihologia mecanismelor cognitive* [The Psychology of Cognitive Mechanisms] (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 511.

7. Ibid. 519.

8. Ibid.

Every actor needs to know the importance of his or her imagination and he or she needs to be able to work orderly with images, representations, memories, fantasies, desires, the subconscious, dreams; the actors needs to be an active element or participant in this process; the actor needs to acquire and develop the feeling of artistic construction, the rules of composition by a permanent imaginative modification of the past, of the present and of the future. The actor needs to be aware of the power of his or her imaginary, of his or her inner space created by hopes, creations, and fantasies, by the connection that he or she has with his or her past or future, dreams, desires, and especially with his or her imagination, which will shape his or her creative personality and, last but not least, his work of art. The connection between the imaginary and the imagination reveals, on the one hand, the importance of the creator, of the material of which he or she is made (memories, past, present, future, desires, thoughts and aspirations, since the imaginary is the material with which the imagination works), and, on the other hand, the importance of imagination (in our context, the imaginary is also the product, a new creation) that, by its techniques and forms, creates a new, actual, present and possible world, a virtual, fictional and imaginary world. Against this backdrop, the imaginary seems as important as the actor's feelings and perceptions, since it allows him or her not only the access to his or her inner self, but also the extraction of the material necessary for the creation and completion of his or her work; it is precisely the product of imagination, a parallel, particular world, an illusion, a veridical and possible fiction. The actor creates living images from his or her imaginary; they will prompt strong feelings, and the products of imagination may become an object of perception, of the imaginary as a product.

While, through memory, the actor is able to reproduce, invoke and experience sounds, images, senses, situations, spaces, circumstances and previous relationships, through representations, images and reproductive imagination, they detach from this material reality. Reproductive imagination builds and changes permanently, it uses memories not only with a reproductive value, but also with a reconstructive one, by the update, restructuring of past experiences and the continuous transformation of images and details in the form of plastic, original, higher images of the subject.

In acting, reproductive imagination has the extraordinary power of creating materials, of drafting new images without a counterpart in his or her previous experience. It provides the actor with the possibility of fitting in new, previously unknown and unperceived contexts, without limiting

knowledge to a perceived experience. Thus, the actor will manage to know a presumed and always possible reality, he or she will associate and generate new images, he or she will split in segments, in components, will recombine the representations and will create a new, interesting and unusual image, not just by the modification of an evocation, but by the compositional reconstruction of representations, of memories, of the absent object. In this case, we are talking about the power of creative imagination of transforming an event, circumstance or past perceived object, an object that otherwise does not exist in space or in time, into an unfamiliar, new, foreign and original one. Thus, imagination participates in the creation of new images that did not exist in the subject's previous consciousness or experience, by accompanying the past representations and memories with current projections; it combines, transforms, changes significations and it recreates the past. By combining real life experiences, his or her memories with the imagined world, the actor can experience a new, complex world filled with representations and interesting images. Here, reproductive imagination comes close to being mistaken for creative imagination that is concerned not only with reality, but also with unreality; it combines and uses the acquired elements in the creation of a new reality, according to the subject's needs and desires; it seeks its object not only on the field of perception, but also in the field of the imaginary; it is spontaneous and creative. Creative imagination is the most complex form of imagination and it relies on quality principles, being defined by the relation to its finality. The creative side of creative imagination is not limited, like in the case of reproductive imagination, to the manner of transformation and combination of imaging sequences, but it involves, apart novelty and originality, the connection of the product, of the idea (characterized by originality, novelty and social importance) to a specific deep and revealing sense of life. Therefore, the difference between the two types of imagination is not given by their creative manifestations, but by the element of originality. Thus, imagination is the basic ingredient of creativity, the latter being the extraordinary capacity of transforming the fruit of imagination in creation. While imagination allows us to think about absent, unreal and even fantastic things, creativity lets us do something significant with these products, with imagination itself. Creativity and creative imagination are, therefore, the human capacity of generating original ideas and solutions that are consistent with or adequate to the given problems and circumstances, being the first stage in the process of innovation.

Imagination explores mainly the unknown, the possible and the impossible, the future and the fantastic, but, without help from thinking, *the spine* of imagination, which develops mentally strategies, plans, it issues opinions and arguments, it deduces, systematizes and analyzes, it could not create logically and coherently the fiction of his or her work. These two processes are in a permanent connection and interaction: while thought (thinking) proposes solutions and provides data and ideas about a specific problem, about reality, by his or her imagination the subject develops, invents hypotheses and strategies of solving this problem by the numerous techniques with which it works (of agglutination or amalgamation, of amplification or diminution, of analogy and association, of removal or approach, of substitution or adaptation, of empathy). The power of thought is linked with imaginative power, and both of them play an important role in the actor's adaptation to the proposed performance situations. The objectivizing of the creative work, by the analysis of thought, by reflection and criticism, enables the understanding, the guessing, the knowledge and the transposition of the actor in acting situations and actions; thus, imagination becomes a back-up of logical thinking. This trait helps inventiveness, by the guessing and prefiguring of the many proposed solutions, because imagination modifies, restructures, eliminated, includes, and creates new elements, ideas and images, it analyzes, develops and recovers them. In the act of creation, the power of thinking is linked with imaginative power, but while with the help of his or her imagination the actor creates and works with fictional situations as if they were real, this analysis synthetizes, involves and issues hypotheses across its artistic approach.

Empathy calls for the ability to transform another's attitudes by a perceptive, cognitive and affective transposition. This means participatory will, an imaginative effort of prediction and transposition in the other's psychology, of emotional access to the partner's reference-framework, of partial identification with him/her, but without dropping the *as if*. Empathy, affectivity and motivation thus become, in the performing arts process, elements that act on the quality of the creation and drive affective, emotional and behavioral reactions; through them, a work of art is not only innovative, it is also valuable.

Therefore, imagination is closely linked to all the psychological mechanisms. While throughout time it was considered a "vacation of reason"<sup>9</sup> or "a sin against the soul"<sup>10</sup> that had to be kept restrained or quarantined as

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9. Ibid., 511.

10. Ibid.

explained by Mielu Zlate, it becomes “so important for the human psyche, that, without it, cognition, values would be paralyzed, the subject would become sterile, it should explore and self-explore.”<sup>11</sup> Against the backdrop of the acting art, it becomes the main pillar of artistic creation, of the creative process, it is the one that can make an object that existed once or an inexistent object become evoked and be brought back or become real for the actor or for the audience, it is the one that shapes beliefs about objects, circumstances, situations or actions, it creates fictions and imaginary worlds, expressive or revelatory works of art in relation to the meaning of human life.

### **Imagination: Projection, Believe and Identification**

An imaginary object, albeit inexistent as such, may be present in the image as real as if it were physical, the only thing that could make the difference between the two being “the different planes of existence”<sup>12</sup>. In the context of the image and of the imagination, this mechanism is called the naïve metaphysics that appears when

you divert your spirit from the pure contemplation of the image as such, as soon as you think about the image without shaping images, a drift occurs and, from the assertion of the essential identify between the image and the object, we go to the assertion of an identity of existence. From then on, the image is the object, we conclude that the image exists like the object.<sup>13</sup>

The actor works in the construction of the fictional world, on the one hand, with the superior cognitive process and with the intuition in the case of creativity and, on the other hand, with intuition, affectivity, imagination, transfer and substitution, in the case of empathy. An image, a specific situation or reaction may lead to an identification with an exterior reference system. In the case of empathy, the actor manages to identify with the fictional world by an affective knowledge, by a total contagion or fusion with the fictional. In the creative process, such knowledge operates intuitively, by imagination and its techniques, by analogies, associations, substitution and by affectivity.

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11. Ibid., 512.

12 Jean Paul Sartre, *Imaginația* [The Imagination] (Oradea: Aion, 1997), 7.

13 Ibid., 8

In his work *Transfer and acting expressiveness*,<sup>14</sup> Gheorghe Neacșu analyzes the relation between the inner creation and embodiment or “gesture-standing acting expressivity”<sup>15</sup> for the purpose of identifying the main characteristics of the acting talent. Apart from the two basic instruments of the creative process, i.e. imagination and affectivity, it introduces a new trait, “acting projection”<sup>16</sup> which relates to the actor’s empathic capacities of transposing, an important characteristic of talent. Based on the experiences performed, they state that “the cognitive side of the acting transposition is characterized by the originality of imagination and by the capacity of heralding the expressive model”<sup>17</sup>. Neacșu states that prefiguration is characterized by three specific traits

presence of the movement elements during the introjection of the role data for the development of the mental model of the character, by the actor’s self-projection instrument of dramatic performance, in the imagined model, and by the selectively anticipative function of this self-projection in the process of acting embodiment.<sup>18</sup>

Based on this traits Neacșu concludes that “acting transposition presents, as creative aptitude, like a three-parameter unit: the originality of imagination, acting prefiguration and affective experience; deeply significant correlations of the three parameters are present.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, an important component of the acting creation process and of artistic talent is in the actor’s empathic capacity, a capacity that may be found closely connected both to imagination, and to their capacity of prediction, since empathy is a form of knowing things intuitively.

In his book *Empathy and Personality*<sup>20</sup> Stroe Marcus emphasizes the significance of this phenomenon that, in his opinion, is the most important component of artistic talent. This provides a complex view of the psychological mechanism of empathy and it claims that three conditions are necessary in its triggering, analogous to those proposed by Mariana Caluschi in her paper *Empathy, Social Life Implications*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gheorghe Neacșu, *Transpunere și expresivitate scenică* [Transposition and Stage Expressivity] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1971), 34.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 51

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 144

<sup>20</sup> Stroe Marcus, *Empatie și personalitate* [Empathy and Personality] (Bucharest: Atos, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Mariana Caluschi, “Empathy, Social Life Implications”. *Social Psychology I*, Iași, VII, 165.



At Marcus, the first condition is the knowledge of the model. This knowledge is possible by imaginative associations or by assumptions in relation to the actor's experiences, thus triggering the empathic process, by introjection. The second condition is fulfilled based on the one above and it involves, by analogy, a projection of the self in the other's psychology; the third condition is obtained based on intuition and it involves the formulation of predictions in relation to the other's behavior; again, here, we are talking about the role or the acting partners, and the relation by the projection of the actor's own behavior.

The psychological transposition in another's system of reference allows, as put by Solomon Marcus, not only "an act of empirical knowledge of the partner"<sup>22</sup> but also an act of affective projection. The cognitive function involves an accurate forecast of the potential behavior and, thus, an "anticipation"<sup>23</sup> of the behavioral strategy. By emotion, by intuition, it can also generate an act of affective projection; the actor can send to the future character his or her own affective experiences.

Therefore, apart from the inner, psychological conditions of the one who empathizes (the actor) and the one that relates to projection, to the projection of the self in the other's psychology, either role or partner, of mental image, an important condition that is not necessary with creativity, is the circumstantial one, which, in the opinion of Solomon Marcus, relates to the belief based on the "acceptance of the one who empathizes"<sup>24</sup> and which is underlying the triggering of the empathic conduct and favors the appearance of this phenomenon. This tendency is also emphasized by Mariana Caluschi who says that, apart from the basic preliminary conditions, the model, the affective characteristics, an extremely important precondition is "the subject's belief in transfer (transposition) convention"<sup>25</sup>.

While in the case of creativity the control of the product, of the work of art is performed depending on its originality, in the case of empathy, the following elements or characteristics prevail: intuition, mobility and psychological flexibility, communication, affectivity, emotion and physiological reactions. Therefore, the product is the acquisition of a state of empathy, no matter if we talk about role, partner or audience,

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22. Stroe Marcus, *Empatie și personalitate*, 25.

23. *Ibid.*, 26

24. *Ibid.*, 30.

25. *Ibid.*, 165.

by which the 'I' feels identified with the other, being able to re-experience emotions, thoughts and actions of the partner. All of them may be objectivized in an original behavior that bears the mark of the one who empathizes.<sup>26</sup>

In the empathic process, no matter if we talk about the one who is expressed in the artistic art of the creative process, the finished product is the acquisition of that state whereby the actor feels identified with the other, being able to experience or re-experience emotions, thoughts and actions of the image, object or subject with which the mirroring (empathy) is performed and whose finality means a personal and original behavior.

While creative imagination is the one that generates original solutions that lead to an innovative work of art, in the case of empathy, substitutive imagination is the one that enables the triggering of the affective, emotional and behavioral reactions, and which makes that a work of art be more than innovative, but also extremely valuable, because it is the one that makes the transition from the imaginary to reality, from the idea to the material thing. The entire creative process is a long string of events mixed with memories, experiences, a flow of created, re-created or pure mental images, fictions and possible worlds that unfold in front of, in the mental plane of the actor, and empathy is the one that overlaps and identifies (without the loss of self-awareness) the actor with the playwright's work, with their own choices, or those of the director or partner.

There are, however, preconditions without which the empathic act and empathy would be impossible. They relate to the existence of a specific model, to the affective traits, to the "acceptance of the one who empathizes"<sup>27</sup> and to the "belief in the transfer (transposition) convention"<sup>28</sup>.

When we talk about the first condition, in relation to the existence of a model, Solomon Marcus emphasizes three means or possibilities of contact of the subject with the external model. The first possibility is reached by involving the partner's direct perception and it is characteristic to any interpersonal relationship; the second by the involvement of the model representation, as with the dramatic actor's transposition (transfer), and the third by the involvement of imagination, lie with the creation or

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26. *Ibid.*, 166.

27. *Ibid.*, 30.

28. Mariana Caluschi, "Empathy, Social Life Implications," 165.

“the invention of an artistic model”<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, no matter if the model is a truly perceived, represented or imagined one, it will be later transferable in his psychology as long as there is a large information range and the object or the model is found on known territory.

The second condition relates to the subject’s inner circumstances or psychological predispositions: sensitivity, a large information and affective background, emotional experience, imaginative capacities that evoke substitutive imagination, the desire of affective communication, of self-knowledge. The importance of substitutive imagination and its input in this context are extremely large, which favors empathic conduct. Solomon Marcus borrows from Ezra Stotland three specific forms of empathy that are shown, as he says, by an imaginative-affective way: “image-self condition” where the subject imagines what he would feel if he were in the place or in the circumstance of the mode, “image-him condition” whereby the individual or subject imagines the model’s state in a specific circumstance, and the last one, “watch-him condition” whereby the subject “observes the model’s movements or physical responses”.<sup>30</sup>

The last condition of belief relates to the identification and transfer of the subject in another’s psychology, while keeping the presence the awareness of his own identity. As seen above, this relates either to the belief in the convention of transposition (transfer) or to the belief based on the acceptance of the one who empathizes. Is this predisposition an essential characteristic of empathy in the performance process? Does it favor the step of incorporation (embodiment) and illumination?

By his imagination, the actor manages to create possible realities, he completes, stimulates and recovers assumptions, generates series of logic and coherent actions that will lead him implicitly to the feeling of truth and belief.<sup>31</sup> Once every element is added in a logical and coherent manner, the actor will experience a new attitude to the inexistent nothingness, an attitude of the truth of the action, of the feeling and of belief. Thus,

if a single small truth and a moment of belief may put the actor in a state of creation, an entire series of moments, in a logical and coherent order, will create a very large truth and a full, long-term period of authentic belief.<sup>32</sup>

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29. Stroe Marcus, *Empatie și personalitate*, 30.

30. *Ibid.*, 32.

31. Konstantin Stanislavski. *Munca actorului cu sine însuși*. (București: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, 1955), 181.

32. *Ibid.*, 166.

which will support and reinforce each other.

According to research conducted by Thomas Pavel<sup>33</sup> on fictional realities, “the what if” game involves two different levels of fictional activity; contrary to simple worlds, it has a “complex structure”<sup>34</sup>, by joining two or more worlds in a single structure. This complex structure may be called “dual structure”<sup>35</sup> made of two worlds, joined by correspondence. This relation means that, for example, Maria, in a game of make-believe “in the first universe will be taken as a cook in the second universe, that sand in the first universe will be taken as cakes in the second universe, and so on and so forth.”<sup>36</sup>

In the context of the performing art, an important mechanism of creation of logic and of verisimilitude of the parallel door that generates and assists the feeling of truth and belief in the simulated game is the generation of an isomorphism, of a correspondence between the world that the actor has to embody and his or her objective world. Of course, there are structures in which “the primary universe does not enter into an isomorphism with the secondary universe, because the latter includes entities and states of affairs that lack a correspondent in the former”<sup>37</sup>. In this case, imagination uses productive, creative elements, it builds not on a relation of correspondence, but on invention.

### **Imagination: Authentic or mimicked empathy? Emotion or quasi-emotion?**

We are dealing here with the originality of imagination, which generated original reactions to specific stimuli in the activity; it stirred internal and external reactions, it created a powerful relation with the fictitious object. Affective responses are the result of this relation, acquired by the feeling of truth and by the actor’s belief in the imagined world. This production resides in the actor’s identification with the framework in which he or she conducts his or her action and emphasizes the expressive capacities of imagination. Thus, just as the child’s game first involves “a

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33. Pavel, Toma. *Lumi ficționale*. (București: Ed. Minerva, 1992), 8.

34. *Ibid.*, 90.

35. *Ibid.*, 90-91.

36. *Ibid.*, 91.

37. *Ibid.*, 91.

plastic tendency, the need to translate an inner image, and the execution, as it happens always, reinforces and establishes the tendency that gives life to the performance"<sup>38</sup>, the actor's game needs a clear relation of internal creation, prefiguration and expressiveness.

But which is the feeling that explains the mechanism through which the actor, within his or her fictional game, may have the feeling of pity, love, fury, despair, as long as he or she knows that what he or she can see, say and hear is not real? How can he or she really feel sad or wasted (sometimes even involuntarily) when he or she knows that the one in front of him will never leave him or that the edge of the precipice is just the stage? How can he cry for Hecuba? Which is the explanation of this phenomenon, of the belief in a similar situation?

When we talk about a real emotion, in a fictional (acting) context, the problem of the authenticity of the subject's behavior is raised; thus, we will be introduced to one of the most controversial issues of the actor's creation, i.e. the affective experience of the role and its circumstances.

The product of the transfer (transposition) is the affective identification of the objective 'I' with the model, image, role or partner, an identification with the purpose of an authentic physiological and behavioral reaction, rather than a mimicking of it. We could talk here not about real empathy, but about the imitation of it. This statement, opposes, for instance, Sartre's ideas; when he spoke about the psychology of emotion, he said that the actor, in performing his or her role, "imitates joy, sadness, is not in fact overwhelmed by joy or sadness, because these behaviors concern a fictional universe."<sup>39</sup>

The authenticity and the experiential dimension of the emotional process, of the affective state in relation to a specific context have raised numerous questions and methodological issues. Against this backdrop, we are looking into the nature of real experience that could complete successfully the empathic process in a situational context.

Kendall Walton, in his book *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* when he speaks about the affective response of the subject to the fictional context, he denies the authenticity of emotion.

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38. Henri Delacroix, *Psihologia artei, Eseu asupra activității artistice*, trans. Victor Ivanovici și Virgil Mazilescu, (București: Meridiane, 1983), 42.

39. Jean Paul Sartre, *Psihologia emoției*, trans. Leonard Gavrilu (București: Univers enciclopedic Gold, 2010), 71.

According to him, the subject experiences “make-believably”<sup>40</sup> in the evoked situations. He offers the example of Charles who, in a fictional context, feels fear, for example. This condition is a fictional one; he is an actor and an object in their own game, an accessory that generates fictitious truths about himself. He admits, however, that characters or specific fictional situations may act on us by prompting emotions in various ways, physical, psychological, and that these feelings and sensations are strikingly similar with real sensations and feeling, but, no matter what our body or mind tells us that we experienced or felt, it is in fact a “quasi-emotion, quasi-fear.”<sup>41</sup>

Thus, this make-believe - I pretend that - in the case where there is an emotional response to characters and the presented fictional events, is nothing else but fictional belief that generates emotions, feelings or states corresponding to quasi-emotions quasi-feelings. This leads to the next example, which supports the aforementioned aspects:

if we decide to direct the Twelfth Night and I decided that I will be Viola and you will be Sebastian, then I established the convention that means that what I say and do is in fact what Viola says and does in fiction.<sup>42</sup>

Paradoxically, the actor may feel various emotions even if he or she knows that what happens to him or her, to the partner, to the mental images is not real. Therefore, the emotions he or she experiences are real in a fictional context, i.e. they are, as also claimed by Walton, fictional truths that generate quasi-emotions.

Another argument that backs up the aforementioned aspects is the frequent case where a child creates an imaginary friend, a playful witness, and claims that the latter is true. The mechanism, this make-believe, is very similar to the game in which is actor is involved. Even if he or she knows that his or her partner is not real, that they are fictitious, the child continues to believe in his or her existence. He or she may even have reactions accompanied by strong emotions to a fictitious situation in which his or her buddy is involved. He or she will experience real fear because of this belief, of the pretense that the monster is a real threat to his or her partner, i.e. a real response in a make-believe context.

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40. Walton, Kendall. *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 14.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

Thus, if the child has the instinctive skill of being caught in the game and react spontaneously to an imagined event, the actor, by his acceptance, desire and belief in the simulated act, undertakes consciously and deliberately this secondary reality and comes to believe in the authenticity of his act.

In the article *The Reality of Responses to Fiction*<sup>43</sup> it is said that

the important thing is not that an event is true or false, real or invented, but that it strikes a chord with the receiver. Some event may be true and not stir any emotional state or, on the contrary, it may be a fantastic event and the involvement and simulation may be more accentuated. Therefore, we should not define truth in relation to fact.<sup>44</sup>

In the actor's art, the acting experience, even if we consider a quasi-emotion or a "succession of typical moments, shortened and condensed"<sup>45</sup>, is an essential component of acting which means both the "condensed and essential reproduction of a suite of emotions, which, in the normal situation, would have been widely performed, and their suggestive representation"<sup>46</sup>.

Can these theories explain the actor's emotional response in an acting situation and the authenticity of the empathic process? Definitely, because the same affective structures are triggered, no matter if we speak about a fictional or a real situation, because the brain cannot distinguish between a real and an imagined activity, it is activated by the representation of a thing. In general, emotions are responses to mental representations that signal further structures, which, in their turn, lead to the occurrence of states, emotions, feelings: discontent, satisfaction, joy, fear and a series of corporeal (bodily) reactions, such as faster heart rate, butterflies in the stomach, etc.

Multiple ideas were invoked in order to explain the phenomenon of belief in relation to empathy, to affective and behavioral responses, either in a real, true context or in an imagined one. One of the driving conditions of this phenomenon is the existence of desire in relation to a specific evocation. In this sense, in the article *Cognitive theory of pretence*<sup>47</sup> Nichols and Stich defend the theory according to which our brain stores the information received by imagination and by beliefs in different mental boxes that have sets of characteristic and clear rules. They regulate the relation between behavior

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43. R.T. Allen, "The reality of Responses to fiction". *British Journal of Aesthetics* 26 (1/1986), 64-68.

44. *Ibid.*, 6.

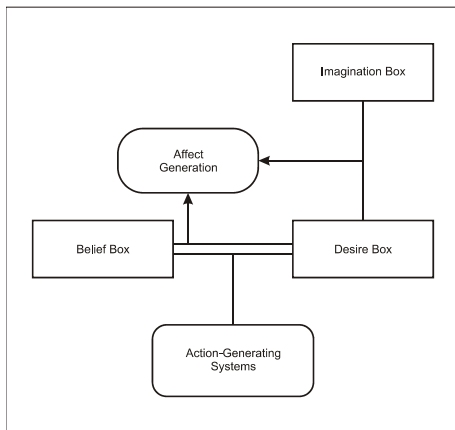
45. Miklós Bács, *Propeedeutica limbajului teatral nonverbal în arta actorului* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujană, 2012), 48.

46. *Ibid.*

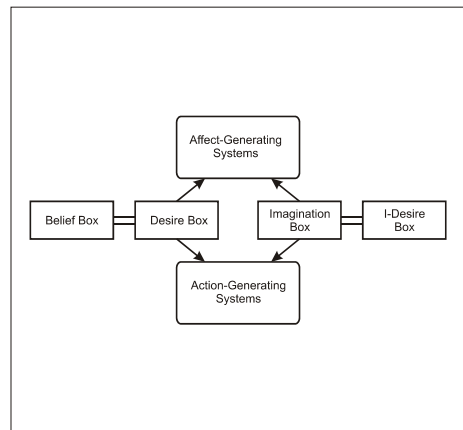
47. Stephen Stich, and Shaun Nicolas, "A cognitive theory of pretence," *Cognition* 74 (2000): 115-147.

and mental states. We have the “imagination box”, wherein there is a “possible world”, and a “belief box”, wherein there is a “world of convictions”<sup>48</sup>. No matter the background characteristic (real or created, simulated), the emotional response of those involved is caused first of all by the desire they have to behave in a manner similar to the “model’s, character’s or object’s behavior in a possible world, and of belie, as compared to this assumption”<sup>49</sup>. Subsequently, desire is a precondition of belief.

Conversely, in his article *Wanting Things You Don’t Want: The case for an Imaginative Analogue of Desire*<sup>50</sup> Andy Egan claims that, in a simulated context, desire and imagination are those that generate affective responses, rather than belief, because the subject is moved (affected) by what he imagines rather than by what he believes. This can be best seen in children. They imagine situations, roles, without truly believing in what they imagine. In the simulated act, they are guided by the action of imagination, by “what if” rather than the “make-believe”. The role of imagination and desire in the production of affective responses to imagined things is similar to the role of desire and belief in the generation of affective responses to believed things. But there is a major difference between believing in an event, as real, and imagining it. While in the former case the object is real, true and non-imagined, in the latter, the experience is imagined, but not believed to be real.



**Fig. 1:** Diagram - S. Nicolas, S. Stich<sup>51</sup>



**Fig. 2:** Diagram - Andy Egan<sup>52</sup>

48. Ibid., 122.

49. Ibid., 127.

50. Tyler, Doggett and Andy, Egan. “Wanting Things You Don’t Want: The case for an Imaginative Analogue of Desire,” *Philosophers’ Imprint*, Vol.7, (9/2007).

51. Ibid., 4.

52. Ibid.



*The theory of thinking*<sup>53</sup> supports the hypothesis according to which the emotional response to a simulated situation does not involve ineludibly the conviction or belief in the actual existence of this evocation, instead it involves the necessity of an imaginative proposal, of a mental representation and its maintenance. The representatives of this theory - Peter Lamarque<sup>54</sup>, Noel Carroll<sup>55</sup>, Murray Smith<sup>56</sup>- dismiss the necessity of real belief, when it comes to the emotional response to a simulated situation, by stating that, for an emotional response, one needs evaluative conviction on the related events.

Robert Cohen in *Acting Power*<sup>57</sup> supports the power of the actor's imagination to create and undertake an *what is* fictional context that will lead to a chain reaction of *as if* and *as though*, turning unexpectedly an acting context in a real one.

Under the principle of cognitive dissonance, he says, a relevant principle in the analysis of the actor's art, "we come to believe in our actions, irrespective of why we began them! Thus, cognitive dissonance may be defined as the power to live one's own lie the mechanism by which actors come to believe in their roles"<sup>58</sup>. Actual scientific proof in this sense was offered by professor Philip Zimbardo of Stanford University who performed the following experience: he built the world of a penitentiary in the Stanford basements and split the participants in two sides, prisoners and guards. Two days later the experience was halted because the subject who played the guards would punish, assault and even torture those in the roles of prisoners. The latter, in an advanced state of mental exhaustion, would take revenge on those identified as guilty or scape goats, "which led to severe psychosomatic disorders and anxiety syndromes."<sup>59</sup> The conclusion in relation to this experience is that illusion mixed inexplicably with reality, the created game with all the elements of actual reality with setting, costumes, actors and audience could no longer

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53. Steven Schneider, "The Paradox of fiction," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN, 2161-0002, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fict-par/>

54. Peter Lamarque, "How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 21 (4/1981): 291-304.

55. Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror; or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

56. Murray Smith, "Film Spectatorship and the Institution of Fiction," *Journal of aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (2/1995):113-127.

57. Robert, Cohen. *Puterea interpretării scenice. Introducere în Arta Actorului* trans. Anca Măniuțiu and Eugen Whol (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2007).

58. Ibid.,22.

59. Ibid., 22.

be distinguished from the actual context. Thus, Zimbardo established a context for acting, wherein the interaction between a psychological reality and a physiological one was authentic and intense. Cohen says that the presence of a context around an action will split experiences, feelings and the degree of focus on the related action, but it will also intensify them. The same thing applies to the acting context. A well-defined, structured and possible context will come to include actual circumstances in which the reality of every moment will be, both for the actor and for the involved audience, a vivid and overwhelming reality.

### **Imagination: Trigger of fictional truths**

Therefore, imagination creates a context that favors the phenomenon of belief. While in a real context, belief and desire are the basic mechanisms in the generation of affective responses, on stage imagination and desire are the instruments that support directly their appearance. The belief in the assumption appears, as seen, because of the context created by imagination and by the subject's desire of behaving similarly to the manner in which the model, the character or the object behaves in a possible world. The detailed creation of the physical context will lead to an inner context that will encourage the triggering of fictional truths, followed by physiological and behavioral reactions.

Once the context is created, and by applying his or her intuition and inner stimuli (memory, representation, imagination, affectivity) on the one hand, and creative imagination and external stimuli, physical actions, objects, setting, costumes, make-up, decor, costume, the actor will act on his or her own mental system and, thus, on his or her own perception. Through the constant configuration and rearrangement of the fictional, physical and inner world, the reality of the performance will tend to become real, authentic, which will involve the belief in the simulated act; this process will generate, eventually, the fictional truths mentioned by Walton.

The subject's belief in the simulated act will prompt the actor's behavior and response to the performing arts reality in a spontaneous *as if/as though* manner, with the help of that affective contagion and affective coalescence with the simulated model, able to generate fictional truths. By the creation, understanding and setting of the physical context in a relatively

known territory by intuitive spontaneity, analysis and conscious development, reproductive and creative imagination and by the affective knowledge of the psychological backdrop of the model's inner objectives, the performance will be construed as real by the subject. Thus, the created fictional truths will prompt physiological responses followed by affective states and emotions. Imagination does more than participate in the shaping and transformation of affective states; it is a trigger and a driver. While, by imagination, a person may simulate his or her own affective existence, in the performing arts context the actor simulates another possible world and also experiences it *as if* it were real.

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**CAMELIA CURUȚIU-ZOICAȘ** is a PhD assistant professor at the Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Theatre and Television. Constantly working as a trainer and an actress, her interests develop around the study of memory and imagination in acting.



## *First Impression in Theatrical Casting*

DIANA ALDEA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** In theatre, casting is a complex process that is less frequently approached by specialized analyses, in comparison with film casting. This article seeks to emphasize the mechanisms involved in the shaping of the *first impression*, which matches the first chronological stage in the casting process. I will define the *first impression*, in the context of theatrical casting, as the manner of establishing the *actor's image* following the analysis of his/her **appearance** and **attitude** – shown more or less knowingly – by a stage director, within several seconds of their first meeting. Usually, the directors' trust in their own intuition, in the "reading" of the face, of the behavior and skills of those who appear in front of them, is absolute. But there have been quite a few cases where appearance has been contradicted by reality. On the other hand, of course, impressions cannot be shaped by the strict rules of logic, since the director is not a machine, but a human being who does not act only on rational factors, but also on affective and emotional ones. In the shaping of the first impression – a process that occurs in a limited timeframe, having a spontaneous and almost unconscious nature – an important role is played by **perception, attention, observation**, during which various *errors of assignment* may occur. All these elements turn casting into a unique event that focuses on a living, condensed and dramatic relation between the projections of two protagonists, the actor and the director, observers and observed alike<sup>2</sup>.

**Keywords:** casting, director, actor, first impression, error, observed, observer.

The casting is a process that takes place in the form of a competition during which actors take various tests in front of the director, in a limited timeframe. From the perspective of the director's creation, however, the

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1. Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, [dianaaldea9@yahoo.com](mailto:dianaaldea9@yahoo.com).

2. Paper presented in the National Conference of Doctoral Students, organized by the Doctoral School of Theatre and Film of the "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, 8-9 December 2016.

casting is the time when the director's vision of the show first makes contact with reality, when the characters, envisaged by the director based on the text, become actual possibilities. As a situation, the casting involves a "close" and basically uninterrupted and reciprocal supervision. In a relatively short time, a cyclic permutation of attention occurs between the actor and the director; each of them becomes observer and observed. A permanent exchange of information is performed between the two parties. Each of them thus evolves from a potential partner to a person identified as artist and as man.

When we look at the directors' statements regarding the manner in which they choose their actors for their cast, we may see that, although they assign substantial importance to the casting process, they define rather ambiguously the method by which they arrive at the roles. The "first impression", "a particular feeling", "intuition", these are just some of the reasons why they made a specific choice, they say. Logic and reason are often secondary. We will look at several examples. When asked about how they select their actors at the Théâtre du Soleil, Ariane Mnouchkine says:

How do I choose the people with whom I work? I expect from the people with whom I will work a number of things that are difficult to define. I may be trying to guess their childhood, their fantasies, their imagination, guts, sense of humor. Sometimes I may be wrong, but I realize that Théâtre du Soleil has a 44-year history and that, in this whole time, those who tried to harm us deliberately were at most six and, of them, three were insane. [...] The thing I'm looking for may be beyond the simple work done, beyond the correct execution.<sup>3</sup>

In an interview to the *Capital Cultural* magazine, director Alexandru Dabija is asked how he selects actors for the roles. His initial answer "If only I knew it, if only I knew it..."<sup>4</sup> (he laughs) is completed with important information when doubled by another question of whether his choices rely on intuition. Here is his answer: "I think so, yes. Yes. In the end, it's intuition, it's like choosing what to wear. Sometimes, I try to explain it to myself, too. Usually, this is what I do: I meet a group of actors, I look at them, we talk, and then I read the text again and imagine how they would look if they

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3. Beatrice Picon-Vallin (ed.), *Ariane Mnouchkine*, trans. Andreea Dumitru (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Camil Petrescu & Revista Teatrul Azi - supliment, 2010), 62-63.

4. "Regizorul nu e o născocire divină", *Capital Cultural*, last modified February 22, 2017, <http://capitalcultural.ro/alexandru-dabija-regizorul-nu-e-o-nascocire-divina/>.

played various characters. This is it, it's not an exact selection, it's something extremely subjective, in the end it also relates to intuition, mood, and ideas."<sup>5</sup>

Director Vlad Mugur recalled his first meeting with actor George Constantin, while he was an assistant in the Bucharest Theatre Institute, class of professor Nicolae Bălăţeanu. It all happened during the admission examination<sup>6</sup>. Vlad Mugur says: "...you know, I had a quality, I *guessed* talents, and I found in that thin and lean boy who moved incoherently a smiling look that could only mean talent."<sup>7</sup>

Such examples only illustrate the share of subjectivity in the decisions made by directors during casting. Closely related to the subjectivity of directing choices is the issue of the director's *first impression* on the actor standing in front of them: how is it shaped and what is its weight in the final choice? I will speak here about the **sources** of the first impression, about the actor's **evaluation** and the director's **decision**, but also about several **psychological processes** involved in the shaping of the first impression: the actor's *appearance* and *attitude*. The former, i.e. the appearance, called by the famous American sociologist Erving Goffman "expressive equipment"<sup>8</sup>, relates to *clothing, sex-, age- and race-related features, body stance, speech particularities, face expressions, gestures, etc.* – i.e. the overall information that we obtain by using our senses when we interact spontaneously with someone. The second source of the first impression is the "attitude": as said by Goffman, it may produce the first emotional reaction. Of course, says the American sociologist, we often expect a decisive correspondence between *appearance* and *attitude*. But we should not forget that the indicated sociologist is considering the "actors" of everyday life.

In the case of theatre, more often than not, the *exception from the rule* stirred the directors' interest and "exception" means here the cases of the actors at whom the appearance and the artistic skills are contrasting, which frequently led to immediate decisions of the directors. One example I'd like to emphasize here is Raymond Andrews', a 13-year old deaf-mute boy, deemed uneducable, who, nonetheless, had a significant influence on the work of

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5. Ibid.

6. Entry in the faculty of acting, a sub-species of theatrical casting.

7. Florica Ichim, *Conversation with Vlad Mugur* (Bucureşti: Teatrul azi, 2000), 34.

8. Erving, Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, romanian edition, (Bucharest, Comunicare.ro, 2007), 52.



American director Robert Wilson, inspiring the projects in which he also played various roles. Conversely, there is the case where the contrast between the artistic skills and the appearance may prompt a director to abandon an actor that he was considering initially for the role. Director Vlad Mugur had selected the well-known actor-poet Emil Botta for the role of Solness in Henrik Ibsen's *Master Builder*. Because the actor failed to show up for the first rehearsal, the director searched for him at home, where he found him, as recounted by him later, "sitting in bed covered with something like an army blanket, a plateful of cigarette butts, a plateful of grapes... He wore a content smile". Illuminated, Vlad Mugur dismissed him.

The first impression has a spontaneous and almost unconscious nature. Two important processes contribute to its appearance: *the evaluation* and *the assignment*. I will approach them individually.

## I.

The *evaluation* process occurs, first of all, based on the information that is obtained verbally, non-verbally and para-verbally<sup>9</sup> and, on the other hand, by psychological processes that are activated, especially at the director, in the first minutes of a casting. The first I would like to approach is perception.

In casting, we deal with a double **perception**: first, we are obviously speaking about the director's perception of the actor, according to the end purpose of the meeting, i.e. the casting in a specific role. Second, however, we are dealing with the reverse perception, from the actor toward the director; the former adjusts his or her behavior and performance depending on how he or she "senses" the director and of how he or she senses that he or she is perceived by the latter. American scientist Solomon Asch<sup>10</sup>, a pioneer of social psychology, interested in how we operate with perception of unknown people, says that we can speak about "forming impressions" rather than about "forming judgments or knowledge". The impression, a first step in the direction of knowing the other, may equate with a strong emotion, which can be enough in a director's choice of an actor. During the casting for the *Medea* play, staged

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9. Additional information can be found in my doctoral thesis *Observer and Observed in the Theatrical Casting Process. Socio-psychological Determinations of the "One-to-One" Relationship*, chapter III, not published.

10. Solomon Elliott Asch, "Forming impressions of personality," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 41 (3/1946): 258.

for the famous La Mama company, director Andrei Șerban was approached on the theatre halls, “by a young woman, her hair bright red, who wore a guitar around her neck” and who asked him whether he needed a composer for the performance. She was Liz Swados and, according to Andrei Șerban, her eyes and her stance inspired such strength that Șerban knew he could trust her; he decided right there and then to include her in the team.

In the forming of perception, **attention** and **observation** play a key role, since perception is an activity of analysis and synthesis. In casting, the correct orientation of **attention** is fundamental for the director. Decisive information may appear from a detail such as a movement of a hand or a particular tone in the voice; it may appear because of some awkward mishap of the actor or because of a word that he or she repeats. Psychologist Anne Treisman notes that the manner we operate our attention acts on what we see<sup>11</sup>. Selective attention will be either inner-oriented - the director and the actor must not forget what they are searching - or oriented toward the other. Inner attention is calibrated with intuition and with cultural information; attention toward the other opens the communication and it places us on the same frequency with “the whole”, to allow us to see the big picture.

The director’s talent is also seen in his or her capacity of guiding his or her attention in the right direction at the right time. Director Yury Kordonsky, recounting his first meeting with Victor Rebengiuc, says:

You talk to someone about life for half an hour, you approach very carefully specific topics and you see how your interlocutor’s eyes change color. You then see whether you are dealing with a good or a bad actor. That’s what happened with Victor. From the very first meeting, it was obvious that I would work with an exceptional actor.<sup>12</sup>

The basis of the observation of a person is given by the “superficial” elements that are the easiest to determine: physical appearance, bearing, physiognomy, gestures, or voice. Interviewed by Florica Ichim, director Vlad Mugur recounts how, when he had to stage A.P. Chekhov’s *Seagull* at the Konstanz Theatre (Germany), he chose actress Adelheide Loch, as Nina, only following a conversation over the phone.

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11. Anne Treisman, “How the Deployment of Attention Determines What We See,” *Visual Search and Attention* 14, no. 4-8 (1/2006), 411–443.

12. Simona Chițan, and Mihaela Mihailov, *Victor Rebengiuc – The Man and the Actor*, Romanian version, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008), 118-119.

## II.

The process of evaluation is followed by the process of assignment of the actor's behavior and artistic performance. Practically, after having been evaluated, the actor is now classified based on the director's interests, purposes and needs. If the actor did not stir the director's interest, the evaluation will rely mostly on categories of membership. Once the image is formed, good or bad, there is a tendency that the subsequent information on that actor is processed in such a way that it reinforces the already shaped impression.

The assignment is a psychological process whereby, for example, a director tries, on the one hand, to analyze an actor's behavior, in order to obtain as many pieces of information as possible about the latter's behavior and, on the other hand, he or she analyzes the latter's artistic performance. These operations of interpretation of the causes of an actor's behavior are called heuristics or errors.

A distorting factor is known as *the halo effect* and it relates to the impact of some features on the overall picture that we have of a person. The observer may be impressed or, on the contrary, may be upset by a specific trait of the actor, without considering other characteristics. If the director knows that the actor in front of him or her is sociable, he or she may also consider that the latter is also smart or efficient.

*The leniency/strictness error* is present when the evaluator becomes overly generous or, on the contrary, overly strict in relation to the actor's performance, based on the relationship that they have with the latter.

*The accessibility error* is seen in the tendency to estimate the changes of a performance depending on how easily we can envisage the actor in different situations. For example, we are focusing on a specific actor only because, back in faculty, we worked extremely efficiently. However, at present, perhaps that actor has no longer been cast in important roles, his artistic skills may have decreased significantly and his taste has no longer developed.

*Distorted thinking* occurs often, because we find it easy to imagine "what if...?", when real events are not fully satisfactory or if we were one step away from a great success or from a catastrophe. If the thing that we imagine gives us a better image than reality, we feel disappointed, frustrated and furious; on the contrary, if our imagination offers us a potential situation much worse than the real one, we feel relieved. For example, by a casting error for the role of Rosalind in *As You Like It*, a play staged in 1991, director Tompa Gabor chose, euphemistically stated by him, a different direction,

much less fortunate than the initial project. Another example, this time of a performance that turned out to be better than imagined, comes from the same director. This was Mrozek's *Tango*, which he had staged during faculty. Although the first cast formula was changed completely<sup>13</sup>, at the moment when the director made the replacements, and Petrică Nicolae obtained Stomil's part at the recommendation of Octavian Cotescu, the play found its direction, a direction better than the one foreseen.

*The recency effect.* The forming of an impression about an actor also depends on the director's most recent professional or private experiences. They tend to turn up frequently in one's mind or in conversation, and they have an impact on how a director interprets the final information, hence his or her opinion on the others, but also on his own behavior. Frequently, says George Banu<sup>14</sup>, when directors work in another country, they complain about the mediocrity of those actors, thinking that they are inferior to the actors in their own country. The phenomenon is perhaps lined with the nostalgia of a specific manner of directing, which is much more familiar. Thus, at Vlad Mugur, according to his own statement, the work with German actors - at the Konstanz theatre - had meant a permanent fight with the need of motivation and the refusal of the spontaneous indication frequently considered by the actors as excessive authority.<sup>15</sup>

*The primacy effect or the anchor effect.* The order in which someone's traits come to be known may act on their effect on the overall impression. Frequently, a piece of information has a stronger impact if it is the first one to be known about the other, even when the following pieces or the last piece of information that one receives contradict it clearly<sup>16</sup>. Once the observer

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13. The first cast was: Vali Popescu -Arthur, Vali Vlădăreanu-Stomil, Costică Bărbulescu-Edek and Cătălina Bărcă-Eleonora.

14. George Banu, *Beyond the Role or the Unruly Actor. Theoretical Miniatures, Portraits, Sketches*, trans. Delia Voicu (Bucharest: Nemira, 2008), 34.

15. Florica Ichim, *Conversation with Vlad Mugur*, (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Camil Petrescu, 2000), 145.

16. Jim Luchins conducted an experiment in which he presented to a number of subject the description of a boy as an extrovert in a context and an introvert in another one. When the subjects were asked to express a general impression about the boy, those who had read first the paragraph that described the boy as an extrovert, perceived Jim as an extrovert, while those who had read the paragraph who had read the paragraph that described the boy as an introvert, perceived the latter as an introvert. See Pierre Feyereisen, "Brain pathology, lateralization, and nonverbal behaviour," in *Fundamentals of Nonverbal Behavior*, ed. Robert Stephan Feldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 50.

finds that they have an adequate impression, they no longer pay attention to the subsequent information.

In order to be able to identify, more accurately, the casting-related psychological aspects, I have drafted and sent two questionnaires consisting of ten questions each to directors, on the one hand, and to actors, on the other hand. One of the questions asked from the directors was: *How important is the first impression about an actor, during casting?* I will quote below some of the most representative answers that allow me to move toward my conclusions. Thus, the reactions were: “[The first impression] It is very important. I think I know from the very first seconds whether I am dealing with someone who stirs my curiosity or if I don’t want to work with them. Moreover, I find that the man with whom I work should be morally ok and emotionally balanced. This may be a disadvantage at times, because talent does not always mean fine behavior.”<sup>17</sup> Or, another statement: “I don’t believe in a first impression, but in the feeling that you get from an actor at the end of the casting process. During casting, for a moment, you may like the person in front of you and next you may not like them any longer. I think the selection involves the average impression.”<sup>18</sup>

Leta Popescu, a Romanian stage director working mainly in the independent theatre speaks about the the first impression in the following terms: “Very important. But not final. You may consider the fact that actor X had a bad day and may give him or her another chance, but those who did not have a bad day will always win. Those who are not late, those who change their regular outfits, those who have opinions and who let themselves guided without let or hindrance. And you can feel and see this during casting.”<sup>19</sup> David Schwartz, on the other hand, states: “I almost never do casting. I need to know people better, to see how they react to various theatre technique. Therefore, I need to spend more time, at least several hours, if not even days, with the actors and actresses, to see how they work together, how they improvise, and especially – WHAT THEY ARE THINKING. Since I am putting on stage performances that carry an overt political message, I need actors who are largely tuned into it.”<sup>20</sup>

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17. Radu Alexandru Nica, Romanian stage director.

18. Delia Gavlitchi, Romanian stage director.

19. Leta Popescu is a Romanian stage director.

20. David Schwartz is a Romanian stage director.

## Conclusions

If I had to formulate conclusions, I would note that the forming of impressions cannot follow the strict rules of logic and objectivity, since the director is not a machine. In our mind, rational processes coexist with affective and emotional ones. At the same time, the forming of the first impression is a process that occurs in a limited timeframe. During casting, i.e. in the very short time, directors operate quick but imprecise, hence risky assessments. The directors' trust in their own intuition, essentially in the appearances of the human face and behavior, is so wide that they are stunned every time when appearances are challenged by reality. But the first impression resembles some kind of reflex and to control it voluntarily is very difficult. The difficulty of identifying the accuracy of the first impression prompts me to note the fact that it is not the truth value that is essential – because, in this case, there should be at least one unequivocal criterion of validation of the first impression; instead, the emotion that the actor communicates to the director is indispensable.

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*DIANA ALDEA* is a stage and film director, plastic artist, graduate of the Audio-visual Programmes MA of U.N.A.T.C. "I.L. Caragiale" Bucharest (2008), of the section of Stage Directing at the Faculty of Theatre in the Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj (2004), as well as of the Painting-Restoration specialisation at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj (2000). Her activity includes theatre and dance performances, directed in the Romania and abroad, teaching and exhibitions, with numerous paintings in private collections in Romania and abroad.

*“You have to give talented young people  
a chance to prove themselves”*

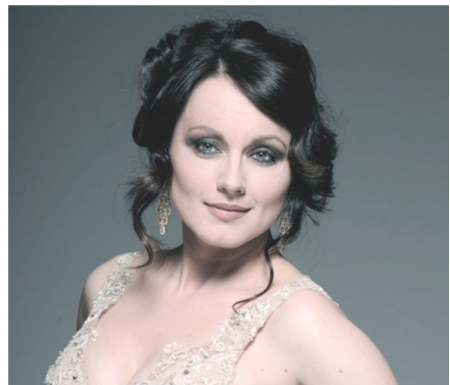
*Interview with the soprano Anita Hartig*

**MIHAIELA ILEA<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The interview with Anita Hartig aims to reveal the personality of the lyrical artist through a form of sharing the sensible, through the simple benchmarks of the world, art and life and the manner in which they are capitalized on the stage. Remembering the years growing up in Bistrita, the years spent as a student in Cluj and the leap to the big world of international lyrical stage has not changed her perception of her own personal values, but rather they build her character and lead to her artistic self. The meeting with Anita Hartig was occasioned by the premiere of Puccini’s *La Bohème* in Cluj, where the soprano played Mimi. The fragmented dialogue took place in unconventional places and situations (at the airport, in the car on the way to the hotel, in the backstage before the general rehearsal). The material formed the basis of a portrait documentary about Anita, broadcast by TVR.

**Keywords:** Anita Hartig, Opera, Cluj, Viena, Mimi, *La Bohème*, Zeffireli

The soprano **Anita Hartig** graduated from Gheorghe Dima Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca in 2006. She had a spectacular ascension, evolving alongside the international elite of lyrical artists. The role of Mimi in Puccini’s *La Bohème* earned her professional recognition, playing it in 2006 in Cluj-Napoca, in 2009 in Oradea, and then in 2012 at the Welsh National Opera, The Royal Opera in



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<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. [mihaiela.ilea@gmail.com](mailto:mihaiela.ilea@gmail.com).



London, Metropolitan Theatre New York and Vienna State Opera. With the same role, she appears in shows in Paris and Munich. In 2014, she debuts as Micaela in Bizet's Carmen at the Metropolitan, and in 2015 – as Violetta in Verdi's Traviata at Barcelona.

**Mihaiela Ilea:** *You just returned from Vienna for a new show, La Bohème, by Puccini. How do you think Mimi, the role you are going to play for the Romanian National Opera in Cluj, is going to be?*

**Anita Hartig:** Mimi has gone through some experiences, she has grown up, learned new things, developed. I am curious to see how I am going to conduct myself. I am quite a spontaneous person and I easily react to my surroundings and to the energy around me, that of my colleagues "and friends". I am eager to see how Mimi is.

**M.I.:** *Mimi was also your debut role in 2006 in Cluj-Napoca, and since then you continued playing her in Romania and abroad. Now, at the Romanian Opera in Cluj, you work alongside old friends in a show with a similar cast as the one you were involved in at Oradea in 2009, when you were a young hope of the lyrical scene. The show is directed by Ina Hudea, as in the case of the 2009 show, Rudolfo was played by Hector Lopez, now by the tenor Teodor Ilincăi. There will also appear other important voices, Adrian Sâmpetrea as Colline, and Florin Estefan as Marcello. What do you think about this professional reunion?*

**A.H.:** I wanted to return to Cluj, if it meant singing with friends and colleagues with whom I grew up professionally. It is difficult at this moment to choose your stage partners, especially at home, where you hear "X or Y are coming... Z as well... you were all available at the same time." It is a professional reunion, of course, but especially a human one.

**M.I.:** *Thank you for allowing us to continue this fragmented interview and to accompany you from the hotel to the airport. The Vienna State Opera is your HOME but still it is a "maddeningly beautiful autumn in Cluj," the place where you spent your university years at the Gheorghe Dima Music Academy...*

**A.H.:** What I can easily remember now, years after having left Cluj... the image of a train comes to my mind. I was commuting by train, every weekend I was going back home to Bistrita to see my parents, my grandparents, and

riding the train was an adventure on its own. Being students, we had no money so we used to travel with what seemed like empty backpacks, although heavy, and we used to walk to the rail station, and the train left late in the night and it was moving so slowly, it took so long for it to reach Bistrita... Nonetheless, we always had a great time on the train... This is what popped into my mind as I was thinking about those times. Of course, all the university experiences, all the friends I made back then and I am still close to, although we do not talk that often. Whenever we see each other, it is like we never parted, and it is interesting to see how each of us, despite growing up a little, remained a kid. We learned something, we lived a little bit and got to see the world. And it is wonderful to see what became of us and how we got here.

**M.I.:** *You are headlining lyrical projects in Vienna, New York, London, Paris, Barcelona, Cardiff, Beirut, etc. Is it possible that the great stage of the world made you feel like Transylvania is far away?*

**A.H.:** Oh, no... I have kept Cluj and Bistrita inside me, but especially my love for nature. I adore animals and to go around the town without even knowing the streets, just wandering by myself. I was brought up in a simple environment and this formed me and stuck with me. Of course I have learned a lot of things, I see some things differently now, but this has nothing to do with what my parents offered me back home.

**M.I.:** *Was there someone in your family that sang? Did you inherit the voice?*

**A.H.:** I was mostly inspired by my mother, because she was a singer and she wanted to have a music career, but not Classic music, rather Romanian Folkloric music. She did not have the possibilities or she was not supported enough by her family, not in the way she supported me. Instead, when I said "Mom, this is what I want to do, with all my heart," she was always there for me. My father, afterwards, seeing that this was not a teenager joke, even if he could not always support me financially, was there for me.

**M.I.:** *Because we are already talking about your birthplace, I suggest to not drive away for a moment, even in our own minds, although the traffic will not provide the perfect environment, and do an exercise of imagination. Please close your eyes for a few seconds and tell us what images you see.*

**A.H.:** Hills, forests, a bridge... it is the bridge in Bistrita I used to cross to go to my grandparents' house... I am becoming sentimental. No. It is the Evangelical Church tower in Bistrita. These are the images.

**M.I.:** *Thank you for the imaginary journey... The encounter with opera, what was the key moment for this decision?*

**A.H.:** My friend and colleague, Roxana Costeanu... When I was about 17, I was studying at the High School of Music (in Bistrita) and I was listening to Romanian Pop music, Mihaela Runceanu. I did not know exactly what I wanted to do with my life, but I knew I wanted to sing. Hearing me sing, Roxana, maybe wiser than me, told me "You have to sing opera!"

I was a bit shocked. What was she saying, had she not seen those full bodied women yelling there, one more than the other? It did not seem to me like this was an art I could do in the future. But she told me "Here, listen to these CDs!" There were arias of various operas with Maria Callas. And I kept listening to them and for some reason I was interested in it, and I wanted to rehearse them, to listen to them again and I remember that I was helping my Mother around the house, she was cooking, I was dusting, and I still listened to those CDs and I don't know why but it overwhelmed me. I was touched by the energy and the emotion of her voice, its power and tumult. I don't know, everything that happened in music overwhelmed me and I said to myself that this is what I would like to do. And since then this is what I am trying to do. I can still remember the first show I had seen at the National Opera in Cluj, I was 17 or 18. I was so impressed by it, by its colors, its music... It was The Barber of Seville.

**The following day. Before the general rehearsal for La Bohème, by Puccini.**

**M.I.:** *At the press conference, someone said that talent is international, it has nothing to do with where you come from, and you did not completely agree with the statement. Also, reminding you that you stressed at the beginning the need for an institutional connection between Gheorghe Dima Music Academy and the Romanian Opera here in Cluj. What were you referring to?*

**A.H.:** You have to give talented young people a chance to prove themselves. And without a payment, we would have come (to the Opera) motivated only by our passion and our desire to improve ourselves, at least for a month. I would have been around all the sopranos, we were so hungry for a bit of knowledge or information. I had been given this chance abroad, we were all lucky enough to make a name for ourselves and obviously it is wonderful when your value is acknowledged, despite not having the same results back at home. But then you return to Romania and you are being told you are great and you are "one of us." Yes, but when I was here, I was not paid attention to and it is sometimes painful... I am not going to sing at home because back when I wanted to do so no one paid attention to me. Now that I have reached a certain level... Yes, it is frustrating, but you return because you want to show them that one can dream and continue down this road with all the pain it brings, and one can get somewhere.

**M.I.:** *You often played Mimi, in Romania or abroad, but also Micaela (Carmen) or Violetta (Traviata). Opera is a syncretic art and thus it requires profound perspectives, time to research and different approaches for each role. How do you get close to each character?*

**A.H.:** Everything is written there, in the music, and I am able to express love from my own experience, being aware or knowing what kind of character that is, because I am not playing a queen in the way I play Mimi, through the outfit, the articulation of the voice, maybe through colors, I do not know.

**M.I.:** *You finished your academic musical studies in 2006 and you relatively quickly had a spectacular ascension, the first important step being your departure to Austria, receiving the appreciations of Mr. Ioan Holender, back then the director of the Vienna State Opera. Who are the people that influenced you? How was this professional journey?*

**A.H.:** I had the fortune to meet people that supported me, that saw a potential and a talent in me, people who challenged it, who wanted to see what was going to happen to me further down the line, sure, by throwing me into cold water. Moving from Cluj directly to the Vienna Opera, where there are important artists performing, was overwhelming. Sure, for me it

was a rather quick journey, one with too many information all of the sudden, but this being my current situation I tried to do my best to be as disciplined as possible, although I am not the most disciplined person. But of course there needs to be discipline. You need to pay attention to what you are eating, you must rest properly, you have to learn your repertoire, to study on a daily basis, but I did not want it to become an obsession, because then it could not have been something natural, something spontaneous. I am still learning and I want to adjust myself to each situation that may arise, to each new role I get, with the voice I have at the moment, because it is such a sensitive instrument and any emotion from within or around you impacts the voice. Automatically, you need to work with what you have. If you happen to have a show in a certain day, then you are under extreme pressure, you fight or you work with your fears, your dreams, with you, in the end. Among the important people in my life was Ioan Holender, who took me to Vienna, he heard me singing and said "Let's see how you are going to do if we put you on such an important stage."

Well, I did what I could, it seems I did not do something wrong. Afterwards, I met Ileana Cotrubaș, who guided me, protected me and supported me for a while. That was for as long as she had the strength to do so or if I was in Vienna and we had the same schedule. She guided me, I learned as much as I could from here, but certainly I will never say that this quest ends with one maestro. You develop, you change, you learn, you become more confident maybe, as time passes by, and you start to make decisions on your own. This does not make it wrong or right, you just want to see how it is like to be on your own. Even if your decisions are not the best, it can sometimes happen that you have a good instinct.

**M.I.:** *It seems you were predestined to perform this role, Mimi from Puccini's La Bohème, you played it several times, even under well-known directors, such as Zeffirelli. Who else did you work with?*

**A.H.:** I worked with amazing people, I even had the chance to meet Franco Zeffirelli at La Scala in Minalo, we all know what wonderful shows he directed all over the world, and I also worked on La Bohème with him, what a coincidence, I am being chased by this title... And, sure, he did not have energy of his younger years, he does have a considerable age, but for me it involved an enormous emotion to shake hands with him, taking into account just how many great artists shook his hand. I felt some sort of

energy exchange and I was overjoyed, I waited for this moment like a child. Among the personalities whom I met with, and whom I was used to look at, for years now, only on television or on the Internet, but then I had the chance to sing alongside with, is Piotr Beczala. I admire him profoundly, he is an incredible colleague, positive, mature, reliable, trustworthy and balanced. Anna Netrebko has a very exuberant and extroverted personality. Krassimira Stoyanova – I have not sang with her on the stage, but I had the pleasure of meeting her. Another soprano whom I have great respect for is Anja Harteros. Sonya Yoncheva, as well – whom I sang with *La Bohème*, along with Teodor Ilincăi, at Covent Garden, where she was Mussetta, and who now has a very important career. Of course these are a lot of wonderful names, you learn from them. I only hope I can find my own place alongside these artists.

*M.I.: You already are among the great names of worldwide lyrical artists. Just like a professional athlete, you trained rigorously to become an opera singer. It is a discipline, a certain vocal technique. What is the daily routine in such a profession?*

**A.H.:** It is not like you can get by with only your daily energy, it requires more, an enormous surplus to work your voice, a certain amount of your voice, capable to travel and to pass over the orchestra of 80 to 100 people, to make it reach even the last row, but also to convey an emotion, and I have no idea where this energy comes from. When I happen to be feeling very energetic, I feel like everything is aligned in one direction. I have slept well, I have eaten well. These are essential and simple things in life that make me feel good. The relationship I am in, of course, offers me a lot of support. What makes me happy in this relationship is that I am not loved because I am a singer, but for who I really am. I am not only a singer, and I refuse to be only this, I want to be a normal woman, to go shopping, to walk with him hand in hand in the park, to go to a movie, these simple things that I take great pleasure from. It is my duty to further challenge my talent, as much as I can, and I hope to have strong nerves to keep doing this, to cope with all the demands. Everybody expects so much from you, and they do not think that you are only a young individual that, besides being an artist, is a human being with everything this entails. For as long as I am going to have the energy, I am going to try to refill my powers from the Universe – to meditate, to pray or to think that there is something bigger than me. I am thinking “Fill me with your energy and your love, so I can pass them on.” Sometimes it works, sometimes I succeed.

**M.I.:** *Beyond the roles you play, beyond the stage, what is hiding behind the mask in your everyday life?*

**A.H.:** I have many discussions and fights with myself, with all that I am, and maybe I am preoccupied, and this can sometimes be seen from the outside, that I am concerned with myself, but I do not consider myself a proud or self-centered person. I do not like to consider myself as being important, and I do not try to pass as such, because I know that this is not my merit, and I do not know for how long I can keep doing this, at least in the way the Universe intended it for me. So, yes, there are a lot of things I am not sure I should share or if there is any point in sharing them, things that have to do with who I am and my own thought process, my life, and the maturity I want to have one day. I am a very sensible person, and if I have to sing, I must sing, I am not allowed to cry, and even after such a long time, if I play someone that dies at the end, I immediately think about my dead grandparent and it is difficult to keep my emotions under control, but I know that their energy surrounds me and lives on through me and this is an important consolation. It is pretty sad, because in such moments I realize that I would not have had any chance to get out of that small town (Bistrita). However wonderful it might be, it is a small Saxon town, you can almost walk from one end to the other in half an hour, still you have a wall in front of you, and for art and your dreams there are not many opportunities. Frankly, it is shocking that somewhere a force from the Universe surrounded me and gave me the power, the enthusiasm, the faith or the hope that I can do what I wanted to do or what I was meant to do. It is sad that many talented kids or young people are limited by their environment and do not have the chance to develop their talents. Sure, the teachers are real heroes, because they do everything in their powers to teach or to give hope to children.

**M.I.:** *Talent, sensibility, discipline, emotion, strength. If I were to continue this personal list of benchmarks for such a profession, where would you place wisdom?*

**A.H.:** I think it is very difficult for a singer to understand that he or she cannot stay on the stage till the end, especially for us, women, because of your fragile physicality. It is hard to realize that you can no longer work at what was once your full potential, to understand that you have to give up

and to make room for someone else. I believe this is an extremely difficult moment, but also one of great maturity and wisdom. It has to occur at the right moment, when you have not fallen in disgrace and people do not want to hear about you anymore or to see you on the stage. It is weird. I have not yet thought about this moment that much, but I have thought that I would like to pass along the knowledges I acquired and I will continue to acquire, to a young person, a soprano maybe, it is easier to work with someone with the same type of voice as you. Of course I would like to give back to other people, I think that is the whole point.

**MIHAIELA ILEA** *is a Teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Theatre and Television, the Department of Cinematography and Media, and a senior journalist at the Romanian Society of Television, TVR Cluj. A producer of cultural TV shows and complex TV programs, she is concerned with studies about the visual image's style and montage, visual essay, communication and the television-art partnership.*





*“Only if you know what makes plays work, will it be possible for you to go beyond and experiment with more modern forms of playwriting”*

*Interview with Dr. Kirsten Hertel, Lecturer in English literature, Playwright, Director and Producer of the Hot Shorts - Short Play Festival from Heidelberg, Germany*

## EUGEN WOHL<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The present interview with Dr. Kirsten Hertel, the director and producer of *Hot Shorts - Short Play Festival* organized by the *Schauspielgruppe des Anglistischen Seminars, e.V.* at the Theatre im Romanischen Keller (Theatre from the Roman Cellar), Heidelberg University, was conducted by e-mail in July 2016, immediately after the first international edition of the *Hot Shorts* festival (2-9 July) drew its curtain. Our discussion focuses on the organization of the short play festival, its impact on the participants and the future projects of the organizers, as well as on the high educational value of such an event, on the importance of familiarizing students not only with the craft of playwriting, but also with the rigor of the stage.

**Keywords:** theatre festival, playwriting, directing, stage management, future projects

**KIRSTEN HERTEL**, PhD is lecturer in English literature at the English Department (Anglistisches Seminar) of the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Germany. She is theatre manager of the *English Drama Group* at Heidelberg University (Schauspielgruppe des Anglistischen



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1. Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. eugenwohl@gmail.com.

Seminars, e.V.), director and producer of the *Hot Shorts – Short Play Festival*, and has written two short plays for the 2011 and 2016 shorts festivals (*Frankenstein Lives!* and *The Last Tape*); she has also co-written and directed *Campus Rose*, a full length play performed in 2014.

**Eugen Wohl:** *First and foremost, Dr. Hertel, congratulations on what I think can be considered a very successful first edition of the Hot Sho(r)ts – International Short Play Festival! Please tell us, how did the idea for such a festival come about and why, in your opinion, is the English Department from the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg and the Schauspielgruppe an ideal platform for such an endeavour?*

**Kirsten Hertel:** Thank you Dr. Wohl, for congratulating us and for having been such a keen audience member over the festival week. This was already our third time of performing short plays written by students; the idea originated in 2010 when I was asked by students and members of our drama group whether we could be doing a production with new 10-20 minute plays and whether I could be teaching a class on playwriting. This is how the *Hot Shorts – Short Play Festival 2011* came into being; at the time, the plays were all from Heidelberg. Because of its immediate success, we did a similar thing in 2013, but selected the best six plays, again all from Heidelberg. Even though playwriting is not part of our normal curriculum here at the English Department, I think we have almost ideal conditions, since we have an active drama group, students of English and a student theatre, the *Theater im Romanischen Keller*, right next to us.

**E.W.:** *The cities represented in this international festival – Dublin, Dunedin, Heidelberg, Iowa City, Norwich – are all part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). How important was the affiliation to and partnership with the UCCN in creating the festival?*

**K.H.:** The idea to go international with our festival was born out of Heidelberg's application in 2014 to become one of the UCCN. The City council asked us and other members of the university to submit project ideas and my colleague, Peter Bews, came up with the idea of doing another Short Play Festival and possibly a short story collection together with other English speaking creative partner cities. Our project was accepted and when

Heidelberg became Creative City, we started on the networking. In other words: the affiliation to and partnership with the UCCN was decisive in creating this year's international festival.



Fig. 1. Poster of the *International Hot Shorts - Short Play Festival, 2016*

**E.W.:** Please tell us a little bit about how the festival was structured and the idea behind presenting the plays into the four groups. Has there been a preliminary selection of the plays?

**K.H.:** For quite a while, we didn't know the number of plays that would finally be submitted. The only thing I knew six months ago was that there were fourteen students in my writing-for-the-stage class and that the aim was to have every student's work in the festival. This time – as in 2011 – there was no preliminary selection of plays, since I wanted to give every student the possibility to experience the process from writing to final production first hand. When we finally knew that we had 23 plays altogether (15 from Heidelberg and 8 from abroad), we tried to group them according to criteria such as: length, genre, and thematic aspects. Our aim was to create groups with a good thematic variety in order to make them as entertaining as possible. Furthermore, the guest plays from Dublin and Dunedin had to be in the first group, since most of the guests were only able to stay in Heidelberg for a long weekend. Hence, groups 2-4 were filled with plays from Heidelberg and Iowa City.



**Fig. 2.** Kirsten Hertel during the Festival, July 2016, Photo: Laura Hopp



**Fig. 3.** Festival Production Team (Left to Right): Katrin Pfändler, Laura Hopp, Annie Mannherz, Melanie Leyrer, Photo: Pia Schlotthauer

**E.W.:** *How was the work on preparing the festival? How did the student playwrights, directors and actors meet and collaborate in the realisation of the twenty-three short productions presented?*

**K.H.:** Out of my writing class, eight of the writers decided not to participate in the directing, but there were others who either directed their own plays or one of the other ones; some decided they wanted to try directing as well as acting and others saw their strength more in helping me with the organisation and production process. We held two nights of auditions at the end of April and the rehearsal period was a short and intense two months. Since many of the directors and actors were newcomers, our more experienced participants were also involved in mentoring the less experienced ones and in watching rehearsals and giving feedback. The collaboration went incredibly well and smooth, taking into account that there were round about 50 people involved.

**E.W.:** *It is clear from the title that the festival was designed first of all as a celebration of the **play** and the **playwright**, encouraging young people to manifest themselves artistically for the stage. From your experience – you teach a **Writing***

*for the Stage* course at the Anglistisches Seminar – how important is it to familiarize students with the craft of playwriting? Even more so, to do it in English, which, for the majority of them, is a second language. How did you decide to create such a course and what are the benefits of giving students an opportunity to experiment playwriting in English?

**K.H.:** I think it is incredibly valuable to give students of language & literature the opportunity to work creatively – not only playwriting. We also have an extra curricular creative writing class here, where students meet once a week and give each other feedback on poems and short prose works they have written. I believe that to experience the writing process themselves, will also give them a different perspective on the writing of the ‘masters’ they are studying, and will give them a sense of personal achievement very different from the usual academic work they are being trained for. That all this happens here in a second language is sheer coincidence, since we happen to be an English department. It obviously means more work for the students (and the teacher and language editors!), but the experience, once again, is very valuable.

**E.W.:** *What is the situation of the new drama currently in Germany? Are theatres eager to include new plays in their repertoires?*

**K.H.:** I can really only speak for Heidelberg, since I rarely go and watch German theatre in other German cities, but for Heidelberg the answer is definitely YES. Heidelberg Theatre regularly includes new writing in their repertoire and in their annual festival, the *Heidelberger Stückemarkt*, young playwrights get the chance to show their work.

**E.W.:** *The festival opened with Prof. Stuart Young’s lecture on **Creating Theatre of the Real: A particular form of Verbatim Theatre** and some of the plays were tributary to this documentary theatre form. Do you consider **Verbatim Theatre** an essential tool in teaching playwriting? How does this theatre form contribute to developing the students’ writing skills for the stage?*

**K.H.:** Yes, thanks to Prof. Young from Dunedin we had a brilliant lecture on *Verbatim Theatre* in the Festival. I was very grateful for it, since this specific form of theatre is not being taught very often here in our department, and it was definitely an asset for our students to also be able to see some examples of this form of documentary theatre live on stage. I’m not of the opinion, though, that it is a necessary or essential tool in teaching playwriting, especially if you teach a class for beginners. On my mind, it is important for beginners to start



thinking in terms of the traditional way plays have been made – in order to learn the craft. Only if you know what makes plays work, will it be possible for you to go beyond and experiment with more modern forms of playwriting.

**E.W.:** *You are not only the organizer and coordinator of the Hot Shorts Festival, but you are yourself a playwright. You wrote and directed *The Last Tape*, presented within the festival. Was the play written especially for this festival? Just to help us understand the experience better, how do you feel, as a playwright, when you hear words written by you uttered on stage?*

**K.H.:** Yes, I wrote *The Last Tape* especially for this festival. Ever since submitting my first short play, *Frankenstein Lives!* to the festival in 2011, I have felt the urge to continue playwriting. My next experience was the full-length play *Campus Rose* in 2014, which was co-written with Amanda Emanuel Smith, a friend of mine. The experience of hearing words you have written uttered on stage is definitely a very unique one for a budding playwright. But if you happen to be the director, too, you start focussing on so many other levels of the production – like character, voice, body and facial expressions – that the words somehow become one of the many facets that bring a play to life. On the other hand, I sometimes (still) detect myself wincing when my actors start improvising on the text during a performance. I want to shout: “no, this is not the way I wrote it...”, but then, once a play is on stage it is not ‘yours’ any more. It now ‘belongs’ to the actors.



**Fig. 4.** Kirsten Hertel with the cast of *The Last Tape* during rehearsals





**Fig. 5.** Nawel Herbrechter and Michael Shiels in *The Last Tape*

**E.W.:** *What would your recommendations be for anyone who desires to write for the stage? And for anyone willing to teach writing for the stage?*

**K.H.:** If you want to find out what playwriting is like, I'd recommend to just do it or to find a workshop that will teach you the basic principles of the craft. There are also lots of books written on the art of playwriting, some better than others. My experience with books as well as with professional teachers is that they are very helpful for beginners to find out about the most important rules and 'dos and don'ts' of the craft, not to mention the feedback you will be given on your work. Afterwards, and with some experience behind you, you will continue doing what feels right for you and you will also be able to pass this experience on to other students of playwriting.

**E.W.:** *What is next for the Hot Shorts - International Short Play Festival?*

**K.H.:** Well, we're hoping now that one of our partner creative cities will continue the *International Hot Shorts* in two years' time. That was our original idea, anyway; we wanted to start it off in Heidelberg, hoping it will be continued elsewhere on a regular biannual basis. Maybe other non-native-English speaking Creative Cities could be included next time, too!

**E.W.:** *Thank you very much for this interview!*

**K.H.:** Thank you very much for your interest in our festival, Mr. Wohl!



**Fig. 6.** Kirsten Hertel during the Hot Shorts - Short Play Festival, July 2016.  
Photo: Laura Hopp

**EUGEN WOHL**, *PhD*, is Teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, Romania and a theatre critic (IATC member) whose professional activities include collaborations with several cultural and academic publications and translations of contemporary plays from English to Romanian. He has a BA degree in English and Romanian literature and language, a BA and MA in Theatre Studies, and a PhD in Comparative Literature and Theatre.



## **PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS**



*Independent... from whom? Independent... from what?  
About independence as procedure*

**Book review: Iulia Popovici, *Elefantul din cameră. Ghid despre teatrul independent din România, Cluj, Idea Design and Print, 2016***



The second half of the last year was, I believe, favourable for books on theatre, despite the fact that, with some sporadic exceptions, the dissemination of new publications continues to be rather insecure. Of course, almost all the festivals across the country and in Bucharest and, obviously, the National Theatre Festival are hosting book launches, when they don't associate themselves to the funding of such new publications; therefore, for the theatrical world, or at least for that part of it that is interested in the specific literature, the information is circulating somewhat unfailingly. However, contrary to what

most publishers believe, the book of theatre is not aimed strictly at the theatre professionals; it is also meant for theatre audiences interested in theatre. Therefore, I truly believe that marketing and distribution efforts related to theatre books should be steadier and, why not, a lot more ingenious.

After *A Stage by the Roadside* [*Un teatru la marginea drumului*], published in 2008 by Cartea românească, and after the coordination of the two very much needed bilingual anthologies *New Performing Arts Practices in Eastern Europe - [Noi practici în artele spectacolului]*, Chişinău, Cartier, 2014 and *The End of Directing, the Beginning of Theatre-Making and Devising in European Theatre [Sfârşitul regiei, începutul creaţiei colective în teatrul European]*, Cluj, Tact, 2015, collections published in the FITS collection— Iulia Popovici returns with a volume written by herself: *The Elephant in the Room. A Companion to Romanian Independent Theatre [Elefantul din cameră. Ghid despre teatrul independent din România]*, Cluj, Idea Design and Print, 2016. I believe that this book fittingly proves that theoretical thinking and applied argumentation have not become extinct in our theatre criticism, in spite of the struggling condition of the contemporary theatre critics. On the contrary, it is precisely this (pensively embraced, I'd say) precariousness of the theatre critic that seems to have encouraged an inquisitive resolve with which very few continue to want to align.

Without aiming to map exhaustively the space of independent theatre, the book chooses a structure that is meant, on the one hand, to generate terminological, methodological and contextual clarifications in the field; and, on the other hand, to emphasize a number of characteristics of just one single level of the kaleidoscopic offer of those rooted in the concept of "independent theatre": *documentary theatre* - or theatre with a documentary dominant in the procedures of artistic construction and development. On such a route, the formula chosen by Iulia Popovici seems to be one of a funnel; by it, the author is boldly and unwaveringly offering a spiral trip from the general to the particular, and from the objective, contextualizing view of the current and pervasive definitions and practices, to deeply personalized selections, options and critical evaluations:

In fact, the book is a puzzle of sometimes academic, some other times essayistic theoretical observations (about the production specificity of independent theatre, about the independent artists' condition, about documentary in general, about the genealogy of documentary theatre in Romania) and of applied work (like the chapter about documentary actors, a chapter very important for me)...<sup>1</sup>

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1. Iulia Popovici, *Elefantul din cameră. Ghid despre teatrul independent din România* (Cluj: Idea Design and Print, 2016), 8.

Of course, the starting point stems from the necessity to define correctly the notion of *independence* itself, in a political, social and aesthetic context that is specific to us, but which is adequately confronted with the situations of other traditions of support offered to culture in Europe and across the world. A theatrical company – and, for one and a half decades, we have seen a strange notional consensus regarding self-definition – is independent... from what? From whom? And especially to which end? Naturally, the basic characteristics extracted by the author from the older work by the director Theodor Cristian Popescu, *Too Many People or Too Many Ideas [Surplus de oameni sau surplus de idei]*<sup>2</sup> (in their turn defined from a model borrowed from Emina Višnić) provide a correct concatenation of “independence”: the theatre/the company is an initiative of a person or a group, it creates an internal managing and production structure, it does not depend (perhaps only partially, by some applied projects) on funding from the state. On the other hand, this type of simple operational definition is not offering the opportunity of a somewhat efficient separation between a private company, whose primary purpose is profit, and a team joined around a programme the end target of which is not profitability, but the construction of a specific artistic discourse aimed at an audience that needs to identify with it, sometimes even without being aware of this. The differentia, claims the author – and, until now, experience regarding the horizon of theatrical independence is confirming it generously – is given by the ethical establishment of theatrical discourses, corroborated with an inquiring, interrogative unrest, regarding Romania’s past and present political and social evolutions.

Iulia Popovici analyses carefully the (pre)history of the appearance of the independent wave after the year 2003, by also introducing other usual concepts, such as the one of *alternative theatre* or *experimental theatre*; she cuts out to a hair the zones that are tangential not only terminologically, but, much more significant, which regard the modalities of production and the ethical-aesthetic motivations. Critical investigation is also applied to the most frequent and more “powerful” opinions on the relationship between the formidable extension of independent practices and companies and the apparently inflationist multiplication of the graduates of faculties of theatre in the last decades. Last but not least, the author analyses, in a manner that is both sensible and daring, the relationship between the subsidized institution and the co-produced or only hosted independent projects, a relationship that is still unstable, hanging on a cliff, despite the obvious artistic and audience-related benefits delivered by the independent zone. (In fact, as we have been emphasizing in the last five or six years, and as the author is doing it several times, the social dimension of *construction and development of audiences*, as

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2. Theodor Cristian Popescu, *Surplus de oameni sau surplus de idei* (Cluj: Eikon, 2013).



essential function of the theatrical company, has come into the focus of the Romanian theatrical world only in the last decade, by the direct contribution of some of the most active and most reliable independent teams).

The second part of the book focuses on documentary theatre, and its structure is as rigorous as it is surprising. On the one hand, the fourth and fifth chapters centre on the multi-stage definitions of the documentary, with applied insistence on the artistic practices that are subordinate or specifically engaged to it; the author propose a thorough discussion (with multiple references from everywhere) relating to the concept of “real”, from the twofold perspective of the creation and of the reception.

On the other hand – and I believe that this is perhaps the most fascinating and most innovative/illuminating section of the book -, the very consistent last-but-one chapter is dedicated to the actor involved/specialized in the documentary praxis: it relies mainly on a survey conducted by the author with actors from our independent space, but also on a relevant international bibliography, and it sheds a special light on the new developments in the actor’s performative-cognitive condition. The documentation techniques and the methods of character construction (mainly anti-Stanislvskian, inwardly, and more), the distances from the real public characters and the moral dilemmas in relation to the subjects of the interviews in the field, the involvement in the stage practice and in the overall theatrical creative process are reconstructed in plain sight by interviews, with the participation of Alexandru Potocean, Katia Pascariu, Nicoleta Lefter, Florentina Țilea, Alice Monica Marinescu, Alex Fifea, Sînziana Nicola, Sever Andrei. Their argued, diverse and nevertheless symptomatically congruent opinions are compared with the points of view expressed by foreign actors, some of them famous, who are also involved in documentary theatre practices - such as Timothy West, Chipu Chung, Diane Fletcher, Jeremy Irons, David Morrissey, Michael Pennington, Henry Goodman and others. This fascinating ad hoc debate is completed, in the end, by a list of the most representative/emblematic performances of the genre, and by a summarizing chapter in English.

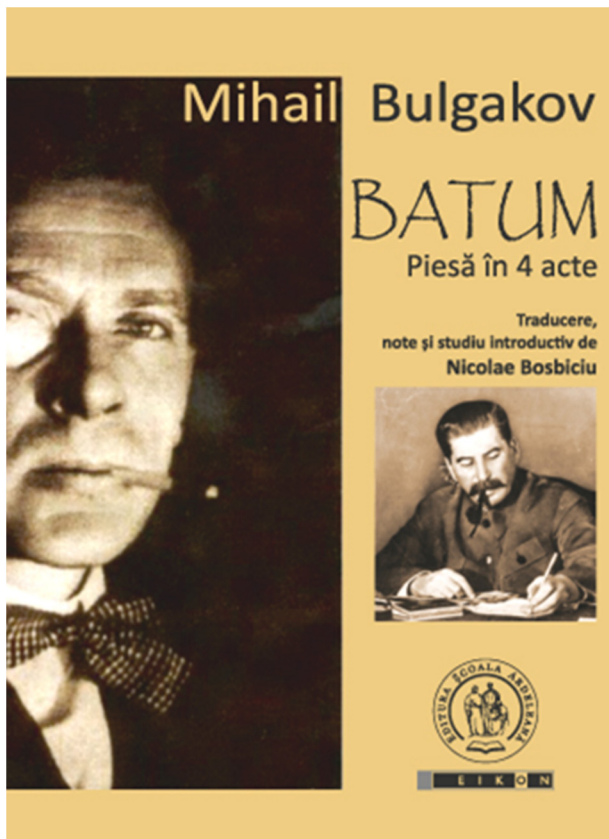
In my opinion, *Elefantul din cameră* is an essential book for the present theatrical history and theory, even if it is not intended, in a declared manner, a history or a theoretical approach, as such: the book is engaging, challenging, overtly personal, but also involving an inherent phenomenological, anti-impressionistic dimension. Its necessity, here and now, is obvious and it is safe to say that its echoes will be enduring.

**Miruna RUNCAN**

*Professor, PhD, Faculty of Theatre and Television,  
Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, runcan.miruna@ubbcluj.ro.*

*Mikhail Bulgakov's Stalin*

**Book review: Mihail Bulgakov, *Batum*, A play in 4 acts, Translation, notes and introductory study by Nicolae Bosbiciu, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon Publishing House, 2015**



For all the readers fascinated by Mikhail Bulgakov's novels, most notably his masterpiece *The Master and Margarita*, as well as for all those interested in Bulgakov's theatre, the recent Romanian translation of *Batum*, published in 2015 by the Eikon Publishing House, will definitely represent a pleasant

surprise. A long overdue project, the play was written in 1939 (commissioned by the Moscow Art Theatre to celebrate Stalin's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, yet later banned and never staged), the publishing in Romanian translation of Bulgakov's last play, an elaborate project undertaken by the professor and researcher Nicolae Bosbiciu, represents an important piece in the puzzle that was the Russian author's complicated relationship with the dictator Joseph Stalin. The author's "obsession" was ignited by Stalin's phone call on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1930 and his promise of a future meeting between the two, an event that, as the translator states in his extensive introductory study, determined the Russian author to become "haunted by horrific neurasthenia and by his fixation on the promised meeting between him and Stalin" (p. 113).

Indeed, *Batum* is nothing more, nothing less than Bulgakov's "play about Stalin", his last dramaturgical work, a last-ditch effort to get the Soviet leader's attention and, as the playwright secretly hoped, to benefit from his protection, in a climate of harsher and harsher repressive measures against "undesirable" writers. Bulgakov began working on the play on January 16<sup>th</sup> 1939, by consulting several sources, both official, like the anthology *The 1902 Batum Demonstration*, and unofficial, religious sources like *The Papers of the Georgia Diocese (1894-1897)* and the article *Memories of a Russian Theology Professor at the Georgian Orthodox Seminar in Tiflis* (1907). After several attempts (ten working titles), suggesting "the difficulty of the playwright's task" (p. 127), Bulgakov finally settles on the title *Batum*, as the action of the play – with the exception of the prologue, set in 1898, when a young, wise for his age and defiant Soso (one of Stalin's many aliases) is expelled from the orthodox theological seminar in Tiflis -, covers the years 1901-1904, circumscribing the events that lead to the Batum workers' strike, of which Stalin is portrayed as one of the main orchestrators, a "Messiah"-like, wise and carrying figure, as well as the immediate aftermath of these actions, Stalin's imprisonment and exile to Siberia and his symbolic return, as the savior of the Russian people.

Combining real historical events with prophetic, premonitory dialogues, like the gipsy's oracular predictions in the prologue (which, the editor informs us, "might have been disliked by Stalin and, together with other scenes, might have led to banning the play", footnote 2, p. 220), or the dialogue in Act III, between the future dictator and an old man, Redjeb, who travelled to Batum to tell young Stalin that he had dreamt that "there will no longer be a tsar and you will free the entire Abkhazia" (p. 282), Bulgakov creates a quasi-hyperbolic portrait of the dictator. In *Batum*, Stalin is depicted as both deeply human (certain physical descriptions that the playwright takes liberties with, like a birth mark, may

have been other reasons for the play's interdiction, see footnote 27, p. 253), and, at the same time, other-worldly and enlightened, capable of miraculous healings and able to survive the horrific conditions from Siberia.

The play, as professor Ion Vartic points out on the book's fourth cover, is "highly controversial to this day" and the mere translation of the text into Romanian, however salutary, would certainly not have been sufficient. In this respect, Nicolae Bosbiciu's editorial work proves to be outstanding. Accompanying the text of the play by an extensive (209 pages), well-designed and more than necessary introductory study, a "must-read" analytical inquiry into the inner workings of this complex dramatic text, its author's personal struggles with "not accepting any compromises" when writing it (p. 56) and the play's genesis and most poignant symbols, the editor's excellent observations are unquestionably a valuable tool for the readers. At the same time, Bosbiciu's rigorous scientific work is not only reflected in his introductory study, but also in the play's 56 explanatory footnotes, meant to guide the reader, to help him distinguish the "real" identities of the characters that populate the play, decipher the meaning of various fragments and quotations, or understand the aesthetic liberties the playwright had taken with regard to certain historical events.

The Romanian edition of Bulgakov's *Batum*, with the translator's extended introduction, is an event that deserves to be celebrated: it is a beautiful and rigorously crafted "homage" to the Russian author and, at the same time, an indispensable component in understanding the fascinating writer that was Mikhail Bulgakov.

**Eugen WOHL**

*Teaching Assistant, PhD, Faculty of Letters,  
Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, eugenwohl@gmail.com.*



## *Celebrating the Art of Theatre in Heidelberg*

**Festival review: *International Hot Shorts – Short Play Festival*, organized by the Schauspielgruppe des Anglistischen Seminars, e.V. in partnership with the UNESCO City of Literature Heidelberg, 2-9 July 2016**

I may be accused of being highly subjective when saying that one immediately falls in love with the splendid city of Heidelberg, but it is a risk I am willing to take. The city's famous landmark – the romantic ruined castle that safeguards it from the hilltop –, its impressive architecture, the Bohemian streets, squares, cafés and restaurants, the abundance of cultural events, its prestigious university and the effervescent student life are all more than sufficient reasons for travelers to, at least once in their lifetime, visit the German town on the banks of the river Neckar.

If these aren't enough reasons to pay Heidelberg a visit, then perhaps the prospect of attending a theatre festival will convince our readers. The first international edition of the *Hot Shorts – Short Play Festival* (the first two national editions were in 2011 and 2013), organized by the Schauspielgruppe des Anglistischen Seminars, e.V. in partnership with the UNESCO City of Literature Heidelberg, festival producer: Kirsten Hertel, took place at the Theatre im Romanischen Keller (Theatre from the Roman Cellar), 2-9 July 2016. For an entire week, *Hot Shorts* theatre festival showcased, on the stage of the Roman Cellar, twenty-three new plays written, directed and performed by students and young professionals from Dublin, Dunedin, Iowa City, Norwich and, of course, Heidelberg, all of them part of the International UNESCO Creative Cities network.

Organized into four groups – each group consisting of around five or six short plays and each of them presented three times throughout the festival week –, *Hot Shorts* managed to become a theatrical event able to delight audiences young and old with dramatic works conceived entirely by the participants, from writing the plays, to directing the performances and, in some cases, even acting in them. Drama and comedy, one-person shows or group productions, laughter, tears, social introspection and absurd touches, all beautifully blended in a festival meant to celebrate theatrical creativity and which would undoubtedly make even the most demanding of theatre

critics smile with hope. For what the festival presented is nothing more, nothing less than a splendid and more than necessary proof that the art of theatre is and will continue to be a relevant platform for young generations to explore the world around them.

The first group, consisting of six plays – *Good Fiona, Bad Fiona* (playwright: Tracy Martin, director: Laura Hopp, performers: Laura Hopp, Lena Hahner, Pia Seebacher), *Close Stranger* (written and performed by Kiri Bell), *A Workman's Tools* (written by Shane O'Reilley, directed by Simone Hebel, performers: Jan Enss, Eric Herbst, Inna Pech, Jonas Hock), *The Forgotten One* (playwright: Jacinta Sheerin, director: Jeff Silence, performers: Laurence Williams, Luis Friedrich, Josie Kerstan), *Goggles* (written, directed and performed by Josie Dale-Jones and Gemma Barnett) – brought forth serious overtones, poignantly tackling such sensitive issues like reconnecting with an estranged parent (*Close Stranger* from Dunedin, New Zealand, Kiri Bell's beautifully written and performed "Theatre of the Real" one-woman show), the complexity of interpersonal relationships beyond gender, race or age (Josie Dale-Jones and Gemma Barnett's funny, playful, yet profoundly honest play *Goggles*), bringing to light forgotten moments of (his)story (*The Forgotten One*), or the inner workings of the human mind in the individual's relationship with himself/herself (*Good Fiona, Bad Fiona*), or with his/her social role, especially when, as shown by *A Workman's Tools*, it only takes a brief second for it to dramatically change.



Fig. 1. Kiri Bell's *Close Stranger*

The second group – *Dance Fever* (written by Giulia Zips, directed by Lukas Lau and Jeannette Jansen, performers: Andrea Greupner and Jannik Buhr), *What a mother!* (written by Anuschka Hopp, directed by Thilo Hatscher, performers: Janina Arndt, Sabine Jack), *Terrible Light* (playwright: Sam Collier, director: Franziska Kirchholtes, performers: Dennis Massmann, Hanna Green), *A Glance Behind the Façade* (author: Melanie Leyrer, director: Annemieke Drummen, performers: Apoorva Lakshminarayana, Markus Lotzenburger), *Life's Crossroads* (written by Ithana Schnapp, directed by Antoine Verleih, performers: Hanile Engelbrecht and Sarah Süß), *Coat Hanger Dialogues* (written by Franziska Kirchholtes, directed by Lukas Lau, performers: Andrea Greupner, Mo Armin) – presented on stage both, in a realistic manner, real-life issues like understanding the efforts necessary to overcome first impressions (*A Glance Behind the Façade*), or the complexities of the men-women relationships (*Coat Hanger Dialogues* and *Terrible Light*), and, in more absurd, sometimes humorous, touches, equally interesting subjects like the opportunity to meet your younger self on a train platform (*Life's Crossroads*), the impossibility to control your body's reactions (*Dance Fever*), or the refusal to acknowledge your problems and the refuge in an alternative reality (*What a mother!*).



Fig. 2. Mo Armin and Andrea Greupner in *Coat Hanger Dialogues*



Group 3 – *The Jump* (written and directed Ann-Kathrin Mannherz, performers: Lea Deinhardt and Moritz Spielberger), *Plane Talk* (written by Pia Schlotthauer, directed by Isabelle Illig, performers: Jannik Buhr, Hanlie Engelbrecht), *We Eat Meat* (written and directed by Alex David, performers: Laurence Williams, Sarah Süß), *The Coyote Stratagem* (written by Lupe Flores, directed by Lea Deinhardt, performers: Moritz Spielberger, Viola von Boehn), *Pork Pies* (written and directed by Charlotte Caspers, performers: Ayse Eser, Laurence Williams, Hanlie Engelbrecht), *The Last Tape* (written and directed by Kirsten Hertel, performers: Nawel Herbrechter and Michael Shiels) – proved to be a well-balanced selection of dramas centering on couple life (*The Coyote Stratagem*, and, to a lesser extent, *The Jump*), on “love, marriage, regrets and memory” (*The Last Tape*), or on important life lessons (*Plane Talk*), and bewitching comedies, like the beautifully written and performed *We Eat Meat*, about a vegetarian cannibal’s struggle with social acceptance from peers, or the black comedy *Pork Pies*, about the deceiving nature of appearances.



Fig. 3. Laurence Williams and Sarah Süß in *We Eat Meat*

The last group – *Ella* (written by Laura Hopp, directed by Maximillian Kleist and Katrin Lang, performers: David Winter, Esther Megbel), *The Department of Abaddon* (written and directed by Jeff Silence, performers: Laurence Williams, Luis Friedrich, Vanessa Bomert), *Awakening* (written and performed by Selyn Beyhan, performers: Amelie Morweiser, Anouchka Meliková, Luis Friedrich), *Socialpaths* (written by Alysha Oravetz, director: Antoine Verleih, performers: Jonas Hock, Josie Kerstan), *Stew* (written and directed by Katrin Pfänder, performers: Hannah Pusching, Lila Miran, Ranja Ambruster, Saher, Maqsood), *Cooper & Jones* (written by Martin Weiffenbach, directed by Matthew Niebes, performers: Sinem Eroglu, Verena Turco, Petra Schwab) – successfully continued the theatrical introspections into the complexity of social roles (*Stew*), individual struggles (*Cooper & Jones*), interpersonal relations (*Ella*, *Awakening*), the human mind (*Socialpaths*), or on a humorously absurd descent into the underworld (*The Department of Abaddon*).



**Fig. 4.** Amelie Morweiser, Anouchka Melikova, Luis Friedrich in *Awakening*

I have begun this review by “denouncing” my subjective perspective and I would like to end it in the same note. What I experienced during the seven days of the *Hot Shorts – International Short Play Festival* transcends the

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petty flaws of some of the short plays or the stage management “glitches” of some of the productions (inevitable in any large-scale event that celebrates the diversity of artistic voices), and that is why I have chosen to completely ignore them. What the festival successfully managed to bring forth, and this is undoubtedly the merit of Kirsten Hertel and the festival’s production team, is a strong sense of collaboration and friendship between artists (some experienced, others at their first encounter with the theatre stage), with the shared goal of making their voices heard. It is an admirable educational and artistic project, at the same time nurturing and celebrating playwrights, directors and actors, and I truly hope it will benefit from many, ever-growing, future editions.

**Eugen WOHL**

*Teaching Assistant, PhD, Faculty of Letters,  
Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, eugenwohl@gmail.com.*