

# DRAMATICA

STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI

2/2017



**NEW PERSPECTIVES  
IN THEATRE HISTORY AND CRITICISM**

**STUDIA  
UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI  
DRAMATICA**

**2/2017  
October**



# STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI DRAMATICA

## EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:

ȘTEFANA POP-CURȘEU, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

## HONORIFIC BOARD:

GEORGE BANU, Université Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle

ION VARTIC, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

MICHAEL PAGE, Calvin College

## EDITORIAL BOARD:

LIVIU MALIȚA, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

ANCA MĂNIUȚIU, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

MIRUNA RUNCAN, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

LAURA PAVEL-TEUȚIȘAN, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

VISKY ANDRÁS, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

ANDREA TOMPA, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

IOAN POP-CURȘEU, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

DELIA ENYEDI, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

RALUCA SAS-MARINESCU, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

ANCA HAȚIEGAN, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

MIHAI PEDESTRU, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

## INTERNATIONAL REFEREES:

DOMNICA RĂDULESCU, Washington and Lee University

PETER P. MÜLLER, University of Pécs

TOM SELLAR, Editor of *Theatre Journal*, Duke University Press, Yale University

JEAN-PIERRE SARRAZAC, Université Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle

GILLES DECLERCQ, Université Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle

PATRIZIA LOMBARDO, Geneva University

LAURA CARETTI, Università degli Studi di Siena

LIVIU DOSPINESCU, Université Laval, Québec

## ISSUE EDITORS (2/2017):

MIRUNA RUNCAN, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

MIHAI PEDESTRU, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

## SECRETARY OF THE EDITORIAL BOARD:

MIHAI PEDESTRU, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

**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)



**Cover design by Andrei Littvin**

---

**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)

---

YEAR  
MONTH  
ISSUE

Volume 62 (LXII) 2017  
OCTOBER  
2

---

PUBLISHED ONLINE: 2017-10-31  
PUBLISHED PRINT: 2017-10-31  
ISSUE DOI:10.24193/subbdrama.2017.2

---

## Thematic issue

### *New Perspectives in Theatre History and Criticism*

## CONTENT / SOMMAIRE

### STUDIES AND ARTICLES

Miruna RUNCAN, <i>Arguments for a Historical Examination of the Discourse of Theatre and Film Criticism</i> .....	9
Katalin Ágnes BARTHA, <i>Theatre Inauguration Ceremony and Symbolic Representation</i> .....	23
Alexandra Emma PEDESTRU, <i>Romanian Theatre Criticism during the Stalinist Era. Construction and Deconstruction of the Critical Discourse</i> .....	51
Iulia POPOVICI, <i>A Theatre for the Workers, Protest as Performance, and the Political Police as (Art) Historian. A Plea for the Rediscovering of Interwar Peripheries</i> .....	69
Miruna RUNCAN, <i>The Coronation of “The Accompanying Comrade” Sică Alexandrescu – A Case Study</i> .....	87
Tomasz CIESIELSKI, <i>Ancient choreia in Neurocognitive Context</i> .....	115
Oltița CÎNTEC, <i>Gianina Cărbunariu’s Theatre, a Form of Memory in Recent History</i> .....	131

Ștefana POP-CURSEU, <i>La théâtralité du tableau vivant dans le théâtre de Samuel Beckett : une perspective néo-avant-gardiste</i> * <i>The Theatricality of the Living Pictures in Samuel Beckett's Theatre: a Neo-Avant-Guard Perspective</i> .....	143
Ion INDOLEAN, <i>The Evolution of the Milicier Film Genre in Communist Romania</i> .....	161
Raluca LUPAN, <i>To Curate a Part of One's Soul. Transplanting a Performance in Three (Radically) Different Spaces</i> .....	173

## MISCELLANEA

Rodica MOCAN, <i>An Approach to Teaching Digital Interactive Performance</i> .....	189
Ana BOARIU, <i>In Search of the Theatrical Unit of Meaning: Exploring Mnemonic by Simon McBurney</i> .....	221

## INTERVIEWS AND PROJECT REPORTS

Miruna RUNCAN, <i>Interview with Cristina Modreanu, Theatre Critic, Curator, Editor in Chief of Scena.ro Magazine</i> .....	243
Olga STEFAN, <i>The Future of Memory Project</i> .....	249

## PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS

Emma Alexandra PEDESTRU, <i>Surviving Change. On the Metamorphoses of Theatre Criticism</i> .....	273
Miruna RUNCAN, <i>New Dramatic Structures, Negotiable Imaginary Spaces. On Assuming the Experimental Condition</i> .....	277

## **STUDIES AND ARTICLES**



## *Arguments for a Historical Examination of the Discourse of Theatre and Film Criticism*

MIRUNA RUNCAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Paradoxically, historical studies of performing arts seem to have seldom approached the manner of development of critical discourses; and this, despite the fact that the basic subject matter that comes to the aid of historiographers interested in arts (fewer and fewer of them can be seen in the academic environment of my activity) is given by critical discourses: leading articles, essays, reviews, investigative pieces, feature reports and interviews from this or that time. Very few researchers seem to have raised valid questions about the relationship between (artistic, theatrical...) creation and the critical discourses meant to represent and assess it. A simple web search including the keywords "theatre", "history", "theatre criticism", "rhetoric" will expose the austerity of this field: such austerity may seem unfathomable, since, both from the viewpoint of the history of performing arts and from the viewpoint of the history of aesthetic, social, philosophical or political ideas, interactions are essential and their dynamics is almost impossible to ignore. This is why this article seeks to emphasize a number of primary themes, each of them potentially representing individual research stages that deserve subsequent systematic development.

**Keywords:** Theatre, Critical discourse, Hystory, Rethorics

### **Political context, ideology, aesthetics: normative criticism vs axiological criticism**

The attempt to place theatre criticism in the historical context of the time of its development is extremely necessary, if not even mandatory, irrespective of the age of a specific critical discourse. The critics' discourses

---

1. Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. [runcan.miruna@ubbcluj.ro](mailto:runcan.miruna@ubbcluj.ro).

do not depend solely on the (hegemonic or emerging) aesthetics and on the modes of theatrical production of the space and time of their conception, but also and first and foremost on the landscape of dominant political ideas, on the power relations that define the delivery of value judgements. In this respect, even when it is not (or it does not seek to be) normative, critical discourse exposes, willingly or not, its axiological and ideological roots, in parallel with the aesthetic references that are on sight, in the fabric and flesh of critical reasoning.

There are two major aspects driving a historical, contextualized rereading of Romanian theatrical criticism in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first one is the need to analyze the specific way (and the subtended strategies) by which, in some periods, theatrical criticism took its normative dimensions/function seriously. Particularly in the former communist areas, like the Romanian one, press discourse and, in our case, theatrical criticism were steered from a single control center in the years of enforcement and strengthening of Stalinism; they mimicked the wooden language of the propaganda emanating from Moscow, by borrowing ideologizing concepts, keywords, strategies and attack tactics against “bourgeois” or “decadent art”, which had already been tested for decades in the Soviet space. The process of gradual withdrawal of the normative dimension, after 1956, in Romania’s case, was slow and unhinged, in direct relation with the domestic political developments – including here both the overt legal changes and the directives “processed” in the countless “plenum” sessions, conferences and symposia with theatre artists, administratives and scholars, extremely relevant in the first fifteen years after the Second World War - but also after 1971, at a different level.

I could refer here, for example, to the debate regarding “dogmatism” – a “popular” theme launched from Moscow in the entire space of satellite-countries, in the wake of legendary Khrushchev’s February 1956 speech. In our country, the debate opened, naturally, in the officious cultural magazine *Contemporanul*<sup>2</sup>, preceding but also following the January 1957 historic counsel of theatre-makers<sup>3</sup>. And it also echoed in the magazine *Teatrul* (March, April, May, June 1957). Paradoxically, unlike the careful delineation operated in the previous debate, regarding stage direction, from March to September

---

2. *Contemporanul*, 19 February 1957.

3. For the 1957 Counsel, see Miruna Runcan, *Teatralizarea Și Reteatralizarea În România [The Theatricalization of Romanian Theatre] - 1920-1960* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2003).

1956, this time it was clear that the polemics did not include generations, or compact categories of critics or would-be critics: in spite of the fact that some definitions and clear attitudes would have been welcome, they were absent from a professional context such as the monthly magazine of theatre people. However, critics of different ages and backgrounds did spar at one another, starting from some op-eds, or even from theatrical reviews: S. Damian, who had been reserved about the quality of some of Mihail Sebastian's plays<sup>4</sup>, was humiliated by Vicu Mândra<sup>5</sup>, and then by B. Elvin (author of the first study on Sebastian<sup>6</sup>) and charged with "dogmatism". "Dogmatically" self-confident, Radu Popescu sprang to S. Damian's defense and tore to pieces Sebastian's *Jocul de-a vacanța*, in *România liberă*<sup>7</sup>. And so on and so forth...

Since I.D. Sârbu<sup>8</sup> had found that the text of Al. Mirodan's *Ziariștii* (which had been recently put on stage at the National Theatre) was thin, Andrei Băleanu<sup>9</sup> replied by blaming the *Teatrul* reviewer with dogmatism; with a classicist training, professor H. Zalis stepped in by quoting amply from Faguet, to prove Elvin's anti-dogmatism<sup>10</sup>, as well as I.D. Sârbu's judgement errors; Horia Bratu<sup>11</sup> shook the dust off the older woeful (Stalinist) keyword "formalism", which he uses in the praising of both duelists – I. D. Sârbu and Andrei Băleanu. Eugen Luca, a critic renowned several years before for the Zhdanovist resolve of his reviews, intervened with a title meant to dynamite sarcastically the whole debate: "Dogmatofobie sau snobism intelectual?" ["Dogmatophobia or Intellectual Snobbery?"]<sup>12</sup>

The discussion about dogmatism faded in total abstract fog, wherein the most vocal ones seemed to be the former professional dogmatists, and the only victims were the critics that expressed sensible aesthetic reserves – S. Damian

---

4. S. Damian, "Prea Multe Aplauze [Too Many Cheers]," in *Încercări de Analiză Literară* (Bucharest: ESPLA, 1954).

5. Vicu Mândra, "O Monografie Excelentă [An Excellent Monograph]," *Gazeta Literară*, December 15, 1956.

6. B. Elvin, *Teatrul Lui Mihail Sebastian [Mihail Sebastian's Theatre]* (Bucharest: ESPLA, 1956).

7. Radu Popescu, "Jocul de-a Vacanța [Holiday Games]," *România Liberă*, February 18, 1957.

8. I. D. Sârbu, "Grandoare Și Servitușile Debutului [Grandeur and the Encumbrances of Debuting]," *Teatrul*, December 1956.

9. Andrei Băleanu, "Despre Teoria Echilibrului Și Alte Ciudățenii [About the Theory of Equilibrium and Other Curiosities]," *Teatrul*, February 1957.

10. H. Zalis, "Judecata de Valoare, Factor Esențial [The Value Judgement, an Essential Aspect]," *Teatrul*, April 1975, 44–47.

11. Horia Bratu, "O Simplă Părere [Just an Opinion]," *Teatrul*, March 1957.

12. Eugen Luca, "Dogmatofobie Sau Snobism Intelectual? [Dogmatophobia or Intellectual Snobbery?]," *Teatrul*, May 1957.



and I. D. Sârbu; a plain symptom that, for the time being, personalized critical opinion had not earned sufficient privilege, even if, apparently, the zone of basic and rough normative criticism had been abandoned<sup>13</sup>. However, at a closer reading, the debate evolved almost involuntarily to the aesthetic qualities of the play structure, to the momentousness and intensity of the lines, to the verisimilitude of the characters and of the circumstances etc. – in spite of the fact that, more often than not, interveners squared up their own accounts.

I believe attention should be paid both to the causes and dimensions of this gradual withdrawal of the normative dimension, and to the tactical variations by which the editorial policies of the next decades would favor this decrease of potential of normativeness, to the benefit of hermeneutic analysis: the evolution of essay stylistics, of the review or of thematic investigations, etc. is not the only aspect at stake here; the balancing strategies between the deliberately normative and self-normative texts (so-called “in line” texts, most of them editorial, ordered answers to investigations or transcriptions of speeches held during party-managed professional conferences, etc.) and the texts on theatrical phenomena and events as they occurred (reviews, analyses, synthetic essays, etc.) are also at stake. I remember accurately that, for decades, as a reader, I would skip the first pages of cultural magazines, which would be programmatically dedicated to propaganda and circumstantial rules, and I would start to read the magazine from where the reviews, investigations, feature stories or essays on the current – literary, artistic, theatrical or film – production would start.

At a different level, special attention should be paid to how, ever since the first decade (1945-1955) dominated by Zhdanovism, the signs of professionalization (or of the return to the basic profession) had appeared at some theatrical journalists, cultural activists or theatre scholars who would also approach criticism. Because, at the midst of the claims of hegemony of normative criticism (signed by officials, by cultural activists or by “state-owned” artists, leaders of theatrical institutions) and the multifold cultural de-indoctrinated praxis, professionalization, in my opinion, is the core: in fact, considering all the brutal returns to dogma, which occurred in the Romanian

---

13. This is, in fact, one of the observations of the anonymous author (possibly Horia Deleanu, although stylistics and argumentation opt, instead, for Radu Stanca – but the poet-director was only a contributor) in the article “În loc de încheiere” (“In lieu of a conclusion”), *Teatrul*, June 1957, pp 35-38, which ends this failed debate.

cultural policies several times, normative-dogmatic criticism gradually and irreversibly became a lost cause, even if it never ceased to exist, between 1956 and 1989. The process of professionalization can be monitored by reference to the cited sources, to the critics' interest in relation to theatre history and aesthetics, since here, too, during the post-1956 decades, a "transfiguration" similar to the one in literary criticism occurred (when some of the more or less young coryphaei of aggressive Zhdanovism later raised mere earnest critical works)<sup>14</sup>.

The second reason for the historical revisiting, apparently even more interesting, relates to the double oriented efficacy of theatre criticism: in relation to the creators and in relation to the audiences. Certainly, such a level of research is considerably more difficult, since no one had dared until now to approach the theatre economic reporting archives, which could be revelatory with respect to the frequency and fluctuations in the spectators' presence at theatre plays in the last half of century. Except for the rare cases where some play had stirred some polemics (which were, in fact, strictly controlled, such as *As you like it*, at the Municipal Theatre in 1961, directed by Liviu Ciulei, or *King Lear* at the Bucharest National Theatre, in 1970, directed by Radu Penciulescu), it is almost impossible to find persuasive evidence about how Romanian criticism sent spectators to see the play, or how it had a negative influence on audience attendance.

Instead, an examination of how theatre or film directors, scenographers or actors, especially after 1956, relate to the critical opinions regarding their creation is possible at any time: with respect to this, many interviews, thematic essays, round tables or investigations of cultural magazines are available, especially after 1960.

One example (of the many) is the series of debate-articles launched by the *Teatrul* magazine in the last part of 1959 and completed in 1960, under the umbrella title *Pentru prestigiul criticii dramatice* [*For the Prestige of Dramatic Criticism*]. Originating in an unsigned feature article in *Scînteia*<sup>15</sup>, „Împotriva tonului apologetic în critica literară și artistică” [“Against the Apologetic Approach in Literary and Artistic Criticism”], fully reproduced by the *Teatrul* magazine<sup>16</sup>, the investigation actually invites the artists (paradoxically, only

---

14. For this purpose, see Alex Goldiș, *Critica În Tranșee* [Criticism in the Trenches] (Iași: Polirom, 2011).

15. No. 4635, 23 September 1959

16. *Teatrul*, October 1959, p 1

one director, Val Mugur<sup>17</sup> and one playwright, Victor Tulbure<sup>18</sup>, the others being actors) to express their opinions, in a sort of experimental operation of “criticism of criticism”. The tone approached by the involved parties was elegant and it expressed a shared (perhaps real, perhaps simulated) respect in relation to the role of criticism. We must not ignore that the political machine of “criticism and self-criticism” was still active, which may also have contaminated the sphere of signification and the position of theatre criticism.

For their most overwhelming part, actors (A. Pop Marțian<sup>19</sup>, Irina Răchițeanu<sup>20</sup>, Kovacs Gyorgy<sup>21</sup>, Toma Caragiu<sup>22</sup> and others) complained about the structure of the review, which was much more literary rather than performing arts-oriented. They said that a too little sepace was allowed for the play, in the body of the text, and that the play was often described superficially, while the creative participation of the actor drowned in stereotypical, empty phrases. They all sought adamantly “to be helped” by critics, but to this end almost all of them (including Val Mugur, who was otherwise a theory-oriented essay writer) claimed the critics’ presence in the creative process, during the rehearsals; some also recommend to the critics to see the same stage play at least twice, not only on its premiere. A few of them also related to a number of very harsh articles, perfused with amusing quotes from reviews, signed by the actor and professor Ion Finteșteanu<sup>23</sup>. Hilarious proposals were also made: for example, the writing of reviews “together” by cooperating critics, which should improve objectivity<sup>24</sup>. But extremely pertinent things are also said. At any rate, the watchwords, which had been

---

17. Val Mugur “Rolul creator al criticii teatrale” [“The Creative Role of Theatre Criticism”], *Teatrul*, December 1959, pp 56-57

18. Nicolae Tăutu “Critical să cunoască opera pe care o judecă” [“The Critic Should Know the Work He Is Judging”], *Teatrul*, November 1959, pp 63-65

19. A. Pop Marțian, “Și Criticul Poate Greși [The Critic, Too, May Be Wrong],” *Teatrul*, October 1959.

20. Irina Răchițeanu, “Critical, Îndrumător Judicios Al Creației [The Critic, Sound Exponent of Creation],” *Teatrul*, October 1959.

21. Kovacs Gyorgy, “Cu Mai Mult Simț Al Răspunderii [More Responsibility],” *Teatrul*, November 1959.

22. Toma Caragiu, “Critica Să Urmărească Spectacolul Și După Premieră [Critics Should Also See the Plays After the Premiere],” *Teatrul*, December 1959.

23. Ion Finteșteanu, “Însemnări Despre Critica Teatrală [Notes on Theatre Criticism],” *Gazeta Literară*, no. 25–26 (1959).

24. Marțian, “Și Criticul Poate Greși [The Critic, Too, May Be Wrong].”

in vogue since 1956 and repeated by very many of the signatories, were *critical/scientific analysis* and even *scientific objectivity*, a sign that the impractical illusions of Stalinist political education had left indelible traces in the artists' profound consciousness.

Curiously, the most... liberal (ironically speaking) point of view, while also the best argumentatively articulated emerged from Margareta Bărbuță<sup>25</sup> – theatre critic and translator, while also a consultant with the Culture and Arts Committee, hence an official of the system. She would synthesize the debate and would draw its conclusions, by separating the overstatements from the pertinent observations, and by inviting to a closer communication between critics and artists. We note that, starting from that first debate, the round tables and the symposia of “criticism of criticism” would return cyclically in the magazine pages, obtaining increasingly more coherence, especially in the next decade. Careful research of the evolution and junction points of these debates should be approached.

### **The aesthetic and stylistic evolution of theatre criticism in relation to international theatrical directions**

From my point of view, one of the areas of great interest in the historical research of theatre criticism relates to how theatrical thinking strives, after 1956, to re-synchronize – where allowable – with the Occidental theatrical theory and artistic praxis. From 1956 to 1989, because the circulation to and from the European West was strictly controlled, an essential part of the information regarding the new aesthetic directions of Europe and the USA was offered by cultural magazines and, after 1960, by very few volumes of studies, travel books written by theatre scholars or forewords to translations. Without denying the importance of theatre tours, especially of those coming to Romania from abroad, their small number and, consequently, limited audiences make us believe that their effect in the process of aesthetic emancipation of Romanian stage directing was rather minor - the very few exceptions, such as the legendary 1972 tour of the Royal Shakespeare Company with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Peter Brook, seem to prove the rule. Instead, the theoretical and practical information, with a synchronization

---

25. Margareta Bărbuță, “Datoria Criticului Și Eficiența Scrisului Său [The Critic's Duty and the Efficiency of Their Writing],” *Teatrul*, January 1960.

role, earned, by comparison, a major importance, and the way in which theatre criticism answered to these needs should be investigated carefully and devotedly. Such a discussion would encompass the examination of the study voyage reports, regarding lectures and cultural exchanges at theatrical institutions or festivals, the essays or even essays on high-profile European dramatic authors, directors and scenographers, avant-garde artistic movements, interviews with foreign artists obtained during trips abroad, or during visits/ tours of such artists in Romania.

For example, ever since its first issue, in April 1956, the *Teatrul* magazine had sought to provide constantly information on the theatre life abroad. Such information comes from voyages or from interviews, and also from the translation and reviews of foreign magazines, preferably from the Soviet-influenced area, but not only. Young Valentin Silvestru, as a disciplined party soldier, proposed a feature story from Moscow<sup>26</sup>, accompanied by small reviews to stage plays; but also a report about an interview with Jean Paul Sartre, given to a Soviet magazine, during his visit to Moscow, helping us find that the writer philosopher thought that the French theatre was still under a crisis, seeking for its spectator, trying to escape the bourgeois/commercial formulae. Jean Vilar's "people's theatre" was, of course, praised by the philosopher-playwright, as were the directors and the teams that promoted Brecht. Furthermore, Sartre appreciated the public policy of establishment of Regional Dramatic Centers that sought to democratize both the theatrical production and access to it by an audience coming from the most diverse categories<sup>27</sup>.

Certainly, the present of Soviet theatre continued to be hegemonic, expressed not only by tours, exchanges and reciprocal visits, but also by the more or less theorized successive return to Stanislavsky's rules. Writings about Stanislavsky come from the academic Eftimiu<sup>28</sup>, the young director Miron Niculescu who engaged in polemics with Ion Finteşteanu regarding the Stanislavsky method and the Knebel method, borrowed at us rather by ear (the debate on the art of directing and re-theatricalization was at its peak)<sup>29</sup>,

---

26. Valentin Silvestru, "Pagini de Block-Notes Dintr-O Călătorie În URSS [Aide-Memoire from a Trip to the USSR]," *Teatrul*, April 1956.

27. "Jean Paul Sartre Despre Situația Teatrului Și Dramaturgiei Franceze [Jean Paul Sartre about French Theatre and Dramaturgy]," *Teatrul*, April 1956.

28. Victor Eftimiu, "Stanislavski Și Alții [Stanislavsky and Others]," *Teatrul*, May 1956.

29. Miron Niculescu, "Stanislavski, Knebel ... Și Noi [Stanislavsky, Knebel... and Us]," *Teatrul*, August 1956.

Ion Marin Sadoveanu<sup>30</sup> and others. But exactly at this time of relative “thaw”, we are reached for the first time, rather hastily, by the first somewhat substantial information about Brecht - deemed decadent by pure and harsh Zhdanovism, exactly when left-oriented Occidentals, and not only, placed him at the core of the new European theatre directions. The first steady article, signed by Alfred Margul Sperbel, was published in October 1956 and it definitely originated in the disappearance, in August, of the great poet and playwright<sup>31</sup>. In 1957, a more consistent essay by Paul Langfelder was published on *Viața lui Galileo Gallilei*<sup>32</sup>, and also a correspondence from Berliner Ensemble by Martin Linzer.

One should consider the direct relation between the guidelines of the Soviet “thaw” as strictly supervised by the party (like “we are allowed” or “it’s free to...”) and the interface position of theatre criticism – in relation to the overall theatre environment. Because, in the next years, the first Brechtian stage plays would also to be staged, some of them weaker, some other widely successful: *Mutter Courage* at the Iași National Theatre, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* at the Bucharest National Theatre, both of them in 1958, and especially *Mr Puntila and his Man Matti*, directed by Lucian Giurchescu at the Giulești Theatre in 1959, a real triumph. This will actually pave the way, in the next decade, to an ample series of plays dedicated by the director to the famous German author.

The rhetoric and (more or less individualized) stylistics of theatre criticism should also be approached with special care, because the structure of the reviews, in itself, is a contextual testimony on how theatre critics of this or that era relate to a specific system of aesthetic or ideological values, to the type of specific editorial policy and, of course, to their target-audience. From this viewpoint, one should analyze the internal sources of the stylistic changes of the writing itself, and the relation of value judgements included in the reviews to the specific atmosphere and to the dominating trends of the theatre environment, at this or that time. Thus, case studies could be built, based on the rhetoric and stylistic analysis, meant to monitor and perhaps to contextualize the evolution of some critical voices that left their mark on the theatre environment for at least a decade, when not more – I.D.Sârbu,

---

30. Ion Marin Sadoveanu, “Izbânzi de Neegalat [Unparalleled Success],” *Teatrul*, September 1956.

31. Alfred Margul Sperber, “Berthold Brecht Și Teatrul [Berthold Brecht and the Theatre],” *Teatrul*, October 1956.

32. Paul Langfelder “Ce e neobișnuit în dramaturgia lui Berthold Brecht” [“The Uncanny of Berthold Brecht’s Theatre”], *Teatrul*, October 1957, pp 7-14

Ștefan Aug. Doinaș or Ecaterina Oproiu in the period of the brief thaw of 1956-1957, later Mira Iosif, Valeria Ducea, Florian Potra, Ana Maria Narti or, undoubtedly, the uncrowned patriarch Valentin Silvestru; and so on and so forth. In the same train of thoughts, I don't believe that the oscillation between theatre criticism and film criticism, of some of the "strong voices" of decades six and seven, is lacking importance. Subsequently, the causes of such migrations should be examined; they can be institutional, economic or related specifically to the inner organization of the two artistic environments...

Starting from here, from stylistics and rhetoric, perhaps the most difficult and most challenging study to attempt would be (closing the circle that we opened in the previous subchapter) dedicated precisely to the fragile/ambiguous concept of *critical authority*: which were, through time, the expectations and the measures of the "authority" of the theatre critic, which were the operating mechanisms of this so-called authority, how did the relationships between the critics and censorships manifest? And, in particular, to what extent did the imaginary collective construction of the *authority of the critic* interfere or not (in line with the propaganda or, on the contrary, with the resistance) with the exercise of plain and harsh political power?

Finally, one should study, contextualize and explain also (where possible) the matter regarding the marked disinterest (where this is not deliberate opacity) of our cultural space in the innovating directions of critical, theatrical and para-theatrical theories of the 1960-1980 decades: in other words, attention should be paid to the marginal paths of formal analysis of dramaturgy (Solomon Marcus<sup>33</sup>, Mihai Dinu<sup>34</sup>), the lack of appetite for thematist, post-structuralist/semiotic or inter-textual criticism methodologies, etc. Because, admittedly, there has been little, if any at all, serious academic approach on

---

33 Solomon Marcus, *Poetica Matematică [Mathematical Poetics]* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1970).

34 Mihai Dinu, "L'interdépendance Syntagmatique Des Scènes Dans Une Pièce de Théâtre," *Cahiers de Linguistique Théorique et Appliquée* 9, no. 1 (1972): 55-69; Mihai Dinu, "Continuité et Changement Dans La Stratégie Des Personnages Dramatiques," *Cahiers de Linguistique Théorique et Appliquée* 10, no. 1 (1973): 5-26; Mihai Dinu, "Individualité et Mobilité Des Personnages Dramatiques," *Cahiers de Linguistique Théorique et Appliquée* 11, no. 1 (1974): 45-57; Mihai Dinu, "How to Estimate the Weight of Stage Relations?," *Poetics* 6 (1977): 209-27; Mihai Dinu, "Ștafeta Personajelor - O Problemă de Tehnică Dramaturgică Si Soluțiile Ei [The Relay of Characters - an Issue of Theatre Technique and Its Solutions]," *Caietele Critice Ale "Vieții Românești"* 10 (1970); Mihai Dinu, "Teatrologia Matematică - Realizări Si Promisiuni [Mathematic Theatre Studies - Achievements and Promises]," in *Matematica in Lumea de Azi Si de Mâine*, ed. Mihai Drăgănescu and Caius Iacob (Editura Academiei RSR, 1985).

the paradox between the focus on the theatrical experiment of theatre directors, and the critical blindness toward the older and newer theoretical directions (alternatives to “honest” impressionism) of analysis and interpretation...<sup>35</sup>

All of the above is but a hurried, not at all exhaustive sketch of the multiple possibilities that could be open by the critical, multidisciplinary exploration of the history of theatre criticism discourse, especially in the Eastern European space – in our case, the Romanian theatre and film press. We shall see whether this challenge has an effect and whether at least some of the historians, academic and, especially, young researchers are ready, in the following years, to focus on such daring surveys.

## References

- Băleanu, Andrei. “Despre Teoria Echilibrului Și Alte Ciudățenii [About the Theory of Equilibrium and Other Curiosities].” *Teatrul*, February 1957.
- Banu, George. *Reformele Teatrului În Secolul Reînnoirii [Theatre Reforms in the Century of Renewal]*. Bucharest: Nemira, 2011.
- Bărbuță, Margareta. “Datoria Criticului Și Eficiența Scrisului Său [The Critic’s Duty and the Efficiency of Their Writing].” *Teatrul*, January 1960.
- Belsey, Catherine. *A Future for Criticism*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Berger, Maurice. *The Crisis of Criticism*. New York: The New Press, 1988.
- Bratu, Horia. “O Simplă Părere [Just an Opinion].” *Teatrul*, March 1957.
- Caragiu, Toma. “Critica Să Urmărească Spectacolul Și După Premieră [Critics Should Also See the Plays after the Premiere].” *Teatrul*, December 1959.
- Damian, S. “Prea Multe Aplauze [Too Many Cheers].” In *Încercări de Analiză Literară*. Bucharest: ESPLA, 1954.
- Dinu, Mihai. “L’interdépendance Syntagmatique Des Scènes Dans Une Pièce de Théâtre.” *Cahiers de Linguistique Théorique et Appliquée* 9, no. 1 (1972): 55–69.
- Dinu, Mihai. “Continuité et Changement Dans La Stratégie Des Personnages Dramatiques.” *Cahiers de Linguistique Théorique et Appliquée* 10, no. 1 (1973): 5–26.

---

<sup>35</sup> Here, too, a parallel should be approached to the same phenomenon in literary criticism, of course much more consistently represented there, as well noted by Alex Goldiș, in *Critica în tranșee*, cited edition.



- Dinu, Mihai. "Individualité et Mobilité Des Personnages Dramatiques." *Cahiers de Linguistique Théorique et Appliquée* 11, no. 1 (1974): 45–57.
- Dinu, Mihai. "How to Estimate the Weight of Stage Relations?" *Poetics* 6 (1977): 209–27.
- Dinu, Mihai. "Ștafeta Personajelor - O Problemă de Tehnică Dramaturgică Si Soluțiile Ei [The Relay of Characters – an Issue of Theatre Technique and Its Solutions]." *Caielele Critice Ale "Vieții Românești"* 10 (1970).
- Dinu, Mihai. "Teatrologia Matematică - Realizări Si Promisiuni [Mathematic Theatre Studies – Achievements and Promises]." In *Matematica in Lumea de Azi Si de Mâine*, edited by Mihai Drăgănescu and Caius Iacob. Editura Academiei RSR, 1985.
- Dromgoole, Nicholas. *The Role of the Critic*. London: Oberon, 2010.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The Function of Criticism*. London: Verso, 1984.
- Eftimiu, Victor. "Stanislavski Și Alții [Stanislavsky and Others]." *Teatrul*, May 1956.
- Elvin, B. *Teatrul Lui Mihail Sebastian [Mihail Sebastian's Theatre]*. Bucharest: ESPLA, 1956.
- Finteșteanu, Ion. "Însemnări Despre Critica Teatrală [Notes on Theatre Criticism]." *Gazeta Literară*, no. 25–26 (1959).
- Goldiș, Alex. *Critica În Tranșee [Criticism in the Trenches]*. Iași: Polirom, 2011.
- Gyorgy, Kovacs. "Cu Mai Mult Simț Al Răspunderii [More Responsibility]." *Teatrul*, November 1959.
- Langfelder, Paul. "Ce E Neobișnuit În Dramaturgia Lui Berthold Brecht [The Uncanny of Berthold Brecht's Theatre]." *Teatrul*, October 1957.
- Luca, Eugen. "Dogmatofobie Sau Snobism Intelectual? [Dogmatophobia or Intellectual Snobbery?]." *Teatrul*, May 1957.
- Malița, Liviu. *Cenzura Pe Înțelesul Cenzuraților [Censorship Taught to the Censored]*. Cluj-Napoca: Tracus Arte, 2016.
- Marcus, Solomon. *Poetica Matematică [Mathematical Poetics]*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1970.
- Marțian, A. Pop. "Și Criticul Poate Greși [The Critic, Too, May Be Wrong]." *Teatrul*, October 1959.
- Mîndra, Vicu. "O Monografie Excelentă [An Excellent Monograph]." *Gazeta Literară*, December 15, 1956.
- Mugur, Val. "Rolul Creator Al Criticii Teatrale [The Creative Role of Theatre Criticism]." *Teatrul*, December 1959.
- Niculescu, Miron. "Stanislavski, Knebel ... Și Noi [Stanislavsky, Knebel... and Us]." *Teatrul*, August 1956.
- Pavel, Laura. *Teatru Și Identitate. Interpretări Pe Scena Interioară [Theatre and Identity. Performances on the Inner Stage]*. Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2012.
- Popescu, Marian. *Oglinda Spartă [The Broken Mirror]*. Edited by UNITEXT. Bucharest, 1997.

- Popescu, Marian. *Scenele Teatrului Românesc 1945-2004. De La Cenzură La Libertate [Stages of Romanian Theatre 1945-2004. From Censorship to Freedom]*. Bucharest: UNITEXT, 2004.
- Popescu, Radu. "Jocul de-a Vacanța [Holiday Games]." *România Liberă*, February 18, 1957.
- Răchițeanu, Irina. "Critical, Îndrumător Judicios Al Creației [The Critic, Sound Exponent of Creation]." *Teatrul*, October 1959.
- Radosavljevic, Duška, ed. *Theatre Criticism – Changing Landscapes*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2016.
- Runcan, Miruna. *Critica de Teatru. Încotro? [Theatre Criticism. Whereto?]*. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2015.
- Runcan, Miruna. *Teatralizarea Și Reteatralizarea În România [The Theatricalization of Romanian Theatre] - 1920-1960*. Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2003.
- Ruth, Wodak, and Paul A. Chilton, eds. *A New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis: Theory, Methodology and Interdisciplinarity*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2005.
- Sadoveanu, Ion Marin. "Izbânzi de Neegalat [Unparalleled Success]." *Teatrul*, September 1956.
- Silvestru, Valentin. "Pagini de Block-Notes Dintr-O Călătorie În URSS [Aide-Memoire from a Trip to the USSR]." *Teatrul*, April 1956.
- Sîrbu, I. D. "Grandoare Și Servituțiile Debutului [Grandeur and the Encumbrances of Debating]." *Teatrul*, December 1956.
- Sperber, Alfred Margul. "Berthold Brecht Și Teatrul [Berthold Brecht and the Theatre]." *Teatrul*, October 1956.
- Szabo, Attila, and Joanna Krakowska. *Theatre After the Change - And What Was There Before the After?* Budapest: Creativmedia, 2011.
- Tăutu, Nicolae. "Critical Să Cunoască Opera Pe Care O Judecă [The Critic Should Know the Work He Is Judging]." *Teatrul*, November 1959.
- Vasile, Cristian. *Literatura Si Artele in Romania Comunista. 1948-1953 [Literature and Arts in Communist Romania]*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013.
- Zalis, H. "Judecata de Valoare, Factor Esențial [The Value Judgement, an Essential Aspect]." *Teatrul*, April 1975.
- "Împotriva Tonului Apologetic În Critica Literară Și Artistică [Against the Apologetic Approach in Literary and Artistic Criticism]." *Scântea*, September 23, 1959.
- "Împotriva Tonului Apologetic În Critica Literară Și Artistică [Against the Apologetic Approach in Literary and Artistic Criticism]." *Teatrul*, October 1959.
- "Jean Paul Sartre Despre Situația Teatrului Și Dramaturgiei Franceze [Jean Paul Sartre about French Theatre and Dramaturgy]." *Teatrul*, April 1956.

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

## *Theatre Inauguration Ceremony and Symbolic Representation*

KATALIN ÁGNES BARTHA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The inauguration of the theatre building in Farkas street can be considered as a landmark of the Hungarian theatre history of Transylvania. The ceremony from 1821 has become a canonical event of Hungarian acting. The study analyzes first how the National Hungarian Theatre was constituted in the frame of the inauguration ceremony referring also to the symbolics of it as a visual and event-like frame of theatre historical remembrance.

Then, will focus on two anniversary celebrations (from 1871 and 1892), in order to analyze how various elements of the anniversary celebrations relate to each other in the context of the institutionalization process.

**Keywords:** 19<sup>th</sup> century, Transylvania, theatre anniversary celebration, institutionalization, invented tradition

After 18 years of construction works,<sup>2</sup> the first Hungarian stone theatre, called also the Hungarian National Stage from Transylvania was opened on Belső-Farkas street in downtown Kolozsvár (Cluj) finally on March 12, 1821. The ground hall had twelve blue chandeliers decorated with silver, while the foreground and the corridors leading to the boxes were illuminated with 9 oil lamps. Two hundred candles were lit in the inner spaces of the theatre (the candlesticks in slat supports could be pull up and lower with the help of chains to illuminate the stage and the seats of the musicians, and also the fly loft) at the evening spectacle which started at 6 o'clock. The theatre entrance was also illuminated by two square oil lamps of great size.

- 
1. Katalin Ágnes Bartha: *Hungarian Academy of Sciences*, bkagnes@yahoo.com. The paper was written with the support MTA Postdoctoral Research Programme. Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Szilágyi Márton.
  2. Lázár Káli Nagy, *Visszaemlékezései. Az erdélyi magyar színház hősora 1792–1821*, ed. János Lázok (Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 2009), 132–135.

Although the original building plan cannot be found, we have a few sources<sup>3</sup> on the basis of which some aspects of the building (i.e. its seating capacity, spatial design and image) may be reconstructed. According to Lázár Káli Nagy, the supervisor of the construction works, the stage was built on the basis of the stage of Theatre an der Wien (The Theatre on the Wien River). Completed in 1801, the Viennese theatre was described as the most lavishly equipped and one of the largest theatres of its age. The usual machinery for rapid changing of the scenery with wheel system was located below the stage. The height of the building made it possible to vertically raise the backdrops. The basic part of the scenic props (curtains, painted drops, sets of legs, and borders) were realized by the scene painter of Vienna's Burgtheater, and the chandelier of the auditorium had been manufactured also in Vienna. There has been made a front curtain, an act drop, stage backdrops that indicated three rooms (a saloon, a rustic room, a classic hall), a garden, a street and a gaol equipped with 40 legs and 11 borders. The costumes were brought by the company, and a few aristocrats also enriched the theatrical costume equipments and supplies.

Having a comfortable seating capacity of 1,200, but being able to stay up to 1,500 people, the auditorium consisted of the stall, then three tiers of boxes painted in blue (lower tier of boxes 15, the second tier 17, while the third had 18 boxes) which could seat between 340-500 people. The stalls seating area had 80 seats, and the first rows featured 32 benches suitable to seat 100 people. The space between the seats and benches of the stalls could pack up to 300 people. The orchestra pit was suitable for 19 musicians to seat around 9 music benches. The gallery provided 300 seats and additional standing room for up to 200 viewers.

According to the minutes of the National Theatre Committee responsible for the functioning of the institution, the 50 boxes within the auditorium were distributed among the aristocrats who supported the construction of the theatre building;<sup>4</sup> from among these 24 were given for good to aristocrats (both men and women) and their families who gave substantial sums to the cause.<sup>5</sup>

---

3. Ibid.; Minute Book of the National Theatre from Transylvania, 1820–1835, Reg 4, Fonds of Hungarian Theatre from Cluj, No. 313, Cluj Branch of the National Romanian Archives, Cluj-Napoca; Zoltán Ferenczi, *A kolozsvári színház története* (Kolozsvár: Ajtai K. Albert press, 1897), 268–270.

4. Minute Book of the National Theatre from Transylvania, ff. 67-68.

5. See the list of the families that supported the theatre: Ibid., 67-68, Ferenczi, *A kolozsvári színház története*, 272-273; Káli Nagy, *Visszaemlékezései*, 140-143.

The inauguration ceremony is well-suitable to study aspects related to the construction of historical remembrance. Since the event didn't have any precedents (at least not in Hungarian language), it can be considered as a 19th century invention, and more specifically, from a historian's position, we can view it as an 'invented tradition' in the sense of Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's terms.<sup>6</sup> Its organization served as a model for following theatrical celebrations, while the event as a whole was an opportunity for the active participants to review, on the one hand, the past of Hungarian acting, while on the other hand, to look into its future and face challenges related to the inevitable cultural and social changes which would occur. Especially if we take the two theatre celebrations of the nineteenth century following the 1821 opening ceremony, both practices (that is looking back and looking ahead) are visible not only in the organization and performance of the events but also in the specific mixture/blend of institutional legitimisation and symbolic presentation of cultural expectations of the era.

In what follows, I will examine the program of the two-day festivities organized for the opening of the theatre in Farkas street with the purpose to explore how the Hungarian National Theatre was constituted in the frame of the celebrations. I will also focus on the significances attached to the function and role of the institution through the language of the celebration (by analyzing, besides the Prologue, the verses of the song sung by the choir, and other related sources), and also on the function(s) of the plays performed during the celebrations. Further more, I will refer to the symbolics of the ceremony as a visual and event-like frame of theatre historical remembrance.

On examining the previously mentioned two anniversary celebrations (the fiftieth anniversary of the theatre opening at the beginning of April 1871 and the centenary of Hungarian acting in Transylvania as celebrated on November 10 and 11, 1892) I will consider the degrees to which the old models set by the inauguration ceremony could be adapted to the new contexts of the anniversaries.

### **How Was the Festivity Constructed?**

The Hungarian Theatre from Cluj had an aristocratic character not only in terms of its sponsorship or funding,<sup>7</sup> but also in terms of membership in

---

6. Eric Hobsbawm, "Invented traditions," in *The invention of tradition* 2008, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–14.

7. See the list of the donators: *Az erdélyi országgyűlések színházpolitikai vitái és iratai (1791–1847)*, ed. Miklós Bényei (Budapest: Magyar Színházi Intézet, 1990), 95–101.

the National Theatre Committee which was responsible for the management of the company;<sup>8</sup> moreover, the Committee employed the members of the company as well.

They also organized the inauguration ceremony so its schedule can be found in the official documents of the Committee. However, certain decisions (which were taken after semi-official or private talks) cannot be revealed. During the meeting held on February 11, 1821 the Committee appointed its members who became responsible for organizing the ceremony; accordingly, the organizing committee was chaired by P. Horváth Dániel, while its members were the following: count Dénes Bánffy, count László Lázár, baron József Naláczi, count József Csáky and baron Miklós Kemény.<sup>9</sup> Then, during the meeting held on March 14 to debate and eventually adopt the new theatre regulation. They defined the competences for the theatre managers who would lead the company and manage the institution.<sup>10</sup> The new theatre regulation contained three parts: 1. the basic regulation which described the functioning of the company; 2. the obligations of the stage directors (*regisseurs*), and 3. the instructions for the censors and the managers of the theatre.<sup>11</sup> According to the regulation, the Committee exercised leadership in every aspect. Moreover, a sub-committee chaired by the (general) manager had the right to impose penalties.

Baron Dániel Petrichevich Horváth, the Commission chair, fully supported the establishing and functioning of the theatre. He was also member of the construction commission, and paid 1,000 forints to own a theatre box. Previously, between December 1813 – March 1814, he had been the manager of the theatre company which had been performing in the ex-stable (owned by count Wesselényi Miklós) transformed into theatre building. In his period,

---

8. The list of the Committee was as follows: Head of Committee: baron Ignác Kemény, lord lieutenant of Kolozs county. Members: count Farkas Bethlen jr., Ferenc Fricsi Fekete, count Ádám Rhédei, count Dénes Bánffy, count László Lázár, Antal Hollaki, baron Miklós Kemény, baron József Naláczy, count József Csáky, Dániel Petrichevich Horváth, Lázár Káli Nagy, István Ágoston, judge of royal free Kolozsvár town, Mózes Ferenczi, town counsellor. Notary: Mihály Szenykirályi, royal judge of royal free Kolozsvár town.

9. Minute Book of the National Theatre from Transylvania, f. 79,

10. Count Dénes Bánffy and count László Lázár were chosen to be responsible for the repertoire and censorship. Dániel Petrichevich-Horváth and count József Csáky were appointed as stage directors, Antal Hollaky (secretary at Transylvanian Gubernia) as music director and Lázár Nagy appointed as economic director.

11. Minute Book of the National Theatre from Transylvania, ff. 98-113. See also in Ferenczi, *A kolozsvári színház és színház története*, 276-277.

the library of the theatre acquired several new drama-texts. During the winter of 1814 Petrichevich organized an amateur company of aristocrats (*Uri Játtzó Társaság* in Hungarian) which performed German, French and Hungarian plays mainly in the governor's saloon.<sup>12</sup> He also had an essential role in shaping the program of the inauguration celebration.

On March 12 the new theatre building was opened at six o'clock in the evening. Baron Petrichevich was the first to appear on the stage: he recited the *Prologue* (*Előszó*) written by himself. Next, the students of the Musical Association of Cluj („kolozsvári muzsikai egyesület”) performed the choir song written for the occasion (entitled *A nemzet innepe az erdélyi magyar játékszín kinyitásakor* [*The Nation's Celebration on the Opening of the Hungarian Theatre from Transylvania*]). The highlight of the first evening was the performance of the 5-act herioc bourgeois tragedy *Zrínyi* by the aforementioned amateur acting company. Showing heavy influences of Schiller, the play had been written by the German playwright Theodor Körner; its Hungarian translation was provided by Petrichevich-Horváth himself, who also assumed the title role. (Otherwise the play had already been performed twice in 1819, on the birthday of the governor, count Bánffy György and the following day.)<sup>13</sup>

The professional acting company came on stage only the following day (on March 13); they performed *King Mathias/Mathias Corvinus*, an original Hungarian sentimental drama written by László Szentjóni Szabó.

### The *Prologue* for the Occassion

The text written and presented by Petrichevich Horváth Dániel was published first in the book entitled *Játékszíni Koszorú* [*Stage Wreath*]<sup>14</sup> by Könyves Máté in 1834, then it appeared in the publication *Emléklap* [*Commemorative Card*]<sup>15</sup>

---

12. See: Ferenczi, *A kolozsvári színészet és színház története*, 175, 232–233, 240–241, 251–252, 267. Imre Sándor, *A széplaki Petrichevich-Horváth család* (Kolozsvár: Gámán János Press, 1908), 26–27; Dániel Petrichevich Horváth, Introduction to *Zrínyi, vitézi szomorú játék öt felvonásban, by Theodor Körner*, trans. Dániel Petrichevich Horváth (Kolozsvár: Ref. Koll. betűi, 1819), a2–a4.

13. Dániel Petrichevich Horváth, Introduction to *Zrínyi, vitézi szomorú játék öt felvonásban, by Theodor Körner*, trans. Dániel Petrichevich Horváth (Kolozsvár: Ref. Koll. betűi, 1819), a4.

14. Máté Könyves, *Játékszíni koszorú*, ed. Eszter György (Budapest: Magyar Színházi Intézet, n.d.).

15. *Emléklapok a Kolozsvári Országos Nemzeti Színház megnyitásának félszázados örömnepére*, (Kolozsvár: Rom. Kath. Lyceum nyomdája, 1871).



issued for the 1871 comemmoration of the theatre opening. The newspapers of the era republished it as well, along the choir song's text and the playbill of the *Zrínyi* tragedy.

The *Prologue* may be read as both a theatre-opening official speech and an argument for the staging of the tragedy. The emphasis was on the national and autohtone features as key elements for the symbolic occupation of both the building space and the local theatre culture.

The beginning of the prologue describes the Hungarian acting stage as being without a property of its own; in this sense, it is evoking the theatrical initiatives from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century which would finally have a building of its own.

The construction of the building holds out the promise of revival for Hungarian acting, while the acting is defined as heart stirring, luring and beatiful craft/profession:

Úgy is tudjuk, mi a sorsa  
 A legkedvesebb Actornak.  
 Tudjuk azt, hogy nem terjedhet  
 Kellemeinek érzése  
 Századokra, mint Apelles  
 Ecsettyének vonásai. (...)  
 Bájoló szép mestersége  
 Ereje tsak addig terjed;  
 Míg szavai elhangzottak,  
 És a visszhang megszüntével,  
 Borostyánja el is alszik.  
 We know anyway the fate  
 Of the dearest Actor.  
 [We know that the feeling  
 Of his good features cannot  
 Encompass centuries like  
 The strokes of Apelles' brush (...)  
 The power of his luring and beautiful profession  
 Lasts only until his words,  
 And the echo ceases  
 Together with the light  
 Of its amber.]<sup>16</sup>

---

16. All the translations from Hungarian belong to the author of the article.

According to the *Prologue*, the company of aristocrats, by daring to open the national theatre, made not only an act of celebrating the theatre, is a sanctifier gesture animated by patriotic feelings and giving it honour and rank (i.e. since they belong to the first estate).

The choice for the *Zrínyi* tragedy is motivated by evoking the great Hungarian nobleman and general in service of Habsburg Monarchy, ban of Croatia. In 1566, from August 5 to September 7 his small force (2,300 soldiers) heroically defended the little fortress of Szigetvár against the whole Ottoman host (102,000 soldiers), led by Suleiman the Magnificent in person. The Battle of Szigetvár ended with Zrínyi perishing with every member of the garrison and his family, thus blocking Suleiman's line of advance towards Vienna. Zrínyi's heroic gesture is motivated by patriotic feeling, love and loyalty to his Habsburg Monarch.

The martyrdom of Zrínyi resonates with the sacrifice brought for the theatre. The *Prologue* finally called for cheering:

*Víg trombiták harsogjatok!!!* [Loudly let the trumpets bray!]

The cheer and vivat were meant for Francis I, the last Holy Roman Emperor, who was also the Apostolic King of Hungary as *I. Ferenc*.<sup>17</sup> The praise and gratitude went to the local representatives of political power, who were of course present at the inauguration (for e.g., count György Bánffy, the cheaf of the Gubernium was viewing the show from the central box located in the second tier of boxes). The theatre was completed thanks to the support received from the governor as well. Count Bánffy claimed a separate box also for his family.<sup>18</sup> The glorification of the monarch, and his representatives (the government and governor) were not just courtesy gestures, but acts of obedience and pledges of loyalty.

### The Choir Song

The choir song entitled *A nemzet innepe az erdélyi magyar játékszín kinyitásakor* [The Nation's Celebration on the Opening of the Hungarian Theatre from Transylvania] was composed by young Zsigmond Szentkirályi (1804–1870, the son of Miklós

---

17. However, according to article 6 of the law from 1791 - which stipulated that Transylvania was part of the Hungarian Kingdom so that the House of Habsburg had the same right to command over it, - also stated that Transylvania had its own constitution which should serve for governing the territory according to its subsequent laws and rules. Bényei ed., *Az erdélyi országgyűlések*, 196.

18. Minute Book of the National Theatre from Transylvania, f. 65.

Szentkirályi (1772-1836), the royal judge of the town, and performed by the students of the musical association of Cluj („kolozsvári muzsikai egyesület”) which was in fact the music academy of the town.<sup>19</sup> Although in his monography about the Hungarian musical theatre of Cluj the author István Lakatos only refers to the fact that the choir of the music school collaborated in the event, the documents of the Musical Association reveal much more about the organization of the festivities.<sup>20</sup>

According to the minutes of the association, the music director Antal Hollaki invited the Commission of the association to his house to discuss the choir song which would be performed at the ceremony. The invitation had been sent to 16 persons but only 9 showed up, among them the conductors József Grosspeter and Antal Polz clavier master. The latter was instructed to gather the singers and also to select beautiful and soothing musical pieces for the orchestra to play in between the acts of *Zrínyi* tragedy, so that ‘we could show our respect which is appropriate for the Hungarian nation’. However, the music pieces selected for the orchestra weren’t recorded in the minutes of the meeting, we also learn from the minutes that costs were supported by the Theatre Committee.<sup>21</sup>

With a few exceptions, the verses of the song by Zsigmond Szentkirályi much resemble the festive language of the *Prologue*. Having biblical vocabulary, the song contains references to antique texts, to the history of Hungary, as well as to Hungarian ancestors. The song calls metaphorically the lack of a theatre building as ‘ideas trembling on sad remains of Fate’, while the completion of the stone theatre a dream coming true: „beatiful dream rocking on the

---

19. See the text of the *Choir Song* in the Minute Book of the National Theatre from Transylvania, ff. 77-78.

20. István Lakatos, *A kolozsvári magyar zenés színpad* (Bukarest: Kriterion Kiadó, 1977), 26. On the cooperation between the National Theatre of Kolozsvár and the Local Conservatory of Music see: Emese Sófalvi „Zeneoktatás a kolozsvári Muzsikai Conservatoriumban 1819-1869 között” (PhD thesis, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, 2016.); E., Sófalvi, „Szolgáltatót a színtársulatoknak mindenféle segílyt, hogy operát tarthassanak... (Adatok a kolozsvári Nemzeti Színház és a helyi Muzsikai Conservatorium együttműködésének történetéhez. 1821-1849)” in *Képes beszéd. Színház- és filmművészeti tanulmányok* 2, 2014, ed. Emese Egyed (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2014), 60-79.; E., Sófalvi, „Az intézményes zeneoktatás kezdetei Kolozsváron,” in *A VII. Nemzetközi Hungarológia Kongresszus Zenetudományi Szekciójának előadásai*, ed. István Angi and Csilla Csákány (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2013), 166-185.

21. Records and Correspondences of the Musical Association from Kolozsvár (Cluj), 1821, Act 3, ff. 2-5, Fonds of Music Conservatory, Cluj, No. 1188, Cluj Branch of the National Romanian Archives, Cluj-Napoca.

blooming Olympos". The figure of the governor appears as a power protecting the newly established institution („Csak Nagy Bánfy' szárnyainak / Terjedjen rá oltalma").

According to the song, the day of joy is marked by the Hungarian sky shining beyond the sun, the moon and the eagle. These symbols were visible also in the space of the theatre, as they were carved onto the golden board above the stage. In the *crest of Transylvania*, the eagle represents the counties, the sun and the moon the Szeklers, since the theatre building could be completed thanks to the donations from these two estates.

Praise, respect and gratitude were put into rhyme and the verses repeated in refrain (*Jöjjetek hát, jöjjetek már / A' tisztelet itt régen vár; A háladás' sas' szárnyain / Lebegjen mejjünk' árnyain. Come, oh come already/ The honour is waiting for a long while for you; The Eagle fan of gratitude/Let be float on our bosom shade*) were in fact equivalent with ritualized and formalised gestures. The last strophe sounds much like a prayer for God's blessing, for the undisturbed rule of the king, and for peace in both Hungary and Transylvania.

The choir song was conducted by the previously mentioned conductor, Antal Polcz, who was also the music master at the court of the chief governor.<sup>22</sup>

### The Zrínyi tragedy

The role of the hero of *Szigetvár* was played by Dániel Petrichevich-Horváth himself, who, according to the memoirs of the famous actress Déryné, could have become a good professional actor.<sup>23</sup> Other important characters were played by the governor's son in law, count József Csáky (as Szolimán) and the governor's daughter, countess Csáky (as Éva, the heroine, wife of Zrínyi). Other roles were distributed also mainly to aristocrats: the young count Pál Bethlen acted as Mechmet Szokolovits; baron József Bornemisza as Ibrahim; baron Miklós Bánffy as Ali portuk; Gergely Barcsay as Mustafa; baroness Mária Inczédi as Ilona, the daughter of Zrínyi; count

22. "A Jókai pár fogadtatása és a jubileumi banquette," *Magyar Polgár* (Kolozsvár/Cluj), Apr. 2, 1871.

23. Daniel Petrichevich Horváth had also written a few original plays and translated plays. (See Déryné, *Naplója*, Vol. 2, ed. József Bayer (Budapest, [1900]), 175. For his writings see: the 'Horváth Dániel (széplaki Petrichevich)' entry in József Szinnyei, *Magyar írók élete és munkái* I–XIV (Budapest: Hornyánszky, 1891–1914) <http://mek.oszk.hu/03600/03630/html/>

János Rhédei played the character of Gáspár Alapi; count János Teleki as Farkas Paprutovits; the elderly count Pál Bethlen was Péter Újlaki, and the role of the young hero and Ilona's suitor, Lőrinc Juranics was played by count János Bethlen (the father of the young count Miklós Bethlen, who, performing under the stage name Bolnai, became a professional actor at the middle of the 19th century.)<sup>24</sup> A few bourgeois person were given smaller roles: for e.g. a military ambassador (played by Menasági); a Turkish military leader (aga, played by Miklós Iszlai); the servant of Zrínyi (played by Sámuel Deáky); a peasant (played by Incze); a Hungarian captain (by Végheli). According to the playbill, the scenes took place „either in Belgrád or in Sziget; depicting the places where the story happened in 1566”. Otherwise the display and spectacle of the locations hasn't been emphasized on the playbill.

The visuality of the performance was provided by the diversity of the costumes and various props (guns, armors, flags and torches) and much less by the spectacle of scenic design. We may note that the staging practice of the era used neither period dress nor period sets.<sup>25</sup> The noble amateurs actors obviously put an emphasis on both the Hungarian and Turkish dresses, thus we can say that the costumes were more important in conveying theatrical illusion, although historical accuracy wasn't elemental in this regard either. At the end of the performance the amateur actors donated the costumes to the wardrobe of the professional acting company.<sup>26</sup>

Although it is hard to believe, there hasn't been any report about this significant series of theatre events,<sup>27</sup> so any conclusion to be taken will be based on sporadic data. In terms of scenical possibilities, the spectacle of the

---

24. About Bolnai see: Katalin Ágnes Bartha, *Shakespeare and the Prestige of Hungarian Acting Profession in Mid-19th Century (The Case of Count Miklos Bethlen)* to be published at University of Bucharest Publishing House, edited by Madalina Nicolaescu, Alis Zaharia.

25. Ferenc Kerényi, “A Pesti Magyar Színháztól a Nemzeti Színházig,” in *Magyar színháztörténet (1790–1873)* 1990, ed. Ferenc Kerényi (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1990), 274.

26. Enchanted by the pomp and spectacle of the dresses a member of the audience, namely count Lajos Bethlen also donated a few items of his own garments „his beatifully made armour, helm and gauntlet.” for the theatre company's costume collection. Minute Book of the National Theatre from Transylvania, f. 98.

27. Ferenczi, *A kolozsvári színészet és színház története*, 278. Only one article on bulilding-constructions appeared in two series: “A' Kolozsvári Nemzeti Játkszín építésének történetei, 's ennek mostani állapotja,” *Magyar Kurir* (Vienna), Dec. 25, Dec 28, 1821. Without naming its author the article is identical with the text of Káli Nagy, and does not give any detail about the ceremony. Káli Nagy, *Visszaemlékezései*, 140-143.

performance couldn't have departed from the usual patterns of scenery (though the stage director György Simonfy enriched the scene by adding a few scenic elements) used in heroic play (*helden spiele* in German/ *vitézi játék* in Hungarian) a very popular type of play in the 1810's in Hungary.<sup>28</sup> In any case, they must have used the already mentioned sceneries at disposal, and namely the classic hall and the salloon painted backdrop with their side-drops (legs) and borders to represent the various inner spaces: *the room within the palace in Belgrad* / *belgrádi palotában való szoba* (I. 1-7.), /; the palace from Szigetvár / *szigetvári nagy szoba* (I. 7-11.– II.1-9.), *Szigetvári palota* [nyilván szoba] (III. 6-10.) /; the tent of the Turkish emperor near Sziget / *Török császár sátora Sziget alatt* (III. 1-5; IV. 1-7.) /; the vault from Sziget / *Szigetbe pintze boltozat* (IV. 8-9 – V. 1-6.) / . Outside scenes like the court of the castle from Sziget / *a Szigeti vár udvara* (II. fv. 10-14.; V. 7-8.) / could be easily arranged by using the curtain representing the garden, while for the final big scene they must have painted a backdrop representing the fortress of Szigetvár and must have provided smoke and torches to symbolize the castle in flames; however, we found no evidence in this regard among the payments of the theatre registered for 1821.<sup>29</sup> But we found payments in sum of 8 ft. for timber-work suggesting that quite a few stage/scene elements (or even a fortress) had been built for staging the Zrínyi Miklós tragedy. Further sum (2 ft) paid for the trumpeter suggests that they must have made use of musical instruments to emphasize the battle scene.<sup>30</sup>

### King Mathias

Although the drama piece was taken in inventory, its textbook is missing from the library of the Hungarian National Theatre from Cluj. Moreover, its playbill is also missing. In 1871 some newspaper articles dealt with the 1821 theatre inauguration, reediting some documents of it, even if it was achievable then, no information was communicated about the playbill cast or any other information related to this performance.

28. The *helden spiele* or heroic play had various thematic types which ranged from middle-ages' knight stories to robber, bandit and highwayman themes, also have sources from the Hungarian history and contemporary themes. On heroic play in Hungary see: Ferenc Kerényi, *A régi magyar színpadon (1790-1849)* (Budapest: Magvető, 1981), 114-133.

29. National Theatre Expenditure, 1821, Act 15, Fonds of Hungarian Theatre from Cluj, No. 313, Cluj Branch of the National Romanian Archives, Cluj-Napoca.

30. Ibid., f. 26.

However, from the memoirs of the actor Göde István we learned that he was the actor to speak first in the play (he played the palatine of Gara).<sup>31</sup> On the basis of theatrical lines of the era we can only suspect that Celesztin Pergő must have played the leading role, while the actress Anna Ungár must have been Pogyebrád Katalin, Borbára Simény was Erzsébet, and the elderly József Székely must have played the character of Mihály Szilágyi. The actress Mária Néb was also playing, only we don't know which character.

### The 1871 Celebration

The fifty-year celebration of the theatre opening took place under the theatre manager and entrepreneur Antal Fehérváry. First, the commemoration was postponed due to lack of concordance. Then, the professional acting company held a preliminary celebration on March 11 which was considered the day the stone theatre was opened. However, the commission supervising the theatre the National Theatre Committee (consisting of members of the local political elite, high-ranking officials and the intellectual elite)<sup>32</sup> decided that a greater celebration should be organized. Therefore, apart from local performers, they invited famous actors from the National Theatre from Pest and also two old actors who participated in the opening ceremony from 12 March 1821. As the organizing process was longer than expected, the festivities finally took place on April 1 and 2.

The program of the celebration organized by the professional acting company had three parts: first, the whole theatre personnel sang the '*Hymn*' of Kölcsey; then, the actress Laura Sz. Mátray recited a *Prologue* written by Gerő Szász (1831-1904), a priest and archbishop and well-known local poet,

---

31. [István Göde], "A magyar színészet történetéhez," *Történeti Lapok* 2, (1875): no 4:896.

32. Head of the Committee : count Imre Mikó. Members of Committee: count János Mikes, vice-president, Gusztáv Groisz, Hungarian-Royal Minister Counselor, Elek Káli Nagy, Hungarian-Royal Minister Counselor, count Miklós Lázár, count Kálmán Esztereházy, lord lieutenant of Kolozs county, baron Sándor Huszár, vice-president of National Hungarian Economic Association, Sándor Halmágyi, chief judge of Urbairial Court, Lugosi József, secretary at Royal Hungarian Ministry, Tauffer Ferenc, head of Kolozsvár Credit Institution, József László, retired actor of the National Theatre from Pest, Sámuel Filep, mayor of free royal town of Kolozsvár. Secretary: József Sándor, editor of *Kolozsvári Közlöny* newspaper. Lawyer: Miklós Ferenczi, Treasurer: Bogdán Korbuly, head of 'Zálogkölcson' Financial Institute from Kolozsvár. See Katalin Ágnes Bartha, "Színházi professzió és presztízs Kolozsváron a 19. század utolsó harmadában," *Erdélyi Múzeum*, 77, no. 3 (2015): 46–78.

which was followed by the *Allegóriai kép* [*Allegorical tableau vivant*] accompanied with coloured illumination directed by the theatre director Fehérváry himself. The second part consisted of a performance of an original one-act comedy called *Becsületészó* [*Honour*] written by József Szigeti, actor and playwright of the National Theatre from Pest. The third part of the festive program consisted of the first act of the famous Hungarian opera *Bánk bán* (by Ferenc Erkel) with the *Magyar tánc* [*Hungarian Dance*] as performed by the dance group of the theatre.

The two-day festive program of the National Theatre Committee was organized for the benefit of the theatre's pension fund. Among the personalities invited we can mention the actors and actresses of the National Theatre from Pest: Róza Laborfalvi Jókainé, Kornélia Prielle, Kálmán Szerdahelyi, Miklós Feleki, and also Krisztina Bogdanovics, a promising young actress. The authors of the two plays (Ede Szigligeti and Mór Jókai) which were performed at the festivities were also present at the performances.

The festive program on April 1 was the following:

First, the whole staff of the theatre went on stage to perform the *Magyar nemzeti himnusz* [*Hungarian National Hymn*] written by Sándor Berta and arranged by Jakab Jákobi, the conductor of the theatre. The already mentioned priest and poet Gerő Szász wrote another *Prologue* the central idea of which was the gratitude felt toward the predecessor actors. The verses resembled *Árpád ébredése* [*The Awakening of Árpád*], an allegorical play written by the famous Hungarian poet Mihály Vörösmarty for the opening performance of the Hungarian Theatre from Pest in 22 august 1837. (for e.g. the syntagms of 'Árpád nemzetének édes szava' [*The sweet words of Árpád's clan*] and 'Sírjuk feltárul' [*Their grave are opening up*]).<sup>33</sup> The prologue was recited by Gyula E. Kovács, the leading actor of the company. This was followed by the *Tableau vivant* entitled *Apotheosis* as directed by the theatre manager Antal Fehérváry in three parts: 1. *A harcok kora* [*The time of battles*]; 2. *A nemzeti irodalom felvirágzása* [*The revival of national literature*]; 3. *A magyar Tháliának emelt első oltár 1821 március 11-én* [*The first altar erected on March 11, 1821 for the Hungarian Thalia*]. The last part involved also the actors Mária Néb and István Göde, who participated at the inauguration ceremony in 1821. The tableau

---

33. On the multi-layered theatrical and social connotations of the Prologue *Árpád ébredése* [*The Awakening of Árpád*] see: Emese Egyed, "Ki vagy te? Az Árpád ébredése című embléma," in Vörösmarty és kora. Tanulmányok Vörösmarty Mihályról és Kőrösi Csoma Sándorról, ed. Piroksa Madácsy and Kálmán Bene (Szeged: Bába és Társai, 2001), 11–32.



vivant arranged for the event represented the respect for the past of the theatre and was meant to induce the cultural memory of the theatregoers. The cultic attitude toward the old actors on the stage, was, according to the press, blenched the cold spectacle of the greek fire „elhalványították a görögtűz hideg csillogását”.<sup>34</sup> The imposing episodes (the revival of national literature and the first altar erected for the Hungarian Thalia) effected a kind of sacred space. The Apotheosis was followed by a veneration expressed for the king and his wife, who were presented as the highest patrons of the theatre (Hódolat, ő cs. Kir. Apostoli felségeik dicsőősegesen uralkodó királyunk és királynénknak ezen színház legm. Pártfogóinak). The entwined picture of the monarch's and his wife was met with much applause. The second part of the program consisted of the performance of an original comedy written by the well-known Hungarian playwright Ede Szigligeti (*A bajusz*).

In accordance with the decision of the organizing commission, on April 2 the theatre company performed a four-act tragedy written by the famous Hungarian novelist Mór Jókai. Entitled *Szigetvári vértanúk* (*The martyrs of Szigetvár*), the play evoked the festive performance of Zrínyi at the 1821 theatre opening. Performed by guest actors from Pest, the play featured also new, for e.g. Miklós Feleky, the actor playing the leading role performed in costume tailored especially for the occasion, while Jókainé, the wife of the playwright was Anna. The play was directed by Gyula E. Kovács. The performance was a success; the audience reacted with ovation and followed the Jókai couple to their housing with torches. The playbill advertised also a brochure published for the occasion (sold for 20 krajcár/pennies). Moreover, even medallion of golden, silver and bronze had been minted; however, they were finished only after the celebration.<sup>35</sup>

Another significant event of the anniversary was the dinner (party) organized in the Redoute building on March 31; then, the following day, according to the newspaper *Magyar Polgár*, Manó Péchy, the royal commissioner invited the actors (both the guests from Pest and the members of the company from Cluj), important literary personalities and members of the Theatre Committee to join a toast.<sup>36</sup>

---

34. Szász Béla, "Színházi jubilaeum," *Kelet* (Kolozsvár/Cluj), Apr. 4, 1871.

35. *Emléklapok a Kolozsvári*, 17–18.

36. "A Jókai pár fogadtatása és a jubileumi banquette," *Magyar Polgár* (Kolozsvár/Cluj), Apr. 2, 1871.

### The 1892 Celebration

On the hundred year anniversary of Hungarian acting in Cluj, the 1821 theatre opening was commemorated as an important moment of the theatre institutionalization process; however, it constituted only a part of the country-wide celebrations. Serious preparations, meetings and consultations preceeded the events which celebrated the hundred year anniversary together with the birth day of József Katona, the great Hungarian playwright, whose national tragedy *Bánk bán* was banned from stages in the neo-absolutist period. We should add that research found that the two dates didn't coincide (the opening performance of the professional acting company from Cluj was on 14 December 1792).<sup>37</sup>

The preparatory consultations involved, beside the organising commission and a few members of the acting company, also the intellectual elite of the town.<sup>38</sup> In the end the local Literary Society celebrated the event on November 10 by performing *Bánk bán*; then, on November 11, a memorial plaque was unveiled at Rhédey palace (where the first Hungarian professional company started its performances, today at the corner of Napoca street), which was followed by a festive lunch and a gala performance. The street of the theatre was illuminated, and the audience was welcomed by a richly decorated and illuminated theatre building/auditorium. The event was met with much interest; among the invited guests were the royal couple. To sense the overwhelming dimensions of the event one should look at the number of invited guests: 52 delegates representing 16 judicial authorities sent; 37 delegates representing 17 scientific, literary, artistic and cultural societies; 12 delegates representing 8 theatres; and 17 journalists from 14 newspapers. Apart from the invited guests, various bodies from Cluj town (30 in total) reported to send 74 representatives.

The gala started with the festive overture (composed by Gyula Káldy); it was followed by the prologue of Mór Jókai, then by a dramatic description of the period entitled *Száz év előtt* [*Hundred Years Ago*], written by Zoltán Ferenczi. The festive program also included a medley of old Hungarian operas compiled by Ottó Müller, as well as the comedy *Jártas-költes vőlegény* (*A well-groomed groom*) by László Bartsai and tableaux vivants arranged on the basis of the *Zrínyi* play. The gala was repeated on November 12.

---

37. Sándor, Enyedi, "Mikor volt Kolozsvárt az első színházi előadás?", *A Hét*, June 18, 1982.

38. Hegyessy Vilmos ed. *Emlékkönyv az erdélyi magyar színészet száz éves jubileuma alkalmából*, (Kolozsvár, 1892), 80.

## Conclusions

The theatre-opening play *Zrínyi* was met in 1821 with some discontent by the public because of, on the one hand, its atmosphere was not 'authentically' Hungarian, while on the other hand, its author was not Hungarian (see for e.g., the critical review of the play by Ferenc Kölcsey).<sup>39</sup> Then, the 1871 staging must have exerted a different effect, due to the fact that it was a different adaptation. On the hundred-year anniversary, they turned to the tradition set in 1821 by creating tableaux vivants on the basis of two dramatically important moments of Körner's play (this genre was very popular during the period). And the performers were selected from among the historical families whose members supported the building of the stone theatre; thus, the organizers provided a familial continuation for the participants.

The role and function of the theatre opened in 1821 was to become both a 'national property' and workshop for 'cultivating the language',<sup>40</sup> and 'an instrument for enriching culture and promoting virtue'.<sup>41</sup> Further attributes of the new institution were 'to protect the national treasure' (see Minutes), and 'serve the pleasure/delight of the heart'.<sup>42</sup> These elements can be found also at 1871 celebration (for e.g., according to the prologues of Gerő Szász, 'the [theatre]house is a temple', while the event was the 'celebration of language, poetry and the arts). It is important to note that the abovementioned functions do not appear as evidence that needs to be provided because they were considered as having been fulfilled during the fifty-year functioning of the theatre. Although the aspect of entertainment within the texts written for the occasion is as a latent presence only, the staged comedies and the tableaux vivants have served this specific purpose. In terms of its language and agenda, the emphasis of the 1892 anniversary was transferred on the practical issue of having a continuous, uninterrupted theatre in town, on the need to fund the theatre similar to the National Theatre form Pest (the Theatre Commission attempted to solve this by political means). It is interesting in this regard that the prologue of Jókai featured some theatre historical elements – for e.g. the play entitled *Titkos ellenkezés* [*Secret resistance*], and the name of

---

39. See for e.g., the critical review of the play: Ferenc Kölcsey, *Körner Zrínyijéről*.

<http://mek.oszk.hu/06300/06367/html/01.htm#185>

40. Minute Books of The Theatre Committee, f. 109.

41. Káli Nagy, *Visszaemlékezései*, 163.

42. Dániel Petrichovich Horváth, "Elő Szó"[Prologue], in *Máté Könyves, Játékszíni koszorú*, ed. Eszter György (Budapest: Magyar Színházi Intézet, n.d.) 109–110.

count Wesselényi – which only signal that the text was written for the festive occasion; otherwise, it is built on the opposition between Hungary and Transylvania where the latter plays the role of preserving the [Hungarian] language).

In 1821, the national theatre culture was much more linked to the theatrical activity of two rather different social groups; in other words, the picture of the heterogeneous society was well-represented by the two-day event.

The theatre was opened the first day with the active participation of the politically influent members of the local aristocracy (quite a few members of the Theatre Commission acted in the *Zrínyi* performance). This group of amateur aristocratic actors supported the acting company since the first theatrical performance in Cluj (1792) and the placement of the acting company under national supervision (1795), and took up financially the case of the constructing an independent theatre building (since 1805). It is worth mentioning that members of the amateur company had been acting for a few years before appearing the new theatre stage to perform the *Zrínyi* tragedy.

Among the performers of the second day, we find among the regular members of the newly established acting company significant actors of the era: József Székely (who became a member of the acting company from Cluj in 1802, Borbára Simény (she became a member in 1803), Anna Ungár (in 1806) and Czelesztin Pergő (in 1810). All of them remained actors of the Cluj stage. Although they had a say with regard to what to perform at the theatre opening, the final decision was taken by the Theatre Commission; therefore, we can conclude that the professional artists supported the taste of the aristocracy/elite in power. The play *King Mathias* by László Szentjóni had been part of the repertoire of the acting company from Cluj since 1804; being a sentimental play written for the crowning of I. Ferenc, it seemed like an appropriate choice to express the gratitude and loyalty, since both the local representatives of the ruling power and the king were specified/mentioned in the festive speech and in the verses of the choir song.

Beside the hierarchical organization of the theatre functioning, at least the same importance should be given to the community-building aspect of participating in theatre building (which aspect I believe is stronger than the belonging to certain social groups). In this regard, I only mention the fact that Gábor Döbrentei, the famous Hungarian critic of the era, established the democratic context of the theatre as an important centre of social life at the

beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century Cluj, by emphasizing the presence in a common space which entailed the possibility to dissolve differences between theatregoers of different social ranks or confessional groups.<sup>43</sup>

The 1871 anniversary was held in the theatre building transformed according to the professional needs of the era.<sup>44</sup> The renovated theatre-interior of the institution by the significant removal of the governor's box (1865) anticipated the political constitutional frame that was to be established by the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. By this time, the politics of the Theatre Committee was not so much involved into the professional management of the theatre. The reason for this was the advanced stage of professionalization and institutionalization, which meant that decisions concerning membership, personnel and staging were now taken by theatre professionals, while the Committee acted as supervising and approving board, and supported the functioning of the theatre through the political and social relations of its members. As a result, the 1871 anniversary consisted of two separate events: the first organized by the professional acting company, and the second by the National Hungarian Theatre Committee.

However, we should observe that the 1821 opening constructed a tradition which was strongly emphasized at the 1871 anniversary, the key components of which were the prologue and the historical theme of Zrínyi's martyrdom. The 1871 anniversary saw an adaptation to a different social and theatrical context, which can be revealed by the use of various forms of communication enabled by both technical progress and dissemination possibilities. As opposed to the lack of media coverage of the opening ceremony, the fifty-year anniversary was extensively dealt with by the local press, thus it became a major cultural event for the literate social groups.

The 1892 celebration became much more professional in this sense; the event enjoyed popularity across historical Hungary and Transylvania and was extensively reported in the national press. The various components of the ceremony (such as unveiling a commemorative plaque on Rhedey palace, the festive lunch with their ceremonial toasts, the procession on the streets of

---

43. Döbrentei Gábor, "Az első füzetbeli jutalom kihirdetésére béküldetett szomorújátékokról." *Erdélyi Múzeum* 10, (1818): 117.

44. In 1865-ben theatre was renovated, and partly rebuilt by Kagerbauer Antal builder master from Kolozsvár. See the plan of the construction work: KÁL, Fond 313, Act 38, ff. 6-12. On the construction see: Orsolya Tóké, "A kolozsvári, Farkas utcai színház 1865. évi átépítése mint színház történeti esemény," in *Képes beszéd. Színház és filmművészeti tanulmányok* (2), edited by Emese Egyed (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum, 2014), 90-99.

Cluj decorated with flags and banners, and the participation of various cultural associations and students wearing rosettes as a symbol of national pride and support) prove the symbolic importance of the entire event. And, as of worthy publications related to the anniversary, we can list the commemorative book edited by Vilmos Hegyessy<sup>45</sup> and also the history of acting and theatre in Cluj, written by Zoltán Ferenczi (*Kolozsvári színészet és színház története* [The History of Acting and Theatre from Kolozsvár]. 1897).

## References

- Bényei Miklós ed. *Az erdélyi országgyűlések színházpolitikai vitái és iratai (1791–1847)* [Political Disputes and Documents on Theatre Issues of the Transylvanian Diets (1791–1847)]. Budapest: Magyar Színházi Intézet, 1990.
- Déryné. *Naplója* [Memoirs of the Actress Déryné] (1-3 vols), Edited by József Bayer. Budapest, [1900].
- Döbrentei, Gábor. "Az első füzetbeli jutalom kihirdetésére béküldetett szomorújátékokról [On the Prized Tragedies Written For the Call of the Journal's first Volume]." *Erdélyi Muzéum* 10, (1818): 105–167.
- Egyed, Emese. "Ki vagy te? Az Árpád ébredése című embléma." *Who are you? The emblem Entitled the Awakening of Árpád*" [In *Vörösmarty és kora. Tanulmányok Vörösmarty Mihályról és Körösi Csoma Sándorról* [The Era of Vörösmarty. Studies on MMihály Vörösmarty and Sándor Körösi Csoma], 11–32. Edited by Piroska Madácsy and Kálmán Bene. Szeged: Bába és Társai, 2001.
- Emléklapok a Kolozsvári Országos Nemzeti Színház megnyitásának félézázados örömnünepére* [Commemorative Card on the Fiftieth Anniversary of The National Hungarian Theatre from Cluj]. Kolozsvár: Rom. Kath. Lyceum nyomdája, 1871.
- Enyedi, Sándor. "Mikor volt Kolozsvárt az első színházi előadás? [When was the First Professional Hungarian Performance in Cluj]" *A Hét*, June 18, 1982.
- Ferenczi, Zoltán. *A kolozsvári színészet és színház története* [The History of Acting and Theatre from Kolozsvár]. Kolozsvár: Ajtai K. Albert könyvnyomdája, 1897
- [Göde, István, "A magyar színészet történetéhez [Data on the Hungarian Theatre History]," *Történeti Lapok* 2, (1875): no 4:896.
- Hegyessy, Vilmos ed. *Emlékkönyv az erdélyi magyar színészet száz éves jubileuma alkalmából* [Anniversary Book on the Hundred Years Jubilee of the Hungarian Theatre from Transylvania]. Kolozsvár: Jubileum Rendező Bizottsága, 1892.

---

45. Hegyessy ed, *Emlékkönyv az erdélyi*.

- Hobsbawm, Eric. "Invented traditions." In *The invention of tradition*. Edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 1–14. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- "A Jókai pár fogadtatása és a jubileumi banquette [Reception of the Jókai Couple and the Jubilee Banquette]." *Magyar Polgár* (Kolozsvár/Cluj), Apr. 2, 1871.
- Káli Nagy, Lázár. *Visszaemlékezései. Az erdélyi magyar színészet hőskora. 1792–1821* [Recollections. The Heroic Period of the Transylvanian Acting. 1792–1821], Edited by János Lázok. Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 2009.
- [Káli Nagy, Lázár]. "A' Kolozsvári Nemzeti Játékszín építésének történetei, 's ennek mostani állapota [The Construction History of the National Theatre from Kolozsvár and its Situation Today]." *Magyar Kurír* (Vienna), Dec. 25, Dec. 28, 1821.
- Kerényi, Ferenc. "A Pesti Magyar Színházról a Nemzeti Színházig [From the Hungarian Theatre from Pest to the National Theatre]." In *Magyar színház történet (1790–1873)* [Hungarian Theatre History (1790–1873)], edited by Ferenc Kerényi, 264–283. Budapest: Akadémiai, 1990.
- Kerényi, Ferenc. *A régi magyar színpadon (1790–1849)* [On the Old Hungarian Theatre (1790–1849)]. Budapest: Magvető, 1981.
- Kölcsey, Ferenc. *Körner Zrínyijéről* [On Zrinyi by Körner] [1826]. <http://mek.oszk.hu/06300/06367/html/01.htm#142>
- Könyves, Máté. *Játékszíni koszorú* [Stage Wreath], Edited by Eszter György. Budapest: Magyar Színházi Intézet, n.d.
- Körner, Teodor. *Zrínyi, vitézi szomorú játék öt felvonásban* [The Tragedy of Zrinyi in Five Acts]. Translated by Dániel Petrichevich Horváth. Kolozsvár: Ref. Koll. betűi, 1819.
- Lakatos, István. *A kolozsvári magyar zenés színpad* [The Hungarian Musical Theatre from Kolozsvár]. Bukarest: Kriterion Kiadó, 1977.
- Minute Book of the National Theatre from Transylvania, 1820–1835. Fonds of Hungarian Theatre from Cluj, No. 313. Cluj Branch of the National Romanian Archives, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.
- National Theatre Expenditure, 1821. Fonds of Hungarian Theatre from Cluj, No. 313, Cluj Branch of the National Romanian Archives, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.
- Petrichevich Horváth, Dániel. Introduction to *Zrínyi, vitézi szomorú játék öt felvonásban*, by Theodor Körner [The Tragedy of Zrinyi in Five Acts]. Translated by Dániel Petrichevich Horváth. Kolozsvár: Ref. Koll. betűi, 1819.
- Petrichevich Horváth, Dániel. "Elő Szó" [Prologue]. In *Könyves Máté, Játékszíni koszorú* [Stage Wreath by Máté Könyves], edited by Eszter György, 109–110. Budapest: Magyar Színházi Intézet, n.d.
- Records and Correspondences of the Musical Association from Kolozsvár (Cluj), 1821. Fonds of Music Conservatoire, Cluj, No. 1188. Cluj Branch of the National Romanian Archives, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

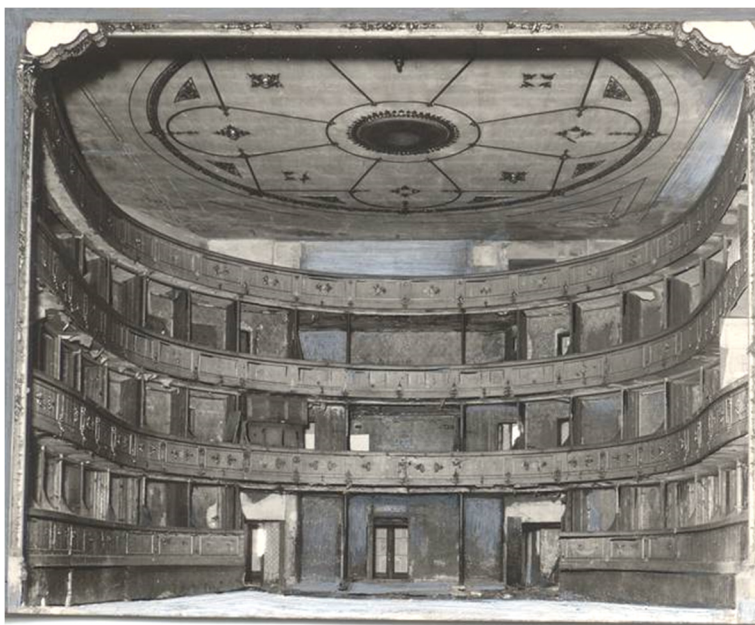
- Sándor Imre. *A széplaki Petrichevich-Horváth család* [The Petrichevich-Horváth family de Széplak]. Kolozsvár: Gámán János Press, 1908.
- Sófalvi, Emese. "Zeneoktatás a kolozsvári Muzsikai Conservatoriumban 1819-1869 között." PhD thesis, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, 2016.
- . "Szolgáltatót a színtársulatoknak mindenféle segélyt, hogy operát tarthassanak... (Adatok a kolozsvári Nemzeti Színház és a helyi Muzsikai Conservatorium együttműködésének történetéhez. 1821-1849) [On the History of the Cooperation between the National Theatre of Kolozsvár and the Local Conservatory of Music]" In *Képes beszéd. Színház- és filmművészeti tanulmányok 2*, edited by Emese Egyed, 60-79. Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2014.
- . "Az intézményes zeneoktatás kezdetei Kolozsváron [The Beginnings of the Institutionalised Music Education in Kolozsvár]." In *A VII. Nemzetközi Hungarológia Kongresszus Zenetudományi Szekciójának előadásai*, edited by István Angi and Csilla Csákány, 166-185. Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2013,
- Szász Béla. "Színházi jubileum [The Theatre Jubilee]." *Kelet* (Kolozsvár/Cluj). Apr. 4, 1871.
- Szinnyei, József. *Magyar írók élete és munkái* (1-14 vols). Budapest: Hornyánszky, 1891-1914.
- <http://mek.oszk.hu/03600/03630/html/>
- Tókes, Orsolya. "A kolozsvári Farkas utcai színház 1865. évi átépítése mint színháztörténeti esemény [The Renovation in 1865 of the Theatre from Farkas Street in Cluj as a Theatre-Historical event]" In *Képes beszéd. Színház és filmművészeti tanulmányok (2)*, edited by Emese Egyed, 90-99. Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum/Egyesület, 2014.



## Appendix



**Fig. 1:** The Hungarian National Theatre in Cluj (1821-1906)



**Fig. 2:** The interior of the National Theatre of Cluj  
(The photo was taken just before its demolition.)

  
 Kolo'svártt.  
 Hétfőn Martius' 12<sup>dik</sup> napján 1821.  
 HAZAFIAKBÓL ÖSZVE-ÁLLOTT TÁRSASÁG ÁLTAL  
 fog elő-adódni  
 A' HAZÁNKBAN LEG ELŐBSZÓR KI NYITANDÓ  
**NEMZETI JÁTEKSZÍN' INNEPÉRE**  
 EGY VITÉZI SZOMORU JÁTÉK  
 V. Fel-vonásokban,  
 ezen nevezet alatt:

**Z R I N Y I**  
 Irta Körner Teodor, fordította Petrichevich Horváth Dániel

Játszó Személyek.

Nagy Szolimán, Török Császár Mechmet Szokolovits, Nagy Vezér Ibrahim, Natoliai Beglerbeg. Ali Portuk, az ügyező Sereg' Vezire Mustafa, Bosniai Basa Lévi, Szolimánnak első udvari Orvosa. Egy Hadi Követ Egy Aga Gróf Zrínyi Miklós, Croatia', Dalmatia', Sclavonia' Banussa, Ország' Taveruicussa, és Sziget Várának Fő Kapitányja.	Gr. Csáky József. Ill. Gr. Bethlen Pál. B. Bornemissa József B. Bánfi Miklós. Barsai Gergely. Lászlai Lajos. Meneségi. Iszlai Miklós. P. Horváth Dániel.	Éva, Született Gróf Rosenberg Kis Asszony, ennek Felesége Ilona, ennek Leánya Alapi Gáspár, Paprutrovits Farkas, Ujlaki Péter, Juranits Lőrincz, Serenk Ferentz, Zrínyi Komornikja Egy Paraszt. Egy Magyar Kapitány Magyar Kapitányok, Magyar és Török Katonák, Testőrök, Kamarások
--	--	---

A' Játszó hely hol Belgrádon, hol Szigetben az 1566<sup>ba</sup> esett történet' helyeit ábrázolja.

A' Lódeknek írta, közepes Emelet	— — — — 6 Rf.	
alsó és leg felső Emeleten	— — — — 5 Rf.	
Zárt-Szék	— — — — 1 Rf.	
Parterre	— — — — — 40 xt.	
Galleria	— — — — — 20 xt.	

Billetek találhatnak a' Piazti Lábon hátsó Telintetes Nagy Lászlai U' szállásán dél utolsó 3 óráig, 5 óráig a' 'Teatrums' Kamrájában.

A' Játék kezdődik pontba 6 órákor, egy ezen alkalmatosságra írott Elő-Szó' Declamatiojával, ezt követi egy ugyan ezen Czeleza készült nagy Kar Ének. Vége létszen 10 után.

**Fig. 3:** The playbill of the Zrínyi tragedy, 11 March 1821  
 (By permission of the Theatre History Collection of the  
 Hungarian National Széchényi Library, Budapest)



**Ünnepélyes előadás,**  
az itteni országos nemzeti színház megnyitása ötvenedik évfordulati napjának emlékéül.  
**Az első előadás 1821 márczius 11-én volt.**

---

NEMZETI SZÍNHÁZ.

33-dik szünet.  
Kolozsvártt, szombaton márczius 11-én 1871.

A helybeli nemzeti színház színészi nyugpénz-alapjának gyarapítására

**Ünnepélyes előadás,**  
3 szakaszban.

---

**Első szakasz:**

a) **Hymnus.** Kölseitől, az összes személyzet által.  
b) **Prolog.** Szász Gerőtől, előadja Sz. Mátray Laura.  
c) **Allegorikai kép.** Fehérváritől, színes fényvilágítással.

---

**Második szakasz:**

**Becsületszó.**  
Szigeti József eredeti vigjátéka 1 felvonásban.

---

**Személyzet:**

Sziklai Leo, gazdag földesur . . . Takács.	Lucretia, társalgónő . . . . . Fehérváriné.
Sziklai Gyula, unoka öccse . . . Prielle.	Lidi, szobaleány . . . . . Márkus Anna.
Róza, fogadott leánya . . . . . Dancz Nina.	Inas . . . . . Szelle.
Bérczi Ákos, Gyula barátja . . E. Kovács Gyula.	Történik Pesten.

---

**Harmadik szakasz:**

**B Á N K - B Á N.**  
Erkel Ferencz eredeti dalművének első felvonása.

---

**Személyzet:**

II. Endre, magyar király . . . Mezei.	Melinda felesége . . . . . Gerecsné M. L.
Gertrud, királyné . . . . . Darai Károlina.	Petur-Bán, bihari főispán . . . . . Bogyó.
Ottó, meráni hercege, Gertrud testvéröccse . . . . . Beczkói.	Biberach, kalandor lovag . . . . . Mezei.
Bánk-Bán, Magyarország nagy ura Cseres Lajos ur	Udvarmester . . . . . Török K.

Udvari hölgyek. Udvaroncok. Békétlenek. — Történik 1213-ik év vége felé.

**Magyar táncz, a tánczszerelő által.**

Helyek ára: Közép páholy 3 ft. 15 kr. Alsó s másod emeleti páholy 2 ft. 60 kr. Felső páholy 2 ft 10 kr. Erkélyszék 1 ft. Elsőrendű zártzék 70 kr. Másodrendű 60 kr. Harmadrendű 40 kr. Földszint 40 kr. Karzat 20 kr.

Jegyek válthatók a színházi irodában reggeli 9-től 1 óráig, d. u. 3-tól 5 óráig.

Tisztelettel kéretnek a n. é. bérlő uraságok, hogy helyeik iránt déli 12 óráig rendelkezni méltóztassanak.

**Kezdeté 7 órakor, vége 9 után.**

Fig. 4: The playbill of the preliminary celebration organised by the professional acting company on 11 March 1871

**Ünnepélyes előadás a kolozsvári nemzeti színház  
megnyitásának örömnünnepére**

**Első nap.**

Szerdahelyiné Prielle Cornelia asszony, Szerdahelyi Kálmán,  
Feleki Miklós urak, és Bogdanovics Kristina k. a. a pesti orszá-  
gos nemzeti színház tagjai mint vendégek.

**NEMZETI SZÍNHÁZ.**

**Rendkívüli szünet**  **Páros szám.**

Kolozsvárt, szombat, április 1-n 1871.

**Az itteni nemzeti színház színész-nyugdíjintézete alaptöke-  
jének gyarapítására.**

**Ünnepélyes előadás.**

**Két szakaszban.**

**I-ső szakasz:**

a) **Magyar nemzeti himnusz,** írta Berli Sándor, hangszerelte és betanította Jakobi Jakab, előadja zenekar-kísérettel az összes színházi személyzet.

b) **Prolog.** írta Szász Gerő, szavalja E. Kovács Gyula.

c) **Apostolok, Fehérvártól.** 3 képmeg-  
1-ső kép: **A harcok kora.**  
2-ik kép: **A nemzeti irodalom felvirágzása.**  
3-ik kép: **A magyar Thálának emelt első oltár**  
**1851 március 11-én.**



Ezen képletben részt vesznek **Ném Márta** és **Göde István**, azon kolozsvári színháztagok meg élő tagjai, kik 50 év előtt a megnyitáskor közreműködtek.

Ezt követi:  
**HODOLAT. Ó cs. kir. apostoli felségnek** dícsősegen uralkodó királyunk és királynénknak ezen színház legm. pártfogóinak.

**II-ik szakasz:**

**A szerző jelenlétében:**

**A BAJUSZ.**

100 arany pályadíj nyert eredeti vígjáték 3 felvonásban, írta: Szilagyi Ede. — Rendező Takács

**Személyzet:**

Koltai István, alispán Adelajd néje, született Thurmdreier néző Thurmdreier, Thurmdreier grófné, Adelajd unoka néje Ersei, Koltai hűga Hugolin Hugó, gróf	<b>Szerdahelyi K. ur.</b> Dancs Nina.  <b>Prielle Cornelia.</b> assz. Kassainé J. M. Mátray B. Béla.	 Várkonyi, gróf Bandi, Koltai huszára Babel, szobalány Inas	Feleki Miklós ur. Lenkei. <b>Bogdanovics K. k. a.</b> Hevesy.  Történet Bécsben a múlt században.
--	---	--	--

Prielle Cornelia asszony, Feleki Miklós és Szerdahelyi Kálmán urak, és Bogdanovics Kristina k. a. a pesti országos nemzeti színház tagjai a korszakot alkotó ünnepély és külföldi érdeklődés iránti érdeklődésből szíveskednek közreműködni.

**Helyek ára:** Közép páholy 10 ft. Alsó és felső közép páholy 8 ft. Felső páholy 6 ft. Erkélyszék 2 ft. Földszinti zárszék 1 ft. 50 kr. Földszinti állóhely 80 kr. Karzati számított hely 1 ft. Karzati állóhely 60 kr.

 Rendelkezhetni és jegyeket váltani a színházi irodában. Ugyanott megrendelések fogadtatnak el az emlekmérekre, melyek közbejött akadályok miatt csak utólagosan készülnek el és adhatnak ki.

Az ünnepélyre vonatkozó alkalmi fizet kapható a pénztárnál és az előcsarnokban 20 krajczárjával o. e.

Tisztelettel kérek a páholy és zárszék bérlo urak és urnók, méltóassanak helyük meg- vagy megem tartása iránt deli 12-óraig rendelkezni, hogy azonnal mások megrendeléseit teljesíthessék.

 A Tisztelet- és szabad zárszék és földszinti bemeneti jegyek érvénytelenek.

**Kezdeté 7 órakor, vége 9 után.**

Holnap a pesti nemzeti színház tagja **Jókainé** asszony vendégfellepten „Szigetvári vértanuk.”

Fig. 5: The playbill of the festive program on 1 April 1871



# Ünnepélyes előadás a kolozsvári nemzeti színház megnyitásának félszázados öröm-ünnepére

## Második nap.

Jókainé, Laborfalvi Róza asszony és Feleký Miklós ur a pesti országos nemzeti színház elsőrendű tagjai mint vendégek.

A szerző jelenlétében.

NEMZETI



SZÍNHÁZ.

Rendkívüli szünet

Páratlan szám.

Kolozsvártt, vasárnap, április 2-án 1871.

Az itteni nemzeti színház színész-nyugdíjintézete pénzalapjának gyarapítására.

# Ünnepélyes előadás.

## A SZIGETVÁRI

# VÉRTANUK.

Eredeti szomorújáték 4 felvonásban, írta: Jókai Mór, az új díszletet elkészítette, és a vártérem léghő robbanását eszközöltette Beczkói János díszfestő. Zrínyi díszbútorát készítette Varga János ruhátárnok, rendező: E. Kovács Gyula.

### Személyzet:

Zrínyi	—	—	—	Feleký Miklós ur.	Szelem, kegyence	—	—	E. Kovács Gyula.
Juránics Lőrincz	—	—	—	Prille.	Ali Portuk, Jancsó aga	—	—	Nagy.
Mária, Lőrincz neje	—	—	—	Sz. Mátyás Laura.	Mahmud	—	—	Váradi J.
Anna, Mária testvére	—	—	—	Jókainé L. R.	Amhat, bass	—	—	Szelle.
Csúky Bertalan, öreg nemes	—	—	—	Mátyás B. Béla.	Nachem beylerbég	—	—	Kassai.
Szeccsdy Péter	—	—	—	Váradi M.	Ferhad, császága	—	—	Saróthi.
Patacsics	—	—	—	Lebrei.	Imán	—	—	Urményi.
Bajony János	—	—	—	Danza Feri.	Lávész	—	—	Váradi A.
Istvánfy Pál	—	—	—	Lenket.	Or	—	—	Balogh.
Serénk, Zrínyi pitvarnoka	—	—	—	Török K.	Orvos	—	—	Szabó M.
Szolejman, szultán	—	—	—	Takács.	Zuelma	—	—	Szeccsdybowa.
Szokolli nagyvezér	—	—	—	Szeccsdy.	Anisz	—	—	Könczöl L.

Magyar vitézek. Urnók. Törökök. — Történet hely: Szigatvár és környéke, idő: 1566 augusztus 4-kétől szeptember 8-ig.

Jókainé, Laborfalvi Róza asszony, és Feleký Miklós ur, a pesti országos nemzeti színház tagjai a korosztályt alkotó ünnepély és kitűzött czél iránti érdekességéből szíveskednek közreműködni.

**Helyek ára:** Közép páholy 10 ft. Alsó és felső közép páholy 5 ft. Felső páholy 6 ft. Erkélyszék 2 ft. Földszinti zártzék 1 ft. 50 kr. Földszinti állóhely 50 kr. Karzati számított hely 1 ft. Karzati állóhely 60 kr.

Tendekérhetni és jegyeket válthatni a színházi irodában. Ugyanott megrendelések fogadtatnak el az emlékérmekre, melyek közbejött akadályok miatt csak utólagosan készítenek el és adhatnak ki.

Az ünnepélyre vonatkozó alkalmi fizet kapható a pénztárnál és az előcsarnokban 20 krajczárjával o. c.

Tisztelettel kértünk a páholy és zártzék berő urak és urnók, méltóságosnak helyek meg- vagy megnem tartása iránt déli 12 óráig rendelkezni, hogy azonnal mások megrendelését teljesíthessék.

A tisztelet- és szabad zártzék és földszinti bemeneti jegyek érvénytelenek.

**Kezdeté 7 órakor, vége 10 után.**

Fig. 6: The playbill of the festive program on 2 April 1871



**Fig. 7:** The playbill of the festive performance on 11 November 1892





**Fig. 8:** The tableau vivant of *Zrínyi's Oath* after the photo taken by Dunky fivérek [Dunky brothers] (11 November 1892).  
On the center baron Béla Szentkereszt as Zrínyi



**Fig. 9:** The tableau vivant of the *Sortie of Zrínyi* after the photo taken by Dunky fivérek [Dunky brothers] (11 November 1892)

**Katalin Ágnes Bartha** is a postdoctoral fellow of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

## *Romanian Theatre Criticism during the Stalinist Era. Construction and Deconstruction of the Critical Discourse*

ALEXANDRA EMMA PEDESTRU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to capture the way theatre criticism changed once the communist regime was finally established in Romania. The focus is on the years of Stalinist reign, as they might be considered the most oppressive, especially in the cultural domain. The article aims, on one hand, to draw a historical context in which the change occurred, while, on the other, it analyzes the various ways Socialist Realism affected critical thinking, substituting aesthetics for ideology in drama reviews and forcing critics to concentrate almost obsessively on the dramaturgy, in the detriment of the performance itself.

**Keywords:** Stalinism, Socialist Realism, criticism, textocentrism, ideology, aesthetics

### **Suppression and substitution of the critical act**

After King Michael abdicated and the communist regime was instated officially in Romania, the responsibilities of artists and art critics significantly drifted away from aestheticism and, closely following the Soviet model, embraced the field of politics and ideological militancy. This historical reality has become axiomatic; the years of the so-called “integral Stalinism” produced an impressive amount of literary and aesthetic rejects from which, later, the authors themselves tried to take a distance; some of them managed to do so elegantly in a new political and cultural environment, others failed in their attempt to penetrate the protective wall of collective memory.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

emma.alexandra.dima@gmail.com. Paper translated from Romanian by Adriana Fekete.

2. v. Angelo Mitchievici and Ioan Stanomir, *Comunism inc. Istorie despre o lume care a fost* (Bucharest, Humanitas: 2017), 15-34.



The tasks of theorists in almost all humanistic domains, though not necessarily simple (as we will see later), were repeatedly defined with clarity by Andrei Jdanov and the Jdanovist spokespeople – among whom the famous Leonte Răutu still ranks as an emblematic figure for the Romanian censorship. To a neutral 21<sup>st</sup> century observer, the constraints imposed on the intellectuals and the creators of the time may seem simultaneous appalling and hilarious because of their restrictive, caricaturistic character.

According to Jdanov's draconian precepts, artistic creation was supposed to incorporate a series of qualities (downright perverse in their illusive simplicity) in order to meet the requirements of socialist realism: to illustrate the struggle of the working and/or oppressed classes against their oppressors; to be founded on socialist values; to fight "obscurantism", "mysticism", and "superstition"; to depict heroes embarked upon building a new existence and so on. However, it was equally important that the lives of the heroic and obviously victorious protagonists be depicted with veracity, not only as an "objective reality" but also in its "revolutionary development".<sup>3</sup> In passing, we can note that the last specification ably/skilfully reversed the argument for verisimilitude and veracity, acting on the conscience of the target audience especially by means of the subtext. Thus, the actual, mundane reality lost its relevance and was replaced by a different, more convenient and carefully processed/altered reality.

In the Romanian space, Leonte Răutu's diatribes targeted at certain socialist fads such as "aestheticism", "formalism", "cosmopolitanism", "comparativism", "apoliticism" and so on<sup>4</sup> reinforced/intensified the message of the Soviet ideologists against aesthetic pluralism which was seen as malign bourgeois inheritance. Seemingly, the recipe for artistic success was available to whoever was willing to accept moral compromise and the gradual inevitable uniformization of cultural products after 30 December 1947.

Consequently, we should not be surprised that the older and younger intellectuals in the USSR and its satellite states, in their ingenuity and disorientation, understood that they were expected to idealize everything, down to the very last consequence of the socialist existence (this being the

---

3. See Andrei Jdanov's speech at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers, available at <http://www.cengage.com/>.

4. See Leonte Răutu's speech at the November 29<sup>th</sup> 1948 meeting with writers, artists and journalists and also "Împotriva cosmopolitismului și obiectivismului burghez în științele sociale", both texts reproduced in Vladimir Tismăneanu and Cristian Vasile, *Perfectul Acrobat. Leonte Răutu, măștile răului* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008).

source of the so-called conflict between “good and better”). However, this well-meaning panegyric/eulogistic intention proved itself insufficient, at least in the field of drama where a more pronounced Manichaeism was recommended, so that the audience should not be overwhelmed by too much good and forget about the existence of various enemies of communist aspirations.

In this respect, we think worth mentioning an episode in 1952, relevant to understanding how socialist realism got stuck/was trapped in a plethora of norms which, today, seem ridiculous. On the occasion of an ample article initially published in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* and made available to the Romanian public by its publication in *Contemporanul*, playwrights and critics were authoritatively reprimanded for the wrong understanding and application of the official aesthetic direction<sup>5</sup> (the contemporary reader would rightfully tend to identify a certain normative intransigence beyond the seemingly benign reproof).

The title, “Let us put an end to the falling behind of our drama”, is as explicit as possible given the spirit of the age. Evidently, the aim of the author, unmentioned, was to make an inventory of the shortcomings of the Soviet dramatic production. Mercilessly, he pointed the finger at playwrights and critics equally, particularly reproaching them for “not having correctly understood certain theoretical and practical aspects of socialist realism and, above all, the problem of conflict as the foundation for the dramatic work”<sup>6</sup>. Actually, the text was trying to sanction the autoprotective tendency of the theatre people against taking risks that could discredit them later on.

For example, the alleged flaw of playwrights was that they “did not found their work on deep, real conflict”, inspired by the mundane existence of the Soviet citizen, whereas the flaw of the critics was that through their writings they encouraged the depiction of an idealized reality. Hence, it was believed that the class struggle was not over and that there still existed numberless negative aspects in the young socialist world that writers had the duty to address in their works, while the role of the chroniclers/journalists was to encourage uninterruptedly the production of adequate works.

---

5. “Să lichidăm rămânerea în urmă a dramaturgiei,” *Contemporanul*, April 11 1952, first published in *Pravda*, April 7 1952.

6. Ibid.

Consequently, the unknown author was accusing the spreading of the “vulgar/trivial theory of conflict extinction” or the reduction of conflicts to the sterile struggle between “good and better”<sup>7</sup>. Such an article discloses, from a contemporary viewpoint, the inability of the Soviet world intellectuals to escape to a safe and satisfactory formula which could provide professional survival. They were denied even this tiny subterfuge (the hyperbolic flattery of the regime) which, normally, should have pleased the authorities. Instead, the glorification of the perfection of the socialist system required, in most cases, a negative counterpoint: condemnation of the class enemies or, in their absence, of the old regimes, along with all the principles (actual or imaginary) that lay at their foundation.

However, as we will see further, Manichaeism and the tendency towards idealization coexisted successfully in Romania, even though the aesthetic idiosyncracies of the dramatic productions had been diminished down to the status of dispensable accessory. From this point of view, it is worth noting the autochthonous reactions to such Soviet pleas (or indictments) as the one mentioned above.

Thus, in the same year, in issue 298 of *Contemporanul*, Lucia Demetrius<sup>8</sup> published an analysis entitled “Unele probleme ale creației noastre dramatice (Some Issues of Our Dramatic Creation)”, similar (and in response) to the one in the Soviet newspaper. In it, playwrights such as Aurel Baranga<sup>9</sup> and M. Davidoglu<sup>10</sup> were scolded for small professional failures. The former was reproached for the fact that in his play “Recolta de aur (The Golden Crop)” he did not show a deep understanding of “the people and their problems” when imagining an apolitical hero (head of an agricultural production cooperative), which was, surely, unthinkable in real life. The latter, despite depicting a “strong” dramatic conflict, was unable to elaborate on it, thus drifting towards *formalism* (in an early version of the play “Cetatea de foc (The Fortress of Fire)”, later improved in reaction to the bad reviews that appeared in *Scînteia*).<sup>11</sup>

---

7. Ibid.

8. Lucia Demetrius (1910-1992) was a Romanian writer, poet and playwright. Between 1949 and 1965 her plays abode by the rules of socialist realism.

9. Aurel Baranga (1913-1979) was a Romanian poet and playwright, author of “Zdrobite cătușe”, the anthem of Romanian People’s Republic, and of numerous socialist realist plays.

10. Mihail Davidoglu (1910-1987) was a Romanian socialist playwright.

11. Lucia Demetrius, “Unele probleme ale creației noastre dramatice,” *Contemporanul*, June 20 1952.

In a later issue, P. Țugui and S. Damian were to make a similar contribution (this time in reaction to the Plenary Session of the Writers' Union), "Despre unele probleme ale dramaturgiei noastre (On Some Problems of Our Drama)", in which they insistently criticized the "schematism" of some plays, providing complex explanation for the roots of the phenomenon:

Trying to conceal schematism, the lack of spiritual substance of certain characters, some playwrights resort to sterile, artificial procedures, taken from the arsenal of decadent bourgeois literature. Schematism and the fake individuality of the characters point to the fact that these playwrights do not sufficiently cherish the beauty and the dramatism of life, confining themselves to "tourist" documentation/research, to mere visits to reality. [...] Socialist realism means the manifold/multilateral representation of the truth of life, of the spiritual richness of the new people; it requires the firm control of schematism, of lifeless clichés that kill real art.<sup>12,13</sup>

Further on, a short comment regarding the responsibilities of the critics catches our attention:

Our theatre criticism should take a militant stand on affirming a just point of view when evaluating original drama; it should be more effective in popularizing the successes of our drama, offering high quality ideological and artistic guidance.<sup>14,15</sup>

---

12. P. Țugui and S. Damian, "Despre unele probleme ale dramaturgiei noastre," *Contemporanul*, September 12 1952.

13. "Încercând să acopere schematismul, lipsa de conținut sufletesc a unor personaje, unii autori dramatici apelează la procedee sterile, artificiale, împrumutate din arsenalul literaturii burgheze decadente. Schematismul și falsa individualitate a personajilor arată că acești autori dramatice nu prețuiesc îndeajuns frumusețea, dramatismul vieții, rezumându-se la documentări „turistice”, la vizite prin realitate. [...] Realismul socialist înseamnă reprezentarea artistică multilaterală a adevărului vieții, a bogăției spirituale a oamenilor noi, impune combaterea fermă a schematismului, a clișeelelor fără viață, careucid arta adevărată."

14. P. Țugui and S. Damian, "Despre unele probleme".

15. "Critica noastră teatrală ar trebui să manifeste o poziție militantă pentru afirmarea punctului de vedere just în aprecierea dramaturgiei originale, să fie mai operativă în popularizarea succeselor dramaturgiei noastre, dând o îndrumare la un nivel mai înalt ideologic și artistic."

We can note how this last recommendation suffers from convenient ambiguity: the authors of the text fulfilled their duty of pointing to a systemic evil; they offered a solution consistent with the problem and concluded their approach with the awareness that they had offered a correct cure, irrespective of the angle from which one might consider the issue. It seems that the tasks of the critics were extremely simple: sanctioning any deviation from the right road, encouraging appropriate writings, and, most importantly, taking a "militant stand". In reality, their task was burdened on the one hand by the fact that socialist realism, subject to excessive rigour, was unable to deliver original/genuine products since it was based on a rather limited recipe collection; on the other hand, it was made difficult by the critics' own disorientation (especially in the case of those with serious professional training) in relation to the new identity of the prototypical intellectual.

Consequently, convergent with the official discourse established by the Soviet publications, the Romanian authors started to question the autochthonous theatrical manifestations and, even though they could not actually reproach the lack (or insufficiency) of Manichaeistic approach, their criticism was directed towards similar shortcomings: superficial, insufficiently elaborate conflicts; the drift towards "formalism", and so on. Such remarks were often circulated in the mass media of the time and they were just slightly (re)formulated from one text to another. Actually, given their simplicity, they could be considered universally valid as all criticism could be reduced to stating whether the authors were successful or unsuccessful in creating characters and conflicts that could support and illustrate the socialist cause/ideal.

In conclusion, we can say that even in the most glorious years of Stalinism, socialist realism was undergoing an insoluble aesthetic crisis, triggered by its purely ideological genesis and by the fact that its existence was prolonged artificially, thus disturbing its life cycle. In Romania, where this trend had been imposed over night, the adjustment of the evaluative discourse to the newly created conditions for creation happened in a brutal and traumatic manner, hence the difficulty that theorists had in acquiring the appropriate critical tools, which resulted in an ever-deeper immersion in an ideology simplified by an *ad infinitum* reproduction of its principles.

### Survival techniques for the cultural journalist

Among the standpoints that were rapidly taken over from Soviet publications (more precisely from *Sovietscoe Iscusstvo*) by *Contemporanul* there was an article directly aimed at theatre criticism, a virulent reproach to journalists – whose mission to support the proliferation of socialist realism seemed to have failed and turned into an arid simulacrum.<sup>16</sup> Once again, the accused were Russian intellectuals, even though the accusations could have easily taken on a universal character. Surprisingly, in this particular instance the issue was the separation of aestheticism and ideology when analyzing the socialist-realistic performances.

V. Vlasov was accusing the Soviet theatre theorists of “narrow empiricism”, of connivance with the playwrights, thus becoming accomplices to the “serious mistakes” made by the playwrights and bearing responsibility for spreading “pernicious conceptions”, among which the hesitant attitude towards the “depiction of negative characters”. However, the main imputation referred to the lack of balance between the interest shown in the content of cultural products and the interest in the analysis of artistic form. As the author put it, “the lack of exigence towards the artistic quality of the play, towards the embodiment of its ideological content in perfect artistic images”.

Instead of being normative and inquisitive, “sanctioning shallowness” and appreciating the value of the works of art in terms of unity of content and form, theatre criticism would rather try to evade, taking refuge in ideological sentences and just stating the adequacy or inadequacy of the plays in relation to the official politics. The reasons for such deviation are numerous; however, we can identify some of them focusing on the Romanian context, with all its peculiarities, such as the obsession with the dramatic support of the performance and the seeming incapacity of evaluating staging beyond the success/failure in the theatrical materialization of the text.

As Angelo Mitchievici notes, “Totalitarian regimes exhibit literature-centred cultures where the role of the writer is oversized because it accumulates the prerogatives of the other humanist sciences”.<sup>17</sup> However, the theatre critic does not work with a finite, constant and one-layered product that can be

---

16. Andrei Jdanov, “Însemnări cu privire la critica teatrală (Notes concerning theatre criticism)”, *Contemporanul*, July 11 1952. Reprinted from *Sovietscoe Iscusstvo*, no.47c

17. Mitchievici and Stanomir, *Comunism inc.*, 27.

evaluated according to such blatantly reductionist principles. On the contrary, he is at greater risk to “be wrong” since his sentences/verdicts refer to a lot of aspects: not just the “correctness” of the text, but also that of staging, interpretation and of other more subtle and insidious elements. Thus, in the context of troubled and radical changes brought about by the traumatic establishment of Stalinism in Romania, the alteration of the theatre critic’s identity was inevitable.

Even though the Romanian culture has always tended to be text-centred, theatre critics started, even before 1947, to pay increasing attention to the elements typical of the performing arts. However, after the imposition of socialist realism, maybe out of fear for their own safety or maybe out of convenience (especially because some of them were new to the field), their interest in the new literature went hand in hand with subjecting the performing elements to the dramatic ones. Thus, a genuine obsession with fidelity to text appeared along with a quasi-general paranoia in relation to the creative liberties that the numerous actors involved in the production of a performance could afford to take.

More often than not, the plays had to pass through numerous filters before their staging was approved; consequently, a purely descriptive review containing just a few fanciful remarks added to the abstract seemed to be a safer option than a thorough technical analysis of the dramatic components that could be criticized for its “aestheticism” or accused of “formalism”. Consequently, in most cases, three out of four columns were dedicated to the play and the author, with detailed moral analysis of the protagonists. Frequently, stage management was mentioned just in passing and mainly referred to the selection of the actors who had the duty to intensify as much as possible the qualities of the characters they played. Let us consider the following example:

Doctor Murgu, too, is a complex character, considered from various angles, a man with a rich spiritual life. Not without hesitation, he manages to overcome confinement to his professional shell, his indifference to political involvement and realizes that the fight for the health of the people cannot be fought outside the fight against the enemies of the people. His struggle with himself, his love of the working people, his increasing combativeness in relation to the class enemies, his moral purity evidenced by his true and strong love for

teacher Marta, his high professional scrupulousness – all these characteristic traits of doctor Murgu make the hero embody the best features of the intellectuals who are now resolutely breaking with the evil influence of the bourgeois school that had taught them.<sup>18,19</sup>

Even without having knowledge of the dramatic text, we can infer the reforming effort made by the character in order to break with the old social order entirely. Additionally, this short fragment portrays the typical hero of socialist realism, namely a person who breaks with her/his own past to the point where s/he loathes the bourgeoisie and dedicates her/his efforts to the working class. The author of the review insists on a series of attributes of the character, essential to its integration in the pantheon of new dramatic heroes: devotion to the proletariat, rejection of the bourgeois order, involvement in the socialist struggle, etc. And, maybe the most important aspect, the author underlines the doctor's transition from apolitism to active involvement in the struggle against the enemies of the people. The evolution of the character is well structured and the review records the most significant aspects of the character's personal, professional and social route. In regard to acting, things are more complicated:

In the role of doctor Murgu, Septimiu Sever achieved a beautiful performance, embodying a complex and bright character. With simple yet valuable means, the actor brought out in relief the inner struggle of the character, and his growth; he highlighted, without ostentation yet convincingly, the positive traits of the hero, as well as his positive potential, not disregarding the presentation of the negative features of the character. Septimiu Sever will perfect his performance in "People

---

18. Aurel Baranga, "Lucia Demetrius: 'Oameni de azi'," *Contemporanul*, October 3 1952.

19. "Doctorul Murgu este deasemenea un caracter bogat surprins din unghiuri diverse, om cu o viață sufletească complexă. Nu fără șovăieli, el izbutește să înfrângă închistarea în carapacea profesiunii sale, indiferența față de politică și să se convingă că lupta pentru sănătatea poporului nu se poate duce în afara luptei împotriva dușmanilor acestuia. Lupta pe care o duce din acest punct de vedere cu sine însuși, dragostea lui pentru oamenii muncii, combativitatea crescândă de care dă dovadă față de dușmanul de clasă, puritatea lui morală vădită în iubirea sinceră și puternică pentru învățătoarea Marta, înalta sa conștiințiozitate profesională – toate aceste trăsături caracteristice pentru doctorul Murgu, fac ca eroul să întruchipeze cele mai bune însușiri ale intelectualilor care se desprind azi cu hotărâre de sub influența nefastă a școlii burgheze în care au învățat."



of Today" if he will get rid of certain unnatural or gratuitous gestures, of certain patterns that he tends to follow and which prevent the actor from fully emphasizing the individual character of doctor Murgu.<sup>20,21</sup>

The particularities of acting are conveyed in rather vague terms, at least in comparison with the obvious concreteness of the description of the literary character's qualities. The strength of the actor resides in the fact that he was able "to bring out in relief" the doctor's character, in other words in the fact that he did not significantly deviate from the course defined by the author and did not feel at liberty to make personal contributions to the character's profile. The actor presented both the positive and the negative traits of the character – an ambiguous remark which does not say anything, in fact, about the particularities of acting. A lot more precisely expressed is the recommendation that Septimiu Sever get rid of his professional tics, of certain "gratuitous gestures" which affect the accuracy of the representation. We could interpret this indication as honest criticism of the tendency shown by some actors for automatism when working on diverse roles; however, we also feel entitled to suspect, given the circumstances, that the actor allowed himself a kind of "poetic licence" whose impromptu character disturbed the reviewer.

In spite of all this, in the latter '40s, when the new political context still appeared dim/vague and indefinite, occasional exceptions occurred when criticism was not completely devoid of critical substance. However, even in these rare cases the texts would inevitably resort to the directives of the Party, as if to a compulsory footnote, keeping at the same time a subtle aesthetic distance. Such is the case of an article on a musical published in 1949, signed by a very young Valentin Silvestru:

---

20. Aurel Baranga, "Lucia Demetrius"

21. "În rolul doctorului Murgu, Septimiu Sever a izbutit o frumoasă creație, înfățișând un caracter complex și luminos. Actorul a știut să scoată în evidență cu mijloace simple dar cu atât mai prețioase, frământările personagiului, procesul lui de creștere, să sublinieze fără ostentație și deci cu atât mai convingător, laturile pozitive ale omului întruchipat, ceeace este bun în el și are șansă să se desvolte, după cum nu a neglijat nici prezentarea laturilor negative ale personagiului. Septimiu Sever își va desăvârși creația sa din „Oameni de azi” dacă va ști să renunțe la unele gesturi nefirești sau gratuite, la anumite șabloane pe care actorul le folosește și care îl împiedică să scoată pe deplin în relief specificul individual al doctorului Murgu.”

This time, the musical has a clear plot which is consistently seen through to the end and almost everything that goes on on the stage is centred around it. The acts are well related to one another and thus increase the interest of the audience as the plot unfolds.<sup>22,23</sup>

This time, the reviewer seems to have overcome his evaluative shyness and dared to focus, analytically, on certain aspects relevant to the performing nature of the show. Inevitably, the political aspect is approached again immediately, conscientiously, if concisely:

This is the more important as it does not refer to some ordinary action. "The step forward" mainly refers to the fact that the plot illustrates an event in a factory. Based on this dramatic plot, the authors raise certain interesting topical political issues, such as the nation problem, validly conveyed with artistry and in the spirit of the important newly issued resolution of the Political Office of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party.<sup>24,25</sup>

After this obligatory remark, the author resumes the proper analysis, he, too, insisting on the fidelity to text issue, even though in this particular case the arguments seem more complex and better related to stage management:

Furthermore, it is worth noting that, even though the plot is well defined, unjustified/superfluous scenes also appear, such as "Summer Goes, Autumn Comes", scenes that seem to have a loose connection to the rest of the plot. This appears to be an old bad habit which

---

22. Valentin Silvestru, "O revistă nouă și un pas înainte, sau spectacolul 'Stroe știe și le spune' de la Teatrul Savoy (A new revue and a step forward, or the show 'Stroe knows and tells' from Savoy Theatre)," *Flacăra*, January 9 1949.

23. "De data aceasta, revista are o acțiune lămurită, urmărită consecvent până la sfârșit, mai tot ceea ce se petrece în perimetrul scenic axându-se pe subiectul propus. Tablourile legându-se unele de altele fac să crească interesul spectatorului pe măsură ce se desfășoară acțiunea."

24. Valentin Silvestru, "O revistă nouă".

25. "Lucrul e cu atât mai important, cu cât nu e vorba de o acțiune oarecare. „Pasul înainte” se referă în special la faptul că acțiunea e reprezentată de o întâmplare dintr-o fabrică. Pe această bază de intrigă dramatică, autorii pun o sumă de probleme politice interesante și la ordinea zilei, cum ar fi de pildă chestiunea națională, expusă artisticeste valabil și în spiritul aceluia important document apărut de curând, care este rezoluția Biroului Politic al Comitetului Central al P.M.R."

the management of the show were unable to get rid of: creating roles, scenes, tableaux not just for the sake of a certain meaning, but also for certain persons who should be employed at any cost; it is desirable that in the future the people who decide to embark upon such projects should focus primarily on the text [...] Responsible for such weaknesses is also N. Stroe – in his capacity as a director. Stage management should cooperate with the authors in order to clarify the issues of the show [...] <sup>26,27</sup>

The review continues by presenting some aspects regarding the nature of the performing arts, in particular of the theatrical performance:

Although acting vivaciously, Didi Ionescu did not show anything more than a certain manner of presentation which he probably thinks original; the same thing happened to other old actresses of the musical ensemble who cannot be said to lack talent. Still, remaining the prisoner of a certain manner of acting is not desirable [...] The show enjoyed the scenery signed by Liviu Ciulley and this was one of the rare occasions when we could enjoy a musical adequately served by well structured, well designed and suitably colourful scenery. Elly Roman's music, even though not very present, showed some new accents for new situations in a musical. <sup>28,29</sup>

---

26. Valentin Silvestru, "O revistă nouă".

27. "E de observat deasemeni că deși există o acțiune precizată, apar și scene nejustificate cum ar fi de pildă „Trece vara, trece toamna”, fără nicio angrenare în complexul general de fapte. Se distinge aci un obicei mai vechi, pe care probabil că nici conducerea acestui spectacol n-a reușit să-l depășească: acela de a crea roluri, scene, tablouri, nu numai pentru un anume sens, ci și pentru persoane, care trebuiesc întrebuințate cu orice preț și ar fi de dorit ca pe viitor, cei ce vor mai porni la o asemenea treabă să își pună în mod deosebit înaintea problemele textului [...] De astfel de slăbiciuni răspunde desigur și N. Stroe – în calitate de regisor. Direcția de scenă trebuie să colaboreze cu autorii la limpezirea spectacolului [...]."

28. Valentin Silvestru, "O revistă nouă".

29. "Deși jucând cu nerv, Didi Ionescu n-a adus nimic peste o manieră de prezentare pe care și-o socoate originală și aceasta s-a întâmplat și cu alte vechi actrițe ale ansamblului de revistă, nu lipsite de altfel de calități. Dar rămânerea într-o anumită manieră de joc nu e recomandabilă [...] Spectacolul s-a desfășurat în decorul lui Liviu Ciulley și e una din rarele împrejurări când am avut posibilitatea să vedem un spectacol de revistă servit adecvat de decoruri bine construite, gândite just, colorate după necesitățile reale ale acțiunii. Mai redusă cantitativ, muzica lui Elly Roman a găsit și unele accente noi pentru situații noi într-un spectacol de revistă."

Interesting enough, at the bottom of the same page, enclosed/surrounded by Silvestru's review, we can find an article by scenographer M. Rubingher on the adaptation of scenography to the specificity of the theatrical performance in which, among short philippics against the bourgeois who had manipulated and deformed history, we can also find decent remarks, such as: "[...] the scenic painter can no longer be a mere illustrator without personality [...]" "[...] he needs to become an active collaborator with the author and the director in defining the graphical space which should be closely linked to the structure of the performance [...]" "[...] the scenic painter needs to have good knowledge of the milieu of the age when the plot unfolds [...]"<sup>30</sup> and so on.

Consequently, the interest in the structure of the theatrical performance, in the technical aspects that define the specificity of the theatrical art, and in the aesthetic particularities of each staging still existed, if rather latent; it became more and more feeble and it almost disappeared in 1953 when the political context changed on Stalin's death (although the Romanian echoes were even then rather weak, especially in the cultural sector). Most of the reviews in the Stalinist age closely followed the compatibility of the text with the socialist requirements and then the compatibility of the performance with the text.

For example, in 1950, in *Scântea*, a newspaper which was supposed to set the ideological tone for the Romanian space, an ample review appeared of the Army Theatre's production "The Last Message". The article was three columns long and the only remark related to the performance as such was the following:

The staging of the play "The Last Message" is a process that the Army Theatre can be proud of. Comrade Perahim's scenery and comrade M. Raicu's stage management contributed to increasing the artistic value of the performance. Substantial merit in staging the play goes to comrade Al. Finți, director of the Army Theatre, who played an active role in setting up and refining the performance.<sup>31,32</sup>

Frequently, the staging of new texts was received with a solemnity that seems hilarious today; it looked as if the critical approach were, in its essence, of a parodical nature. Only by becoming familiar with the political context of the

---

30. M. Rubingher, "Aportul plastic în spectacol (The fine arts in theatre)," *Flacăra*, January 9 1949.

31. Zamfir Brumaru, "Ultimul mesaj (Last message)," *Scântea*, May 7 1950.

32. "Montarea piesei „Ultimul mesaj” este un proces care face cinste Teatrului Armatei. Decorurile tov. Perahim și direcția de scenă a tov. M. Raicu au contribuit la ridicarea valorii artistice a spectacolului. Un mare merit în montarea piesei îl are tov. Al. Finți, directorul Teatrului Armatei, care a avut un rol activ în elaborarea și punerea la punct a spectacolului."

age can today's reader understand the axiological blockage which the journalists of the early '50s had to face. Confronted with a monstrous mechanism producing works that lacked originality, it is not surprising that they would cling on to certain commonplaces, previously tested and approved. In general, theatrical production was criticized for the shallowness of the plot or of the characters; the insufficiently harsh exposure of the people's enemies; the use of humour in delineating the negative characters which could result in the audience's slight empathy for them; the liberty that the stage managers sometimes took in relation to the text, etc. Obsessively denounced were caricature, grotesque humour, reality schematization and, certainly, the lack of plot unity. Furthermore, any deviation from the aesthetics of socialist realism was criticized. Mixing styles was forbidden whereas simplicity and clarity enjoyed unanimous appreciation. Ultimately, the new theatrical forms tried to attract a rather unrefined audience, with minimal aesthetic experience. In addition, metaphors and symbols had an intolerable allusive potential. The following examples illustrate this state of affairs:

The main issue of dramatization, namely the conflict, has been solved here with mastery. However, the author did not succeed in presenting the conflict with the same vigour throughout the plot. The unity of the conflict is often disrupted by the attempt to present the multiple aspects of reality as separate snapshots.<sup>33,34</sup>

Or, a fragment from an older text, dating back before 1948, which criticizes the lack of aesthetic unity (showing the beginning of the obsession with aesthetic and ideological purity):

Likewise, certain tendencies towards symbolism and vague philosophical rambling, which appear awkward in folk clothing, [...] deprive the play of simplicity. And besides the lyricism of the dialogue and an imagistic and verbal excess, this blend between the author's voice and the voice of folklore gives rise to confusion.

---

33. Margareta Bărbuță, "Trei generații de luptători (Three generations of fighters)," *Contemporanul*, May 15 1953.

34. "Problema de bază a dramatizării, aceea a conflictului, este rezolvată aici cu măiestrie. Dar autoarea n-a reușit să prezinte în tot timpul acțiunii cu aceiași vigoare acest conflict. Unitatea conflictului este adesea fărâmițată din pricina tendinței de a prezenta multiplele aspecte ale realității în instantanee disparate."

[...] Mr Şahighian's stage management showed a number of flaws, foremostly a shortcoming that is, unfortunately, quite frequent in our theatre: mixed theatrical styles. A generally realistic interpretation is at times disrupted by expressionist moments [...].<sup>35,36</sup>

Additionally, as we have already mentioned previously, the acting performances were generally evaluated in direct relation to the features of the character, according to the prescribed formula "X succeeded/failed in highlighting..."

To a certain extent, Elvira Godeanu's interpretation illustrated the anxiety of the character but the development of the process was not conveyed convincingly enough. [...] The embassy counselor was played by Ion Iancovescu whose interpretation was filled with cynicism and rapacity. However, the complex nature of the character was not sufficiently explored. The actor failed to highlight the fact that the American diplomat is the exponent of monopolist trusts and unscrupulously pursues their goals. [...] N. Băltăţeanu found the right ways to give dramatic expression to the manifold nature of the character and managed to bring out to relief the accents of human sincerity from beyond its cynicism and decrepitude.<sup>37,38</sup>

---

35. Silvian Iosifescu, "Un debut: 'Omul din Cetel' dramă în 3 acte (10 tablouri) de Mihail Davidoglu," *Contemporanul*, 1946.

36. "Deasemeni anumite tendinţe spre simbol şi spre filosofarea vagă, ce par stingherite în haina folclorică pe care o îmbracă [...] răpesc piesei din simplitate. Şi în afară de liricizarea dialogului şi de un exces imagistic şi verbal, acest amestec între glasul autorului şi glasurile folclorului naşte confuzii. [...] Direcţiei de scenă a d-lui Şahighian i se pot imputa mai multe lucruri şi în primul rând o lipsă, din păcate frecventă în teatrul nostru: amestecuri de stiluri. O interpretare în general realistă este brăzdată pe alocuri de momente expresioniste [...]."

37. Simion Alterescu, "'Casa cu stururile trase' de fraţii Tur," *Contemporanul*, January 19 1951.

38. "În interpretarea Elvirei Godeanu a existat într-o măsură oarecare, frământarea care caracterizează personagiul, dar dezvoltarea acestui proces nu a fost redată cu destulă forţă de convingere. [...] Consilierul ambasadei este interpretat de Ion Iancovescu, care i-a dat o interpretare plină de cinism şi rapacitate. Dar caracterul complex al acestui personagiu nu a fost destul adâncit. Astfel interpretul nu a reuşit să scoată în relief cum tipul diplomatului american este exponentul trusturilor monopoliste şi urmăreşte fără scrupule înfăptuirea scopurilor acestora. [...] N. Băltăţeanu a găsit forme juste de expresie scenică pentru multilateralitatea personagiului, reuşind să scoată la suprafaţă, de sub cinismul şi decrepitudinea acestuia, accentele de umană sinceritate."

The educational role of the theatre was frequently underlined and the idea arose that entertainment with no propagandistic deep meaning was nothing else than a prolongation of the bourgeois values which, certainly, needed to be eradicated. Humour, in particular, required careful control:

Our audience enjoys laughing, certainly, but their laughs need to be a sharp weapon aimed at the representatives of the oppressing class, at the remains of the past, and not a narcotic meant to lull class vigilance as was the case with the bourgeois theatre. If our actors fail to consolidate sufficiently the educational and political role that they have to play in our popular democratic regime, it is possible that some of them return to the ways of the bourgeois theatre.<sup>39,40</sup>

The above fragment comes from an inquiry undertaken by Margareta Bărbuță on behalf of *Contemporanul* to identify those performances of the 1949-1950 theatrical season which, since the premiere date, had somehow altered their content. The document is extremely relevant to understanding the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic requirements of the theatre critics. The author's main motivation is expressed in unequivocal terms:

The public who comes to watch a performance months after its premiere has the same right to know the truth in the same theatrical expression as the public who watched the performance on the first nights. The actors have no right to distort the content of the play or the characters they play for the sake of a laugh. Self-importance is an evil bequeathed by the bourgeois theatre [...]<sup>41,42</sup>

---

39. Margareta Bărbuță, "Schimbarea la față a unor spectacole (The transfiguration of some performances)," *Contemporanul*, March 17 1950.

40. "Publicului nostru îi place desigur să râdă, dar râsul său trebuie să fie o armă ascuțită împotriva reprezentanților clasei exploatare, împotriva rămășițelor trecutului, nu un narcotic menit să-i adoarmă vigilența de clasă, așa cum fusese în teatrul burghez. Neadâncirea suficientă a rolului educativ-politic pe care ei trebuie să-l îndeplinească în regimul nostru de democrație populară, are drept rezultat o revenire a unora dintre actorii noștri la procedeele teatrului burghez."

41. Margareta Bărbuță, "Schimbarea la față".

42. "Publicul care vine să vadă un spectacol la câteva luni după premieră are același drept să cunoască adevărul în imagini scenice cași publicul din primele seri. Actorii nu au dreptul să denatureze conținutul piesei, al personajilor interpretate, numai de dragul unui hohot de râs. Vedetismul este o racilă pe care a lăsat-o teatrul burghez [...]"

The sin of the actors and directors, implicitly, was that of having inserted jokes in the performances, somehow distorting the ethics of the dramatic texts. The objections were expressed in the following manner:

Marcel Anghelescu prolongs the scene in which he reads the article in "The Voice of the National Patriot" and exaggerates the humoristic effects by exhausting every word to such an extent that the article, meant to expose the demagogy and fake patriotism of the bourgeois press of the time, is left devoid of content; Niki Atanasiu (Chiriac) spits on his hands and dusts Master Dumitrache's coat, repeating the gesture to satiation. Throughout the play there is a shrill affectation of the characters' gossipy nature, a waste of gestures that divert the attention of the audience from the real meaning of the play.<sup>43,44</sup>

This, of course, is merely a sample of the censorial role critics had to undertake in order to survive professionally. Some of them played it brilliantly, maybe even with an ounce of conviction. Interestingly enough, an extensive dossier followed the above-mentioned article, with contributions from personalities like Sică Alexandrescu, J. Cazaban, Al. Finți, Aurel Baranga, Sorana Coroamă, Moni Ghelerter and so on, all of them actors, directors or playwrights. The consensus seemed to be that the actors have the obligation to do everything in their power in order to avoid improvising and, thus, betraying the text.

Therefore, we might conclude that the first years of communism in Romania were not only profoundly traumatic, but also game-changing when it comes to the theatrical field. Critics and reviewers had to abide by new rules, some of them so draconian that they managed to alter critical thinking itself, with long-term repercussions in our culture.

---

43. Margareta Bărbuță, "Schimbarea la față".

44. "Marcel Anghelescu prelungește scena lecturii articolului din „Vocea patriotului național”, exagerând atât de mult efectele comice, trăgând de fiecare cuvânt, încât goleşte de conținut acest articol, menit să desvăluie demagogia sforăitoare și falsul patriotism al presei burgheze a timpului; Niki Atanasiu (Chiriac) scuipă în palme și scutură de praf surtucul lui jupân Dumitrache, repetând gestul până la saturație. În toată piesa, o afectare stridentă a mahalagismului personajilor, o risipă de gesturi care au darul de a îndepărta atenția publicului de la conținutul de idei al operei."



## References

- Anonymous. "Să lichidăm rămânerea în urmă a dramaturgiei." *Contemporanul*, April 11 1952.
- Alterescu, Simion. "'Casa cu storurile trase' de frații Tur." *Contemporanul*, January 19 1951.
- Baranga, Aurel. "Lucia Demetrius: 'Oameni de azi'." *Contemporanul*, October 3 1952.
- Bărbuță, Margareta. "Schimbarea la față a unor spectacole." *Contemporanul*, March 17 1950.
- Bărbuță, Margareta. "Trei generații de luptători." *Contemporanul*, May 15 1953.
- Brumaru, Zamfir. "Ultimul mesagiu." *Scânteia*, May 7 1950.
- Demetrius, Lucia. "Unele probleme ale creației noastre dramatice." *Contemporanul*, June 20 1952.
- Iosifescu, Silvan. "Un debut: 'Omul din Cetal' dramă în 3 acte (10 tablouri) de Mihail Davidoglu." *Contemporanul*, 1946.
- Jdanov, Andrei. "Însemnări cu privire la critica teatrală." *Contemporanul*, July 11 1952.
- Mitchievici, Angelo and Ioan Stanomir. *Comunism inc. Istории despre o lume care a fost*. Bucharest, Humanitas: 2017.
- Rubingher, M. "Aportul plastic în spectacol." *Flacăra*, January 9 1949.
- Silvestru, Valentin. "O revistă nouă și un pas înainte, sau spectacolul 'Stroe știe și le spune' de la Teatrul Savoy." *Flacăra*, January 9 1949.
- Tismăneanu, Vladimir and Cristian Vasile. *Perfectul Acrobat*. Leonte Răutu, măștile răului. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008.
- Țugui, P. and S. Damian. "Despre unele probleme ale dramaturgiei noastre." *Contemporanul*, September 12 1952.

**Alexandra-Emma Pedestru** is a PhD student at the Theatre and Film Doctoral School of Babeș-Bolyai University, with a thesis about Romanian theatre criticism during the communist regime. She has a master's degree in Film and Performative Arts from the Theatre and Television Faculty in Cluj, and in 2014 she graduated from Theatre Studies at the same institution.

## *A Theatre for the Workers, Protest as Performance, and the Political Police as (Art) Historian. A Plea for the Rediscovering of Interwar Peripheries*

IULIA POPOVICI<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The article argues the importance of a renewed approach of the proletarian and Agit-prop theatre in interwar Romania, as well as forms of political proto-performances, as sociological and political phenomena, more than as aesthetical ones, based especially on the research of primary sources. Due to the specific political context of the period and the harsh censorship, these primary sources are mainly to be represented by the files of the political police of the time, Siguranța. Taken over by its communist successor, these files were manipulated and reinterpreted according to occasional political needs: any research of the original documents is an archaeological process dealing with both the analyzed activity per se and the politicization of archives during the 1948-1989 period.

**Keywords:** proletarian theatre; Agit-prop; interwar Romania; political performance; archives; Communist Party of Romania

For 50 years, proletarian and Agit-prop interwar theatre in Romania didn't leave any trace within the local tradition of this art. The impression of many theatre professionals that Romania never had a practice of theatrical events made by workers, for the workers and about the workers worth an artistic and research interest is fueled by the limited number of articles and books (all dating from before 1977) revisiting the so-called „tea parties”, poetry reciting, amateur or semi-professional performances, etc., but also, occasionally, respectable professional productions, which make the core of

---

1. *Independent Researcher.*

this practice<sup>2</sup>. The existing bibliography is not only associated with a period of perceived artistic mediocrity and political indoctrination (the 1950s and the early 1960s), which might make readers suspect that even the facts themselves were invented, but it is also partially unreliable by itself because of historical alterations. For instance, it is not believable that an illegal communist party with around 1.000 members could have been responsible for all proletarian theatre events – as it appears in Margareta Andreescu's *Proletarian Theatre in Romania* (1977), the only synthesis on the subject –, and it is a historical fact that not all trade unions in Romania (the most constant producers of workers' theatre in the 1920s and 1930s) were associated with the communists (a large part of them were connected to the socialists, the mortal enemies of the communist parties in that period). In many situations, the past of the proletarian and Agit-prop theatre was yet another field for the post-1945 regime to build a legitimacy, to erase parts of history in order to emphasize its own position. And the moment when all these (few) publications appeared – some, at the peak of socialist realism, others, during the national communism – made politically undesirable, hence, absent, any reflection on the connections with and influences of the Soviet amateur/Agit-prop/proletarian theatre of the 1920s and 1930s.

The theatrical practice itself falls also prey to strong lack of cultural interest for amateur and politically engaged art and to the official narrative regarding the interwar period in general and the interwar performance art especially<sup>3</sup>. The focus on the model of actors-run private companies, on the one hand, and on the aesthetical phenomenon of the so-called „theatricalization” (the self-affirmation of theatre as an art autonomous from literature or visual arts and of the stage director as the actual author of the performance<sup>4</sup>) has left

---

2. Claudine Amiard-Chevrel, ed., *Le Théâtre D'agit-Prop - Vol. 3* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1977); Margareta Andreescu, *Teatrul Proletar Din România [Proletarian Theatre in Romania]* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1977).

3. In the section of her book dedicated to the Romanian stage of the 1920s and 1930s, Miruna Runcan only mentions the only official – and subsidized – repertory workers's theatre, Work and Joy, saying that the trade union support for such proletarian theatres, common in US, the Soviet Union, and Western countries, was difficult to find in Romania. The aesthetical contribution of the Work and Joy Theatre is considered as non-existent. See Miruna Runcan, *Teatralizarea Şi Reteatralizarea În România – 1920-1960 [Theatricalization and Re-Theatricalization in Romania – 1920-1960]*, 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Editura Liternet, 2014), 22.

4. For more on this topic, see Miruna Runcan, *Teatralizarea Şi Reteatralizarea În România – 1920-1960 [Theatricalization and Re-Theatricalization in Romania – 1920-1960]*, 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Editura Liternet, 2014).

aside not only the struggles of the proletarian theatre or the more aesthetically appealing yet equally underdeveloped Futurist performance<sup>5</sup>, but also, for instance, the stronger vein of the interwar Expressionist theatre<sup>6</sup>. Not necessarily by accident, a number of stage directors interested in Expressionism were involved in left-wing movements, either as communist sympathizers, as socialists or members of Jewish leftist organizations, and some of them, such as Sandu Eliad or I. Ligeti, were also working in the proletarian theatre<sup>7</sup>. Paradoxically, it is little known how much all these directions, mainstream and underground, were actually interconnected at the time – with, for instance, a future supporter of the extreme right wing (director and writer Haig Acterian) writing in 1932 about the preeminence of directing and acting over the written play (the essence of „theatricalization”), and giving Soviet „revolutionary theatre” examples, in the first issue of a leftist review, which had the name of a well-known Agit-prop, Bolshevik, mass theatre movement (*Sinyaya Bluza* / *Blue Blouse*)<sup>8</sup>.

The situation of leftist and human rights public interventions with both a political and a performative dimension (public actions that sometimes were to be institutionalized decades after under the – umbrella – term of performance art or political spectacle), which were, at first glance, marginal in the politically controlled context of the 1920s and 1930s, is even more dire in terms of knowledge about them. While the public actions – from the mass spectacle of the burial of their leaders or „martyrs” to semi-religious processions – of the far-right are well documented<sup>9</sup> and recognized, including in their performative side, the public performative presence of the left, indeed, much less visible even at the time, is practically unknown. Which, in the end, makes it less possible to understand the complex nature of the

---

5. See Ion Cazaban, „Futurismul ca Model Teatral [Futurism as Theatrical Model],” *Studii Și Cercetări de Istoria Artei - Special issue "Futurism Today. One Hundred Years since the Futurist Manifesto,"* 2010.

6. See Ion Cazaban, *Scena Românească Și Expresionismul [The Romanian Stage and Expressionism]* (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Camil Petrescu / Teatrul Azi, 2010).

7. See Sandu Eliad, „Despre Teatrul Militant. Oameni Și Fapte Dintr-O Biografie Nescrisă a Teatrului Nostru [On the Engaged Theatre. People and Facts from an Unwritten Biography of Our Theatre],” *Teatrul*, March 1971.

8. See Haig Acterian, „Acterian, Haig (1932) „Teatrul Creator” [„Creative Theatre],” *Bluze Albastre. Revistă de Literatură Proletară [Blue Blouses. Proletarian Literature Review]*, May 5, 1932, 6.

9. See Roland Clark, *Sfântă Tinerețe Legionară. Activismul Fascist În România Interbelică [Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania]* (Iași: Polirom, 2015).

Romanian interwar period. Of course, one of the first questions to be dealt with is whether, taking into consideration their period and specific context, these performative events can be considered art (a traditional criterion for performance art to be „labeled” as such is for it to take place within an artistic context – a theatrical venue, a museum, a gallery, a festival, a biennial, etc.) and can be rightly and actually taken into account either as proto-manifestations of an art (performance art) that will develop as such much later, or in relationship with contemporary practices of political/social protests. It can be inferred that people involved in such actions did lack an artistic conscience: it is the case, for instance, for the three young Romanian-Hungarians who, in 1929, went to a costume ball in Târgu-Mureş demanding a general amnesty, dressed as guardian and convicts, referencing the Doftana prison (where many of those convicted for communist-related offences were kept) and a recent report, about the police abuses on prisoners, of the League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADO)<sup>10</sup>. But the performative dimension does exist, and it might be worth a deeper research into how the particular political conditions of interwar Romania were requiring for creative-performative forms of protest, what these forms and their recurrent patterns were, how they were initiated, who those involved were and what their motivations were.

Contemporary oppressive political contexts are leading to strikingly similar gestures: the members of the Pussy Riot group do have an artistic conscience, but their 2012 „punk prayer”<sup>11</sup> was never aimed at an artistic reception. It is the same with the actions of another Russian collective, Voina<sup>12</sup>, and examples might follow, which makes it all more valuable to understand the long history of such practices in different moments and places, including in interwar Romania.

According to existing published materials and recollections, a proletarian, Agit-prop theatre did exist in interwar Romania – as the political performative interventions did also exist, not only on the far-right spectrum. More than that, the development of theatre forms addressing the less educated classes was a constant topic for the intellectuals and theatre professionals of the time.

---

10. ANIC, Fond 96, File 1074.

11. Jeffrey Tayler, “What Pussy Riot’s ‘Punk Prayer’ Really Said,” *The Atlantic*, November 8, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/11/what-pussy-riots-punk-prayer-really-said/264562/>.

12. Ellen Barry, “Artist Playing Cat-and-Mouse Faces Russia’s Claws,” *New York Times*, January 21, 2011.

The political and civic education of the masses was of stated importance for both the far-right and the supporters of the left, the conservatives and King Charles II (the head of the Kingdom of Romania between 8 June 1930 and 6 September 1940). Conservative nationalist historian and statesman Nicolae Iorga founded in Bucharest, through the League for the Cultural (later, Political) Unity of All Romanians, aka the Cultural League (Liga Culturală), a Popular Theatre (Teatrul Popular) as early as 1921. It was not at all intended as a proletarian theatre per se, but it did address a popular, non-elitist audience, with the aim of raising the level of both education and patriotic (to be understood as „national”) conscience of the „people”. During the 1920s, for the Popular Theatre worked artists who were not nationalists in Iorga’s and the Cultural League understanding of the term, nor interested in traditions and the traditional village life, such as Victor Ion Popa<sup>13</sup> and Aurel Ion Maican<sup>14</sup>, later – two of the poster figures of „theatricalization”.

The Work and Joy Theatre (Teatrul Muncă și Voie Bună), run by the above-mentioned acclaimed playwright and director Victor Ion Popa, was founded in 1938 at the initiative of the then-Minister of Labor and Social Protection, Mihail Ralea, a leftist (the general term of the period was „democrat(ic)”<sup>15</sup>) sociologist, and Ralea was reacting to a much discussed public concern. Years before, in 1931, the playwright, director and theatre critic George Mihail Zamfirescu founded a company, called Masca (The Mask), meant to address its performances to industrial workers. (Just to prove how imbricated the theatrical worlds were back then, Zamfirescu was also the founder, in 1932, of the „13+1” Company, which produced several Expressionist performances, including one by I. Ligeti, one of the professional directors working in the proletarian theatre.) Masca was presenting its productions in various Bucharest neighborhoods, on the stages of the so-called popular athenaeums, established at the initiative of King Charles II as places for the

---

13. See G.M. Zamfirescu’s assessment of V.I.Popa’s work with the Popular Theatre, George Mihail Zamfirescu, *Mărturii În Contemporaneitate [Contemporary Testimonies]* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1974), 36–37.

14. See Vera Molea, “Aurel Ion Maican. Începuturile Carierei Artistice (I) [Aurel Ion Maican. The Beginning of the Artistic Career],” *SCIA, Theatre, Music and Cinema Series, New Series*, 2008. It is true that Maican worked at the Popular Theatre as an actor, at the beginning of his professional life.

15. Mihail Ralea was not affiliated to neither the communist or the socialist movement, he was connected to various centrist, then leftist peasant factions and parties and a declared opposant of the Iron Guard.

workers and „lower classes” to socialize, attend concerts and performances, etc., even participate in amateur events. Many articles written by G.M. Zamfirescu during the 1930s (and first published, in 1938, in a book titled *Mărturii în contemporaneitate / Contemporary Testimonies*<sup>16</sup>) deal with the topic of a workers’ theatre and how should it work, chastising, for instance, those who supported less aesthetically oriented forms and approaches (as the amateur theatre of the trade unions was) and the popular audience’s lack of taste for „avant-garde” theatre, which is another proof of the wide spreading of such discussions.

Basically, it is a case where the general focus on certain aspects of the interwar theatre alone – in fact, only on the *winners* of the competition on forms and ideas – has left aside the complexity of the artistic and political debates of the period, and the material conditions that prevented any real possibility for alternative theatrical languages to fully develop. But the peripheral character of certain forms of theatre didn’t make them less part of the general conversation of the moment. For instance, one has to take account of the difficulty to finance theatrical productions and the fact that performances were subject to state authorization and thorough censorship, aspects responsible for the fact that a lot of proletarian theatrical events took the disguised form of „tea parties”, and some of them were variants of apartment theatre, or for the fact that one of the very few amateur proletarian full-fledged productions of the era presented on a professional stage, the Jewish Barasheum, had only one performance<sup>17</sup>. Plus, the politically charged atmosphere, impacted by the shock of the Bolshevik Revolution, was making an enemy of the state out of everybody potentially contesting the status-quo from a non-conservative, non-nationalistic perspective: which made possible for Vasile Abrudean, for example, a worker-peasant in the Arad region, to be charged, in 1931, with a criminal offense („agitation”) for owning and sharing two brochures, one containing proletarian theatre plays<sup>18</sup>; or, for a trade union performance with Maksim Gorki’s *The Lower Depths* to be kept with armed policemen guarding the audience<sup>19</sup>.

---

16. George Mihail Zamfirescu, *Mărturii în Contemporaneitate [Contemporary Testimonies]* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1974).

17. See C. Z. Alexandru, *Teatru Între Baionete [Theatre Between Bayonets]* (Bucharest: Grafica Noua, 1970), 54–79.

18. ANIC, Fund 96, File 1442.

19. Alexandru, 107–11.

Theatrical futurism was also a victim of the local conditions, and so it was the local avant-garde: while their publications were extremely short-lived in Romania, due to both money and censorship, its representatives, some of them heavily surveyed by the Siguranță<sup>20</sup>, found their artistic recognition and fulfilled their artistic trajectory mainly abroad. While the specific political context is at least of the reasons why the Soviet Agit-prop theatrical experiments from the 1920s and 1930s didn't find a field as fertile in Romania as in Germany, for instance, both the proletarian theatre as developed in USSR before the mid-1930s, and the avant-garde were collateral cultural victims of the Stalinist, hardline realist-socialist version of Soviet regime installed in Romania after 1948. Until recently, discussing the potential legacy of interwar proletarian theatre might have appeared as having no relevance for the contemporary Romanian stage; but the emergence of new forms sharing a common ethos with that theatre<sup>21</sup> undeniable changes the stakes.

From this perspective, researching legal and illegal forms of proletarian and Agit-prop theatre is, in fact, a foray not into the aesthetics but into the complexity of a public professional and political debate at the time of conflicting narratives about the future of the theatre, the new Romanian state and the country in general, with the debate itself, the identity and biography of those involved as important as the *success* of the said debate.

### Political police as archivist and art historian

For a variety of reasons, live performances (in the form of reciting poetry, staging of dramatic fragments, singing, public lectures, various actions in public space) played a more central social and cultural role for the legal or underground left movements during the interwar period than they did for the anticommunist opponents, dissidents and political prisoners after 1948. One of the reasons was the limited access of the left-wing parties to publication and distribution of books, and the very strict censorship of the period. So strict that in 1935, for instance, the political police started a whole nation-wide campaign to confiscate all existing copies of the Romanian translation of Andre

---

20. See Tănase, Stelian (ed.) (2008) *Avangarda română în dosarele Siguranței* [*The Romanian Avant-Garde in the Files of the Political Police*], Iași: Polirom.

21. The work of director David Schwartz and various collectives dealing with non-professional community groups.



Malraux's *Man's Fate* (*La Condition humaine*), for „promoting communism and terrorism”<sup>22</sup>, even if the preface to the novel was written by a very honorable, liberal literary critic (E. Lovinescu), who nobody would have ever suspected of communist leanings. Left-wing publications (newspapers, magazines, brochures, books) were also a common piece of evidence for indictment charges when they were found during police searches, while participation in artistic or cultural live events was much more difficult for the authorities to use as undisputable proof for illegal political activity. Also, communist political convicts had strictly controlled access to written material, especially political one, so theatre (for instance) was the available tool for them to promote their social ideas and for their group to bond (theatre, for example, was use as a means for political education, see Andreescu, 1977). But, above all, the intended audience for the communist and socialist parties was social groups with limited education and limited reading or cultural practices – which explains both the preference for live encounters or events and the non-standardly artistic form of these events (involving amateur performing, for instance). As put in Lynn Mally's terms, about the equal preference for the performing arts of the new Soviet state, until mid-1930s:

At a time when film equipment was scarce, and illiteracy was high, theatres spread the political message of the revolution. They were also evidence that the revolutionary state (in the Romanian case, the revolutionary party, n. I.P.) was committed to a mission of enlightenment.<sup>23</sup>

Logocentric as the public space in Romania has ever been, and even more in a time when radio was a technological revolution and film – an exceptional event, the harsh definition of criminal political activity introduced by the so-called Mârzescu Law in 1924 had a huge impact on the press, especially after 1933, when first the Grivița strikes (in February), then the

---

22. See ANIC (National Central Historical Archives), Collection 50, file 155 (on „Communist intellectual sympathizers”). For the impact of Malraux' novel on young communist intellectuals in Romania, see Péter Várdy in dialogue with Imre Tóth (2014) *În viață sunt lucruri care nu se fac. Și totuși se fac...* [*In Life There Are Things You Don't Do. Yet You Do Them...*], București: Humanitas, p. 101.

23. Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917-1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 4.

assassination of prime-minister I.G. Duca by a group of legionnaires<sup>24</sup> (in December), prompting King Charles II to instate an indefinite state of siege (it was replaced, in 1941, with the state of war).

Press distribution was difficult even for legal publications, and the lifespan of left-leaning newspapers and reviews was very short. The *Blue Blouse* review had only four issues. The *Working Life* (*Viața muncitoare*), the legal weekly of the Unitarian Trade Unions, appeared between 1925 and 1930, but only some of the issues could be traced at the level of the year 1963<sup>25</sup>; for the others, no copy survived. While trade unions didn't understandably have an interest in documenting their (artistic) activity, and the socialist parties or other organizations had a limited practice of keeping records (especially for non-financial, non-organizational aspects), as an illegal organization, the Communist Party of Romania (the name used during the Third International) had a totally different problem: it didn't have the proper conditions to keep its own operational archive and it was risky to do it, not to mention keeping copies of the illegal publications it supported (for instance, the newspaper *Scânteia/The Spark*). In 1943, the most famous communist „fall” (the discovering, by the Siguranță, of a clandestine house in Bucharest) lead to the entire operational archive being confiscated; at some other moment, the archive buried by its keeper was dug up partially rotten.<sup>26</sup>

The question then would be: how could all these performative actions, events, etc. be documented at the level of the year 2017? The thesis of this article is that the main historian of the leftist movement, including its artistic dimension, is the interwar political police, also known as Siguranța.

People might not keep copies of their sent letters – but in case of everybody associated with any form of governmental criticism, Siguranța took care about making copies of their correspondence. For instance, in 1938 (before his own second departure for France), the surrealist painter and poet Victor Brauner sent a letter to the well-known French communist writer Louis Aragon, in which he was pleading for a literary exchange between

---

24. Members of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, the fascist organization active in interwar Romania, including as a party, also known under the original name of its paramilitary branch, the Iron Guard.

25. Titu Georgescu and Mircea Ioanid, eds., *Presă PCR și a Organizațiilor Sale de Masă 1921-1944 (Prezentare Bibliografică)* [RCP Press and That of Its Mass Organizations 1921-1944 (Bibliographic Presentation)] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1963), 93–94.

26. See Cristina Diac, *Zorii Comunismului În România. Ștefan Foriș, Un Destin Neterminat* [The Dawn of Communism in Romania. Ștefan Foriș, an Unfinished Destiny] (Târgoviște: Cetatea de scaun, 2014).

„progressive” writers in the two countries. Siguranța intercepted the letter and made it part of Brauner’s personal file, alongside a report, signed by one of the Siguranța detectives: it concerns information about the relationships between Brauner and Aragon, and Brauner and another surrealist poet, Gherasim Luca, about surrealism in general, the splitting of the movement and the connections with the Communist Party.<sup>27</sup> (In this particular case, the political police act as both an archivist and an art historian.) One might learn a lot about how a review such as the *Blue Blouse* was distributed thanks to the documents in the file of a man trialed for giving away this publication and talking about Russia in a village bar in 1932.<sup>28</sup>

B(ernard) Lebli, one of the theatre professionals most invested in the proletarian theatre, the director of the production with Gorki’s *Lower Depths* at the Barasheum and, after the war, the director of the Jewish State Theatre in Bucharest, died in 1966 without writing his memories, hence his contribution was left aside after the nationalistic turn of the Romanian Communist Party.<sup>29</sup> But (some of) his manuscripts are to be found in the Siguranța archives, giving testimony on his writing, his interests and his larger political and intellectual profile.<sup>30</sup> We shouldn’t forget that the excessive attention given by the Siguranța to those critical to the status-quo and the fact that they were seeing communists everywhere, even where there were only disgruntled citizens talking in a bar, helped the postwar Communist Party build an oversized image of itself, and falsify historical facts (Diac, 2014).

Of course, the Siguranța archives are not able to turn the interwar proletarian theatre into something it was not – an aesthetically highly valid set of productions with a lasting impact on the theatrical tradition. But a research into these archives – correlated to the existing published memories and other analysis – would clear why it was so: who were those involved in such practices, what the relationship with the mainstream theatre was, what were the challenges, who was the audience, what this theatre wanted to accomplish, etc.

Which doesn’t mean that such a research is not a complicated endeavor by itself.

---

27. ANIC, Fund 95, File 26251 (Victor Brauner).

28. ANIC, Fund 96, File 1646.

29. After 1944, Lebli was involved in the Democratic Jewish Committee (Comitetul Democratic Evreiesc/CDE), an organization controlled by the communists and used against the Zionist organizations in dealing with the „Jewish problem”.

30. ANIC, Fund 95, File 4589 (Bernard Lebli) and File 4591 (Ciubotaru Froim).

### **„The communist problem” – a short introduction into archival dynamics**

During the communist regime, the former archives of the interwar political police and the judicial archives were selected according to the „subject” of the files: those dealing with the extreme right activists stayed with the new General Direction for People’s Security (Direcția Generală a Securității Poporului/ DGSP – the first official name of the Securitate, the rightful successor of the Siguranță), and those related to the members and activists of the underground left went to the archive of the Communist Party (mainly, the Archive/Fund of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Romania, then the Romanian Communist Party, RCP). In fact, the whole Siguranța archive was taken over, initially, by the communist successor of the interwar political police, and several categories of files were transferred first to the Central Verifying Commission (1948-1950), then to the Party Control Commission (CCP<sup>31</sup>; after 1965, the Party Central College), to be further archived as part of the Central Committee Fund. Those transferred files were related to all pre-1944 members of the Communist Party and members of their families, supporters, other people involved in their activity, members and supporters of the Socialist Parties, Jewish organizations (other than the Zionist ones and Zionists in general<sup>32</sup>, including when they had acted as communist/socialist sympathizers or even party members), women’s organizations, and human rights groups (generally grouped under the term „the communist problem”). Basically, everybody who had been surveyed by the interwar political police for other reasons than fascism („the legionnaire problem”<sup>33</sup>), Zionism, or irredentism entered in this category. The reason for this transfer was the big-scale verification process initiated by the Party in 1948<sup>34</sup>: the smallest communist party in Europe in 1944, the Romanian Workers’ Party attracted a huge number of members after the war, mainly in order to legitimize itself, which ended up with a large number of opportunists, royalists, members of the former historical parties (liberals, etc.) and other persons with a politically or socially questionable past, including former members of the extreme-right

---

31. In Romanian, Comisia Controlului de Partid/Colegiul Central de Partid.

32. Those files were kept by Securitate as Zionists were part of the „nationalistic problem”. Members or organizations such as Hashomer Hatzair were subject to a full-fledged anti-Zionist campaign in the 1950s, ended with a series of very public (show) trials in 1953-1954.

33. The fascist organization active in interwar Romania, including as a party, was the Legion of the Archangel Michael, also known under the original name of its paramilitary branch, the Iron Guard.

34. Case by case verifications started as early as 1945-1946.

Legion of the Archangel Michael. Since the communists were surveilled by both the central and local branches of the Siguranța (the files contain also the correspondence of various bureaus of the institution related to the local activity of one communist suspect or another), some files regarding communist and trade unions activities, which were not deemed essential for the verification of the party members, remained in local archives.

The role of the Central Verifying Commission was to re-confirm the party membership status of everybody, including based on their activity before and during WWII as it was reflected by the documents in the Siguranța archives (the verification was a sort of a cross-referenced process, in which the person's autobiography and self-presentation in front of the Commission were confirmed or invalidated by the archival material and/or references given by other party members or people they worked with). In 1950, after the verification process was completed, the Central Verifying Commission was disbanded, and CCP took over the mission of „vetting” party members, alongside dealing with violations of party discipline or ethics, thus creating its own archive of personal files (including the autobiographies, references, etc.), while the original archives from the interwar period were slowly moved into the Historical Archive of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (in the first half of the 1950s)<sup>35</sup>. After 1960, when the party became more invested into the preservation (and the re-writing) of its own memory and history, many published materials confiscated by the Siguranța were taken from the original files and moved into the archive of the Institute for Historical and Social-Political Studies (ISISP<sup>36</sup>). Also, at some moment in the 1960s, ISISP started a very ambitious project of oral history, collecting the memories of former fighters in the French Resistance and in the Spanish Civil War etc., and supporting the publication of memories related to various moments in the pre-1945 history of the communist movement. One of the books commissioned and published by ISISP, for instance, is *Theatre Between Bayonets* by C.Z. Alexandru, a carpenter heavily invested in the proletarian theatre supported by trade unions. His recollections are vital in terms of testimonies about the working process, the modes of production and the people involved in proletarian theatre events, but unless confronted

---

35. According to historian Ștefan Bosomitu, in a private communication, the periodical vetting of party members was a sort of a ritual, meant, among other things, to blame individual members for the errors of the party, which explain the proliferation of redundant information within the personal files at CCP.

36. In Romanian, Institutul de Studii Istorice și Social Politice.

with other documents, not entirely reliable in terms of the actual connections between the trade unions and the Communist Party (even if many people he worked with in the amateur proletarian theatre were members of the party – such as Ion Popescu-Puțuri, the ISISP director at the time of the publication of the book). One of the people giving testimony to ISISP about his participation in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War is Iso Schapira (1903-1981), after the war, the first (and last) director of the Jewish State Theatre in Iași. A former student of Piscator and, at the moment of his enrollment in the International Brigades, actor and stage director at the Pariser Idischer Arbeiter Theater (the Parisian Yiddish Workers' Theatre – PIAT), Schapira recounts for the ISISP archives his endeavors as the animator of Agit-prop musical and theatrical performances for soldiers on the Spanish front.<sup>37</sup> For all known accounts, this is the only source of information about leftist war theatre involving the Romanian members of the International Brigades and it gives precious details about the participants, the repertory, the sources of influence and the role of such actions.

After the 1989 Revolution, the whole Archive of the Central Committee was taken over by the Ministry of National Defense and moved outside of Bucharest (to Pitești). It began to be transferred to the Central National Historical Archives (ANIC) between 1993 and 1995, and most of it was open for researchers starting with 2000. The latest to be made available for researchers were the files in the CCP Fund: ANIC made the inventory in alphabetical order, and it ended up releasing some documents as late as 2014.

The part of the ISISP patrimony dealing with published materials (newspapers, reviews, books, brochures, posters, pamphlets, etc., dating from before and after 1945) – the library of the institution – was transferred to the Central University Library<sup>38</sup>. The ISISP archive per se – the historical part (pamphlets, brochures, written documents, illegal press, posters, photographs, microfilms), and the current part – was transferred to the Library of the Romanian Academy (which had its own collection of interwar periodicals) and then, in 2000, to the National Archives; some funds became available for research in 2014. The local archives stayed put (the funds are preserved by the local branches of ANIC).

---

37. ANIC, Fund 60, File 95, p. 200 and following.

38. For the history and the content of this fund, see the official presentation of the Library: <http://www.bcub.ro/catalogue/unibib/memoria-comunismului-fondul-isisp-din-biblioteca-centrala-universitara-din-bucuresti>.

But knowing where the archives currently are and the fact that some funds were only recently made available for research are not the only problems. During the whole time they were kept by the communist authorities, basically, between 1948 and 1989, the original Siguranța archives were reorganized according to the needs of the party. For instance, the whole pre-1944 part of the Agit-Prop (Propaganda and Agitation) Fund was recreated from scratch – actually, from documents taken from other files –, since the party didn't have any trace of its own propaganda activities. The same happened to a special collection dedicated to the leader of the party in 1948-1965, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej<sup>39</sup>, recreated from various files, and a similar process may be inferred even about the files dealing with the Central Committee and the General Secretariat of the party during its illegal existence (the Moscow archive of the Komintern also played an important role in this archival recreation<sup>40</sup>). The confiscated material was moved from the original files – usually, personal and judicial ones –, into a fund that should, in the logic of things, belong to the ISISP archive; but if it's about newspapers, brochures, or letters by Romain Rolland, Panait Istrati and the likes, the documents are to be found in the Collection 190 of the Archive of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (CC of RCP), created in the year 1977.<sup>41</sup> The same non-intuitive principles apply to transcripts, testimonies, notes, etc., about the activity of party members and other participants to events relevant for the party (reconstructed) history, such as the royal coup on 23 August 1944, but also the manuscripts of Constantin Argetoianu's diary<sup>42</sup>, which are part of Collection 60, „Recollections, memories and notes of personalities about the social-economic and political situation in Romania”. At the same time, another set of files, subtitled „The economic, social and politic situation of Romania” and including articles, memories, notes, but also original

---

39. I am grateful to historian Mihai Burcea for drawing my attention to this aspect. For more on the creation of this fund and the reconstitutive practice of the Communist Party in terms of its own archive, see Diac, Cristina, 2012.

40. In the 1970s, ISISP made a documentary trip to Moscow to retrieve materials in the Komintern archive, see Diac, 2012. Even previously, in 1968, during the rehabilitation of Romanian communists, victims of Stalinism, started by the new Ceaușescu regime, the Central Party College was in contact with the Komintern archives.

41. <https://www.scribd.com/document/241775224/Ziare-Brosuri-si-Documente-cu-Caracter-Politic-Cultural-Democratic-si-Antifascist-1875-1901-1905-1908-1910-1912-1914-1917-1920-1922-1939-1>.

42. Argetoianu was an anti-communist liberal politician and statesman, briefly the prime-minister of Romania in 1939, arrested by the communist regime in 1950 and dead in prison in 1955, without having stood a trial.

materials taken from pre-1945 files with no relation to the „communist problem” (such as an analysis about the political situation in Romania, with a focus on the Iron Guard, dating from September 1940<sup>43</sup>), are archived within the multifarious ISISP Fund (Fund ISISP-XII). The difference between the two funds with so similar titles is that Collection 60 includes documents related to general subjects (some of them are extended autobiographies), while Fund ISISP-XII focuses on strikes, the economic and political situation in certain regions or villages, railroad workers, the oil industry and references to strictly economic aspects.

The description of the inventory of the Collection 60 says that the Historical Archive of the CC of RCP was, before 1989 (actually, since 1953), a part (a „sector”) of the ISISP, but the files within this fund bear the „affiliation” to the Chancellery of the CC of RCP (the Chancellery being the internal administration body of the Central Committee, in charge of redacting, keeping track and communicating to the lower echelons of decisions adopted by the party leadership); while the files belonging to the ISISP bear (now) only this denomination. The Chancellery was the keeper of other historical collections, also related to the National Democratic Block (Blocul Național Democrat), or, for instance, the Patriotic Defense (Apărarea Patriotică), while Fund ISISP-VII deals with „Trials filed against militants of the revolutionary and democratic workers’ movement in Romania”, which overlaps thematically with Fund 96 of the old Archive of the CC of RCP.

Fond 96 covers judicial – personal or group-related – files concerning trials for communist/antifascist-related offences, and in many situations it complements itself another fund, Fund 95, which includes all pre-1944 personal files of „antifascist fighters” (an umbrella term for communists, socialists, activists in Jewish organizations, and other leftists), including the criminal records originating in the judicial files in Fund 96 (at least, this superposition can be traced back to the original creator of these files, Siguranța). Again, since Fund 95 and Fund 96 were the basis for verifications operated by the Central Verifying Commission and continued by the Party Central Commission, copies and transcripts of documents in those Funds, or references to them, are also to be found in Fund CC of RCP – CCP.

Collection 50, „Documents elaborated by the repressive authorities on the activity of the Communist Party and the revolutionary mass organizations”, includes general documentation about the activity of various organizations,

---

43. ANIC, Fund ISISP-XII, File 47, vol. I-II.



distribution of manifestos, reports and correspondence of the authorities, many of them dating from before 1924, when the RCP became illegal. Fund 95, Fund 96, and Collection 50 are the only original sources of archival documents (excluding the materials elaborated by the Communist Party itself, largely retrieved from the Komintern), and the only ones where the files themselves were created by the pre-1944 authorities. A lot of documents were taken from the Collection 50 and moved to the Collection 60 or other funds, with or without copies kept in the original files. And so, the archival vicious circle is completed.

In fact, ANIC has been facing huge problems in making the inventory and organizing the archive initially belonging to ISISP because its organization and evidence didn't follow the archival normative of the period<sup>44</sup>, while the inherent post-1990 conditions made its funds part of the general Archive of the CC of RCP, blurring the original differences between the „historical” and the „current” (i.e. post-1944) archive. Most likely, the borderline chaotic structure of the ISISP funds and their overlapping with other funds and collections are the result of the institute's efforts on creating its archive according to the momentary discursive needs of the party, and the constant rewriting of the party history (the post-1965 rehabilitation of the Romanian victims of the Great Purges, the role of each participant to the events on 23 August 1944, the emphasizing or downplaying of the Soviets' involvement in different moments, the artificial „Romanization” of the party etc.).

The tormented history of the pre-1944 archives not only makes the process of looking for the traces of the interwar proletarian theatre and political performative actions a very complex mission, but it is also the mirrored image of how this theatre was itself manipulated to serve the legitimacy of the party, at one moment or another. Unlike the impression given by books such as Margareta Andreescu's, the Communist Party was not the only „producer” of proletarian and Agit-prop theatre, and the example of the three men in Târgu-Mureş protesting against the police abuses is not related to RCP<sup>45</sup>. But only a thorough research into the archival labyrinth might shed a real light on what the interwar workers' theatre, legal and illegal, in theory and practice, really was.

---

44. See <http://www.arhivelenationale.ro/index.php?lan=0&page=122>.

45. Even if the League for the Defense of Human Rights was treated after 1944 as being on the orbit of the Communist Party, Siguranța didn't consider it as such, and its founder, lawyer and journalist C.G. Costa-Foru, was himself a non-communist democrat. See ANIC, Collection 50, Files 1177 and 1178.

## References

- Acterian, Haig. "Acterian, Haig (1932) „Teatrul Creator” [„Creative Theatre”].” *Bluze Albastre. Revistă de Literatură Proletară* [Blue Blouses. Proletarian Literature Review], May 5, 1932.
- Alexandru, C. Z. *Teatru Între Baionete* [Theatre Between Bayonnets]. Bucharest: Grafica Noua, 1970.
- Amiard-Chevrel, Claudine, ed. *Le Théâtre D’agit-Prop - Vol. 3*. Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1977.
- Andreescu, Margareta. *Teatrul Proletar Din România* [Proletarian Theatre in Romania]. Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1977.
- Barry, Ellen. "Artist Playing Cat-and-Mouse Faces Russia’s Claws." *New York Times*, January 21, 2011.
- Cazaban, Ion. "Futurismul ca Model Teatral [Futurism as Theatrical Model]." *Studii Și Cercetări de Istoria Artei - Special issue "Futurism Today. One Hundred Years since the Futurist Manifesto,"* 2010.
- Cazaban, Ion. *Scena Românească Și Expresionismul* [The Romanian Stage and Expressionism]. Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Camil Petrescu / Teatrul Azi, 2010.
- Clark, Roland. *Sfântă Tinerețe Legionară. Activismul Fascist În România Interbelică* [Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania]. Iași: Polirom, 2015.
- Diac, Cristina. "Liderul Nevăzut. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej Și Grevele de La Grivița [The Invisible Leader. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and the Grivița Strikes]." In *Spectrele Lui Dej. Incursiuni În Biografia Și Regimul Unui Dictator* [Dej’s Phantoms. Explorations Into a Dictator’s Biography and Regime], edited by Ștefan Bosomitu and Mihai Burcea, Polirom., 31–49. Iași: Polirom, 2012.
- Diac, Cristina. *Zorii Comunismului În România. Ștefan Foriș, Un Destin Neterminat* [The Dawn of Communism in Romania. Ștefan Foriș, an Unfinished Destiny]. Târgoviște: Cetatea de scaun, 2014.
- Eliad, Sandu. "Despre Teatrul Militant. Oameni Și Fapte Dintr-O Biografie Nescrisă a Teatrului Nostru [On the Engaged Theatre. People and Facts from an Unwritten Biography of Our Theatre]." *Teatrul*, March 1971.
- Georgescu, Titu, and Mircea Ioanid, eds. *Presa PCR Și a Organizațiilor Sale de Masă 1921-1944 (Prezentare Bibliografică)* [RCP Press and That of Its Mass Organizations 1921-1944 (Bibliographic Presentation)]. Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1963.
- Mally, Lynn. *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theatre and the Soviet State, 1917-1938*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Molea, Vera. "Aurel Ion Maican. Începuturile Carierei Artistice (I) [Aurel Ion Maican. The Beginning of the Artistic Career]." *SCIA, Theatre, Music and Cinema Series, New Series*, 2008.

- Runcan, Miruna. *Teatralizarea Și Reteatralizarea În România – 1920-1960 [Theatricalization and Re-Theatricalization in Romania – 1920-1960]*. 2nd ed. Bucharest: Editura Liternet, 2014.
- Tayler, Jeffrey. "What Pussy Riot's 'Punk Prayer' Really Said." *The Atlantic*, November 8, 2012. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/11/what-pussy-riots-punk-prayer-really-said/264562/>.
- Zamfirescu, George Mihail. *Mărturii În Contemporaneitate [Contemporary Testimonies]*. Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1974.

**Iulia Popovici** is a performing arts critic and curator. Her writing focuses on alternative Romanian and Eastern European performing arts scene, documentary theatre, and the social challenges of contemporary arts. She edited two books, commissioned by the Sibiu International Theatre Festival, on New Performing Arts Practices in Eastern Europe (Cartier, 2014) and The End of Directing, the Beginning of Theatre-Making and Devising in European Theatre (Tact, 2015). Her latest book: Elefantul din cameră. Ghid despre teatrul independent din România (Idea/Colectiv A, 2016).

## *The coronation of “the accompanying comrade” Sică Alexandrescu – A case study*

MIRUNA RUNCAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Have “People’s Artists” been famous artists, plain “nomenklatura” representatives in the artistic milieu or just “accompanying comrades”? What were the characteristics of the mechanism producing these “people’s artists” in the first years after the concept had been imported from the USSR? What are, in this context, the specificities of the Romanian theatre environment? Who are the people selected to become “distinguished artists”, “State Prize Laureate”, “Emeritus Masters of art” or “People’s artists” – and what justifies this hierarchy? Clearly, some of the members of the first generation of communist “theatre heroes” were truly artists who had earned a certain fame even before the Second World War. Others, however, had not – or they had earned an entirely different kind of status and fame in the artistic milieu. We shall try to uncover at least a part of the mechanism for selecting/producing “state artists”, by means of a case study focusing on possibly the most illustrative character for the stated theme: theatre director Sică Alexandrescu. With this in view, we used previous files of personal research concerning the political, ideologic and aesthetic debates in the first decades of the communist regime, we revisited archives, journal and cultural magazines collections and, of course, we revisited the articles and books written by the famous theatre director himself.

**Keywords:** Theatre Directing, Romanian Theatre, Theatre History, Cultural Policies

### **Historic context: theatre in the first decades after the Second World War**

In contrast to other areas of science and arts, Romanian theatre appears to have welcomed the passing from a democratic regime to communism without any suspicions, or even with strange enthusiasm. If we look closely

---

1. Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.  
runcan.miruna@ubbcluj.ro.

at the documents of the time, even before the nationalization that took place on June 11th 1948, a large portion of the private theatre companies, but especially some of the most important artists, be they directors, actors or scenographers, seemed to adjust as they went along, both in terms of artistic productions, and in terms of their public discourse - in interviews, articles and essays published in the press. Of course, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the country was, effectively, under occupation and censorship was becoming stricter by the day, between 1945 and 1948.

In fact, between 1945 and 1948, Romanian theatre was going through a (reality-denying) vibrant creation boom. Despite the fact that it could not use its main stage, which had fallen prey to the Allied bombardments in 1944, the National Theatre in Bucharest used, after the necessary repairs, its Studio hall in Piața Amzei and, for the bigger shows, it was making use of the inappropriate festivities hall of the St. Sava Highschool. Private companies appeared and disappeared like one-day flies because of inflation and of the fluidity of legislation; in other cases, they just optimistically and stubbornly picked up where they had left off because of political reasons, or because they had left into refuge. The audience, freshly emerged from the horrors of war and plunged into the nightmare of Russian occupation, speculation in goods and material deprivation, merely wanted to relax: so, paradoxically, the cinema and theatre halls were almost always full.

The Association for Romanian-Soviet Friendship (ARLUS) got set up, under the management of “the red prince”, Scarlat Callimachi<sup>2</sup>, an old-time left-wing activist - just like his wife, the excellent Jewish actress Dida Solomon. Within the framework of ARLUS, a variety of circles and literary groups for young artists started blooming and famous writers and artists like Camil Petrescu<sup>3</sup>, Ion Sava<sup>4</sup>, Ion Aurel Maican<sup>5</sup>, Tudor Vianu<sup>6</sup> and many others were being invited to hold lectures and workshops. ARLUS published the *Lumea*

---

2. Scarlat Callimachi (1896-1975) writer and journalist, communist activist, called by the artistic environment “the red prince”. He had an aristocratic genealogy, one of his ancestors being even the prince governor of Wallachia between 1806-1807 and 1812-1819.

3. Camil Petrescu (1894-1957) was a writer, literary theory author and playwright. He was the Manager of the National Theatre of Bucharest between 1938-1939 and a member of Romanian Academy from 1947.

4. Ion Sava (1900-1947) was a famous and influential theatre director, journalist and theatre theory author.

5. Ion Aurel Maican (1893-1952) theatre director.

6. Tudor Vianu (1898-1965) Literary critic, scholar and aesthetics specialist. He was also manager of the National Theatre in 1945.

magazine (which would disappear by the end of the decade): this is where theatre director Ion Sava published a part of his vibrant and hopeful articles and essays - including the project for an Arts Palace, featuring a Round Theatre, to be built on the old spot of the National Theatre. At the end of 1945, I.A. Maican was asked to be the director of the Performance Arts Directorate in the Arts Ministry, where he started work on the new Theatre Law, and even on a law intending to reform the Arts Conservatory. However, his time as a director was to be quite short, as the Soviet agents soon arrested him under the false accusation of having stolen the stage sets of the Odessa Opera House, the director of which he had been for a few months during the Romanian occupation. He was released within days of his arrest, but his political collaboration with the new regime ended there.

As we can see, times were as complicated as they were filled with energy. In such a historic context, aesthetic innovation in theatre is rather limited and difficult, due to political instability, economic hardship, rampant inflation and general confusion. Private companies mostly wished to make money quickly in order to stay alive, so they were taking on the lightest and least problematic of repertoires, or performed reruns with assured box-office revenue. National Theatres timidly tried out plays that would both satisfy the more pretentious audiences and keep the authorities off their back. For instance, in 1945, Ion Şahighian<sup>7</sup> directed *So it will be* by Simonov, and in 1947, the same „hard-working” director staged Davidoglu’s debut *The man from Ceatal* and one more Soviet fill-up production, *The Peace Island* by Evgheni Petrov; it seems obvious that he wished to be seen to adjust to the new rules. Young directors with a history of communist activism were brought in, like Dinu Negreanu, Moni Ghelerter or Mihail Raicu, staging *The Russian Question* by Simonov, or *The Young Guard*, a dramatization of Fadeev’s novel etc. However, in 1947, Ion Sava’s most daring – and last - experiment was to take place in the St Sava festivity hall: *Macbeth* performed with masks. Despite the public’s curiosity, however, the reviews were quite ambiguous, and Sava would die within half a year, broken hearted by the apparent flop<sup>8</sup>.

---

7. Ion Şahighian (1897-1965) was one of the most famous and prolific theatre directors of the National Theatre in Bucharest, in constant competition with his colleague, director and writer Ion Sava. Şahighian even managed to direct, before the Second World War, some Romanian film productions, mainly comedies and melodramas.

8. Virgil Petrovici, “End notes” for Ion Sava, *Teatralitatea Teatrului [The Theatricality of Theatre]* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1981), 427.

In the context of general unrest and anxiety, the nationalization, a long time object of rumor and hearsay, was met by a rather prepared theatre community. Some of the artists had already spread out throughout the country, attracted by the privileged conditions offered for professionals in the bigger cultural centers, which were aiming to merge with the newly set up (starting with 1946) popular or state theatres, in most of the cities where a theatre building existed. Some others were caught on the wrong foot, like the young Liviu Ciulei<sup>9</sup>, whose father had only recently, in 1946, started exploiting the cubist style block of flats on Magheru Boulevard, featuring the two halls of the Odeon Theatre (today Nottara). In the same way, the news was shaking for actors Mircea Şeptilici and N. Stroe, who owned a prosperous cabaret theatre operating in the basement hall of the Atlantic Bar, in the Romarta building.

Other theatre owners were at ease, the future seemed bright: using the trump card of having had rough fights with the legionary government, which had led to the shutting down of her legendary company in 1941, actress Lucia Sturdza Bulandra<sup>10</sup> poisedly came in to discuss matters with the "leadership" (apparently with Gh. Gheorhiu-Dej, head of the communist party himself); she obtained, as of the end of even 1947, the post of director/manager of the Municipal Theatre, next to Izvor Bridge. Later on, the famous actress managed to also round up as a Studio the performance hall of the Central School, near Icoanei Garden (after 1948, the high school was renamed Zoia Kosmodemianskaia).

---

9. Liviu Ciulei (1923-2011) was the most influential theatre and film directors in the communist era. Trained both as architect and actor, he studied theatre directing with Ion Sava and film directing as assistant director of Victor Iliu, the mid 50s. He had also a reach and exceptional carrier as actor and stage designer, and was the manager of Bucharest Bulandra Theatre between 1963-1987. After being removed from that position, he followed a brilliant theatre carrier in Europe and the United States, where he was also the artistic director of Guthrie Theatre of Mineapolis. In 1965, he was awarded at Cannes for the direction of the *Forest of the Hanged*.

10. Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra (1914-1991) famous theatre and film actress, born into the aristocratic old family Sturdza, who had a consistent education and had an academic degree in literature and philosophy. For choosing an artistic carrier, she was rejected by her family. She married Tony Bulandra, also a well-known actor and, in association with other important colleagues from their generation, they took over the independent Davilla Company in 1914, and transformed it in the most famous private theatre in Romania. Even if all the partners were related in an administration council, Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra was the real executive manager all along.

Finally, after a few months of confusion, the overwhelming majority of Romanian actresses, actors, directors and scenographers, with or without complete artistic studies, joined by a host of amateurs who had found their vocation in the hosts of art courses for workers that had been started everywhere, became state employees, in a theatre either smaller or bigger, either central or provincial. As private companies were not paying their employees over the summer unless they were on tour or playing in summer gardens, the nationalization actually represented an unexpected blessing for theatre artists: the opportunity of a life out of precarity. Little did it matter that one would play Nila the Drummer instead of Juliet, and that one would stage Pogodin's propaganda plays instead of Strindberg. The theatre worker had bread on the table. Taste issues, aesthetic directions and personal aspirations were all matters that could be postponed – their discussion would only start again after about a decade.

### *Enter the "People's Artist": a pre-history*

Sică Alexandrescu, like many of his peers in the same generation and in the ones following, was a "self-made artist". He had never followed the courses of the Arts Conservatory (nor had V.I Popa or Ion Sava done so, the former had read Letters and Philosophy, the latter was a lawyer), but he also had not been enrolled into any kind of university. Despite the fact that, throughout his career, he publicly claimed to be a follower of the great director Paul Gusty<sup>11</sup>, the truth is that he had worked at the National Theatre in Bucharest, after finishing high-school, as a backstage director assistant, for less than one season, just before leaving to the front in the First World War<sup>12</sup>. Before that, starting even at 17, he had been an apprentice in the operetta company run by George Carussy, and he had managed to even help around in the Bulandra-Maximilian-Storin company. After the war, in 1920, Alexandrescu left for the newly set up National Theatre in Cluj, following actor and writer Zaharia Bârsan<sup>13</sup>, whom he had met during a tour. He was

---

11. Paul Gusty (1859-1944) was a well-known and respected theatre director at the National Theatre in Bucharest.

12. Margareta Andreescu, "An Introductory Study" in Sică Alexandrescu, *Un Drum În Teatru [A Way in Theatre]* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1980), 7.

13. Zaharia Bârsan (1879-1948) writer, actor, theatre director, the first artistic manager of the National Theatre at Cluj.



hired here, as well, as backstage director; but as he was a hands-on, charismatic person, he was soon promoted by the tragedian-playwright (who spent years running – albeit confusedly and inconsistently – the Cluj theatre) to the position of stage director.

This success, based on putting on a light repertoire, mostly consisting of bubbly comedies and vaudevilles, gave him a boost: Sică Alexandrescu came back to Bucharest in 1926 and set up, together with a few friends, a private company: Teatrul Nostru (Our Theatre), aiming to fill in the summer entertainment gaps, in the season of theatre holidays. The company rented the hall of the Marconi cinema on Calea Griviței and it offered, in the garden or inside the hall, a variety of comedies and music-hall performances, some translated by Alexandrescu, others translated and locally “adapted” (so-called “localizări” in Romanian argotic language).

The practice of “localizări” was still very widespread: one would translate a music hall text extracted from the French, English or German tradition, then change the names of the characters to Romanian names, adjust the situations slightly to the local dramatic space/context and “pouf!” – a new play appeared. As enforcement of intellectual property rights was almost inexistent in Romania in the beginning of the XXth century, adaptation of this kind were excellent sources for easy money, if one was at least mildly talented. In this sense, Sică Alexandrescu, on his own or in association, later, with Tudor Mușatescu, Al. Kirițescu, Mircea Ștefănescu or other fashionable playwrights (during the war, Alexandrescu also offered adaptation and translation work to Mihail Sebastian<sup>14</sup>, who was not allowed to publish at the time because of his Jewish descent) – created, up to 1946, a fully-fledged industry of local adaptations, with zero investment in the rights of the original authors.

The success registered by Teatrul Nostru – where Sică Alexandrescu admittedly put on a Caragiale play for the first time – spurred him on to expand the business. According to his own confessions<sup>15</sup>, within just one season he adventurously started managing several companies at a time. Between 1927 and 1928 he took on the management of (and partially owned) three theatres (Teatrul Nostru, Teatrul Mic and Alhambra). In 1928 he filed for bankruptcy and withdrew from the public eye for almost a year, translating and

---

14. Mihail Sebastian (1907-1945) writer, theatre critic, playwright.

15. Sică Alexandrescu, *General La Patru Ani [A General at Four Years Old]* (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1969), 140–41.

making adaptations for future shows. Starting in 1929, his enterprising efforts in music hall and commercial theatre restarted with a passion, encompassing the summer season as well, at cinema garden Marconi in Bucharest and Modern cinema in Ploiești.

His big breakthrough would only come in 1936 though, after Maria Ventura<sup>16</sup> gave up her own theatre, which had spent six years under the elegant roof of the Majestic theatre hall, just across the National Theatre. Paying the debts, Sică took over the hall on Calea Victoriei and a large part of Ventura's cast and crew, establishing the 'Comedia' theatre. In the meantime, next to the reborn Teatrul Nostru and Teatrul Mic, he was already, together with actor Vasile Toneanu or with playwright Tudor Mușatescu, the manager of Teatrul Vesel (taken over from actor Ion Iancovescu) and also of Teatrul Liber: no less than five private companies. In 1937 he decided to associate all of them, in cartel fashion, similarly to the Paris model, setting up a Cooperative Society of Theatre and Art Enterprises (SCITA); he even managed to lure within the association the famous Regina Maria Theatre, owned by the Bulandra-Maximilian-Storin group.

The advantage of working in a cartel set-up was that commonly administrated projects could be created and actors of one theatre could play (with quite some difficulty in scheduling the shows) as stars in all the associated theatres. Despite the well-praised hit that Sică Alexandrescu ensured the company, by staging, together with Soare Z. Soare, in only two weeks (!) *The Karamazov Brothers* at Regina Maria, Mrs. Bulandra was not content with the cooperative management. Or perhaps she was simply not used to not controlling everything personally. Teatrul Regina Maria had always intended to present a repertoire and aesthetic alternative to the National Theatre, and therefore being associated in name with theatrical enterprises that played for commercial success, like those run by Alexandrescu, may have appeared for some as a lowering of standards and prestige earned in decades. In any case, the actress-princess withdrew her company from this association in 1939 and, after her departure, SCITA fell apart<sup>17</sup>. The entrepreneur-director maintained,

---

16. Maria (Marioara, Marie) Ventura (1886-1954) famous theatre and film actress of Romanian origins, who studied in Paris and played there for several decades at the Comédie Française. She also founded and run in Bucharest a theatre company on her name (between 1929-1936).

17. Simion Alterescu et al., eds., *Istoria Teatrului În România - Vol. 3 [A History of Theatre in Romania - Third Volume]* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1973), 62–82; Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul Românesc. Vol. 5: Teatrul Românesc În Perioada 1913-1925* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1974).

however, property and management rights for some of the mentioned companies, centering, obviously, on Comedia, the fancy theatre on Calea Victoriei.

As we can see, between the wars and in the war period, Sică Alexandrescu rather walked the path of wide administrative-commercial success than that of artistic-modernist achievement. He was seen, above all, as a manager and as an enterprising producer. He launched on the stage, with excellent intuition and a good understanding of the works, actors that would become stars and, sometimes, even playwrights; but at no time was he seen as an important director - more as a correct and demanding interpreter of easy melodrama and comedy (even to the point of asking military precision of his teams). He carefully stayed away from all the aesthetic debates of the interbellum, stating on a regular basis (with a conviction that only feigned modesty) that the only aesthetic trend he was interested in was the one that "fills the hall". A man of a humorous disposition, he often sarcastically declared that his peers' (rather tame, in fact) "avangarde" aesthetic experiments are simply nonsense.

It is only in 1937 that he went through some sort of aesthetic ego crisis: he reworked, in order to commemorate a quarter of a century since the author died, Caragiale's *O noapte furtunoasă* (A Stormy Night), back to back with *Conu Leonida*, at Comedia. The advertising campaign boldly stated that the staging is a move to "recover" the texts: the director was thus trying to answer the "worried" points put forward by V.I. Popa in 1931, in an article published in *Vremea*, titled „Caragiale the director”. V.I. Popa had proposed the hypothesis that, in fact, the best way of directing Caragiale texts was the very manner the playwright had used in directing the premieres of his plays. Later, under the communist regime, Sică Alexandrescu would turn this hypothesis of "the directing tradition of Caragiale" into the core of his normative theories - never mentioning V.I. Popa again.

Perhaps the most relevant indicator regarding the artistic fate of Sică Alexandrescu before 1945 is that, except for his debut in Cluj and for two productions in one season at the Cernăuți National Theatre, he was never invited to direct at any of the national theatres – however rich and multifaceted his artistic activity may have been.

Considering everything, when the regime changed, the owner of Comedia and of so many smaller companies would have qualified perfectly for the label of „bourgeois exploiter”, in letter and in spirit, and ought to have been, as such, condemned to at least a few years out of the spotlight, if not worse. Nevertheless...

## **From a "bourgeois exploiter" to an "accompanying comrade" and then to a "People's Artist"**

Between 1945 and 1948, the Comedia repertoire went through a radical "renewal". Next to classic plays and, again, Caragiale, staged with a cast of the most representative actors brought together from all the different companies owned by Sică Alexandrescu, during each season plays of either classic Russian heritage or, already, of Soviet propaganda origin were added to the repertoire. Ostrovski is a big hit, thanks to the addition to the team of a Russian director turned Romanian national, Ivan N. Dubrovin, who seemed to have materialized from nowhere and who, based on the little information we have from that time<sup>18</sup>, may have been at some point a student of Stanislavski. Despite repairs being made to the building, that Alexandrescu payed for from his own pocket (the hall was rented from its owner, Eforia Spitalelor), a lot of new titles are put on, in a mix of "quality" repertoire, commercial theatre, but also new discoveries: in 1946 the theatre witnessed, under the stage direction of Sică, the debut of Aurel Baranga<sup>19</sup>, later one of the flagship authors of communist propaganda in theatre and, for years on end, a writer holding different leadership functions in the political apparatus. His debut play, a comedy that people have long forgotten featuring peasants, was called *A ball in Făgădău* and would turn out to be the first step into a long-term friendship/collaboration among Sică Alexandrescu, Aurel Baranga and the new star of theatre/political life, actor Radu Beligan<sup>20</sup>.

It is more than probable that, in the enthusiastic years up to the nationalization, Sică Alexandrescu invested quite a bit of connective imagination for quietly establishing useful alliances with the new favorites of the communist regime. It is just as true that fate was, in a tragic way, extremely favorable for him. After the demise by illness of writer and theatre director G. M. Zamfirescu<sup>21</sup> in

---

18 Ioan Massof, *Teatrul Românesc [The Romanian Theatre]* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1981), 257–58.

19. Aurel Baranga (1913-1969) journalist and playwright. After his debut, as avant-garde poet in 1931, he joins in 1945 the communist apparatus. He is a member of the Central Comity of the Communist party from 1969 to 1974.

20. Radu Beligan (1918-2016) theatre and film actor, theatre director, artistic manager of Comedy Theatre in Bucharest (1961-1969) and of the National Theatre in Bucharest (1969-1989). President of the International Institute of Theatre from 1971, and from 1977 appointed honorary president for life. He was also an important political figure during the communist regime, awarded the title of "People's Artist" in 1962, member of The Central Comity of the Communist Party (1969-1989) and a representative in the National Assembly (1961-1975).

21. George Mihail Zamfirescu (1898-1939)

1939, at only 41, between 1944 and 1947, three of the masters of modern theatre directing disappeared by accident – all both theorists and innovating artists: Soare Z. Soare<sup>22</sup> died on the very day of August 23 1944, in the fire exchange at Băneasa, while he was coming back from Bucharest, in a taxi, to the village where he was staying in refuge. Victor Ion Popa and Ion Sava would die just one year apart, the first in 1946 and the other in 1947, prey to incurable diseases. This series of misfortunes is completed by the departure of the Italian director Fernando de Cruciatti<sup>23</sup>, who had been hired in 1938 at the National Theatre, had enjoyed for years a well-deserved level of appreciation and had even taken over the Romanian citizenship; in the beginning of 1949 the artist was forced by the authorities to go back to his native country. In other words, the field of modernist stage direction that had blossomed between the wars was now drastically diminished, and the National Theatre would be the first to feel the consequences of this disaster.

In this context, the nationalization entails an almost full absorption of the Comedia theatre into the staff of the National Theatre, starting with Sică Alexandrescu. Given that he had first set a play at the National Theatre only in 1946, the public and professional presence of the entrepreneur-director would gain, almost overnight, an impressive weight.

First of all, the overgrowth of staff in the National Theatre, in times of material hardship, did not seem to generate any sustainability worries for the new authorities, even under precarious administration/repertoire organization. For mysterious reasons, the authorities decided not to repair/rebuild the traditional National building but, strangely, to use Majestic/Comedia building, as main headquarters, and the studio in Piața Amzei was kept; the old National theatre ended up being demolished. Even though it seems speculative, it is even possible that a mutually beneficial deal had been arranged between the entrepreneur Alexandrescu and the communist regime: he lost the halls (which were all rented, so he only lost the restauration money that were already invested) and won the status of first stage director of the National.

Secondly, the absorption of the Comedia actors (but also of others from theatres run by Sică Alexandrescu) radically changed the elitist composition of the actor corps of the first stage in the country. The society partners, but also the regular actors in National Theatres had enjoyed, for almost a century, certain privileges (summer salary being only one of them) that actors in private companies had not had access to. The most renowned actors would also hold

---

22. Soare Z. Soare (1894-1944)

23. Fernando de Cruciatti (1889-?) was an Italian theatre and film actor, theatre director.

positions as teachers at the Conservatorium. The payment grids of National Theatres were significantly higher than whatever a private company was able to pay, no matter how successful its shows. It is, therefore, understandable that the takeover of the Comedia actors, which practically doubled the cast of the National Theatre, would mean an overthrowing of decade-old hierarchies and would change the internal chemistry of the team, favoring the recognition of Sică Alexandrescu as an essential power and decision factor, even without any official confirmation.

We must also take into account, in this context, both the new ideological rhetoric and the new "routines" of "collective management", with meetings for political persuasion, for establishing the aesthetic norms according to the Stalinist views etc. as they had been imposed by the pro-Soviet regime. On the basis of a well-developed elasticity, acquired during the decades of commercial success, in which he had had to become an expert in networking, Sică Alexandrescu was to become, overnight, not just one of the pillars of stage direction in the National Theatre, but also one of the „trustworthy" mouthpiece of the system.

Sică Alexandrescu never presumed to become a theorist. And yet, without throwing around his weight, yet authoritatively, he instated his own «norm code», that mostly came forth of his practical experience, carefully and patiently distilled and compared to that of his peers.<sup>24</sup>

It is precisely his perfect indifference to the aesthetic debates on modernist theatre directing of the interbellum, his ironical views on "decadent" avant-garde trends, experiments or to any search for new kinds of theatre expression that would offer him, at the time of Stalinist propaganda, some kind of *carte blanche* for building the new directorial academism, disguised in the confused uniform of "socialist realism". Socialist realism<sup>25</sup> did have, in theatre, its own methodologic norm, dictated by Stalin himself: the Stanislavski system and

---

24. Margareta Anghelescu, "Introductory study" in Sică Alexandrescu, *Un Drum În Teatru* [A Way in Theatre] (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1980), 55.

25. The term of socialist realism, as normative, was first used by Maxim Gorki in 1932 and later attributed to Stalin himself. The All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 defined Socialist Realism as the only true art, effectively out-lawing all "dissident" artwork. After the Second World War, the socialist realism became the artistic dogma for all the communist countries for at least one decade, fading (with local particularities) after Stalin's death and Khrushchev's denunciation of the 'cult of personality'. See on that subject Andrew Ellis, ed., *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting 1920–1970* (Milano: Skira, 2012).

method<sup>26</sup>. In other words, just like Molière's Mr Jourdain, Sică Alexandrescu would declare himself a *sui generis* Stanislavskian, "sans le savoir" – and this move holds the key to his reception as an absolute classic, which is finally due to his good maneuvering of the historic context.

As a matter of fact, the correct platitude of his staging went hand in hand with his demonstrative choice of directing texts that were pure political orders, the kind of texts that would flood all the country's stages at the time. Besides Soviet playwrights that had become the standard (Kataev, Kanin with *I was born yesterday*, 1948, Serghei Mihalkov with *Ilia Golovin*, 1950, Stein with *A personal issue*, 1955 and 1957) or Russian classics (Gogol, *The Reviser*, 1952 and 1956, Ostrovski with *The girl without a dowry*, 1954), `master` Sică was a true performer of the new proletcultist playwriting, staging it almost every season, up to 1960: five titles by Baranga, two of Mircea Ștefănescu, one by Lucia Demetrius and, of course, the (painfully failed) dramatic debut of "Academy member" Mihai Beniuc, called *În valea Cucului* (In the Cuckoo's Valley) – a peasant drama about the collectivization, set in Transylvania. This last play would be the object of his own unembarrassed, thick praise, with a clear addressee, in *Teatrul* magazine:

However, the card he would play starting in 1950 remained that of declared "Stanislavskian", self-evident classicality, together with "authentically staying in the service of the dramatic author" and using simply appropriate casts, whose artistic contributions to the making of the shows would nonetheless be overstated in declarations. Tickling the (natural, after all, in all ages) egos of his actors became, paradoxically, a weapon with theoretical value.

### The Caragiale umbrella

1952 was witness to the celebration of 100 years since Caragiale's birth. The regime could not afford to fail taking on board the memory of the national "comedy genius". For Sică Alexandrescu, the Caragiale centennial represented the main stake for enhancing his official imago: a new facade, on the one hand, meant to erase from the public memory the old image of expert in commercial theatre and; on the other hand, he could prove himself capable of giving his artistic abilities a theoretical backing and an air of "seriousness" with an academic scent.

---

26. Lynn Mally, "Autonomous Theater and the Origins of Socialist Realism: The 1932 Olympiad of Autonomous Art," *Russian Review* 52, no. 2 (April 1993): 198, <https://doi.org/10.2307/131343>.

The truth is that, even starting with his first contribution as a director-on-hire at the National in 1948, Sică went back to *O scrisoare pierdută* (*A Lost Letter*). He chose a composite cast, with old theatre society members and several newcomers from Comedia, some of whom would, for decades, will act as a sort of backbone for the successive "reinvigorations" of this production: Marcel Anghelescu as Pristanda, Costache Antoniu as "the drunk citizen", Niki Atanasiu as Cațavencu, Ion Finteșteanu as Farfuridi, Radu Beligan as Agamemnon Dandanache. The less inspired Ion Ulmeni would be replaced from 1952 and in 1956 versions, by the unmistakable Alexandru Giugaru, the stage-filling Nicolae Brancomir would be exchanged in the same remake with the mimic and attitude comedian Grigore Vasiliu-Birlic; and the younger and more charming Constantin Bărbulescu would replace Alexandru Critico as Tipătescu. As for the central position, that of Zoe, Sică Alexandrescu was less... decided: in 1948, Zoe would be interpreted by the commercial theatre comedian Eugenia Zaharia, ex-owner of ephemeral companies and someone of an apparently too „light” talent for the importance of the part. In 1952 and in the 1956 version, the part was to be taken over and shared by two great actresses with an undeniable prestige on the main stage of the country: Cella Dima and the gorgeous Elvira Godeanu (rumor had it at the time that she was in an "intimate" relationship with the very leader of the country). No surprise in the fact that, in all the versions cases, the scenography was signed by Walter Siegfried. We are talking about, and this would be the case in many situations, the very same stage set that had just been dusted clean.

In 1949 Alexandrescu remade and expanded his coupé *O seară la Union. O noapte furtunoasă* (*A Night at Union and & A Stormy Night*) from 1937, in which he had sharply combined pieces of *Momente și Schițe*<sup>27</sup>, but also bits of *Cânticelele comice* (*Comic songs*) by Alecsandri.

He would come back to Caragiale in 1951 though, with *D'ale Carnavalului*, which he had put on at least four times by then in his various companies. The production only ran for a month; the scenography was again made by Siegfried. The cast was based on his constant actors – one could call them „the Sică team” within the National Theatre: Radu Beligan, Alexandru Giugaru, Niki Atanasiu, Grigore Vasiliu Birlic, Cella Dima, with the addition of Maria Volontaru and the much younger Carmen Stănescu, who would later become the last and unforgotten Zoe that the maestro chose for *Scrisoarea pierdută*.

---

27. *Momente și schițe* (Moments and Sketches) is a famous collection of I.L. Caragiale's short stories.



Looking back, it becomes clear that the director was preparing, in fact, to programmatically restage all of Caragiale's comedies for the centennial season, on the – virtually prestigious, but not completely fulfilled - model that he had used in 1937. This personal ambition may have silently influenced the torturing process of censorship and rewriting “on demand” that Academy member Camil Petrescu was submitted to, while writing *Caragiale in his time*<sup>28</sup>, a play he dedicated to the same event. The Alexandrescu's “auctorial” project had to come first. Plus, Camil Petrescu, the former manager of the theatre (1938-1939), had to learn his place, under the new communist regime.

In February 1952, he would redo *Noaptea furtunoasă*, this time in a collage with *Conu' Leonida față cu reacțiunea* (*Leonida and the revolution*). For the first, he kept the cast and set of 1949 production, for *Conu Leonida* he invited the venerable actors Sonia Cluceru and George Timică. In March 1952, he would produce a new combination: a coupé between *Momente* and *D'ale Carnavalului* in which, of course, the second part was simply a recycling of the performance the year before. If we also count the festive performances, throughout the season, of *Scrisoarea pierdută*, it is clear that we already have an integral succession of all comedies, of which a vast majority are remakes of old performances.

The communist authorities do not seem to have caught on to the trick. Quite the opposite, they were extremely happy, the newspapers, radio and news broadcasts cannot praise enough this consistent and “brilliant” valorization of the great playwright works. And the director earned, in the collective memory, a never contested first place as far as staging Caragiale is concerned, which would last for a few decades.

In April 1952, by National Assembly decree, together with other actors of the theatre (among whom, obviously, Costache Antoniu, the communist party's secretary into the National), Sică Alexandrescu was awarded an *Ordinul Muncii clasa I* (Order for Work Merit, class I) “for the work undertaken during the Caragiale centennial”; in January 1953, by means of a similar decree, he was crowned with the title of *Maestru Emerit al Artei* (*Honour Master of Art*). Seven years later he'll become a “People's Artist”.

Sică Alexandrescu would nonetheless back up his remakes spree at the National with stances with more theoretical pretensions that are published in the contemporary press and would be restated not only in several articles, but also in later books. His basic tenet was, of course, that of “recovering”

---

28. See Ion Vartic, ed., *Caragiale În Vremea Lui. Procesul Tovarășului Camil* [*Caragiale in His Time, The Case against Comrade Camil*] (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Camil Petrescu / Teatrul Azi, 2014).

the work of the great comedy author in the "original" form, that in which Caragiale had directed his own opening performances. He claimed that this pursuit of directorial archaeology had been informed by very old actors, like Nicolae Soreanu, who had been a part of the original casts – as he stressed in the introduction of *Stage direction notebook for A Lost Letter*, first published in 1953. While in this edition Radu Beligan was mentioned as a 'working party', in the bundle of *Notebooks* on 1956, in which *O noapte furtunoasă* and *D'ale Carnavalului* are added, Belgian's name magically disappeared.

Publishing *stage direction notebooks*, on Stanislavski's model, was meant to add to the classic-academic-leaning foundation of the 'maestro's life work. Of course, however, the language used to justify the need for recovering the 'authentic' Caragiale vision of the comedies was the typical jargon for the hard-core cultural propaganda of the beginning of the 50's:

The bourgeois-landowners' oligarchy, which Caragiale unmasks and condemns in his comedies, being unable to attack his vigorous body of work in brutal ways (like the organized gangs of troublemakers and fighters, the chauvinist attack by Sturdza in front of the Academy, the Caion affair) chose a subversive, much subtler manner of diminishing its corrosive virulence. Instead of members of the exploiting classes, Caragiale's characters were first interpreted by bourgeois theatre criticism, and later transformed by the stage performances, by means of scenography and costume, as being small provincial slum-dwellers.<sup>29</sup>

As all ideological interpretation of the situations and characters in Caragiale was blooming in this age, it is obvious that the thesis of a progressive „alteration” of the performances, however absurd (and finally hypocritical, if we take a look at a few of the first „summer” shows by Sică Alexandrescu, with some actors coming straight from music-hall or variety theatre) fit like a glove on the dogmatic, mechanistic and self-important discourse of the new theatre critique. The falseness of the hypothesis is proved, paradoxically, precisely by the minute similarity of the way spaces, typological casts and performances were conceived, whether before or right after the war, in Bucharest, Craiova, Iași or wherever else.

---

29. Sică Alexandrescu, *Caiet de Regie Pentru O Scrisoare Pierdută* [Directing Notebooks for A Lost Letter] (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură și artă, 1953), 6.

In fact, the very much praised and used stage direction notebook turns out to be a whip-up of transparently superfluous stage direction indications, accompanied by movement concepts for the – rather static – scenes of every act. More than that, in the notebook, the director himself refers to so-called „traditional” lines: these being lines that Caragiale’s actors introduced during the rehearsals and that the writer approved on site, but never introduced in the printed editions. However, these remained intact, being passed on from generation to generation: the best example is the last line uttered by Cetățeanul turmentat, “*Nu mai pupa mâna, că se-nchide urna!*” (“Stop kissing the hand, the poll might end!”). Alexandrescu didn’t even feel the contradiction between this respect borne by the teams of artists to the performance memory of the author and the thesis of `alteration`: a thesis that, today, as in its time, preserves its ridiculousness and toxicity:

After his death, “ministers, MPs, senators, higher or lower officials and political partisans of more or less influence” have done everything in their power to make sure that “the Caragiale style” remained only an ever-fading memory...<sup>30</sup>

While emphatically remembering, in an article written ten years later, his so-called process of “restauration” of the Caragiale performances in 1952, that he had been so generously rewarded for by the authorities (in the meantime, in 1960, he had also become a *People’s Artist*), a process to which he had already devoted so many other articles, all saying the same thing, the stage director did not miss the opportunity to self-importantly conclude:

Caragiale’s theatre, returned today to its author, has resurged from the very spirit that created it, returned to the mind and soul that created it, renewed its old garments on the patterns of the original cut and now appears as the most authentic page of critical realism expressed through domestic playwriting.<sup>31</sup>

---

30. Ibid., 7.

31. “Caragiale și montările sale”(Caragiale and his set-ups), *Contemporanul*, 8 iunie 1962, in Alexandrescu, *Un Drum În Teatru [A Way in Theatre]*, 132.

## The fight for re-theatricalization

What we, today, call "the fight for re-theatricalization" is, in fact, a large debate, with strong polemic accents, about stage directing, which had originally been started by the *Contemporanul* magazine in the spring of 1956; its echoes were still to be heard, especially in the new *Teatrul* magazine, up until the end of 1957. The debate took place in the context of the short ideological 'spring' that all communist countries enjoyed after Nikita Khrushchev's speech in February 1956, in which the secretary general of the CPUS condemned the crimes and personality cult of the Stalinist age. Khrushchev had thus given a sign to re-evaluate the ideological and cultural limitations imposed by hard-core Stalinism. Similar re-evaluations took place all throughout the European East, particularly as far as cultural practices were concerned. In Romania, under the discrete supervision of party representatives, this trend would somewhat shake the film-making industry and the literary circles. However, it was only in theatre that the ball rolled and became more substantial; this was especially because of the accumulated tensions between the 'old guard' of privileged artists, in alliance with 'party' playwrights, and a new generation of stage directors that called for a real professionalization of the whole of the artistic process, but also for a much more dynamic modernisation of performing arts.

The young directors (Mihai Raicu<sup>32</sup>, who also had political responsibilities), Lucian Giurchescu<sup>33</sup>, Horea Popescu<sup>34</sup>, Sorana Coroamă Stanca<sup>35</sup>, Dan Nasta<sup>36</sup>, Liviu Ciulei, George Rafael<sup>37</sup>, Radu Stanca<sup>38</sup>, Crin Teodorescu<sup>39</sup>, Vlad Mugur<sup>40</sup>, joined, even if more discretely, by Ion Cojar<sup>41</sup> and Miron Niculescu<sup>42</sup>, from

---

32. Mihai Raicu (born 1922) theatre director, artistic manager of several theatres between 1952 and 1978, like the Satu Mare State Theatre, The National Theatre of Cluj, The National Theatre of Targu Mures etc.

33. Lucian Giurchescu (born 1930) theatre director, former artistic manager of Comedy Theatre Bucharest (1969-1979, 1990-1993).

34. Horea Popescu (1925-2010) theatre and film director.

35. Sorana Coroama Stanca (1921-2007) theatre and television director, playwright.

36. Dan Nasta (1919-2015) poet, actor, theatre director and art collector.

37. George Rafael (1920-1984) theatre director.

38. Radu Stanca (1920-1962) poet, playwright, theatre director, theatre theorist.

39. Crin Teodorescu (1925-1970) theatre director.

40. Vlad Mugur (1927-2001) theatre director, theatre professor, artistic manager of National Theatre in Cluj (1965-1971).

41. Ion Cojar (1931-2009) theatre director, theatre professor, artistic manager of National Theatre in Bucharest (1997-2001).

42. Miron Niculescu (born 1930) theatre director.

the Bucharest National Theatre), informally organised as "The V. I. Popa circle of young directors", and took frequent and acid positions in *Contemporanul*. At the same time, they wrote well-founded essays of theatre aesthetics, but also critical articles of the daily theatre life in Bucharest and in the country, or reviews dedicated to the theatre education; most of the essays were published in *Teatrul* magazine<sup>43</sup>.

The concept of *re-theatricalisation* was introduced by Radu Stanca, in his two essays dedicated to theatre aesthetics, and was taken over by Liviu Ciulei in a famous study about scenography; the term was, in fact, a bridge towards the large-scale movement of theatricalisation (aesthetic modernist marking of the artistic autonomy of stage direction, in relation to literature and film) that had taken shape between the wars; it was theoretically founded by the Russian avant-garde and discussed in a Romanian context especially by the famous theatre directors Ion Sava, Ion Aurel Maican and Victor Ion Popa.

This artistic and generational conflict was sustained from the shadows by the very authorities responsible with theatre at the time: the young literature professor Paul Cornea<sup>44</sup> had recently been nominated as a director of the Performance Arts Directorate in the Ministry of Culture. He was the one to draw the seemingly peace-making conclusions of the debate in *Contemporanul*, from September 1956, and at the same time the person allowing the young directors of the 'circle' to present a separate report from the one drawn by his own Directorate, called '*Referat*', in the framework of the history-making *Forum of theatre makers* in December 1956. The forum often fell prey to angry exchanges of opinions and accusations; but, to the surprise of 'the old guard', in the closing argument, Paul Cornea congratulated the young group and programmatically took over some of their remarks.

How did Sică Alexandrescu feature in this small turmoil? His artistic path seemed to go through a paradoxical phenomenon. On the one hand, some of the young directors that had launched the polemic waves started attacking him indirectly, or even by name, as early as March-April 1956. On

---

43. Miruna Runcan, *Teatralizarea și Reteatralizarea În România. 1920-1960 [The Theatricalisation and Re-Theatricalisation in Romania]*, Second ed. (Bucharest: Editura Liternet, 2012).

44. Paul Cornea (born 1923) comparative literature academic, author of numerous research volumes in literary aesthetics and literary sociology. In his youth, he was a communist activist, and was the director Performance Arts Directorate in the Ministry of Culture (1956-1958) and the director of the Cinema Directorate of the same Ministry (1958-1968).

the other hand, the regime rewarded him with the very first international tour that a Romanian theatre, the National, would be allowed since the end of the Second World War.<sup>45</sup>

The attacks started, for instance, with an article by Mihail Raicu, who indirectly referred to the press and public failure of Sică's (one and only) attempt at staging a Shakespeare play, *King Lear* to be exact, in the summer of 1955:

No doubt that it is also the diplomatic tone of the Theatre Directorate whenever an Honour or People's Artist ought to be criticised that contributes to the lukewarm hushing of any difference in opinions. At the same time, theatre directors seldom notice new insights when they appear in their theatres, so as to be able to promote or harness them.<sup>46</sup>

Yet it was George Rafael, the excellent stage director at Teatrul Tineretului (The Youth Theatre and later Nottara), who had the huge courage of passing straight to concrete examples. The young directors, he claimed, were held in a sort of reserve pool in the big theatres, or even boycotted by the actor crews with resounding names, something that took place with the direct support of the older stage directors - who were neither interested in teaching anybody anything, nor capable of accepting that other visions than their own were possible. The theatre institutions, such as they were organised and functioning at the time, not only did not encourage young talent, but were suspicious of newcomers and held them back, whenever they were not working them out plain and simple:

Because, paradoxically, Teatrul Tineretului has not trained, since it was established, any young stage director. Similarly, Teatrul Municipal has not trained so far any young director, with the exception of Dan Nasta,

---

45. "To whom do we owe this happy, unexpected result? (A.N.: the success of the Paris tour in 1956) First of all, we owe it to Caragiale and to the people taking charge today of the destiny of our country, whom we will never be able to thank enough for helping us reach this summit for Romanian theatre: we owe it to the party, which so lovingly fosters art and its servants, to our wise and generous government, who put their faith in us and sent us to Paris with dear sacrifices." Sică Alexandrescu, *Caragiale în timpul nostru (Caragiale in our times)*, Editura pentru literatură, Bucharest, 1962, p. 135.

46. Mihail Raicu, "Meșteșugari Și Artiști [Artisans and Artists]," *Contemporanul*, March 16, 1956.

who trained himself. (...). How come comrades Sică Alexandrescu, W. Siegfried or Mony Ghelerter have not trained at least one youngster each, how come they haven't helped at least one person grow and promoted them as a stage director?<sup>47</sup>

Sică Alexandrescu would only join the debate at a late stage, allowing first the floor to a deliberately dogmatic first line including Academy members Eftimiu<sup>48</sup> and Călinescu<sup>49</sup>, his colleague and competitor Ion Șahighian<sup>50</sup> (whose acidity against the younger generation was only matched by the mechanical proletarian jargon he used, typical for the public lynching specific to the political trials of the age), director Marin Iorda<sup>51</sup>, actor and professor Ion Finteșteanu and theatre historian and party activist Simion Alterescu<sup>52</sup>. All these voices changed the direction of the discussion, accusing the youngsters of arrogance, impatience in allowing themselves to grow up, contempt for the 'fundamental primacy of the text', but also for the actor's artistic contribution. The sparring between the youngsters, backed up by professor G. Dem Loghin<sup>53</sup> and other important voices, among whom even Tudor Arghezi<sup>54</sup> and the old guard would go on for months on end.

It was only in September that the voice of master Sică was to be heard, after coming back all glorious from the Paris tour, where, in the Festival Théâtre des Nations, the National had presented *O scrisoare pierdută*, but also *Ultima oră* by Mihail Sebastian, directed by Moni Ghelerter. Despite its shortness and the fact that it is written more as a pamphlet than as a response to the complex issues that had been raised by most of his interlocutors, his article, called "Let

---

47. Rafael George, "Regizorii Tineri, Presa Și Altele... [Young Directors, Press and Other Matters...]," *Contemporanul*, April 6, 1956.

48. Victor Eftimiu, "Regizorul Și Textul [The Stage Director and the Text]," *Contemporanul*, April 13, 1956.

49. George Calinescu (1899-1965) was a famous and influential literary critic and historian.

50. Ion Șahighian, "Problema Regiei Într-Un Punct Critic [The Issue of Directing at a Critical Point]," *Contemporanul*, April 20, 1956.

51. Marin Iorda, "Câteva Aspecte Concrete Ale Muncii Regizorului [Some Concrete Aspects of the Stage Director's Work]," *Contemporanul*, May 18, 1956.

52. Simion Alterescu, "Îndrăzneală Și... Încă Ceva [Daring And... Something Else]," *Contemporanul*, May 4, 1956.

53. Dem G. Loghin, "Arta Regiei Nu a Rămas În Urma Artei Actoricești [The Directing Art Has Not Remained behind the Acting Profession]," *Contemporanul*, August 22, 1956.

54. Tudor Arghezi (1880-1967) One of the most prominent Romanian poets, writers and journalists of the XX century.

us be more optimistic!" was one of the most obvious, but also most perverse attacks of the "old guard". Sitting comfortably not only on the Paris tour pedestal (about which he would later, in 1968<sup>55</sup>, publish a book that included more work-related travels), but also on the comfortable position of common sense, Sică Alexandrescu gave the impression that he agreed with and even encouraged the purpose of the "debate". Yet his intervention appeared to be eager to draw conclusions and close the discussion, diluting the concepts and levelling the very conflict at its core.

We can face the future with faith. And we must not forget that there are stage directors who have rightly been awarded the title of Honour Masters, people who have dedicated their lives to this craft since 1944: Finți, Moni Ghelerter, followed by a flock of promising talents in stage directing. I call them «promising», because, however talented and in a hurry these youngsters may be, the profession of stage director remains one that requires some maturity.

As these new elements will reach their maturity, they will fortunately replace the "empirical craftsmen". But until then, let us give praise that Romanian theatre, as good or bad as it is, is capable of representing us honorably in international competitions like the one this year in Paris, and that the National Theatre, with its hybrid crew (as described by a collaborator to the official magazine *Teatrul*) manages to gain a top place among the world's nations.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the ironic tone (which would earn him an irate answer, in *Teatrul* magazine, signed by Ștefan Aug. Doinaș<sup>57</sup>, a temporary editor of the said publication), the motif that Alexandrescu attacked most profoundly was the distinction between craftsman and artist, present in the title of the previous Mihail Raicu article (the one that caused the most annoyed reactions on the side of the "maestros").

---

55. Sică Alexandrescu, *Cu Teatrul Românesc Peste Hotare [Taking Romanian Theatre Abroad]* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1968).

56. Sică Alexandrescu, "Să Fim Mai Optimiști! [Let Us Be More Optimistic!]," *Contemporanul*, September 7, 1956.

57. Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, "Argumentele Unui Optimist [The Arguments of an Optimist]," *Teatrul*, no. 7 (July 1957): 85–86.



In our environment, most youngsters, if they have had the chance to run a show once, wish for nothing less than to run the show by themselves for good. (...) It is on purpose that I call it a craft. One of the articles is called «Artisans or artists?». This is a dangerous choice. And I think this is the very core of the problem. All of us who do this work – or, if you do not like the word, this profession – must be, as much as possible, masters of our craft. We must be good craftsmen and, those who have it in them, artists (...) Whoever tries to jump over the first step without treading on it solidly is wrong to think that they will be able to balance on the top step of the art of directing.<sup>58</sup>

Underneath the thinly spread layer of false modesty, the director positioned as patriarch ended the intervention with normative definitions that, in hindsight, are deliciously empty, proving once more a lack of interest for any authentic theatrical culture and a complete mismatch with the very essence of the debate that had already gone on for half a year:

Stage direction is not, nor should it ever be, as some claim “an art in itself”. It should remain a subordinate art, an interpretative art. One can have a “personal style”, one can become a “personality”, one can dare all sorts of things, but the limit of daring is betraying the text. One can be Yehudi Menuhin or Lipatti – in their art – yet the job is to strictly follow what the inspiration of Beethoven laid down on the staves. And that does not mean superficially “holding to the letter”<sup>59</sup> of the author’s indications, but trying to understand and render their deeper meaning.<sup>60</sup>

The fact that the debate slowly faded out in 1957, leaving a significant imprint on the series of ever more brilliant performances of the years 1956-1960, signed by the new directors caught up in the re-theatricalization fight, but also by others who had just finished the university did not seem to put Sică Alexandrescu’s mind at ease. This is possibly why he came back, sarcastically, in the winter of 1958 (a rough year, with new arrests and

---

58. Alexandrescu, “Să Fim Mai Optimişti! [Let Us Be More Optimistic!].”

59. Sică Alexandrescu refers here to a previous article of G. Dem. Loghin.

60. Alexandrescu, “Să Fim Mai Optimişti! [Let Us Be More Optimistic!].”

persecutions, a time when the young editors at *Teatrul*, dedicated to the re-theatricalization trend, Șt. Aug. Doinaș, Ioan Negoîtescu and I. D. Sârbu, were all in prison!), by planting a new attack:

If a stage director has been successful, it is because, while present in the performance, he was not visible to the public (...). We state this because, again, I can see writers in the press agitating now, in the sixth decade of this century, rediscoveries of issues that were being discussed in 1922, regarding the «theatricalization» of theatre. I feel as if I can see, at the core of this pompous problem stating, a huge and ridiculous soap bubble. Theatre is theatre of it is nothing at all. (...) We will continue also in the future to stay away from such traps, even if some highly refined theatre scholars might consider us out of fashion.<sup>61</sup>

Being contemporary with the first performances of Brecht's plays, staged by Lucian Giurchescu and Horea Popescu, which were accompanied by debates on "the theory of distancing effect" and enjoyed enormous audience and critical success, the vitriolic intentions of the statements above are drowned, up to this day, in an involuntary ridiculousness.

### Ending and apotheosis

After many performances and master classes abroad, granted to him by the authorities over time (Finland, Germany, Belgium, Poland), Sică Alexandrescu was, almost inexplicably, sent into retirement from the National Theatre in 1967. However, he would not withdraw without having been organised the exit of a big aristocrat: he would emphatically stage *Apus de soare* (*Sunset*) by Delavrancea – in the same set design signed by Mircea Marosin, with the same costumes and with over 60% of the cast (including George Calboreanu in the leading role) of the same text directed in 1956 by... Marietta Sadova and Mihai Zirra! Not only did "no one remember" the performance put on 11 years before, but the echoes of the 1967 one would become a legend, especially due to the show's filming and repeatedly broadcasted, for decades, on television. At the end of his last season,

---

61. Sică Alexandrescu, "Drumul Teatrului Nostru E Bun [Our Theatre Is on a Good Path]," *Teatrul*, no. 11 (1958).

Alexandrescu staged the classic *Răzvan și Vidra* by B. P. Hasdeu, taking advantage of the anniversary of the writer, and the official press applauded with gusto:

The making of this performance has been awarded – a *tout seigneur*, *tout honneur* – to Sică Alexandrescu, certainly the most adapt among our directors to faithfully translate the spirit and the flesh of such a masterpiece, through the spirit of the National Theatre and the sense of a commemoration of wide historic and cultural resonance.<sup>62</sup>

It would, however, not be a real retirement: starting in September, he would be the director-manager of the State Theatre in Braşov (that he would rename Teatrul Dramatic and would end up, today, bearing the name... Sică Alexandrescu). The local authorities would afford him a personal car with a chauffeur and even a superb nationalized villa in the old town, with a garden going up to the mountain Tâmpa promenade. He would programmatically introduce a full-year schedule, as in SCITA, taking out the summer holidays. For his own work, he generally reset old stuff (including the recent *Apus de soare*, with the same set and bringing in the leading actors of the Bucharest national, who were paid a fortune). The truth is that even since the 50's he had put on the same Bucharest shows, for good money, throughout the country, taking advantage of a permissive system.

The repertoire of the six Braşov seasons reminds one, to some degree, of the repertoires at Teatrul Nostru or at Comedia: a mix of classic, Romanian and foreign titles (Labiche, Scribe, Alecsandri, Caragiale, Zaharia Bârsan, V.I. Popa) and more or less commercial comedies written by friends (Mircea Ştefănescu, Baranga, Gheorghe Vlad) or even adaptations that he claimed as his own [see *Băieţuşul tatii sau Napoleon era fată* (*Daddy's boy or Napoleon was a girl*), with a billboard stating "an adaptation by Sică Alexandrescu of an American farce"! – the real author is called Margaret Mayo]. Of course, by the standards of the time, Soviet authors were well represented.

Alexandrescu invited a majority of directors from the older generations, among which, gallantly, Marietta Sadova, whose *Apus de soare* he had subtly taken over, and who found a collaborative refuge in Braşov for years after that. The dusty repertoire and the distance between the top young actors and the old invited directors generated a small press revolution: in January 1969, some of the young crew (Maria Velcescu, Ştefan Dedu Farca,

---

62. Radu Popescu, "Răzvan Și Vidra de B. P. Haşdeu," *România Liberă*, February 25, 1967.

Dan Săndulescu, Mihai Bălaș, Mircea Andreescu, Costache Babii, Luminița Blănaru) organised in the *Astra* magazine a round table, moderated by the just as young critic Ermil Rădulescu. They asked for new directors to be invited, people with wider visions and more aware of the theatrical realities of their time (the names of Radu Penciulescu and David Esrig were mentioned); they strongly claimed a renewal of the repertoire and the setting up of an experimental studio<sup>63</sup>. The heated atmosphere would soon be calmed, without the director giving up the "permanent season": Alexandrescu would hire Eugen Mercus, a stage director who had recently enjoyed great success in Târgu Mureș and invite, next to people in his generation, a few younger directors who staged texts that had more to do with the spirit of the times [*Acești îngeri triști* (These sad angels) and *Pisica în noaptea anului nou* (The cat on New year's eve) by D.R. Popescu, *The Price* and *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller etc.]. In the years to come, a relative peace was to follow.

People's Artist Sică Alexandrescu would die of a stroke, while on holidays in Cannes, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1973. He is still considered, to this day, a "classic" figure of Romanian stage direction.

## References

- Alexandrescu, Sică. "Drumul Teatrului Nostru E Bun [Our Theatre Is on a Good Path]." *Teatrul*, no. 11 (1958).
- Alexandrescu, Sică. "Să Fim Mai Optimiști! [Let Us Be More Optimistic!]." *Contemporanul*, September 7, 1956.
- Alexandrescu, Sică. *Cu Teatrul Românesc Peste Hotare [Taking Romanian Theatre Abroad]*. Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1968.
- Alexandrescu, Sică. *General La Patru Ani [A General at Four Years Old]*. Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1969.
- Alexandrescu, Sică. *Caragiale În Timpul Nostru [Caragiale in Our Time]*. Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1962.
- Alexandrescu, Sică. *Tovarășul Meu de Drum, Tutunul [My Journey Companion, the Tobacco]*. Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1973.
- Alexandrescu, Sică. *Un Drum În Teatru [A Way in Theatre]*. Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1980.

---

63. Ermil Rădulescu, "Masă Rotundă Cu Actorii Tineri [A Round Table with the Young Actors]," *Astra*, February 1969.

- Alexandrescu, Sică. *Caiete de Regie Pentru O Scrisoare Pierdută, O Noapte Furtunoasă, D'ale Carnavalului* [Directing Notebooks for A Lost Letter, A Stormy Night and The Carnival]. Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1956.
- Alexandrescu, Sică. *Caiet de Regie Pentru O Scrisoare Pierdută* [Directing Notebooks for A Lost Letter]. Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură și artă, 1953.
- Alterescu, Simion. "Îndrăzneală Și... Încă Ceva [Daring And... Something Else]." *Contemporanul*, May 4, 1956.
- Alterescu, Simion, Anca Viorica Costa-Foru, Olga Flegont, and Ion Cazaban, eds. *Istoria Teatrului În România - Vol. 3* [A History of Theatre in Romania - Third Volume]. Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1973.
- Barbu, Nicolae. *Momente Din Istoria Teatrului Românesc* [Moments from the Romanian Theatre History]. Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1977.
- Bâțfoi, Dorin-Liviu. *Așa S-a Născut Omu Nou* [And so Was Born the New Man]. Bucharest: Editura Compania, 2012.
- Carandino, Nicolae. *Teatrul Așa Cum L-Am Văzut* [Theatre as I Saw It]. Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1986.
- Comarnescu, Petru. *Ion Sava*. Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1966.
- Doinaș, Ștefan Augustin. "Argumentele Unui Optimist [The Arguments of an Optimist]." *Teatrul*, no. 7 (July 1957).
- Eftimiu, Victor. "Regizorul Și Textul [The Stage Director and the Text]." *Contemporanul*, April 13, 1956.
- Ellis, Andrew, ed. *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting 1920–1970*. Milano: Skira, 2012.
- George, Rafael. "Regizorii Tineri, Presa Și Altele... [Young Directors, Press and Other Matters...]." *Contemporanul*, April 6, 1956.
- Iorda, Marin. "Câteva Aspecte Concrete Ale Muncii Regizorului [Some Concrete Aspects of the Stage Director's Work]." *Contemporanul*, May 18, 1956.
- Loghin, Dem G. "Arta Regiei Nu a Rămas În Urma Artei Actoricești [The Directing Art Has Not Remained behind the Acting Profession]." *Contemporanul*, August 22, 1956.
- Malița, Liviu. *Cenzura În Teatru. Documente. 1948-1989* [Censorship in Theatre. Documents. 1948-1989]. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Efes, 2006.
- Mally, Lynn. "Autonomous Theater and the Origins of Socialist Realism: The 1932 Olympiad of Autonomous Art." *Russian Review* 52, no. 2 (April 1993): 198. <https://doi.org/10.2307/131343>.
- Massof, Ioan. *Teatrul Românesc* [The Romanian Theatre]. Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1981.
- Massoff, Ioan. *Teatrul Românesc. Vol. 5: Teatrul Românesc În Perioada 1913-1925*. Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1974.
- Măciucă, Constantin. *Teatrul Și Teatrele* [The Theatre and the Theatres]. Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1978.

- Paraschivescu, Constantin. *Teatrul Sică Alexandrescu, Braşov. Monografie [Sica Alexandrescu Theatre. A Monography]*. Braşov: Teatrul Sică Alexandrescu, 2014.
- Popa, Victor Ion. *Scrieri Despre Teatru [Writings on Theatre]*. Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1968.
- Popescu, Radu. "Răzvan Şi Vidra de B. P. Haşdeu." *România Liberă*, February 25, 1967.
- Raicu, Mihail. "Meşteşugari Şi Artişti [Artisans and Artists]." *Contemporanul*, March 16, 1956.
- Rădulescu, Ermil. "Masă Rotundă Cu Actorii Tineri [A Round Table with the Young Actors]." *Astra*, February 1969.
- Runcan, Miruna. *Teatralizarea Şi Reteatralizarea În România. 1920-1960 [The Theatricalisation and Re-Theatricalisation in Romania]*. Second ed. Bucharest: Editura Liternet, 2012.
- Runcan, Miruna. *Modelul Teatral Românesc [The Romanian Model of Theatre]*. Bucharest: UNITEXT, 2000.
- Sava, Ion. *Teatralitatea Teatrului [The Theatricality of Theatre]*. Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1981.
- Sava, Valerian. *Istoria Critică a Filmului Românesc Contemporan - Vol. 1 [The Critical History of Contemporary Romanian Cinema - Volume 1]*. Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1999.
- Stanislavski, K.S. *Munca Actorului Cu Sine Însuşi [The Work of the Actor with Himself]*. Bucharest: Editura Cartea Rusă, 1953.
- Stanislavski, K.S. *Viaţa Mea În Artă [My Life in Art]*. Bucharest: Editura Cartea Rusă, 1951.
- Şahighian, Ion. "Problema Regiei Într-Un Punct Critic [The Issue of Directing at a Critical Point]." *Contemporanul*, April 20, 1956.
- Vartic, Ion, ed. *Caragiale În Vremea Lui. Procesul Tovarăşului Camil [Caragiale in His Time, The Case against Comrade Camil]*. Bucharest: Fundaţia Culturală Camil Petrescu / Teatrul Azi, 2014.
- Vartic, Ion. *Radu Stanca, Poezie Şi Teatru [Radu Stanca – Poetry and Drama]*. Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1978.
- Vasile, Cristian. *Literatura Şi Artele În Romania Comunistă. 1945-1953 [The Literature and the Arts in Romania under Communism. 1945-1953]*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010.
- Vasile, Cristian. *Politicile Culturale Comuniste În Timpul Regimului Gheorghiu-Dej [The Cultural Policies in Communism under the Gheorghiu-Dej Regime]*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011.



## Ancient *choreia* in neurocognitive context

TOMASZ CIESIELSKI<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper addresses the problem of difficulties in the detailed reflection of the ancient aesthetic terms, in this case *choreia* - triune of dance, music and singing. The paper hypothesis is that an important contribution to understanding of *choreia* can be brought from contemporary cognitive sciences and neurosciences. Firstly, an outline of the key historical and anthropological research on the ancient term is presented, attained from classical sources as well as the recent analysis. The issues that need clarification are then listed. In the context of *choreia* it is primarily the type or level of experience, in which the unity of music, singing and dancing would emerge. Analysis of the neural correlates of predominantly motion, but also music and language perception entails to recognize in them the potential basis for a unity of artistic elements particularly in the cognitive experience of both the performer and spectator. Further analysis within the cognitive theories regarding movement control and the origins of the language contrives to see *choreia* as a specific cognitive quality. The conclusions from these considerations are then applied to the analysis of the performances of CHOREA Theatre Association, which refers to ancient patterns. It leads to a further refinement of the *choreia's* analysis and indicate possible directions for further research.

**Keywords:** ancient dances, dance reconstruction, cognitive aesthetics, neuroaesthetics, sensorimotor aesthetics, joint action

### Introduction

Ancient *choreia*, despite years of scientist's studying and artist's experimenting its heritage, remains mostly a blur fantastic wish or romantic dream of both of these groups. The first, approach the problem from different perspectives at the end having them, as Graham Ley state, paradoxically

---

1. Faculty of Philology, University of Łódź, Poland. ciesielski\_t@uni.lodz.pl



obscuring their view on the case<sup>2</sup>. The second, on the other hand, rely on their intuition, which tends to be strongly affected by their modern craftsmanship and current trends. This last assessment can be easily assigned to anybody trying to work with Greek tragedy, as it always means dealing with foundations of Western culture, therefore also using history to express our own needs and desires. Nevertheless, there are some apparent facts to which we can refer to. Attempting to keep to those mostly approved, I will try to show in the current study if modern cognitivism and neurosciences can shed light on our understanding of the experience of *choreia*, as well as its indisputable importance for the theatre.

To pursue the methodological endeavor of this article I begin by gathering the findings of historical research on the essence of the ancient *choreia*. Thus, the term is defined in a broad manner and put in the right theoretical and historical context. This indicates the directions in which *choreia* can be possibly recontextualized using theoretical and conceptual apparatus of modern cognitive science and neuroscience. In particular, the research on the neural correlates of motion control and perception, as well as proposals for binding them to the processing of music and language are at stake. The conclusions of this section are further correlated with the contemporary theatrical practice, which attempts to performatively reconstruct the cognitive and aesthetic quality of the ancient *choreia*.

### ***Choreia* – the unity of three**

“*Choreia*, of course, is dance and song taken as a whole” (Laws, II, 654b)<sup>3</sup>, says Plato in the *Laws*, in a passage that directs my reflection. Although the philosopher is not mentioning here “words” or “action”, it is clear that they were also a part of it, which makes *choreia* a total form of art<sup>4</sup>. If turning around this statement we may also say after Ley, that most probably there was no poetry without music<sup>5</sup>.

---

2. Graham Ley, *The Theatricality of Greek Tragedy: Playing Space and Chorus* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007).

3. Interestingly, the same passage from Laws is also translated “Choir-training, as a whole, embraces of course both dancing and song” Plato, *Laws*, ed. and trans. R.G. Burry, Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 93.

4. A.P. David, *The Dance of the Muses. Choral Theory and Ancient Greek Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 35.

5. Ley, *The Theatricality of Greek Tragedy: Playing Space and Chorus*, 133.

David is fulfilling this picture arguing that the very base of Greek poetry – the metre – is by all means a residue of the movement:

...it is far more likely that what is called a metre in ancient Greek was always, to begin with, a dance measure (even if modified by the epithet 'iambic'). The elements of metre are feet! [...] Plato is explicit that metres measure bodily motion, not speech...<sup>6</sup>

In another fragment, David becomes even more straightforward:

Metres, we are likely to be told, are abstract systems of formal constraints. But think about the nature of a foot: there is nothing either abstract or formal about it; it is, in fact, the most pedestrian thing there is. A poetic foot in Greece was a dance step [...] If a dance began [...], on the right foot for luck, and ended on the right foot as well in the final antistrophe or epode, we have a hypothesis for reconstructing the steps of an ode. One need only remember, as a general maxim, to put one foot after another; or to put it another way, the left foot must come between successive steps of the right. If my reader can walk, or has seen people walk, he will quickly grasp the real constraints inherent in Greek metre.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, David closes the circle of dance – poetry – music – dance – etc. with the very dance at the beginning as an extra-linguistic origin of metre in Greek poetry<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, dance marked the musicality of poetry or even ancient Greek language in general:

Ancient Greek is already musical, measured as it is purely by the short or long of the syllable, and not subject to variable or discretionary stress (which he terms accent) as in modern meters. The rhythm is inherent in the words: "The syllables themselves are the rhythmic matter from which a rhythm originates."<sup>9</sup>

---

6. David, *The Dance of the Muses. Choral Theory and Ancient Greek Poetics*, 27.

7. David, 37.

8. David, 30.

9. Thrasybulos Georgos Georgiades, *Greek Music, Verse, and Dance* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1973), 55.

This takes us back to dance or wider – movement as an original source. It is actually misleading to even consider this relation as a circle of dependence as presented above, as for the ancient Greeks dance, music and poetry most probably existed almost as one entity. This is valid at least until the development of tragedy, which disunited them. An important moment of this process is the exclusion of the actor from chorus, which led chorus to become representational.

What had been a composer's orchestra was obliged to become a dramatist's vehicle, costumed and perhaps even masked: a chorus of old men, or libation-bearing women, or Furies. Unlike music and dance, which need not be imitative, the phenomenon of the dramatic personation and representation of myth could be linked directly to depictions in the visual and the plastic arts, and imitation became the central concern of philosophical approaches to poetry and poetics.<sup>10</sup>

This process seems to be irreversible. Music, dance and poetry separated and evolved alone, making it if not impossible for contemporary artist to perform them together, then mostly recognised only as virtuosity. Classical music is to be listened by a static spectator, dancing to it often rather disturbs the experience then strengthens it. Moreover, ironically, the same audience usually does not understand the words sung if not following libretto, which also underscores the distance between once joint qualities of *choreia*.

What is gone from the cultural point of view (even though many artists attempt to challenge themselves with creating performances somehow actualizing ancient *chorus*) paradoxically seems to never have happened for the human mind. I will argue below, that *choreia* is the ever-actual modality of perception.

### Neurocognitive perspective

The breakthrough discovery that allows such speculations and fertilizes many other fields of humanities is the existence of so called "mirror neurons" in human brain. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian neurobiologists found neural networks that activate both when one performs a certain task, e.g. opening the door at the time of observing the same action. For the first time

---

10. David, *The Dance of the Muses. Choral Theory and Ancient Greek Poetics*, 25.

this mechanism has been observed in macaque monkeys, when examining the reactions of selected areas of the monkey's brain whilst performing specific tasks (in this case grabbing of a fruit). Electrodes placed in the macaque's brain were signalling the stimulation of selected areas of the central nervous system. To scientists' surprise, at the moment when a monkey was idle, and one of the researchers caught the fruit, the electrodes received a strong signal. Neurons responded the same way as when the macaque was catching the legume itself. Scientists have poetically called discovered cells "the mirror neurons"<sup>11</sup> – name as appealing as misleading. These cells are in fact only a part of a complex structure – as called by Emily S. Cross – *Action Observation Network*<sup>12</sup>. It includes, in anatomical terms: cells that encode only movement, canonical neurons coupling movement with objects, simulation/mirror cells and other supplementary circuits. AON plays a crucial role of solving almost all the calculations needed to perceive and perform physical actions. All determined by an inherent economy of human brain – the less effort the better. The economy or optimization rule serves its purpose on every level of the process. Therefore, it is easier to relay on the same mechanism of the action processing and apply it whenever needed than create each time a precise picture of it. Likewise, it is more efficient to use the same circuits for both performing and observing similar actions done by others, than double the information in the memory for each modality of its usage. Considering a wide discussion on the importance of such neuronal multimodality for social interaction, it can be also seen as a premise for a joint action and synchronisation of ancient chorus<sup>13</sup>.

The very same economy leads to the coupling of sounds and actions. As proved in later research of the Italian scientists, the macaque's mirror neurons reacted also when it only heard the sound of the action<sup>14</sup>. Speech and sounds

---

11. Vittorio Gallese, "Embodied Simulation: From Neurons to Phenomenal Experience," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 4, no. 1 (March 2005): 32, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-005-4737-z>; Vittorio Gallese et al., "Action Recognition in the Premotor Cortex," *Brain* 119 (1996): 593–609; G Rizzolatti et al., "Premotor Cortex and the Recognition of Motor Actions," *Brain Research. Cognitive Brain Research* 3, no. 2 (March 1996): 131–41, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8713554>.

12. Emily S. Cross, "Building a Dance in the Human Brain: Insights from Expert and Novice Dancers," in *The Neurocognition of Dance. Mind, Movement and Motor Skills*, ed. Bettina Bläsing, Martin Puttke-Voss, and Thomas Schack (Hove - New York: Psychology Press, 2010), 210.

13. Yuval Hart et al., "Individuality and Togetherness in Joint Improvised Motion," *Plos One* 9, no. 2 (2014).

14. Marc Jeannerod, *Motor Cognition: What Actions Tell the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 111.

in general are most probably encoded audiomotorically, once again partly by the circuits involved in action processing<sup>15</sup>. However, this relation is not only anatomical. Cognitivists propose that action programs operated by AON when memorizing the movement are based on *Basic Action Concepts*<sup>16</sup>. These can be described audibly, verbally and visually. For example, a fundamental for classical ballet *plié* (bending of the knees) can be considered as such an action concept, which can be repeated with a “fitting it” resonant name. That does not mean, however, that BACs necessarily relay on representation. It is worth noting particularly when considering the not-obvious relation between the sound and movement, for example in karate, which tends to be rather a dynamic coherence and not a relation of representation<sup>17</sup>. These two issues link us back to David’s insistence on keeping the metre underfoot. Brain is apparently inherently linking sound and dancing step, both on a hardware level of anatomical region used during dancing, and software level of dynamically joint performance of voice and foot. When recognized, such a synchronized activity might be rewarded by the pleasure mechanism in the brain, as a sign of subject’s or potential partner’s health, but also stimulate the search for meaningful symmetries in the environment - for example a symmetrical body of a dangerous predator<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, symmetry in space and time (synchronization) can be considered – as Ramachandran proposes – as a neurophysiological aesthetic law. Tragic *choreia* must have been a great example of fulfilment of such a rule, with the pursuit of the artists to achieve perfect harmony within the chorus’ performance. Oppositely, if this is correct, it supports the hypothesis, that *choreia* was not only an aesthetic artefact, but also a certain cognitive competence.

The discovery of the mirror neurons provoked a large discussion on the spectators’ experience in the theatre, which I present and discuss in detail elsewhere<sup>19</sup>. Also, Greek audience must have made large use of simulating

---

15. Ivar Hagendoorn, “Some Speculative Hypotheses about the Nature and Perception of Dance and Choreography,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (2004): 96–97.

16. Bettina Bläsing, “The Dancer’s Memory: Expertise and Cognitive Structures in Dance,” in *The Neurocognition of Dance. Mind, Movement and Motor Skills*, ed. Bettina Bläsing, Martin Puttke, and Thomas Schack (New-York: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 84.

17. Tim van Gelder, “What Might Cognition Be, If Not Computation?,” *Journal of Philosophy*, no. 91 (1995): 345–81.

18. Vilayanur Subramanian Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Quest for What Makes Us Human* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 234.

19. Tomasz Ciesielski, *Taneczny Umysł. Teatr Ruchu I Tańca W Perspektywie Neurokognitywistycznej* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014).

neurons, as they themselves were in all likelihood very familiar with the dances and songs of the *choreia* and thus enjoyed the embodied recognition of the performance<sup>20</sup>. This is true at least for the early tradition of dancing in the circle<sup>21</sup>. Regardless of how interesting it would be to discuss this problem further, it does not advance us in the search for neurocognitive *choreia*. Until now, only the connection between dance and music was indicated, not including the poetry or even simply the words. Answers might be provided by canonical neurons mentioned above. In the frontal areas and in the parietal association cortex areas (considered to be responsible for analysing the stimulus) a number of motor neurons of specific properties were discovered. Some of them are active both during the execution of the action, and the passive observation of possible objects of this action<sup>22</sup>. The study proved their visuomotor character, which develops probably not right away, but gradually with growing up. In addition to the basic function, they have the ability to represent activities related to the item's specified class. In other words, the canonical neurons represent objects in terms of possible actions to take against them: a small nut will release the program of a precise grip, while a big apple – an action requiring use of the whole hand, followed by a broad opening of the mouth<sup>23</sup>. The same simulation mechanism probably allows one to understand names of given objects<sup>24</sup>. Numerous experiments have demonstrated the existence of an equivalent area of canonical neurons in humans<sup>25</sup>. Interestingly enough, this particular area of a monkey's brain is phylogenetically equivalent to the place, which in human anatomy is known as the Broca's area; its involvement in the use of language has been repeatedly clinically documented. Of course, enacting through human canonical neurons such advanced features as recognition and naming of objects is possible thanks to a much greater complexity of these structures than in monkeys. In fact, the parietal areas are

---

20. Corinne Jola et al., "Motor Simulation without Motor Expertise: Enhanced Corticospinal Excitability in Visually Experienced Dance Spectators," *Plos One* 7, no. 3 (2012).

21. David, *The Dance of the Muses. Choral Theory and Ancient Greek Poetics*, 41–42.

22. Leonardo Fogassi and Vittorio Gallese, "The Neural Correlates of Action Understanding in Non-Human Primate," in *Mirror Neurons and the Evolution of Brain and Language*, ed. Maxim I. Stamenov and Vittorio Gallese (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 2002), 15.

23. Fogassi and Gallese, 28.

24. Jeannerod, *Motor Cognition: What Actions Tell the Self*, 162.

25. J Grèzes et al., "Activations Related To 'mirror' and 'canonical' neurones in the Human Brain: An fMRI Study," *NeuroImage* 18, no. 4 (April 2003): 928–37, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12725768>.

one of the most developed in the course of evolution of the human in relation to other primates. Psychologists provide additional evidence for the hypothesis of performative perception. Among others, the early research by Jean Piaget and Ulric Neisser confirmed that preliminary knowledge of infants is being developed thanks to built-in motor skills, unconscious knowledge of basic laws of physics and regularities of temporal and causal relationships<sup>26</sup>. Mediated in this data are the ability to interact with the environment and the mirroring capabilities of the same brain networks; it is the key to the knowledge and understanding of the world. In cognitive studies such idea can be simply defined as “the embodied mind”<sup>27</sup>.

To better present the consequences of such a concept, I shall recall the George Lakoff’s concept of the metaphor, considered not as a language-based poetic tool, but the fundamental structure of human interaction with the world:

Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature<sup>28</sup>.

Metaphor, as Lakoff describes it, exists between what we can experience through the senses, and the terms on which this knowledge is mapped. In other words, the understanding of concepts is embodied – structured by the constant relationship and interaction with the world through the body, including the brain. Thus, Lakoff’s proposal, lately developed and reshaped

---

26. Jeannerod, *Motor Cognition: What Actions Tell the Self*, 169.

27. Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1991); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind & Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

28. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 4.

together with Vittorio Gallese, can be defined as the interactive theory of meaning<sup>29</sup>. According to it, there is no separated brain module dedicated to linguistic and abstract reasoning, since those are based on the same multimodal sensorimotor systems of the brain as other aspects of human consciousness. This is also consistent with the principle of optimization – if it were otherwise, the data would have to be doubled in the mind and constantly "translated" from one language of processing to the other. A prerequisite for relying all mental processes on the same neural structures is their multimodality. This feature constitutes sensorimotor neural networks – AON – that are responsible for simulation and processing of action. They respond to visual, auditory and proprioceptive stimuli, and so they are a part of neurological base for the embodied mind. It needs to be noted here, that "multimodality" is radically different from "supramodality" - that is combining various modalities of experiencing by the higher associative areas, which can be understood as rational thinking. That is not necessary for the processes of constructing metaphors, because combining data is performed on the lower levels of processing<sup>30</sup>.

However, only now, with the development of modern neurosciences and subordinate technologies, these hypotheses can benefit from more empiric evidences. The way our consciousness functions in the brain circuits, although still very unclear, is presenting itself as extremely complex, multimodal and most of all non-hierarchical. Lower processes can strongly affect high reasoning as well as oppositely, the need of organizing our experiences in a "reasonable" way often changes the initial stimulus (top-down and bottom-up connections). All of these are happening not as a computation, but rather as feedback negotiations of the "sense" with our body and environment and, as I expect, can be successfully correlated with the latest proposals on non-representative intelligence models<sup>31</sup>. In such a context, dancing, demanding extensive use of the crucial motor brain networks, appears to be an external representation of a deep reflection<sup>32</sup>. Joined by song and poetic words that

---

29. Vittorio Gallese and George Lakoff, "The Brain's Concepts: The Role of the Sensory-Motor System in Conceptual Knowledge," *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 22, no. 3–4 (2005): 456.

30. Gallese and Lakoff, 459.

31. In particular, swarm intelligence models can be an example here. See Tim van Gelder, "What Might Cognition Be, If Not Computation?," *Journal of Philosophy*, no. 91 (1995).

32. Corinne Jola, "Research and Choreography: Merging Dance and Cognitive Neuroscience," in *The Neurocognition of Dance. Mind, Movement and Motor Skills*, ed. Bettina Bläsing, Martin Puttke-Voss, and Thomas Schack (Hove - New York: Psychology Press, 2010), 210.



can originate from the same bodily source, a dance performed by the ancient chorus – *choreia* – is a staged metonymy of the processes presented above. Oppositely, *choreia* can be seen as a performative model of the embodied acting or even cognition.

### **Artistic endeavour for cognitive *choreia***

Unfortunately, when applied to the history of theatre, the embodied mind seems only a hypothetical statement; it might be proven, however, to a certain extent, by modern practices of reconstructing Greek theatre. The theatre association from Łódź (Poland), appropriately called CHOREA<sup>33</sup>, could be a perfect example. Created from the two research groups: The Antique Orchestra and The Dances of the Labyrinth, it was fully devoted for several years to researching the qualities of ancient *choreia*. Importantly, only limited part of that research was devoted to a *strict* reconstruction. The group was mostly trying to create modern *choreia*, which recall the core qualities of ancient, ritualistic performance, but not its aesthetics and context. The artists created, on the base of both scientific and artistic inquiries, a unique method of developing a “multidimensional actor”.

Actor's training in CHOREA is multimodal, but based on physical training, or perhaps more accurately dance and acrobatics. This includes both bodily techniques derived from Eastern traditions, as well as original material developed by members of CHOREA. Also further aspects of the performer's training are built on the movement. Only after appropriate preparation of the body during a warm up, the development of vocal material may begin. It is not yet then treated in a musical way, but, so to speak, physiological – attention centres to bodily aspects of creating sound. Musicality is introduced also through dance exercises, joint with characteristic for ancient Greek music complex and odd rhythms. Generally, at this stage, actor is opened for interaction with a partner or even with a group. It is the building of the support in partnering and common rhythm that turns out to be crucial for the later work with the voice. This is achieved by simple tasks focused on linking motion with the sound, and subsequently harmonizing it with the group. Alternatively, the basis for the introduction of musicality is the observation of the dialogue between different rhythms based on the same beat, minted in motion by other performers.

---

33. <http://www.chorea.com.pl/pl/o-nas/idea/> [10.04.2015]

In the same way word and text are introduced. They arise in connection with the music, or directly through working with the body. A common task at this stage is to create one's own movement alphabet through improvisation. Giving the inspiration of images representing non-Latin alphabets often supports the creative process. In effect, each performer creates his limited, primary alphabet, based on which he improvises with a partner. On the one hand, it is therefore the task of creating a performative language (*parole*), and on the other, bonding activities and intentions with the visual stimuli. Only after such introduction the actual speech begins to appear, which would never break away from its bodily basis during the performance.

Clearly, the above-described evolution of the workshop is in practice rarely present, and the training of CHOREA's actors includes all these elements in an order matching current production. Nevertheless, the process is always based on physical training, which through work with voice is the output for music and word. Most of the exercises can therefore be considered as tools improving cognitive abilities and the search of organic connections between the elements of *choreia* – learning embodiment. As surveys show, the performers of the Theatre CHOREA are obtaining in this way also a unique presence on stage. In addition to the synergistic use of multiple artistic media, it is considered by spectators to be the greatest value of the theatre's performances<sup>34</sup>.

Extremely important for theatre performances of CHOREA is also the emphasis on group work and the search for common rhythms, which can be read as a reversal of the process of separation of the protagonist from the ancient chorus. Moreover, in the cognitive context, CHOREA's practice can be recognised as an attempt to reconstruct a truly embodied and profound social relationship, into which the audience is also drawn. Viewers are invited to be a participating witness of the events on the stage, not the distant observer. Given such audience, performer becomes truly vulnerable.

A significant final example of the creative process in CHOREA might be here the production *Grotowski. An Attempt to Retreat*. Six performers under the supervision of (participating in the stage action) director – Tomasz Rodowicz – try to reference their practice to the activities of Jerzy Grotowski. This appeal seems to be in the context of my reflection an added value. Grotowski, at the early stage of his career, postulated "art as vehicle" – a term created by Peter

---

34. The research was made for the *TAKE OVER: Seeing theatre through young audiences eyes* project ran by CHOREA Theatre Association as a partner of British Council.

Brook<sup>35</sup> – that allows the performer transcend the average reality of his or her life<sup>36</sup>. Not coincidentally, he also referred to the ritualistic origins of the theatre, where *choreia* certainly should be placed. Therefore, the led discourse can be hypothetically opened to social neurosciences, which opens a possible new research area.

The performers in the show are acting almost purely as a joint choir – everyone always remain active on the stage. Between the moments of common singing combined with the movement there are also solo fragments. However, as in ancient processions performer separates only for a moment from the choir, to express the concerns of the society. Even if he or she relay strongly on his or her own creative process, they are always in a rhythmic, musical or simply physical way accompanied by other actors. Importantly, all the (para)solo performance pieces also are prepared through teamwork, so that, from the beginning, they emerge in relation to a common organic rhythm of the group. In the same time, this builds the expected presence of the performers, which does not depend here only on their individual commitment and competence.

The musical and rhythm structure of the performance is evident. In a symbolic way, water drops falling from the I.V.bag measure time and set the rhythm. More important, however, it is the music composed by Tomasz Krzyżanowski. It organizes a performance, but not a narrative, which itself breaks down in a seemingly loose associations and correlations. They remain, however, "sensible" thanks to the multimodality of the experience of both artists and audience – it does not make sense narratively, but produces meaning in an experiential and perceptual way. In particular, this is visible in the scene of peculiar procession, which transforms into a living sculpture created out of the actors' bodies. The process is accompanied on the one hand by the monologue of the actress, and on the other by the emerging from the performers' movement common singing. None of these elements fit to the other.

Analysis of the CHOREA's performances proves to be ineffective, if based on the classical methods of cultural studies, even taking into account their postmodern proposals. Their semiotics and narrative entangle, not following

---

35. Peter Brook, "Grotowski, Art as Vehicle," in *The Grotowski Source Book*, ed. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 381–84.

36. Carla Pollastrelli, "'Art as Vehicle': Grotowski in Pontedera," *New Theatre Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (November 18, 2009): 333, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X09000621>.

any rational logic. Without a doubt, however, the production forms a coherent whole, felt and understood by the viewer. It seems that it is precisely this type of performances in a specific way closer to achieving quality similar to the ancient *choireia*. Obviously, they also suggest that not only intersubjective unity of art was the essential element of the antique performance, but also a common experience of the members of the choir<sup>37</sup>.

## Conclusions

The arguments quoted at the beginning of the paper undoubtedly indicate that ancient chorea was some form of the unity of music, movement and speech. In cognitive sciences, it can be described as a special symmetry and synergy of the cognitive control of movement, perception of rhythm and music, and the usage of abstract concepts - poetic language. But there is no certainty what, in fact, would be this unity in terms of its structure and mechanisms.

As proposed here, it seems it was not limited to the aesthetic coexistence of different artistic elements on the stage. This is not apparent either from the descriptions of ancient chroniclers, or preserved treaties (especially Aristotle's), or ethnographic and anthropological researches. Thousands of years of the evolution of theatre blurred the ancient quality and developed a dominance of the forms focusing separately on the word, music and dance. Hope to reconstruct the meaning of the ancient *choreia* seems to be given by contemporary cognitive science, which through the embodied mind concept allows us to see the coexistence of these forms of human activity as an inherent feature of the mind. If we agree to accept such hypothesis, it is worth paying attention to contemporary artistic activities that attempt to restore *choreia* to life by the artistic tools.

CHOREA's actors seek in their work the "unity of three", mastering the skills of using them on the stage. Through demanding training and hours spent in the studio, they attempt to overcome inner boundaries and awaken organic qualities of an actor's performance to achieve intense stage presence. The intensity of the spectacles of CHOREA is extraordinary and in a very specific way stimulates the audience, as I argue, the *choreia* should do. At the

---

37. Mariusz Bartosiak, "Chorea – Próba Odwrotu Czy... Powrót?," *Kultura I Społeczeństwo* 56, no. 2 (January 1, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10276-012-0016-2>.

same time, in the practice of the CHOREA's actors all distinct elements of which it is composed are clearly present. Perhaps, then, watching artistic strategies they use could be fruitful not only for understanding the embodied acting but embodied mind in general. Particularly important here seems to be the question of rhythm, as an element connecting movement, music and language and the various stages of linking them into the performance.

Modern neuroscience is often accused of bringing humanistic, philosophical problems to physics and chemistry governing the functioning of human brain<sup>38</sup>. Even though cells and neurotransmitters are indeed its field of interest, the conclusions that can be derived from their studies are much more far-reaching. They do not question the authenticity of aesthetic experience, but consequently prove its existence and even deepen its possible outcomes. These can be even deepened by broadening the terms that are crucial for understanding of performing arts, and ancient *choreia* is one of them – a term that could be revised thanks to contemporary science. In return, such research might be inspiring for the cognitive studies, by revealing the aspects of the embodiment that are still in question.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to express my very great appreciation for CHOREA Theatre Association for being allowed to be the member of the group participating in its creative process and, at the same time, being an external observer of their achievements. I also wish to thank Professor Mariusz Bartosiak for his critical suggestions and assistance of my own research.

### References

- Bartosiak, Mariusz. "Chorea – Próba Odwrotu Czy... Powrót?" *Kultura I Społeczeństwo* 56, no. 2 (January 1, 2012). <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10276-012-0016-2>.
- Bläsing, Bettina. "The Dancer's Memory: Expertise and Cognitive Structures in Dance." In *The Neurocognition of Dance. Mind, Movement and Motor Skills*, edited by Bettina Bläsing, Martin Puttke, and Thomas Schack. New-York: Taylor & Francis, 2010.

---

38. Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart, "Preface," in *Performance and Cognition. Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 2006.

- Brook, Peter. "Grotowski, Art as Vehicle." In *The Grotowski Source Book*, edited by Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, 381–84. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Ciesielski, Tomasz. *Taneczny Umysł. Teatr Ruchu I Tańca W Perspektywie Neurokognitywistycznej*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014.
- Cross, Emily S. "Building a Dance in the Human Brain: Insights from Expert and Novice Dancers." In *The Neurocognition of Dance. Mind, Movement and Motor Skills*, edited by Bettina Bläsing, Martin Puttke-Voss, and Thomas Schack. Hove - New York: Psychology Press, 2010.
- David, A.P. *The Dance of the Muses. Choral Theory and Ancient Greek Poetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Fogassi, Leonardo, and Vittorio Gallese. "The Neural Correlates of Action Understanding in Non-Human Primate." In *Mirror Neurons and the Evolution of Brain and Language*, edited by Maxim I. Stamenov and Vittorio Gallese. Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 2002.
- Gallese, Vittorio. "Embodied Simulation: From Neurons to Phenomenal Experience." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 4, no. 1 (March 2005): 23–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-005-4737-z>.
- Gallese, Vittorio, L Fadiga, Leonardo Fogassi, and G Rizzolatti. "Action Recognition in the Premotor Cortex." *Brain* 119 (1996): 593–609.
- Gallese, Vittorio, and George Lakoff. "The Brain's Concepts: The Role of the Sensory-Motor System in Conceptual Knowledge." *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 22, no. 3–4 (2005).
- Georgiades, Thrasybulos Georgos. *Greek Music, Verse, and Dance*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1973.
- Grèzes, J, J L Armony, J Rowe, and R E Passingham. "Activations Related To 'mirror' and 'canonical' neurones in the Human Brain: An fMRI Study." *NeuroImage* 18, no. 4 (April 2003): 928–37. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12725768>.
- Hagendoorn, Ivar. "Some Speculative Hypotheses about the Nature and Perception of Dance and Choreography." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (2004): 96–97.
- Hart, Yuval, Lior Noy, Rinat Feniger-Schaal, Avraham E. Mayo, and Uri Alon. "Individuality and Togetherness in Joint Improvised Motion." *Plos One* 9, no. 2 (2014).
- Jeannerod, Marc. *Motor Cognition: What Actions Tell the Self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Jola, Corinne. "Research and Choreography: Merging Dance and Cognitive Neuroscience." In *The Neurocognition of Dance. Mind, Movement and Motor Skills*, edited by Bettina Bläsing, Martin Puttke-Voss, and Thomas Schack. Hove - New York: Psychology Press, 2010.

- Jola, Corinne, Ali Abedian-Amiri, Annapoorna Kuppuswamy, Frank E. Pollick, and Marie-Hélène Grosbras. "Motor Simulation without Motor Expertise: Enhanced Corticospinal Excitability in Visually Experienced Dance Spectators." *Plos One* 7, no. 3 (2012).
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind & Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Ley, Graham. *The Theatricality of Greek Tragedy: Playing Space and Chorus*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007.
- McConachie, Bruce, and F. Elizabeth Hart. "Preface." In *Performance and Cognition. Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Plato. *Laws*. Edited by R.G. Burry. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Pollastrelli, Carla. "'Art as Vehicle': Grotowski in Pontedera." *New Theatre Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (November 18, 2009): 333. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X09000621>.
- Ramachandran, Vilayanur Subramanian. *The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest for What Makes Us Human*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011.
- Rizzolatti, G, L Fadiga, V Gallese, and L Fogassi. "Premotor Cortex and the Recognition of Motor Actions." *Brain Research. Cognitive Brain Research* 3, no. 2 (March 1996): 131–41. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8713554>.
- Gelder, Tim van. "What Might Cognition Be, If Not Computation?" *Journal of Philosophy*, no. 91 (1995): 345–81.
- Varela, Francisco J., Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch. *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1991.

**Tomasz Ciesielski:** *Performer, dancer, theatre researcher. Since 2009 member of the Theatre Association CHOREA, worked within the projects (workshops, performances) issuing the experiences of Jerzy Grotowski and especially ancient music and dance: Antic/Dance in Re-Construction 2010, Koguty, Borsuki i inne Kozły 2011, Oratorium Dance Project 2011. In 2011 started cooperation with Granhøj Dans (Aarhus, Denmark) finalized with the international productions Men&Mahler oraz Rite of Spring Extended, both awarded Årets Reumert Vinder. Following the individual doctoral studies program at the University of Lodz concentrated on the anthropology of theatre, possibilities of applying neurosciences and cognitive sciences into dance and theatre studies. Author of the first polish monograph presenting advances in dance neuroaesthetics: "The Dancing Mind. Dance and Movement Theatre in Neurocognitive Perspective". Leading workshops on the same topic in Poland. Secretary of the editorial board of polish Dictionary of Dance in XX and XXI centuries.*

## *Gianina Cărbunariu's theatre, a form of memory in recent history*

OLTIȚA CÎNTEC<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** My paper highlights the way in which, by documenting some Romanian histories from our recent past, Gianina Cărbunariu's theatre fuels our collective memory. Cărbunariu picks topics avoided by authorities, not enough or not at all analyzed by historians or sociologists, themes that are aesthetically treated focusing on small histories, real facts forgotten by researchers, facts that are pointed out through theatrical expressiveness. My study is built around the methodology developed by Paul Ricoeur in his book, *Memory, history, forgetting*, which I use as frame of my analyze. As content I have chosen a few of the most successful shows created by Gianina Cărbunariu and the most relevant in this analytic context.

**Keywords:** drama, Gianina Cărbunariu, recent history, memory.

In *Memory, history, forgetting*<sup>2</sup>, when speaking about the Phenomenology method whilst developing its principles, Paul Ricoeur substantiates the relationship between the concepts giving the title of the book by asking three questions: 1. What do we remember? 2. Whose memory is it? 3. How do we remember and fuel our memory?. According to this pattern, I will analyse the manner in which, by examining some significant recent events using theater-specific methods, theatre maker Gianina Cărbunariu<sup>3</sup> actually puts

---

1. Faculty of Theatre, "George Enescu" National University of Arts, Iași. oltitacintec@gmail.com.

2. Paul Ricoeur, *Memoria, Istoria, Uitarea* (Timișoara: Amarcord, 2010).

3. Gianina Cărbunariu (n. 1977) (born 1977) is a theatre maker, graduate of the Faculty of Theatre Directing at the University of Bucharest. Among her recent creations as a theatre maker: *Ordinary people* (National Theatre „Radu Stanca” Sibiu, 2016), *Solitaridy* (co-production of the National Theatre „Radu Stanca” Sibiu, National Theatre in Brussels and Avignon Festival as part of the project Cities on Stage/Villes en Scene, performance presented in 2014 Avignon



public memory to the test. In the book I mentioned as the “frame” of my study, the French philosopher makes a clear distinction between the cognitive side of memory, consisting in searching and recognising past events, and the pragmatic side, that of acting once the memories have been triggered. Remembering doesn’t just mean getting, re-acknowledging an image of the past, but searching for it, «doing» something in this regard, as Paul Ricoeur would say. It is my belief that Gianina Cărburariu’s interest in revealing sequences omitted by recent history is filed, in artistic form, in such an endeavor of the pragmatics of remembering, of anamnesis. By doing shows that document events that are significant for community awareness, the theatre maker proposes a collective approach of shared memories.

### What do we remember?

For about a month, in 1981, on the panels that stood as boundaries around a building site in Botoșani, as well as on the walls of the surrounding buildings, chalk inscriptions hinting towards rebelling against the communist regime had appeared. In full alert, the political police – Securitate in the town, as well as that in the neighboring county of Suceava, thoroughly investigated and found out that the culprit behind this very brave form of protest was Mugur Călinescu, a 17 year old student attending one of the city’s high schools

---

Festival official selection), *For Sale* (co-production of the Odeon Theatre and the State Theatre in Hamburg as part of the international project Hunger for Trade, 2014), *Typographic Capital Letters* (co-production of Odeon Theatre, dramAcum Association and Divadelna Nitra Festival as part of the Parallel Lives project - 20th Century Through the Eyes of Secret Police, 2013), *Sibian Tiger* (dramAcum production at the Comedy Theatre, 2012), *X mm of Y km* (a collective production Paintbrush Factory in Cluj, 2011), *Sold Out* (a production of Kammerspiele Theatre in Munich, 2010), *20/20* (dramAcum production and Yorick Studio in Târgu Mureș, 2009). Participation in international festivals: official selection of the Festival of Avignon, the Biennial New Plays From Europe, Wiener Festwochen Festival, TransAmerique Montreal Festival, Festival Dialog from Wrocław, Divadelna Nitra in Slovakia, LIFT London, Festival Kontakt in Torun, New Drama in Budapest, New drama in Moscow etc. The scenarios of the performances were translated and put on stage by other directors. The play *Kebab* was translated and had more than 20 stagings in theaters around the world, including the Royal Court in London, Schaubühne Berlin Kammerspiele in Munich. The performances start from contemporary themes or question certain aspects of recent history. These topics were documented through interviews and archival research and the documentation process was followed by improvisation with the actors. The script created was one of fiction where sometimes they incorporated elements of reality (excerpts of interviews with real people, real pictures of documents, objects etc.).

"A.T. Laurian". The case was subject of an inquiry, code name "The Student", and the files have been archived in the Securitate vaults up until the historian Mihail Bumbuş found it and brought it to light<sup>4</sup>. With the exception of the boy's family, very few people remember in the post-communist years that a kid had had enough of queuing for hours just to buy food, of enduring censorship, ideological control and, influenced by the polish model of which he had randomly heard on the Europa Liberă radio had acted and pushed for people to rally together and to stop accepting the daily humiliations that the communist regime induced. The drama of Mugur Călinescu is that, after he and his family experienced first hand the gruesome methods of one of the most violent branches of political police, the Romanian Securitate, he fell ill shortly of leukemia (1983) and died in 1985<sup>5</sup>.

Mihail Bumbuş has studied the records of the inquiries in the archives of the Securitate, looking into the minutes, tracking reports, documentation regarding decisions, informative notes, he spoke with his mother, friends, former class mates (some of them appeared in the records as information sources for the investigators), but he also spoke with two of the officers who worked on the case (this happened in 2007). Gianina Cărbunariu took full advantage of this "readymade" material and created a show *Typographic Capital Letters* in which 4 actors take turns interpreting different parts, encompassing all of the characters involved in the drama, from the police officers to his family and school environment, using a young actor to fill the role of Mugur Călinescu. The docu-fiction created by Gianina Cărbunariu uses the case as an opportunity to remind the viewers of what used to be an unusual dissidence in the communist era (according to statistics, from a total population of 22 million, there were over 11.000 employed by the Securitate, and over half a million of informants, Mugur Călinescu being himself offered to become an informant to escape the consequences of his actions. Just to compare, now there are 15.000 employees in the Romanian Secret Services, from a total population of 19 million!) and of the lack of desire and action from the post-communist Romanian authorities to elucidate the decades of political police repressions. Gianina Cărbunariu's theatre isn't just a docudrama one, hat re-enacts real events from the past. It starts from documenting the subject in the archives,

---

4. Marius Oprea, *Şase Feluri de a Muri* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2009).

5. There are some rumors not yet proved that the Securitate used to irradiate the ones considered enemies of the regime. Mugur Călinescu's family think that this might be the case for their son.

holding meetings and talking with the ones involved or with general relevant people to the topic. She just uses this valuable material she has gathered through solid research and shapes it in artistic format, transposing it into a docu-fiction. In a particular way, she uses recent history as a source of inspiration, picks some eluded sequences of our past and dramatizes those in a theatrical manner. In her creative work, the artist builds an aesthetic representation of the past that acts equally on the public's memory and imagination, methods of knowledge who stimulate each other, offering her audience a spectacular way to branch back into the past. The audience is always a "character" in the show. Upholding the strict guidelines of documentary theatre, Cărbunariu always keeps her distance, detailing the subject from as many perspectives and angles as possible, letting the audience pass judgement on what they see. In *Typographic Capital Letters* the viewers are integrated into the show – two spotlights reminiscent of the interrogation lamps are flashed right through their eyes, highlighting them, everyone being very close to the stage, filmed live while the images are broadcast onto a screen in front of them.

In an interview she did with Europa Liberă Radio, Gianina Cărbunariu mentioned: „I think that what theatre can do, what a protest can do, what activists can do is bring a whole new agenda into focus and, again, to apply pressure onto decision makers”<sup>6</sup>. Reexamining recent history through artistic manners combines the objective dimension of research and documenting with the subjective one that comes from choosing the topic, from the way in which the script is structured. This type of theatre does not issue rulings, does not pretend scientific objectivity, although it does refer to expert materials constantly.

Gianina Cărbunariu's theatre forces the viewer to process the variety of things discoverable in the acting space. In this regard, it is a participatory theatre as well. The theatre maker is attracted by „unclear, ambiguous things”, by pages of history lost willingly or unwillingly, that she can bring back into the general attention through theatre. A political theatre, socially engaged but equally valuable from an aesthetic point of view. Despite its' fragility from the perspective of temporal durability, her theatre is much more effective in impacting the public by being a living type of art. Her creation speaks of recent history through forgotten episodes, usually pertaining to a smaller chain of

---

6. Lucian Ștefănescu, „Mesajul unui gest de revoltă din trecut: libertatea și democrația nu vin de-a gata, ele trebuie recâștigate zi de zi,” Radio Europa Liberă, 2014, <https://www.europalibera.org/a/mesajul-unui-gest-de-revolta/25267778.html>.

events, closer to all of us, that the larger picture, the official speech has officially lost sight of. What Cărbunariu is doing is solid proof that history is an infinite source of new ideas and the small scale of history is also very important for any society.

Gianina Cărbunariu's theatre is a special kind of "mark" of history: the script (attested testimonies, but also a few subjective ones), the show (as a message aimed towards the public), talk-back sessions. Each time, the accuracy of information primes, alongside the combination between documentary and fiction in the scenic style chosen by the creative team. Her theatre has a dimension of recovering recent history, an ethical dimension driven by the point to point aesthetic intervention in which history has failed.

### Whose memory is it?

Gianina Cărbunariu is known beyond the borders of Romania, particularly in Germany where she worked on a few projects. At Münchner Kammerspiele, for instance, she created *Sold Out*<sup>7</sup>, a performance about the massive migration of Saxons from Romania to Germany in the 70s and 80s, when, according to statistics, around 14.000 Romanian citizens with German origins have left the country. Not by following immigration procedures though, but by paying considerable sums to the communist state. Between 1967 and 1989, over 225.000 Romanians citizens with German origins were sold by the Ceaușescu regime to the Federal Republic of Germany, the whole business totaling, according to German statistics, up to approximately DM 1.127.737.770. The price varied depending on how much the Romanian state considered they had "invested" in those who wished to leave: young people were at the top of the selling range, students in particular, the top of the gruesome catalogue being formed by graduates.

The sums have varied across the years, the average being 7 000 – 8 000 per immigrant<sup>8</sup>.

---

7. Kammerspiele, München – *Sold Out* by Gianina Cărbunariu. Translator: Ina Tartler. Directing: Gianina Cărbunariu. Sets and costumes: Dorothee Curio. Lights: Christian Mahrle. Visuals: Daniel Gontz. Music: Pollyester. Assistant director: Carmen Coțofană. Dramaturgie: Malte Jelden, Julia Reichert. With Sylvana Krappatsch, Lasse Myhr, Hildegard Schmahl, Lenja Schultze, Edmund Telgenkämper și Michael Tregor. 2010.

8. According to the quoted book: someone with high level of education – DM 11.000 (approximately USD 3.000), an undergraduate – DM 5.500 (approximately USD 1.506), a technician – DM 2.900 (approximately USD 792), a person without education – DM 1.800 (approximately USD 490).

Gianina Cărbunariu discovered the topic by reading about it on various blogs and an interview with Ernst Meinhardt, a German journalist who documented the issue. Captivated by the phenomenon, one that escaped the interest of historians or sociologists, Cărbunariu tracked how the members of the two communities involved in the process, Saxons and Swabians holding Romanian citizenship on one side, and Germans from Germany on the other, have assessed this topic in our recent history. Staying true to her method of operating when social situations catch her eye, Gianina Cărbunariu has again developed a resourceful operation of theatre anthropology, learning through talking to a lot of people involved in the past in the process, the ones who had agreed to discuss their own experience. The story of the show is fictional, but it has been built on the basis of interviewing 40 subjects, all of them respondents to the press add she had put out. "Many of the ones interviewed wished to remain anonymous as some agents of the political police are still active today", Cărbunariu points out in the newspaper "Abendzeitung"<sup>9</sup>. She has massively relied on their testimonies to validate the truth of the text, to very accurately depict the way in which communist authorities would obtain money. Not only members of Securitate took advantage of this type of trade, but also those who brokered the deals, from party members to customs workers. The totalitarian regime is also evoked on stage through Daniel Gontz's visuals: the Ceaușescu couple at one of the Plenary Meetings of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, at Sala Palatului and an image with the map of the Socialist Republic of Romania surrounded by sparkling rays of sunlight, one of the cliché propaganda images specific to the years of Ceaușescu's communism. At the end of the show, actors also read fragments from the interviews that have stood at the basis of the script. Although inspired by real events, the show is not one of pure documentary theatre and, to facilitate its way towards the public, the creation team presented the real life situations with a touch of absurd humor. Relative to the way in which, as an artist, she relates to reality, Gianina Cărbunariu believes that the tension between reality and fiction is always important and inspiring. Countless sequences of recent history are neglected, even though they will have a long term effect and would explain certain specifics the Romanian society confronts now. A society that still contemplates pages of a long gone history, exaggerating their importance, but one that does not take enough care of the stages closer to our time.

---

9. Irina Wolf, "Sold Out – Un Spectacol Despre Vânzarea Etnicilor Germani [Sold out - a Show about the Selling of Ethnic Germans]," *Teatrul Azi* 9–10 (2010), 93.

The aesthetic approach of historical themes could be a smoother way of displaying delicate issues and, all the while, of answering questions relating to more obscure, less known parts of history. Through this project, the artist has proven that recent history can be reactivated through theatrical means, through memories brought back into artistic attention, sparking the curiosity of specialists, starting from objective, direct testimonies from those involved, from journalistic investigations and ethical obligation of carefully researching a topic, reinforcing it by adhering to a variety of sources. "Apart from the phenomenon of «selling», the theme has seemed important to me because it steers the discussion towards the entire communist era and the relationship between the East and the West, towards the theme of immigration and identity (what is it like being a German citizen and German Romanian citizen or German Turkish or, in a broader term, what is it like today to be a European citizen – in the sense that some are more «European» than others"<sup>10</sup>, Gianina Cărbunariu points out.

### **How do we remember and fuel our memory?**

Gianina Cărbunariu focused on european citizens and community equality in another project of hers – *Speak Silence?/Sprachen Sie Schweigen?*<sup>11</sup>, in which she tackles a phenomenon that, so far, has not been approached by neither sociologists nor historians. Her theatrical approach shines a light on a special type of mimesis that focuses on the present and recent past, aesthetically questioning a wide range of social issues treated with indifference by the authorities, turning the public attention towards dire circumstances currently ignored by the community. The theatre maker identifies and broadcasts situations ignored by the larger scope of history, or the official history if you will, but that impact people, showing circumstances with social significance. In this case, the artistic theme has been the freedom of the workforce to circulate in Europe, the hypocrisy of the continental authorities as its' basis,

---

10. Oana Stoica, "Statul Român și-a abandonat cetățenii - Interviu cu Gianina Cărbunariu [The Romanian State Abandoned Its Citizens - Interview with Gianina Cărbunariu]," *Dilema Veche*, August 12, 2011.

11. National Theatre "Radu Stanca" Sibiu (2017), a show by Gianina Cărbunariu, set design and visuals: Mihai Păcurar, Assistant Director: Sanda Anastasof, music: Alex Halka, documentation: Gianina Cărbunariu and Andrei Ioniță, translation: Fabiola Eidloth and Daria Hainz, with: Emőke Boldizsár, Daniel Bucher, Ofelia Popii, Valentin Späth, Marius Turdeanu.

translated through silence and lack of intervention in the countless situations in which the Eastern Europeans, not the ones from the „brain drain”, but the simple ones, who work menial jobs, are considered different from the Western Europeans. European legislation exists, theoretically it's mandatory and always applied, it's just that reality offers numerous examples of circumstances in which it is bypass, to the loss of those who are not protected by the system. The employment areas Gianina Cărbunariu focuses on are those avoided by westerners, of physical labour, paid worse, like constructions, looking after the elderly, slaughterhouses and, in patches, agriculture. Press articles, talks, mostly with Elvis Iancu, one of the Romanian born workers who, in 2014, have protested at the Mall of Berlin – Mall of Shame, because not all the rights of the employees there were respected<sup>12</sup>, interviews and improvisations have been the means of research of the cases that have become the subjects in the show. The idea behind the text of the show comes from the organic connection with facts, the real cases, relevant to the topic, blunt realities, depicted by intertwining reality and fiction.

The sense of empathy with the subjects and the difficult situations they are in is normal, it comes from the fact that the theatre maker decides to choose their stories, she binds them in fragmentary scripts, structured in sequences, presented from multiple angles. Cărbunariu's creations manage to maintain a precious balance between the information in the field and the aesthetic/emotional traits, a condition which tremendously helps in building credibility. Although belonging to political theatre, they steer far away from ideology and promoting various thesis, all the while being convincing, offering a considerable plethora of sources and a wide range of perspectives. All wrapped up in theatre specific forms. Her shows have a perfect symmetry, an expression of her director logic and of total creative control when using the tools of documentary theatre. In the process of gathering informations and building characters, the artist uses both direct testimonies, creating sort of a diary or intermediary journal consisting of opinions and impressions of those involved. For *Speak Silence?/Sprachen Sie Schweigen?* the people did not intend or did not know how to keep personal journals, so the artists' creative team intervention has managed to collect an adequate piece of material. When effectively constructing the show, this piece of oral history,

---

12. Parallel networks that have brought construction workers from Eastern Europe, including Romania, treated them unfairly, making them work overhours, paying their salaries with big delays or not paying it at all, threatening and forcing them to lie in front of authorities.

undoubtedly subjective, has become, through assuming, selecting and building, part of a dramatic docufiction script. The preparatory operations thus become journeys into memory, remembrance, whose purpose is reflect and warn against a few unfortunate facts that plague the essence of European democracy. The script is brilliantly built, perfectly balancing the documentary basis with the scenic form imagined (fashion show, multiple part lesson, job fair presentation, scenic action etc.), going through different theatre moments in terms of content and build, using means specific to mockumentary too.

*Speak Silence?/Sprachen Sie Schweigen?*'s cast includes Emőke Boldizsár, Daniel Bucher, Ofelia Popii, Valentin Späth, Marius Turdeanu, each having tight connections with the artistically analysed theme, being brought on board for this reason precisely. Apart the fact that they are very good actors. In the structure of the show, therefore, multiple layers of information and meaning are combined, offering up a complex multi angled depictment of the problem. There are life details that the audience discovers in the *intro*, built like an awards show, on a huge red carpet where actors present one another. The selected elements of biography are funny and are all in connection with the theme theatrically debated. Daniel Bucher is a true blooded German, but he fell in love with Romanian actress Fatma Mohamed and, to be with her, has moved to Romania. Marius Turdeanu wanted to emigrate to USA, but tried an unusual route to get there – Ukraine, Russia, Alaska – only to be found in Vladivostok and sent home by the police. In one of his student break he went to Germany to make some money, got a job working in constructions, but then lost all his earnings in a local pyramid based game. Emőke Boldizsár is the most multi-cultural of them all: born in a Hungarian family in Bistrița, graduated a German high-school, her parents work in EU and she uses the money that they sent her to complete her university studies. Ofelia Popii has collaborated with a Theatre in Stuttgart, so has worked in the West, in a project undertook by the National Theatre "Radu Stanca", and her brother works in Germany. Valentin Späth is a young actor born and raised in Germany who, to the complete amazement of his family and friends, has decided to accept the offer of being a paid actor in Romania.

The script signed by Gianina Cărbunariu collects episodes significant to her topic, with a close timeframe to the present, but barely if at all known to the public, keeping the required grave tone but sprinkling in some humour into the real or docu-fiction situations presented from Germany and Romania. The actors create an alternate world on stage, inspired by true facts, a world from the underground of the EU, inviting us all to think about what the



European community really is and how equality in rights is really understood and applied. Romanians are „the cheapest offer on the market” and this inferior position is triggered by their lack of options and the poverty sweeping the nation. Of the „culture of silence” as an element of EU hypocrisy nothing is being said! Gianina Cărbunariu’s theatre pushes the viewer out of his/her traditional comfort zone, shining a light on history which „fabricates” reality, revealing situations that decision makers prefer to ignore. It’s not the first time she is preoccupied by freedom of expression as a democratical base. In *Regular People*<sup>13</sup> she brings up on stage warnings on integrity and corruption in various EU countries by presenting several cases of whistleblowers. “These people have lost their careers, jobs, sometimes even families and health, their houses, all the while being under extreme pressure. They did not, however, give up their cause because in their hearts they believed what they were doing was right, that they own the moral high ground in a tough situation in which they are being forced to choose. People like them have always existed, yet new means of broadcasting a message into the public domain (internet, media), play a crucial role in sharing cases to a much larger audience. What this picture still needs is a legal framework that protects and rewards as opposed to the punishments they currently receive. The project harbors 8 cases of *whistleblowing* in Italy, United Kingdom and Romania, European countries in different development stages and with different legal frameworks in terms of integrity issues”, Gianina Cărbunariu mentions in the show’s booklet.

Multilingualism is an European trait and it is imprinted into *Speak Silence?/ Sprachen Sie Schweigen?’s*. Texts are spoken/translated into/from Romanian, German, Hungarian, but they have been rehearsed in English, the „official” tongue of the project. The clever, poignant irony is another quality of the show (red carpet to the EU, „the German kebab”, when first arriving in Romania Daniel Bucher’s passport had expired but not him, nor the border police noticed the „detail”, his family’s reactions when hearing that Späth had decided to take a job with a theatre in Sibiu etc.)

---

13. National Theatre "Radu Stanca" Sibiu, set design and visuals: Mihai Păcurar, music: Bobo Burlăcianu, video documenting: Veioza Arte - Tania Cucoreanu & Andrei Ioniță, cast: Florin Coșuleț, Mariana Miha, Ioan Paraschiv, Ofelia Popii, Dana Taloș, Marius Turdeanu. The show is part of Be SpectACTive!, project co-financed by Creative Europe Program, together with Capotrave/Kilowatt Festival Sansepolcro (IT), Bakelit Multi Art Center Budapesta (HU), B-51 Ljubljana (SL), Domino- Perforacije Festival- Zagreb (HR), London International Festival of Theatre (UK), Tanec Praha (CZ), York Citizens Theatre Royal (UK).

Part of the experimental platform Human Trade Network, *Speak Silence?/ Sprachen Sie Schweigen?*'s is a political creation about the double standards of the EU, about hidden agendas and, in its subtext, but in an equal way, about the blame attributed to disinterested Romanian authorities who couldn't care less about the status of his citizens abroad. It's a show about defending the defenseless, those who would need protection the most.

A special form of memoirism, Cărbunariu's theatre art dusts off from forgiveness, through relevant samples, important historic events, perfectly placed between the historic document and the aesthetic medium. An active art form, the theatre Gianina Cărbunariu produces is one that mediates, targeting pages that are harder to absorb for the official history from the near and very near past. It is valuable proof that theatre and history can intersect in favour of the truth. And they have to do so. In the end, both theatre and history can be seen as journals in which forgotten situations can be noted and revealed.

## References

- Dobre, Florica, Florian Banu, Luminita Banu, and Laura Stancu. *Acțiunea "Recuperarea". Securitatea Și Emigrarea Germanilor Din România (1962-1989) [Action "Recovery". The Securitate and the Migration of Germans from Romania (1962-1989)]*. Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 2011.
- Oprea, Marius. *Șase Feluri de a Muri*. Iași: Polirom, 2009.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Memoria, Istoria, Uitarea*. Timișoara: Amarcord, 2010.
- Ștefănescu, Lucian. "Mesajul unui gest de revoltă din trecut: libertatea și democrația nu vin de-a gata, ele trebuie recâștigate zi de zi." Radio Europa Liberă, 2014. <https://www.europalibera.org/a/mesajul-unui-gest-de-revolta/25267778.html>.
- Stoica, Oana. "Statul român și-a abandonat cetățenii - interviu cu Gianina Cărbunariu [The Romanian State Abandoned Its Citizens - Interview with Gianina Cărbunariu]." *Dilema Veche*. August 12, 2011.
- Wolf, Irina. "Sold Out – un spectacol despre vânzarea etnicilor germani [Sold out - a Show about the Selling of Ethnic Germans]." *Teatrul Azi* 9–10 (2010).

**Oltița Cîntec** is a theater critic and scholar, artistic manager of Luceafărul Theater in Iași and President of the Romanian Section of AICT/IATC.Ro Group.



## *La théâtralité du tableau vivant dans le théâtre de Samuel Beckett : une perspective néo-avant-gardiste*

ȘTEFANA POP-CURSEU<sup>1</sup>

« *La peinture est une poésie muette, la poésie, une peinture parlante* »  
(Plutarque)

**Abstract:** *The theatricality of the living pictures in Samuel Beckett's theatre: a Neo-Avant-guard perspective.* Samuel Beckett's theatrical work has been quite often compared, especially in the recent literature, to the abstract directions in modern painting and sculpture, but there was no attempt to analyse its relationship to its contemporary artistic movements taking their roots in the historical Avant-guards. The present article proposes to revisit Samuel Beckett's theatre through a new perspective, mainly that of the theatricality of the living pictures (*tableaux vivants*) present in his stage conception, through the bias of European and American Pop Art, Assemblagism, New Realism and other Neo-Avant-guard artistic movements. Reconsidering thus an essential moment of theatre history, with the instruments of theatre iconography, we try to open new doors in the understanding of his work as a playwright and as a stage director, by replacing it in the right context of visual and performing arts.

**Keywords:** Samuel Beckett, tableau vivant, Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme, théâtralité

En déclinant le paradigme de l'éternelle attente dérisoire, la critique n'a jamais omis de remarquer que le théâtre de Samuel Beckett manque de véritable mouvement et que, dans son évolution des premiers drames des années 50-60 aux dramaticules des années 70-80, il semble vouloir réduire au maximum le

---

1. Université Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca. [pop\\_curseu@yahoo.com](mailto:pop_curseu@yahoo.com)

dramatique même, en remettant en question des éléments clés comme l'action ou la fable, l'espace-temps et le personnage-acteur. Cependant, en dehors de quelques études plus récentes, on a rarement recouru à la comparaison directe avec les arts plastiques pour essayer de comprendre les raisons profondes de la bizarre construction de ses pièces qui lui font faire figure à part dans la dramaturgie et sur la scène du XXe siècle<sup>2</sup>.

Comment expliquer le fait que malgré l'invasion du narratif et du poétique, malgré le choix du « statisme » et du « minimalisme », son œuvre donne vie à une théâtralité intense, étrange, souvent insoutenable ? Notre principale hypothèse est que nous avons dans le cas de du théâtre beckettien, à un niveau dramaturgique, ce qu'Arthur Danto désigne comme état un concept clé dans le cas de l'esthétique et de la poétique des nouvelles avant-gardes picturales, du Pop Art et du Nouveau Réalisme : *la transfiguration du banal*<sup>3</sup>.

Afin de tracer quelques réponses et d'essayer de valider l'hypothèse formulée, nous nous proposons de regarder le théâtre de Beckett avec une loupe différente, qui est celle du « tableau vivant », et cela, avec les yeux d'un visiteur passionné de musées d'art moderne.

Ainsi, si nous définissions le *tableau vivant*, d'après Diderot, comme la « mise en scène d'un ou plusieurs acteurs immobiles et figés dans une pose expressive suggérant une statue ou une peinture »<sup>4</sup>, plusieurs éléments essentiels doivent-ils retenir notre attention quant au déplacement de ce terme dans le théâtre de Samuel Beckett : **l'immobilité, l'expressivité du corps** dans cet arrêt momentané, et le **renvoi, la ressemblance à un objet d'art plastique**, par définition dépourvu de mouvement (sculpture, peinture). Analysons donc ces trois aspects de l'image théâtrale, scénique, proposée par Beckett tout en gardant à l'esprit ses possibles connexions avec les œuvres d'art plastique et les installations spécifiques à la culture néo-avant-gardiste, moderne et post-moderne contemporaines de Beckett (La Pop Art européen e américain, l'Assemblagisme, le Nouveau Réalisme français, l'art Funk).

---

2. Jamoussi Lassaad, *Le pictural dans l'œuvre de Beckett. Approche poétique de la chose*, (Tunis-Bordeaux: Sud Editions, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2007) ; Porter H. Abbott, « Samuel Beckett and the Arts of Time : Painting, Music Narrative », in Lois Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts : Music, Visual Arts, and Non-Print Media*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), p. 7-24 ; Betty Rojzman, *Forme et signification dans le théâtre de Beckett*, (Paris: Nizet, 1987) ; Roger Blin, « Conversation avec Lynda Poskine », in *Revue d'esthétique*, numéro spécial hors-série, *Samuel Beckett*, éd. par Pierre Chabert, (Toulouse: Privat, 1986).

3. A. Danto, *La transfiguration du banal, Une philosophie de l'art*, (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

4. Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique* (1758), (Paris: Classiques Larousse, 1975), 110.

## 1. L'immobilité

Omniprésente autour des personnages becketttiens, l'immobilité est comme une maladie chronique qui paralyse leurs élans physiques et psychiques, c'est le gris, la décrépitude, c'est la mort lente avant la mort définitive, c'est l'impossibilité d'agir, l'action désirée mais interdite, par manque de libre arbitre ou par impuissance acquise. « Nous sommes sur terre, c'est sans remède », disait Hamm dans *Fin de Partie*, immobilisé dans sa chaise, si semblable aux êtres condamnés au plâtre, conçus par George Segal (fig. 1). Les personnages becketttiens n'ont pas le choix : concrètement, Vladimir et Estragon ne peuvent qu'attendre, Pozzo et Lucky ne peuvent que rester liés l'un à l'autre, Clov



Fig. 1 : George Segal, *Man Sitting at a Table*, 1961,  
134.5 x 122 x 122 cm.

ne peut que servir Hamm, Nell et Nagg ne peuvent que rester dans leurs poubelles, Winnie ne peut que se laisser engloutir par le mamelon, La bouche, dans *Pas moi*, ne peut que parler, La femme, dans *Berceuse*, ne peut que se bercer et se taire, le Souvenant de *Cette fois* ne peut que se souvenir, et ainsi de suite. Réduits à la stagnation, actifs uniquement au niveau intérieur (autant que leur langage peut nous le faire transparaître), ces êtres sont condamnés à l'immobilité ou à la fausse mobilité, les deux prouvant être des données existentielles pour tous ces personnages au fond banals, communs, mis en évidence seulement à travers leur sélection et leur emplacement particulier dans l'espace scénique.

Ces personnages acquièrent ainsi le statut d'*images métonymiques* de l'humanité post-moderne. Et la scène beckettienne concrétise ces images en leur attribuant des qualités plastiques à grande force centripète, en les rendant non seulement visibles, mais hyperboliquement présentes dans le champ visuel de la scène de théâtre.

Ces qualités plastiques sont dues non seulement à l'étrange expressivité des corps, isolés dans l'espace, mais aussi à l'association d'un corps immobile, ou quasi mobile, à un objet qui reprend et assume une partie significative des qualités du corps avec lequel il entre en contact. Il en est ainsi du fauteuil roulant, des poubelles, du magnétophone, du mamelon de terre, de la berceuse, de la table (*Impromptu d'Ohio*) ou de l'oreiller (*Cette fois*). Et nous voyons que déjà en 1948, l'attention de Beckett, parlant de la peinture moderne, dans son texte *Les peintres de l'empêchement*, était attirée par l'absence de qualités actives, référentielles de l'objet figuré et par l'utilisation brute de son image plastique : « Le premier assaut donné à l'objet saisi, indépendamment de ses qualités, dans son indifférence, son inertie, sa latence »<sup>5</sup>. Pourtant, bien que les objets beckettien émanent à leur tour de l'indifférence, de l'inertie, de la latence, ils participent à la circonscription de l'espace vital de chaque personnage à moitié réifié. Ils établissent un cadre figé, en mettant en évidence cette « choseté » que Beckett décelait dans le travail des peintres modernes car, même là où mobilité il y a, son caractère répétitif, circulaire et mécanique, annule l'idée de toute évolution ou changement possible des personnages ou de leur relation quasi figée avec les choses qui les secondent.

---

5. Beckett Samuel, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn, (Londres: John Calder, 1983), 135.

D'ailleurs les paroles de Beckett lui-même résument le mieux la situation existentielle dans laquelle il place ses propres personnages, si nous leurs attribuons ce qu'il dit à propos du peintre contemporain Bram Van der Velde : « est le premier à admettre qu'être artiste c'est échouer, comme personne n'a osé échouer, que l'échec est son domaine. », mai qu'il fait « de cette soumission, de cette adhésion, de cette fidélité à l'échec, une nouvelle occasion, un nouveau terme de la relation et de l'acte que, incapable d'agir, obligé d'agir, il produit, un acte expressif, ne fût-ce que de lui-même, de son impossibilité, de son obligation. »<sup>6</sup>

C'est ainsi par l'intermédiaire de l'incapacité d'agir allié à l'obligation de l'acte expressif que le tableau vivant peut prendre forme dans l'horizon imaginal beckettien : Prenons le cas de *Oh les Beaux jours* ! Voici les premières didascalies de la pièce, qui ne manquent d'ailleurs pas d'inclure déjà des renvois à des techniques picturales, plus ou moins composites voire contradictoires, la simplicité et la symétrie allant main dans la main avec le style pompier :

Étendue d'herbe brûlée, s'enflant au centre en petit mamelon [(fig. 2)].

Pentes douces à gauche et à droite et côté avant-scène. Derrière, une chute plus abrupte au niveau de la scène. Maximum de simplicité et de symétrie.

Lumière aveuglante.

Une toile de fond en trompe l'œil très pompier représente la fuite et la rencontre au loin d'un ciel sans nuages et d'une plaine dénudée. Enterrée jusqu'au-dessous de la taille dans le mamelon, au centre précis de celui-ci, Winnie. La cinquantaine, de beaux restes, blonde de préférence, grassouillette, bras et épaules nus, corsage très décolleté, poitrine plantureuse, collier de perles. Elle dort, les bras sur le mamelon, la tête sur les bras. A côté d'elle, à sa gauche, un grand sac noir, genre cabas [...] Un temps long.<sup>7</sup>

6. Dans le dialogues avec Georges Duthuit, « Three dialogues », in *Disjecta, Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, édition et préface de Ruby Cohn, (Londres: John Calder, 1983), 145, *apud* Casanova Pascale, *Beckett l'Abstracteur, Anatomie d'une révolution littéraire*, (Paris: Seuil 1997), 132.

7 Samuel Beckett, *Oh les beaux jours, suivi de Pas moi*, (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2004 (1ère éd. 1963-1974)), 11-12.





**Fig. 2 :** César, *Sein*, 1967, Fondation Giannadda, Suisse.



**Fig. 3 :** Claes Oldenburg, *Free Stamp*, années 90.

L'immobilité du tableau est interrompue par l'irruption brutale du son dans le paysage initial, qui oblige le personnage à réagir. « Une sonnerie perçante se déclenche, cinq secondes, s'arrête. Winnie ne bouge pas. Sonnerie plus perçante, trois secondes. Winnie se réveille. La sonnerie s'arrête. Elle lève la tête, regarde devant elle. Un temps long. » C'est le deuxième moment d'immobilité et donc deuxième pose du tableau vivant. « Elle se redresse, pose les mains à plat sur le mamelon, rejette la tête en arrière et fixe le zénith. Un temps long. » C'est le troisième moment d'immobilité. Puis elle commence à parler, l'acte est entamé, mais la difficulté et la lutte permanente avec l'échec de mener à bien une action ininterrompue a comme résultat la confrontation du spectateur à une longue alternance de bouts de phrases et de pauses, semblables à une suite d'arrêts sur image (stop cadre) cinématographiques ou à des prises de vues en rafales d'un appareil photographique : « un temps », une action, des paroles, « un temps », etc.

N'est-ce pas toujours Diderot qui anticipait cette vision quasi-cinématographique en disant que « le spectateur est au théâtre comme devant une toile où des tableaux divers se succéderaient comme par enchantement » et

qu'« il faut mettre les figures ensemble, les rapprocher ou les disperser, les isoler ou les grouper, en tirer une succession de tableaux, tous composés d'une manière grande et vraie » ?<sup>8</sup>

Chez Beckett, pourtant, la diversité n'est qu'apparente et, il est vrai, beaucoup plus présente dans les premières pièces. Plus on avance vers les œuvres des années 80, plus les dramaticules acquièrent un caractère statique et narratif, et plus les personnages se suffisent scéniquement à eux-mêmes, en devenant le centre d'une image visuelle unique. Et, même seuls, sans la présence des objets adjutants<sup>9</sup>, ils sont souvent de trop, trop visibles, et c'est le tour de l'éclairage d'intervenir pour amputer certaines parties de ces corps, devenues inutiles ou inutilisables (dans *Cette fois*, 1976, *Pas moi*, *Catastrophe*, 1982). Le minimalisme devient ainsi un instrument de focalisation de l'attention du spectateur sur quelques détails surdimensionnés par contraste : noir – blanc, plat – enflé, lumière – obscurité, prévisible – imprévisible. Détails qui se chargent d'une expressivité particulière et qui ont réussi à fourvoyer la critique de spécialité puisqu'ils ont valu au théâtre beckettien l'insertion dans la catégorie de l'absurde, alors qu'il ne s'agissait que d'une manière plastique, poétique et dramatique de marquer les vides et les protubérances réelles mais cachées de toute une époque. Nous ne pouvons pas nous empêcher de reconnaître ici, comme le faisait Peter Szondi à propos du drame moderne en général, « les demandes techniques du drame comme reflet de demandes existentielles »<sup>10</sup>, qui trouvent leur pendant dans les recherches des autres domaines artistiques de cette même époque comme, par exemple, chez Giacometti (fig. 4), qui anticipe en quelque sorte le dramatisme figé beckettien.

## 2. L'expressivité plastique du corps scénique

En tant que deuxième élément caractéristique du tableau vivant, l'expressivité corporelle va de pair dans le théâtre de Beckett avec la focalisation du regard du spectateur sur la condition existentielle des personnages, rendue

---

8. *De la poésie dramatique*, 110.

9. Voir aussi l'article de Catherine Naugrette, « Études des objets dans *En attendant Godot* et *Oh les beaux jours* », in Marie Claude Hubert, *Lectures de Samuel Beckett*, (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009), 75-86.

10. Dans l'« Introduction » à la *Théorie du Drame moderne 1880-1950*, (Belval: Circé, « Coll. Penser le théâtre », 2006).



**Fig. 4 :** Alberto Giacometti, *Table*, 1933, plâtre 148,5 x 103 x 43 cm.

de manière très plastique. Le corps des personnages beckettien, et implicitement des acteurs, est toujours mis à l'épreuve. Ce n'est quasiment jamais le corps humain dans ses positions naturelles. Comme le remarque aussi Marie Claude Hubert dans son article « Evolution de la mise en scène du corps »<sup>11</sup>, sans faire malheureusement de comparaison avec les arts plastiques, chez Beckett, les corps sont de plus en plus souffrants, et portent les marques de tares profondes. Et, effectivement, l'expressivité de cette douleur qui a laissé son empreinte dans la chair est telle que ces personnages se

---

11. Marie Claude Hubert, *Lectures de Samuel Beckett*, « Evolution de la mise en scène du corps de *En attendant Godot* à *Oh les beaux jours* », *op. cit.* p. 119-126.

transforment en images, en effigies, en métaphores mi-vivantes, mi-statueuses : le corps aveugle toujours assis de Hamm (image royale de la supériorité décrépite), le corps courbé sur des jambes qui ne peuvent jamais s'asseoir de Clov (image de l'éternel esclave, cheval de trait), le corps à quatre pattes marchant à reculons de Willie (image de la régression), le corps englouti par la terre de Winnie (image de l'élan brisé, dont Beckett lui-même parlait lors de la mise en scène de *Oh les beaux jours*, à Londres en 1979), encore et toujours des métaphores de la condition humaine, du grand drame fragmenté de l'humanité<sup>12</sup>.

D'ailleurs, si nous regardons du côté de la manière dont Beckett lui-même travaillait en tant que metteur en scène avec ces corps estropiés, nous remarquerons, avec Dina Mantchéva, que « les mises en scène de Beckett suivent deux tendances fondamentales – la quête d'une unité visuelle maximale et le refus de mouvement dramatique : le plus souvent, l'auteur organise ses spectacles autour d'une image dominante qui constitue le noyau sémique »<sup>13</sup>.

Ces corps expressifs, qui s'érigent en images dominantes et obsessives, ont tous perdu leur souplesse originaire et la raideur est devenue une de leurs caractéristiques communes, remplaçant peu à peu les traits qui les individualisaient dans les premières pièces. « *Aussi ressemblants que possible* », portant de longs vêtements noirs, blancs ou gris, de « *longs cheveux blancs ou gris* », ce sont des êtres vivants dans des corps de plus en plus momifiés, réifiés, plastifiés presque, qui font tableau après tableau, dans une véritable gamme iconologique que le spectateur se doit de déchiffrer. Icônes qui acquièrent incontestablement un caractère universel, mais qui portent en même temps la marque indubitable de leur contemporanéité. Ce sont des portraits dont la « biographie dramatisée » est à reconstituer par le spectateur à partir des bribes données.

Si nous revenons à l'exemple de *Oh les beaux jours !*, Winnie n'est-elle pas d'un côté une Marylin déchue, une beauté blonde accrochée à son miroir, à son rouge à lèvres et à sa brosse à dents, puis d'un autre côté, l'effigie de la femme universelle, célébrée du temps qu'elle était belle, comme disait Ronsard mais « enterrée vivante » une fois sa gloire passée ? (fig. 5 et 6)

---

12. Pour une étude plus poussée sur la métaphore et l'image philosophique chez Beckett voir Uhlmann Anthony, *Samuel Beckett an the Philosophical Image*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 54 et suiv.

13. Dina Mantchéva, « Les carnets de mises en scène de Samuel Beckett et la cohérence de son écriture dramatique », in *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, (n°249, 2011-1), 71.



Fig. 5 : Mimmo Rotella, *Marilyn*, 1963.



Fig. 6 : Roy Lichtenstein, *Girl with mirror*, 1964.

En opposition avec l'acte, le tableau, précise Patrice Pavis, dans son *Dictionnaire du théâtre*, est « une unité spatiale d'ambiance, de caractérisation d'un milieu ou d'une "époque" ; c'est une unité thématique et non actantielle »<sup>14</sup>. En effet, chez Beckett, il n'y a pas de véritable chaîne actantielle dans le sens classique du terme, mais un circuit fermé dans les limites d'un seul cadre avec une forte unité thématique. Pourtant, la caractérisation du milieu et de l'époque se fait bien autrement que par une unité spatiale d'ambiance. Un très bon exemple en ce sens serait le dramacule *Catastrophe*, que l'auteur dédie à Vaclav Havel. Tout le mouvement se fait du côté du metteur en scène, de son assistant et du technicien des lumières, alors que le Protagoniste, lui, est dans un statisme complet. Afin d'obtenir l'image forte de la catastrophe, après plusieurs essais insatisfaisants, le metteur en scène demande qu'on « coupe l'ambiance » en ne gardant « Rien que la tête. » Le corps du Protagoniste « rentre lentement dans le noir. Seule la tête éclairée. Un temps long. » et M dit :

14. *Dictionnaire du Théâtre, Termes et concepts de l'analyse théâtrale*, (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1980), 393.

« C'est beau ». Tant que la tête du protagoniste reste baissée, la catastrophe est là, le tableau est complet, muet, sans signe de vie. Mais la force de la métaphore beckettienne (dans ce cas précis une splendide métaphore politique) réside justement dans le tableau *vivant*, qui refuse vivement de se taire complètement :

Seule la tête éclairée. Un temps long. Formidable ! Il va faire un malheur.  
J'entends ça d'ici. Un temps. Lointain tonnerre d'applaudissement. P.  
relève la tête, fixe la salle. Les applaudissements faiblissent, s'arrêtent.  
Silence. Un temps long. La tête rentre lentement dans le noir.<sup>15</sup>

Avec les tableaux vivants de Beckett nous sommes loin de ce tableau qui fournirait le cadre nécessaire à une enquête sociologique ou à une peinture de genre ; pourtant, la vision « picturale » de la scène, qu'implique l'esthétique du tableau au théâtre, garde des liens profonds avec le monde, avec la société dont il est, *volens nolens*, le produit artistique, avec tous les paradoxes et les déchirures qui la traversent. La vision picturale de la deuxième moitié du XXe siècle n'est plus celle du XVIIIe, mais – si nous reprenons les formules de Diderot, en leur appliquant les changements radicaux soufferts par l'art moderne<sup>16</sup> – nous remarquerons que certains de ces propos gardent toujours leur validité<sup>17</sup>. « Un tableau bien composé, disait-il, est un tout renfermé sous un point de vue, où les parties concourent à un même but et forment par leur correspondance mutuelle un ensemble aussi réel que celui des membres dans un corps animal. »<sup>18</sup>

Nous avons bien vu jusqu'ici que le tableau vivant beckettien est effectivement un tout refermé sous un point de vue, et où les parties concourent à un même but, à la création de la même image dominante, au même noyau sémique. Mais la réalité de l'« animal » moderne et post-moderne est différente, pour Beckett comme pour bien d'autres artistes dramatiques et plastiques des

15. *Catastrophe et autres dramatiques*, (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1997), 80-81.

16. Cf. Malița Liviu, *Extreemele Artei (Les extremes de l'Art)*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editions Accent, 2010).

17. L'affirmation comme quoi le tableau au théâtre est « une disposition (des) personnages sur la scène, si naturelle et si vraie que, rendue fidèlement par un peintre, elle me plairait sur le tableau » est, bien sûr, impossible à appliquer à l'esthétique moderne et la question du « naturel » ouvre un débat qui ne trouve pas sa place dans la présente étude. Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique*, 110. Pour Diderot, le tableau est aussi l'image dominante qui hante en quelque sorte l'auteur : « La pantomime est un tableau qui existait dans l'imagination du poète, lorsqu'il écrivait, et qu'il voulait que la scène montrât à chaque instant lorsque l'on joue. »

18. Diderot, article « Composition » de l'*Encyclopédie*, III, 772a.



années 60 : c'est la dégradation, l'amputation, l'aliénation, l'exhibition de soi dans la vitrine consumériste et la perte de l'individualité dans la sérialité (fig. 7).

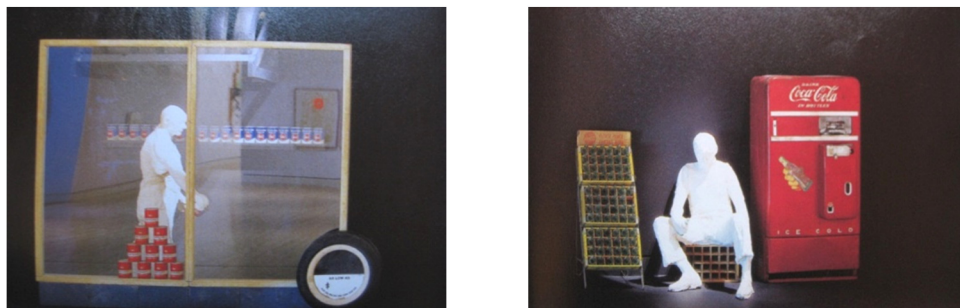


Fig. 7 : George Segal, *The gas station*, 1963-64.

### 3. La ressemblance à un objet d'art plastique

Depuis ses premières pièces, Beckett regroupe très souvent ses personnages de manière à ce qu'ils fassent tableau, mais non pas dans le sens de l'esthétique classique : la ressemblance, contrairement à ce qu'envisageait Diderot, ne se fait pas seulement en tant que *reconnaissance formelle* mais en tant qu'*étonnement, choc et provocation* du spectateur. Il s'agit d'investir et d'occuper l'espace autrement que dans la vie courante ou sur la scène traditionnelle, d'arrêter l'existence dans son développement monotone, d'interroger, de faire penser, de reconnaître ces effigies humaines des multiples et pourtant uniques, universelles, joies et souffrances.

Beaucoup de peintres et artistes plastiques de son temps suivaient une voie similaire. Pourtant, à part les quelques rapprochements avec la sculpture de Giacometti, que Beckett appréciait énormément, la plupart des études critiques ont insisté sur le caractère abstrait des formes et des personnages beckettien :

Le caractère abstrait des individus dans les mises en scènes de Beckett affirme Dina Mantchéva, est accentué par l'ambiguïté de leurs rapports sur le plateau. [...] L'ambiguïté recherchée par Beckett dans son travail scénique n'est pas sans faire penser à celle des derniers ouvrages où elle devient le principe structurel fondamental.<sup>19</sup>

19. Dina Mantchéva, « Les carnets de mises en scène de Samuel Beckett et la cohérence de son écriture dramatique. », 69.

Ou bien, comme le dit Pascale Casanova, il s'agit plutôt de transposer la révolution de l'abstraction ou, plus largement, la mise en cause des présupposés de la figuration à la littérature.<sup>20</sup>

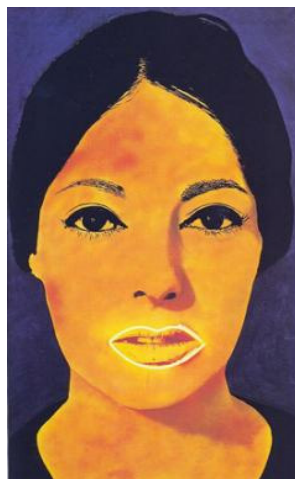
Pourtant, à notre avis, cette étiquette de l'abstraction n'est pas véritablement justifiée. Les personnages beckettien, bien qu'épurés de tout le surplus naturaliste-vraisemblable et ambigus dans leurs rapports sur scène et avec leur spectateur, ont des contours bien précis et concrets. Ils sont là, vivants, dans le cadre emprisonnant de la scène-tableau, espace concentré de leur propre existence à trous et à protubérances.



**Fig. 8 :** De Kooning,  
*Women singing*, 1966.



**Fig. 9 :** Martial Raysse,  
*France Miroir*, 1962.



**Fig. 10 :** Martial Raysse,  
*Peinture haute tension*, 1965.

Winnie et Willie ne ressemblent pas aux personnages de De Kooning, par exemple, que métaphoriquement parlant, alors que les similitudes nous semblent beaucoup plus significatives avec certaines tendances des mouvements plastiques du Pop Art et surtout du Nouveau Réalisme, des années 60-70 : l'accumulation des objets autour de Winnie, ces objets qui l'aident à continuer, et dont elle dépend au premier acte, mais qui deviennent inutiles et inutilisables au second, ne s'apparentent-ils pas aux accumulations de Martial Raysse ou de Spoerri ? Winnie n'est-elle pas au cœur même d'une *installation* scénique, un tableau vivant qui se charge de toutes les caractéristiques des nouvelles recherches qui révolutionnent les arts plastiques, dans la deuxième moitié du XXe siècle ?

20. Casanova Pascale, *Beckett l'Abstracteur*, *Anatomie d'une révolution littéraire*, 130.



Regardons aussi un peu Claes Oldenburg et la manière dont il met en scène l'espace et ses objets surdimensionnés (**fig. 3**), gonflés, qui inversent la relation entre consommateur et objet consommé, l'être moderne étant happé par ceux-ci, à l'exemple du mamelon de terre qui consomme lentement l'être qu'il devrait nourrir (si l'on pense à la fausse « terre nourricière » et aux œuvres métonymiques de César, **fig. 2**). La bouche de *Pas moi*, les têtes suspendues dans le noir, à trois mètres du sol, ne fuient-elles pas le réalisme scénique classique, par la transfiguration du banal, tout en restructurant le figuratif d'une manière plastique, en hyperbolisant la forme et en déstructurant les contenus ? La métonymie iconique, cette hyperbolisation d'une partie du corps qui prend sur elle le poids de l'être dans sa totalité, tout en accentuant le vide qui l'accable, que l'on retrouve si souvent chez Andy Warhol et dans le Pop Art (**fig. 11**), n'est-elle pas aussi une métonymie existentielle chez Beckett : « l'être tout entier... (sus)pendu à ses paroles... » ?



**Fig. 11 :** Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Monroe's lips*, 1962.

D'après l'étude de ses cahiers de notes de mise en scène, il semble que Beckett ne fût pas du tout indifférent au pouvoir expressif de la peinture car ses « remarques scéniques y accordent une attention accrue aux nuances des couleurs, aux pantomimes, à la richesse des images plastiques ». Et si, sur le plan textuel, nous sommes d'accord que « tous ces signes visuels tendent à remplacer l'absence de cohérence syntagmatique dans la fable, par un nouveau type de cohésion, associative et paradigmatique, caractéristique du texte lyrique »<sup>21</sup>, il faut ajouter qu'au niveau scénique, le poétique est associé aux dispositifs du tableau vivant, véritable *image-support* pour le spectateur moderne.

21. Dina Mantchéva, « Les carnets de mises en scène de Samuel Beckett et la cohérence de son écriture dramatique. » 69.

En conclusion, nous dirions que Beckett *ne réduit pas le dramatique, il le réinvente, le transfigure* (en passant ainsi au sens propre au-delà du figuratif classique devenu impossible). La forme du drame beckettien est le correspondant vivant de la forme plastique que revêt la nouvelle réalité des années 60. Si le théâtral dans un tableau dépend de la capacité de l'artiste de rendre le mouvement ou les effets de mouvement, chez Beckett la théâtralité est étroitement liée aux efforts dans la direction du mouvement, aux envols brisés, aux élans coupés, à l'esquisse d'un mouvement et non à son accomplissement. Et si le poétique et le narratif occupent une place essentielle dans ces pièces, la scène n'est jamais abandonnée en tant qu'espace privilégié de la rencontre des regards. Le *theatron*, lieu où l'on donne à voir est on ne peut mieux servi : car le face-à-face acquiert un nouveau type de proximité. Ce qui est donné à voir est ce que l'on doit voir : le *ici* et le *maintenant* scénique. Le rideau se lève sur la parole en présence de l'image, même en l'absence de l'action. Puis, dans ses derniers textes, c'est la lumière qui fait office de rideau, elle fait découvrir, elle dévoile, elle met en marche le mécanisme de l'*installation* théâtrale, du tableau qui prend vie et voix, de la voix qui se fige en tableau sous les yeux du spectateur et du critique ébahi.



Fig. 12 : Jasper Johns, *The critic sees*, *The critic smiles*, *Summer critic* (1961-1969).

## References

- Abbott Porter H., « Samuel Beckett and the Arts of Time : Painting, Music Narrative », in Lois Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts : Music, Visual Arts, and Non-Print Media*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1999.
- Casanova Pascale, *Beckett l'Abstracteur, Anatomie d'une révolution littéraire*. Paris: Seuil 1997.
- Beckett Samuel, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn. Londres: John Calder, 1983.
- Beckett Samuel, *Oh les beaux jours, suivi de Pas moi*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2004 (1<sup>ère</sup> éd. 1963-1974).
- Beckett Samuel, *Catastrophe et autres dramatiques*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1997.
- Blin Roger, « Conversation avec Lynda Poskine », in *Revue d'esthétique*, numéro spécial hors-série, *Samuel Beckett*, éd. par Pierre Chabert. Toulouse: Privat, 1986.
- Danto Arthur, *La transfiguration du banal, Une philosophie de l'art*. Paris: Seuil, 1989.
- Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique* (1758). Paris: Classiques Larousse, 1975.
- Diderot, article « Composition » de l'*Encyclopédie*, III, 772a.
- Hubert Marie Claude, *Lectures de Samuel Beckett*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009.
- Lassaad Jamoussi, *Le pictural dans l'œuvre de Beckett. Approche poïétique de la choseté*. Tunis-Bordeaux: Sud Editions, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2007.
- Malița Liviu, *Extremele Artei (Les extremes de l'Art)*. Cluj-Napoca: Editions Accent, 2010.
- Mantchéva Dina, « Les carnets de mises en scène de Samuel Beckett et la cohérence de son écriture dramatique. », in *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, n°249, 2011-1.
- Pavis Patrice, *Dictionnaire du Théâtre, Termes et concepts de l'analyse théâtrale*. Paris: Éditions sociales, 1980.
- Rojtman Betty, *Forme et signification dans le théâtre de Beckett*. Paris: Nizet, 1987.
- Szondi Peter *Théorie du Drame moderne 1880-1950*. Belval: Circé, « Coll. Penser le théâtre », 2006.
- Uhlmann Anthony, *Samuel Beckett an the Philosophical Image*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

**Ștefana POP-CURȘEU**, Ph.D at the University of Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle, in Theatre and Scenic Arts, is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Theatre and Television of „Babeș-Bolyai” University Cluj-Napoca, where she teaches antique and medieval theatre history and modern theory of theatre. She published many articles in the domain of Theatre, in France and Romania. She translated alone or in collaboration with Ioan Pop-Curșeu a dozen of books from French to Romanian, such as *Samuel Beckett, Sfârșit de partidă*, 2000, L.-F. Céline, *Convorbiri cu*

*Profesorul Y, 2006, Pascal Vrebos, Avarul II, 2010, Gilles Deleuze, Imaginea-mișcare, 2012), and is author of the book: Pour une théâtralité picturale. Bruegel et Ghelderode en jeux de miroirs, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, coll. Teatru-Eseuri, 2012. She wrote in collaboration with Ioan Pop-Curșeu two theatre scripts and directed two performances based on these scripts (Killed by Friendly Fire, 2014 and Every Tzara has his Dada 2016). She is also, since 2011, the artistic director of The National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca.*



## *The Evolution of the Milicier Film Genre in Communist Romania*

ION INDOLEAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract<sup>2</sup>:** In order to observe the manner in which the image of the Romanian militiaman is perpetuated throughout the movies produced during Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime (1965-1989) we will analyze the most important detective films of that period. This will allow us to recognize a series of characterological and professional attributes present in the protagonists of these narratives which claimed to have come from reality. All of these heroes are shrewd, tenacious and well-intentioned because the official propaganda wanted to deliver a certain beautified image of the Romanian agent, about whom these films suggested having the mental and physical capabilities to be successful against any kind of villain and therefore being able to protect his country with a great sense of duty and commitment.

**Keywords:** Cultural politics, Film, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Communism, Espionage, Industry, Censorship, Propaganda.

*"Milicier"* defines the type of police films with law enforcement made during Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime. The term is a combination of the *"policier"* cinematographic genre and the Romanian noun *"milițian"* which in communist countries defined the now globally used *"policeman"* (en) / *"policier"* (fr) / *"polițist"* (ro) / *"poliziotto"* (it) etc.<sup>3</sup>

---

1. Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
*Ion.indolean@gmail.com*.

2. Translated into English by Ilinca Hărnuț.

3. I arrived at this term intuitively, but then I found it used by the researcher Bogdan Jitea, in his unpublished doctoral thesis entitled *Dizidență și conformism în cinematografia regimului Ceaușescu* (Bucharest, 2015), where he had the historian Lucian Boia as his scientific supervisor. So I can say that I invented the term *milicier* instinctively, without knowing that someone else had previously thought of it. Because I am not the first to drive it into public space, I need to specify this.

As we comprehend, the original “polis” has Greek origins (“politeia”) and it firstly meant “city” (e.g., “acropolis”: “upper city”). In time, the term obtained more meanings, one of them being “regulation and control of a community”<sup>4</sup>, which in fact refers to keeping order in a certain place by means of police. On the other side, “militia” is a Latin word, which – understood in the way we are interested in – emerged during post-revolutionary Russia, being intended to draw a distinction between the new Soviet law enforcement agencies and the disbanded Tsarist police<sup>5</sup>. In opposition to the western police, the newly-formed communist militia (also written as “militsiya”) was based on repressive principles, being a tool of state ideology, controlling the entire society by means far-reaching functions that touched the life of every citizen<sup>6</sup>.

In order to observe the manner in which the image of the Romanian militiaman modifies throughout the movies produced during Ceaușescu’s regime (1965-1989), we will start with the *Miscellaneous Brigade*<sup>7</sup> series and we will try to build the portrait of this agent-character, taking into account the following titles: *Adventures by the Black Sea*<sup>8</sup>, *Seven Days*<sup>9</sup>, *The Magic Circle*<sup>10</sup>, *The Man in the Overcoat*<sup>11</sup>, *The Investigation*<sup>12</sup>, *A Girl’s Tear*<sup>13</sup>, *Blackmail*<sup>14</sup>, *The End of the Night*<sup>15</sup>, *To Kill a bird of Prey*<sup>16</sup>.

---

4. Online Etymology Dictionary <http://www.etymonline.com/word/police>.

5. Louise Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society: The Evolution of State Control* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 19-37.

6. Louise Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society*, p xiv.

7. Mircea Drăgan director, *Brigada Diverse* (series of three films) by Nicolae Țic, Studioul Cinematografic București, Buftea, premiered on December 14, 1970, June 26, 1971, respectively December 20, 1971.

8. Savel Stiopul director, *Aventuri la Marea Neagră* by Tudor Popescu, Studioul Cinematografic București, Buftea, premiered on May 29, 1972.

9. Mircea Veroiu director, *Șapte zile* by Nicolae Ștefănescu, Casa de filme Unu, Buftea, premiered on September 24, 1973.

10. David Reu director, *Cercul magic* by Nicolae Mărgeanu, Cora Vulcănescu, directed by David Reu, Casa de filme Patru, premiered on 1975.

11. Nicolae Mărgineanu director, *Un om în loden* by Haralamb Zincă, Nicolae Mărgineanu, Casa de filme Unu, Buftea, premiered on April 16, 1979.

12. Constantin Vaeni director, *Ancheta* by Florin N Năstase, Casa de filme Patru, Buftea, premiered on November 10, 1980.

13. Iosif Demian director, *O lacrimă de fată* by Petre Sălcudeanu, Casa de filme 5, Buftea, premiered on November 3, 1980.

14. Geo Saizescu director, *Șantaj* by Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu, Geo Saizescu, Casa de filme Unu, Buftea, premiered on February 2, 1981.

At that time, these *milicier* films were made with at least two purposes: political and entertainment. Some promoted, in a veiled manner, the industrialization of the country while drawing a fabricated portrait of Romania and its relations with Western countries. The others simply talked about professional and well-trained agents who are doing their job beyond reproach.

If we watched these films without knowing the context in which they were made, we could easily conclude that Romania's enemies could not have been native mobsters, criminals or traffickers – it is suggested that the system had dealt with them a long time ago – but either Westerners who were trying to steal plans and valuable achievements of Romanian scientists or citizens who did not adapt and were wrong because they did not want to understand the undeniable advantages of communism.

This nationalist double rhetoric (*we won't sell our country and are we exceptional*) has become permanent in the highly popular slogan used by neo-communist politicians. It is a speech that still works; we have to look no further than the December 2016 parliamentary elections<sup>17</sup>.

But the position defining this type of slogan was false even before 1989. Romania's economic co-operation with the West had been extended during the Ceaușescu regime; it was just that the authorities kept it secret for ideological reasons.

From 1964 onwards, Romanian advertisements sponsored by the Government of Bucharest started appearing in western newspapers, they were meant to attract western tourists<sup>18</sup>. This was the case, in one form or another, in all fields. Constantin Pivniceru, managing director of Buftea

---

15. Mircea Veroiu director, *Sfârșitul nopții* by Marian Iordache, Casa de filme Patru, Buftea, premiered on May 23, 1983.

16. Iosif Demian director, *Lovind o pasăre de pradă* by Petre Sălcudeanu, Casa de filme Patru, Buftea, premiered on November 7, 1983.

17. "REZULTATE EXIT POLL PSD a câștigat ALEGERILE PARLAMENTARE 2016", *Gândul*, accessed October 15, <http://www.gandul.info/rezultate-exit-poll-psd-a-castigat-alegerile-parlamentare-2016-16020403.html>: in this period of the electoral campaign for the 2016 parliamentary elections, the rhetoric of many parties focused on the nationalist direction, a fairly sensitive trajectory that was adopted both by the "traditional" parties and by new parties that stood out from the very beginning by means of adopting this position. The people who have entered the campaign with this message are PSD, who somehow continue in this manner their speech at the Euro-parliamentary and presidential elections in 2014, when they declared themselves "proud that we are Romanians".

18. Adam Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965-1989* (Iași: Polirom, 2016), 88.



during 1970-1989, recalls that in the mid-1980s Romaniafilm bought a whole page in Variety magazine for \$ 5,000<sup>19</sup>, to facilitate co-productions with the West.

The favorable opinion Ceaușescu benefited from materialized in mutual visits of high-ranking officials such as the arrival of the President of France, Charles de Gaulle in Bucharest from May 14 to 18, 1968, and, perhaps the most important PR coup of them all, the visit of the US President, Richard Nixon, on August 2-3, 1969. The reception of the American delegation took place one year after Romania's refusal to partake in the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

This positive opinion lasted for a while, as suggested by the Ceaușescu's visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland between 13-16 June 1978, at the invitation of Queen Elisabeth II.

Diplomatic relations helped Romania become a member of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. All in 1971 and 1972, with discreet US help<sup>20</sup>.

Even after serious misconduct, such as human rights abuses in the Paul Goma affair (1977), or the flee to the West of foreign intelligence deputy Ion Mihai Pacepa (1978), Romania still required and received Western aid. In June 1981, the IMF provided a substantial credit (\$ 1.3 billion), provided it reduced consumption, transferred the bulk of investment from the heavy industry to the agriculture and boosted foreign trade<sup>21</sup>.

Therefore, the muffling of Romania's relationship with the West could only be imposed by the official propaganda of the PCR. Most negotiations with foreign countries were kept secret to the Romanian people in order to promote the idea of *overcoming difficulties with their own forces*<sup>22</sup>, a slogan promoted by the authorities immediately after the 1975 floods, which emphasized that the country is doing very well on its own account.

This position was also imposed when it came to the cinematographic production, so it was also the case of the *milicier* films. They pointed out that society had long overcome the mistakes of the Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej regime, and well trained people had taken the place of the gross, illiterate and unprepared activists.

---

19. Constantin Pivniceru, *Amintiri din actualitate 50 de ani de cinematografie în România* (București: Tritonic, 2012), 21.

20. Adam Burakowski, *Dictatura*, 192.

21. Ibid., 284-285.

22. Ibid., 233.

We notice in *milicier* films, like in all now and about films, an embellished world, but where, however, you can notice certain shortcomings and problems of the system. In these police films, ethical and principled investigators skillfully and enthusiastically conquer any offense against the law or the state property. Dangerous elements, few of which still exist, come from outside the country or from some natives who were wrongly trained during the Dej regime. Guilt is thus transferable, outsourced or attributed to the past.

Next, we'll look at the films in chronological order to see more clearly the evolution of the agent's image over time.

The evolution of the agent-character begins with the *Miscellaneous Brigade* series, produced between 1970 and '71. Even if it's seen as a comedy, the story is filled with militiamen and it allows us to include it as a *milicier*. The *Miscellaneous Brigade* squad, marginalized within the militia, is the department responsible for dealing with the smallest illegalities, with petty theft that are rather funny than serious.

There's a dog, a painting, something that's stolen from a shop or a house, but everything remains at the level of a farce. Understanding the derision of the chosen situations, the filmmakers assume a self-ironic attitude: militiamen and thieves always stumble, but the moralizing end makes criminals pay for what they did.

More serious events than these petty robberies happened, however, in Romania, but censorship made sure they did not appear in the press. This censorship is known as "censorship by omission"<sup>23</sup>.

Romania was one of the most under-informed countries in Europe and in the former Soviet bloc, and the press was one of the most supervised and controlled national mass information systems<sup>24</sup>. The *informative role* of the press has been replaced by the *educational role*, the main objective being the propagation of political, ideological and moral teachings by use of the printed word<sup>25</sup>; The press communicated ideas, not information, the party's representation of the world, not events, the ideological activity of the party, not the immediate reality<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, more serious deeds than stealing a dog or a painting had to be omitted from public discourse and from a public debate. The ordinary citizen was presented only with the positive aspects of the *new man*, displayed as honest, fair, working, non-polemic, and obedient.

---

23. Iulian Boldea, "Cenzura și teatrul", *Apostrof*, October, 2009.

24. Emilia Șercan, *Cultul secretului Mecanismele cenzurii în presa comunistă*, (Iași: Polirom, 2015), 15.

25. Ibid., 15.

26. Ibid., 15.

The press omitted not only serious crimes, but also accounts of any form of damage to the “public good”<sup>27</sup> or women and minors working in industrial night-shifts, occupational illnesses, and accidents at work, living standards or the hygienic-sanitary situation of the population<sup>28</sup>.

In this context, *Miscellaneous Brigade* contributes to prolonging censorship through omission. However, the problem of political decision-makers in relation to BD was one of nuance: no matter how likeable, the protagonists were prejudicial to the image of law enforcement. The militiamen were discredited in the public eye, this course of actions being afterwards perpetuated in a post-revolution TV series, aired by PRO TV, featuring the policemen Garcea, an organ dwelling on the shores of idiocy.

This mockery of the authorities led to the seize of the production of the next eight films that the authors of the series had scheduled. Film critic Dumitru Ion Suchianu’s intervention regarding the third BD series – named *B.D In the Mountains and by the Seaside*<sup>29</sup> – issues an interesting parallel debate. Suchianu states that he personally would have preferred comic situations to be more of and more consistent, concluding that the unfavorable chronicles of some of the critics will perhaps bring about such improvement<sup>30</sup>. So we have to ask ourselves if the position of film critics was so significant that their written intervention could change the course of the history of a cinematic project and its degree of popularity. Who read it, how many readers and, in particular, how did the opinions expressed affect the viewers / performers? Another critic, Mircea Alexandrescu also had a negative opinion about the film, saying that we are witnessing a third series of comedic adventures of B.D. with a feeling bordering hopelessness<sup>31</sup>.

Lead actor of the series, Sebastian Papaiani remembered that a certain general Constantin ascertained the parodic nature of the story only after the third film had been released and thus stopped the series: “He was a general.

---

27. Ibid., 142.

28. Ibid., 143.

29. Mircea Drăgan director, *B.D la munte și la mare* by Nicolae Țic, Mircea Drăgan, Studioul Cinematografic București, Buftea, premiered on December 20, 1971.

30. Dumitru Ion Suchianu, “B.D la munte și la mare”, review of *B.D la munte și la mare* by Nicolae Țic, Mircea Drăgan, directed by Mircea Drăgan, Studioul Cinematografic București, Buftea, premiered on December 20, 1971 *România literară*, January 13, 1972.

31. Mircea Alexandrescu, “Să vorbim cu durere despre comedie”, review of *B.D la munte și la mare* by Nicolae Țic, Mircea Drăgan, directed by Mircea Drăgan, Studioul Cinematografic București, Buftea, premiered on December 20, 1971 *Cinema*, January, 1972.

General Constantin. A smart man stopped the movie. He was sharp as a razor! Brilliant! He stopped the film because he felt we were mocking the militia. It took him three movies but he got it. Do you get how smart he was?! [...] He didn't provide any more uniforms; he didn't provide us any more blank bullets. He didn't allow the militia to come on the set with us"<sup>32</sup>.

After the well-known *theses of July 1971*, when the stricter control of the ideological direction also influenced the Romanian cinema, the first *milicier* was *Adventures by the Black Sea* (1971). Agent George Martin (Florin Piersic) appears to be a transition character. In his record, a proper instruction is mixed with the fact that he is a womanizer and sometimes unreliable. He is reminiscent of the BD series militiamen, but he is more professional and works at a higher level. He manages to vanquish a whole network of capitalist spies. Their portraits, parodic and unbelievable, can be the delight of an audience favoring action comedies – like BD or the popular Sergiu Nicolaescu's movie *Uncle Marin, the Billionaire*<sup>33</sup>. What *Adventures by the Black Sea* suggests is that socialism excels technologically and scientifically, and that capitalism seeks to appropriate its achievements, led by its inability to produce quality inventions. The film critics of the time emphasized that there were still no people trained to make proper police films in the country.

Following this semi-failure, *Seven Days* (1973) begins, in a somewhat atypically manner, the series of *milicier* films meant to change once and for all the image of the law man, (in)voluntarily ridiculed by *Miscellaneous Brigade* and unconvincingly built by *Adventures by the Black Sea*. Mircea Veroiu's *Seven Days* really shows an attentive counterintelligence agent who takes his job very seriously; so seriously that Veroiu, in a work of fiction that claims to have a documentary quality, follows the character for seven days as he tails a band of foreign agents who steal a sample of steel created by Romanian inventors with the purpose of exporting it. Veroiu's suggestion, perhaps imposed by the propaganda, would be that the authorities are working so well that criminals do not even realize that they are under observation. Beyond the subject and the foreseeable resolution in the end (*good* overcomes *evil*), what is surprising about *Seven Days* is the fact that there isn't much talking,

---

32. "Dezvăluire inedită despre unul dintre cele mai iubite filme românești", Gândul, accessed October 15, 2017, <http://www.gandul.info/magazin/dezvaluire-inedita-despre-unul-dintre-cele-mai-iubite-filme-romanesti-15074387>, personal translation.

33. Sergiu Nicolaescu director, *Nea Mărin miliardar* Vintilă Corbul, Eugen Burada, Amza Pellea, Casa de filme Patru, Buftea, premiered on February 5, 1979.

at a time when the Romanian films were over-saturated with slogan-lines. Having the experience of co-directing *The Stone Wedding*<sup>34</sup>, Mircea Veroiu's feature film debut is an image and style exercise, remarkable first and foremost because of the spectacular quality of the trivial fact.

*The Magic Circle* (1975) seems closer to the wishes of the propaganda concerning the clarity of the story and the *thoughtful* use of the film. Octavian Cotescu interprets a tenacious militiaman who, alongside his colleague, manages to make the most improbable connections and thus solve the case of a double homicide, a process during which he demonstrates almost magic capabilities. In all respects, this film complies with the Party's demands: agents are serious, good professionals, much more intelligent than criminals, who, in the meantime, completely unjustifiably commit murder, simply because they cannot integrate into the system called socialism. In spite of the obligatory diplomacy of the time, perhaps also forced by the circumstances in which such a film, portraying the good practice of law enforcement, could not be blamed, in film critic Dan Comșa's text there is some reticence over the quality of this project that can be sensed. The author aims more to find mitigating circumstances for the film, rather than unfavorable arguments; it is as if Comșa himself tries to find excuses for the film, saying that, maybe, "the cursed charge" of the conflict is to blame and the slightly vague psychological mechanisms, feeling somewhat morally forced, which are finally the answer to all the questions<sup>35</sup>.

Perhaps the *milicier* that's best aligned to the rigors of the *policier* genre, as it was produced in France or the United States, is *The Man in the Overcoat* (1979). The film has a solid intrigue and a fluid deployment of action. Judging by his understanding of story building, we can boldly say that Mărgineanu offers a lesson of style to the more tenacious Sergiu Nicolaescu. If at the level of his narrative structure, *The Man in the Overcoat* is beyond reproach, the subject it approaches becomes slightly politicized when the protagonist, engineer Stamatiad (Victor Rebengiuc), brings to light the story of a former friend of his, who used to be in the legionary movement, who is now seeking revenge at any cost. Having returned from abroad, where he had lived for thirty years, this Westerner by adoption, harboring pathological resentment, cannot separate

---

34. Dan Pița, Mircea Veroiu directors, *Nunta de piatră* by Dan Pița, Mircea Veroiu, Studioul Cinematografic București, Buftea, premiered on January 29, 1973.

35. Dan Comșa, "Cercul magic", review of *Cercul Magic* by Nicolae Mărgineanu, Cora Vulcănescu, directed by David Reu, Casa de filme Patru, 1975 *Cinema*, August 1975.

himself from the past. Even though in this case as well the winner is *the right one*, the militia does not solve the case easily and doesn't establish impossible connections. Things flow naturally, and Mărgineanu almost diverts from the propaganda through the detached and emphatic way he relates to his subject. If we follow *The Man in the Overcoat* and *The Magic Circle*, we can see that it's sufficient if the difference resides in nuance and how one is positioned related to the subject.

Another film that fits the idea of the unprecedented professionalism of the Romanian agents is *The Investigation* (1980). The explosion of a 4300-ton Kauper furnace at a steel mill in Galați triggers the investigation conducted by party activist Ștefan. The film promotes, among other things, the industrial sector as well, suggesting that the people employed in it are willing, ambitious and eager to do their best. This is the source of their involved behavior. All the characters are critical of themselves, even though the explosion is due to bad weather conditions. The implacable, unforgiving destiny, nature claiming it's due, these remain flagships in the world of ideas of communist cinema. Nature seems the only potential obstacle to the completion of socialism. Besides, we can notice in *The Investigation* at least two details which were perpetuated in several films: a) the stories occur all over the country, so that spectators can identify themselves more easily with the characters; and b) major activists living in large, elegantly furnished houses, build during the monarchy in Romania. Although these activists were building up communism and the "*new man*", they were addicted to bourgeois prosperity, their fight against it taking place only at a declarative level.

*A Girl's Tear* (1980) shows a Romanian village, where the suspicious death of a young lady is investigated. The militiamen that come from the city discover a patriarchal mentality, which objectifies women. They don't have the same rights men do, they are not allowed to emancipate, it is suggested that they are guilty for any physical or psychical aggression. Demian brings front this attitude, challenging it. The outside intervention coming from an urban, civilizing world is the only one that can penalize the villagers. Alongside Mircea Veroiu and partly Nicolae Mărgineanu, Demian creates a more realistic image of the Romanian agent.

*Blackmail* (1981) builds a plot around engineers who have fraudulently obtained their diplomas. The topic is delicate because it relates to an issue of the multilaterally developed society. But the film remains just moralizing; it does not aim to solve the problem, but rather punish these impostors. Because the engineers who bought their diplomas have to pay at least from a moral point of view, an unknown man, in a hoarse voice, blackmails them, through

phone calls, asking them to help with industrial espionage for a for a group outside the country. This narrative scheme seems to comply perfectly with the type of *milicier* demanded by the Party. Promoting the industry goes well hand in hand with the spectrum of external danger and the Romanian secret services which impeccably defend the country. Agents are moving fast, they have the making of great detectives and they go straight to the heart of things. They are so precise that their leader corrects her younger colleague who didn't remember correctly the phone number at which a possible illegal call had been made: "57 57 56, not 57 57 57!"<sup>36</sup>. No matter which of them had been right, this number, too easy to remember, is part of the shaky logic the film is built on. The head of the investigation squad manages to surpass the gender barrier through a humorless and hardworking attitude. In a society as patriarchal as the communist one, whose problems we exposed in a more nuanced manner in *A Girl's Tear*, this agent is the example of an exemplary woman who has to work twice as much to be considered equal to men. 1983 brings along the films *The End of the Night* and *To Kill a Bird of Prey*. Veroiu and Demian continue well, in line with what they had begun in *Seven Days* and *A Girl's Tear*. They do not resort to prefabricated models of events and characters, but instead they try to question the society by interrogating the narrative details they work with. The plot of the two films is similar: a traffic accident, after which a young woman loses her life. We notice that in most films the victims are women. This choice would be interesting to analyze in a separate article.

*The End of the Night* shows Toma (Gheorghe Visu), a young motorman who has been ill influenced all his life. The escape, for one like him, appears to be a benevolent agent who chooses to neglect even his personal life in order to bring him on the right track. *To Kill a Bird of Prey* also features a goodhearted agent who would be willing to help the guilty provided they would also agree to change.

However, the antagonists won't or can't change and are, therefore, punished rather by nature or by faith than by the system.

After watching these *milicier* films, one can notice two directions: Romanian felons can get a second chance if they will ask for it; but when it comes to foreign agents, the state is merciless. Investigations often function as pretexts meant to highlight the professionalism of the agents, some issues the system is trying to repair, and the idea that *The Party sees everything*.

---

36. "Santaj 1982 Film Romanesc", Youtube, accessed October 12, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3BcAtLg72A>.

## References

- Alexandrescu, Mircea. "Să vorbim cu durere despre comedie", review of *B.D. la munte și la mare* by Nicolae Țic, Mircea Drăgan, directed by Mircea Drăgan, Studioul Cinematografic București, Buftea, premiered on December 20, 1971. *Cinema*, January 1972.
- Boldea, Iulian. "Cenzura și teatrul", *Apostrof*, October 2009.
- Burakowski, Adam. *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965-1989*. Iași: Polirom, 2016.
- Comșa, Dan. "Cercul magic", review of *Cercul Magic* by Nicolae Mărgescu, Cora Vulcănescu, directed by David Reu, Casa de filme Patru, 1975. *Cinema*, August 1975.
- Pivniceru, Constantin. *Amintiri din actualitate. 50 de ani de cinematografie în România*. București: Tritonic, 2012.
- Shelley, Louise. *Policing Soviet Society: The Evolution of State Control*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Șercan, Emilia. *Cultul secretului. Mecanismele cenzurii în presa comunistă*. Iași: Polirom, 2015.
- Suchianu, Dumitru. Ion, "B.D. la munte și la mare", review of *B.D. la munte și la mare* by Nicolae Țic, Mircea Drăgan, directed by Mircea Drăgan, Studioul Cinematografic București, Buftea, premiered on December 20, 1971. *România literară*, January 13, 1972.

**Ion Indolean** has BA and MA in Film Studies and is a Ph.D. candidate with a thesis about film on contemporary subjects produced in Communist Romania. Writes for various cultural Romanian newspapers and collaborated with Astra Sibiu, TIFF and Comedy Cluj Film Festivals. Directed the feature film *Discordia* that won the debut prize at TIFF in 2016 and was nominated at GOPO Awards in 2017.





*To curate a part of one's soul.  
Transplanting a performance in three (radically) different spaces*

RALUCA LUPAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The curating process of a performance like *4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane constitutes a reflection of a round, back and forward act of doubt and belief. A suitable or a malicious managerial decision in chancing a given data in the performance can determine the path and the course of the show. Every act or management action can alter the channels of communicating with the audience and its perception and reception of the performance.

**Keywords:** curating, interaction, independent theatre, space, distance, audience

Contemporary Romanian theatre succeeds in making room for new aesthetics and in meeting its audiences' expectations both in state-financed institutions that provide a cultural offer satisfying the needs of a broad, multicultural audience, and in an independent sector which focuses mostly on social and documentary theatre, exploratory performances, musicals and theatre-dance.

Transplanting a show designed for a state institution onto the stage of an independent theatre implies major changes in the curating methods of that production. Most of the time, the independent companies use non-conventional spaces, and by this we understand any space from cafe to apartment or industrial hall, whose main use is not, in itself, cultural, and this directly influences the relationship between the actor and the audience. An independent theatre company can provide and generate a large palette of performative shows and products.

Moving a show meant to be performed in a state institution in an independent company means redefining it. Trying to re-brand a theatrical product in transition requires a coherent curating program from its producers,

---

1. Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

which consists in keeping active and efficient the actor's and director's resources in a precarious medium that lacks the credibility of a long-established cultural institution. It is this lack of credibility that makes the local or county administration treat independent companies unfairly. Still, it would be unjust not to mention their support in the last two years. The plays designed and performed by the independent companies are becoming more and more present on the map of the national and international festivals, as well as in the marketing strategies of the local cultural institutions or of those supporting cultural events.

The need for this transition arises from the artistic team's desire for the survival of their product. Most of the cultural marketing plans aim at the longevity of the product. This kind of work, which intends to develop the show and keep it on the market through personal limited means, resembles a curator's work.

When curating a show, things happen following a different set of rules than in the case of another works of art. The procedural framework is conceived according to the audience's needs and expectations, as well as to the actor's intellectual availability and his physical and mental energy, according to the material resources, space and time, all these being under a continuous financial pressure.

Even though the coherence of the message that the show delivers is based on a pattern, a set of rules, the type of interaction changes in order to offer the audience a different experience. The forms of interaction in a show from the independent field can contain a multitude of performative frames.

The spectator of the independent theatre expects to experience something different. That is why the set of rules changes depending on the public attending the performance. This usually happens mainly in the case of cafe/club theatre.

### **Theatrical context 2009-2011**

Being formally introduced in the artistic field as a theatre actor, I was trained and conditioned to work in a state institution. Starting from Sarah Kane's text, *Psychois* 4.48, I created a one-woman show for my master dissertation at the Theatre Department. The show has the pattern of a product that can often be seen in a state institution. Performing it in an independent company was not viable since the theatrical field in Transylvania lacked in alternative spaces and this type of institution. Given the circumstances, together with the director, Alexandra Felseghi, we decided to focus on creating

a show "as if it were" in a state institution, though the main aim was the *In-Yer-Face*<sup>2</sup> dramaturgy. In that period, Sarah Kane's writings were up to the minute. In the 2000s most of the Romanian directors, and not only, expressed their preference for the playwright of "blood and sperm theatre".

The dramatic style named by Aleks Sierz, *In -Yer-Face*<sup>3</sup>, the new type of theatre that came into being in Great Britain in the 90s arrived in the Romanian theatrical background after a decade. We could even say, theatrically, that *the British were coming*.

Among those who considered that the "plays of blood and sperm" are worth seeing by the Romanian audience, we would like to mention: Tudor Țepeneag who puts on *4.48 Psychosis* with Maia Morgenstern, at Act Theatre (2004), Mihai Mănuțiu who directs *Phaedra's Love* at Ioan Slavici Theatre, Arad (2006) and *4.48 Psychosis* at Lucian Blaga National Theatre (2008). Răzvan Mureșan approaches the same *4.48 Psychosis* differently from his colleague and presents it the same year, 2008, at Lucian Blaga National Theatre. In 2009 Andrei Șerban puts on *Cleansed* on the stage of the same theatre. Theodor Cristian Popescu (director) and Eugen Wohl (translator, essayist and professor) start translating more texts by Sarah Kane. In order to highlight the newly discovered dramaturgy and its mark, Sarah Kane is dedicated a three day festival at the National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca - *Sarah Kane's Days*. Despite the critics' controversial feedback and the audience's reaction (some of them leaving the hall feeling disgusted), Andrei Șerban's *Cleansed* was both awarded national prizes and praised internationally.

It is obvious that the number of directors who have stood the risk of putting on Sarah Kane's plays in Romania is relatively small in the international theatrical context. For the Romanian economic, social and cultural background of that period (2000), these approaches were true acts of courage. As an instrument of the culture you are part of, it is extremely difficult to change the mentalities shaped by a socialist-communist history, liberating them.

It is within this context, confronting with a precarious economic reality, that in 2011 we started to create a show-exam-research based on Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*.

In order to outline the moment of transition and structural transformations of this show-exam-research directed by Alexandra Felseghi we need to analyze the process of creation from the very beginning.

---

2. "What Is in-Yer-Face Theatre?," In-yer-face Theatre, accessed July 9, 2017, <http://www.inyerfacetheatre.com/what.html>.

3. Termen introdus de Aleks Sierz in cartea sa Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001).

The analysis of the show, the research-exam on Sarah Kane, the interpretation of a crucial text, the examination of the means of training and of acting methods, all took place along the preparation and performance of the show.

The steps that we took to take the practical part of the exam were the following:

Master student - directing department: Alexandra Felseghi

Master student - acting department: Raluca Lupan

### *Constructing the show - the university version*

a) Choosing the text and sending it to the professors (Professor Mihai Mănuțiu, Professor Laura Pavel).

b) Getting the permission to put on the show.

c) Deciding on the theme and message of the show: man's reshaping/reconstructing himself in the absence of love in all its forms. Severe depression and its consequences. Suicide – from intention to decision.

d) Deciding on the theme of the research. The actor opted for the *In-Yer-Face* type of actor, the viscosity, the organicity and performativity of an actor formed by this type of text, patients with suicidal tendencies and patterns of behaviour, means of incorporating an *essence –text*.

e) Research and documentation: the reading of all Sarah Kane's texts (both in English and in Romanian), readings on the *In-Yer-Face* phenomenon, watching live and online shows, reading national and international critique; documenting the psycho-emotional processes of the people prone to suicide.

f) The actor's training: reshaping the body. The concept of movement belongs to both the actor and the director. The theme chosen for the choreographic scene: the effect of antipsychotics and anti-depressants on the patient's body and mind. The expressionist body-language of these moods.

g) The set of methods and exercises needed to construct the role will be detailed later in this paper.

h) Scenographic elements: corner of a room, a watch, 7 pieces of white chalk, 9 pebbles/stones, one cigarette.

i) Time: a 4-6 hour rehearsal/day / 33 days.

j) Costs: 21 €.

k) Rehearsals: depending on the available rehearsal spaces of the Faculty of Theatre and Television (Babes-Bolyai University), the rehearsals took place between 10-14 and 16-20.

l) Choosing a date when the examinations committee could watch the show: 6.05.2011 (practical exam).



**Fig. 1:** Scene from 4.48 Psychosis by Sarah Kane directed by Alexandra Felseghi, one woman-show with Raluca Lupan, Maican Hall (FTT), May, 2011

### *The actor's perspective on the show*

a) Research on *In -Yer-Face* theatre or "the individual's legitimate strangeness". Debates on "How do you plead for an *In-Yer -Face* play?" What would be its aim in the theatrical context? Which are the performative means that help you perform an essential -text?"

b) The *essence text* had Greek tragedy influences. Reading the text. Choosing the paragraphs meant to support the director's idea. Choosing the theme of the play: lack of love and its consequences. Final text: 30 pages. The re-arranging of the text was possible after both the actor and the director agreed on the idea of a one woman-show.

c) Research on the psychological difference between mental disturbance and mental disorder. Analysis of BPD (borderline personality disorder), ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder), bipolar disorder, personality disorder, anxiety, dysphoria, dyskinesia, severe depression.

d) Analysis of the physical and cognitive degradations in the case of the diagnosed patients, as it follows: body, nervous system, mood, thoughts, behavior, social relationships, self-esteem, sexual impulses/ libido, emotions and feelings, addictions, suicidal or self-mutilating behavior.

e) Documentation on the type of used medicines: typical antipsychotics given to patients in psychiatric or normal hospitals.

f) Defining the character: he/she (the lack of name reinforces the idea that any of those present could be the character they see, the gender being the director's choice and depends on the concept) – suburban individual diagnosed with severe depression. Dramatic situation: 48 minutes before committing suicide or the last 48 minutes of life. Since there were no biographical references in the text, both the director and the actor decided to build the character identifying with it. Key moments in the actor's personal life were chosen and superposed on the stage situations. The actor's trial to completely identify with the character was based on Stanislavski's concept of "affective memory". Choosing to dig deep inside the actor's affective memory was not the best choice. By the end of the rehearsal the actor's social behavior was severely affected. Outside the rehearsal space, the actor developed an obsessive-compulsive type of behavior. Both the actor and the director noticed this.

g) Character memorandum and journal, rehearsal journal.

h) Exploiting themes like: physical isolation, social isolation, chronic depression, suicide in theatrical improvisations.

i) Corporality: body deformation –main reasons: severe depression and medication. The elements of theatre-dance were meant to describe the body transformed by isolation, medication, violence, weight loss, alienation, lack of human affection.

j) The attempt to build the character's body grammar (gestural semiotics): lethargy, excess, physical violence, spasm.

k) Space: the corner formed of 2 walls 2m/2m. The exterior limit is marked with chalk. The choice of the space insinuates, physically and fictively, a patient's padded cell in a psychiatric hospital.

l) Soundtrack: the ticking of a clock, Venetian Snares- Szamár Madár, Radiohead-No Surprises.

m) Costume: grey men's shorts, white T-shirt, the right wrist is bandaged.

n) Scenography: clock, rocks, chalk.

### **Theatrical context 2011-2017**

It is after 2000 that the first independent theatre companies make extravagant changes in the Romanian cultural market. Cultural associations formed by actors, directors, playwrights who wanted to create or could not find a position in the state institutions, appeared as small associations. Young and enthusiastic, they started founding an independent sector. Still, the bigger institutions did not meet this openly, calling it a "trifle", a refuse of applying for a position in a state institution. It was seen as "unemployment"<sup>4</sup> a probationary job, until the position of actor - service provider - was available. The freelancer actor stood out. The alternative space becomes necessary for an independent company to survive. The stage can be a cafe, a street, a disabled industrial zone. Any space may become a stage.

The members of Create.Act.Enjoy, the independent association invest their own resources in the company and try to rent low-priced shabby spaces. Most of the marketing strategies of the independent companies are online, on different media platforms and social networks. Since the aim is to sell and not to identify the target audience, most of the independent companies appeal to incoherent marketing strategies. The cultural offer of these companies is diversified offering documentaries, sport theatre (improvisation theatre), personal development workshops for all ages, shows for children, theatre residences, performances, art therapy, happenings, exhibitions with performative insertions, concerts, etc.

Some of the independent companies present on the local market in Cluj Napoca are: Reactor de Creație si Experiment, Varoterem Project, Colectiv A, Reciproca, Create. Act. Enjoy, GroundFloor, Shoshin.

### **Reconstructing the play/ show in the independent area**

Starting with 1995 and continuing ever since Romania adopts the international models and the first independent shows appear in the west of the country as club or cafe theatre. Thus, for the first time, the alternative spaces offer the graduates a new possibility to manifest their talent and creative energy. The alternative space welcomes everyone who is willing to reconsider their artistic product.

---

4. Sandu Gabriel, "De ce teatrele românești sunt conduse de actori și regizori cu mandate infinite [Why Romanian Theatre Institutions Are Managed by Actors and Directors with Infinite Mandates]," *Vice*, February 2, 2016, <https://www.vice.com/ro/article/de-ce-teatrele-romanesti-sunt-conduse-de-actori-si-regizori-cu-mandate-infinite-577>.



Without being familiarized with the aesthetics of the independent theatre, independent companies or alternative spaces, together with Alexandra Felseghi, we tried to understand the new form of performance. In this theatrical context the independent theatre becomes the opponent of the traditional state institution. The message of the independent companies was one of opposition.

The show-research-exam 4.48 *Psychosis* by Sarah Kane had an unexpected trajectory. After my finishing the master studies, the show was put on and played in an alternative cultural space: Fabrica de Pensule - The Small Hall.

### *Fabrica de Pensule - The Small Hall*

The first re-location of the play took place in 2012. It left the university space to be performed as a co-production with Fabrica de Pensule.

#### Transition- Stage 1

- a) Evaluating the costs
- b) Evaluating the auxiliary costs (sound, lights)
- c) Promoting costs
- d) Strategy costs
- e) Copyright costs. The actor's intention was to continue the master research with PhD studies. Since the project turned into a PhD thesis included in an educational program, there were no copyright fees
- f) Setting-arranging the room/hall
- g) Rehearsal program
- h) Date of performance

Due to the lack of space (the Small Hall being less than Maican Hall of the Faculty of Theatre and Television) there were some curatorial changes. The corner of Maican Hall was on the left, whereas in the Small Hall we had to use the right corner because of the windows. Changing the space meant altering the whole form of the performance.

Windows are perceived as elements of the space that allow access. The concept of the play was based on a closed space that did not permit the way in and gave the impression of a claustrophobic space. The actor's training, direction and movements change in a different setting. The space will influence the actor's performance. In this regard, we have moved the space from left side corner to right side corner. The shift of sides made the actor's training modify. The duration of rehearsals changed by increasing the amount of time of the actor's understating, doing and processing every move. I, myself am a right handed actor, and transporting the performance

from left to right transformed the time of rehearsal. The distance between objects changed and the actor's point of view had to vary. Every turn of the head, every eye-contact, every move, every meaning that was in the original performance had to be reviewed and modified.

As for the audience, since they were seated at a bigger distance from the stage than in the initial performance, there was an alteration in the reception of the show. We could say that those who saw once again the play in this context had the experience of a different performance, a different play. First time the performance was played, the audience had the possibility to seat on cushions in the first row, at approximately 50 cm from the delimited stage. But in the new space, at The Small Hall, we had to distance the audience from the stage even more and also lift the seats higher from the ground by using 10, 15 and 20 cm platforms on which the chairs were placed. By distancing and using a higher point of view, the visual perspective of the audience shifted the degree of intimacy between the actor and his spectators. By doing these modifications, the voice training, volume and diction suffered and therefore the facial expression, masks and movement had to be reinforced by exaggeration. So we can say that distancing or rising the surface on which the public sits on has an effect on: the level of intimacy, acting (body image, mind, thought, voice). The first idea of the performance endured an alteration, the concept of telling and intimate story about a girl's last 48 minutes of being alive has been amended. It became a story told by afar.

Since the production costs would have increased, because the auxiliary personnel should have been paid, the director decided to do the light and sound technician's job.

The strategy and marketing costs were covered by the actor and the director.

The rehearsals were established according to the other productions taking place in the Small Hall. The arrangement of the acting zone and the steps for the audience became part of the actor and director's job, the co-producer not taking part in this process. Since the hall had recently been renovated, both the director and the actor had to clean it which affected the rehearsals, the actor's mental and physical mood. Having to move these steps daily prolonged the time the acting space was used. The actor and director's tiredness and exhaustion prevented them from being efficient, as they also took care of the technical part. We had to reconsider every day and every rehearsal. We had to calculate exactly how much it took to: move the stairs for the audience from the back of the room to the stage, how much it took to clean the space- stage and audience, how much time was left for actual physical training, rehearsal for 45 minute, how much time to clean floor

and walls after rehearsal, how much time to move the platforms back in their initial space. The pressure of time and space improved our technical abilities, but with the cost of the lower quality of the performance.

In transitioning and curating a delicate performance like *4.48 Psychosis* we need to pay attention to time, space and how we manage them. The internal (body and mind) and external resources of the actor and of the director have to be spent with the diplomacy of a business manager. The management of resources needs to be trained and as a freelance actor and director you need to have a clear vision on the possible turns that performance will endure. Aspects like this have to be envisaged by the entire team that is part of the curating process.

### *Transition Stage 2*

Second re-location was from The Small Hall (The Paintbrush Factory) to The Box Hall (Create. Act. Enjoy) in 2013. This re-location process was a bit different from the proceeding one. The management process had similarities, but the artistic stage underwent some big transformations.



**Fig. 2:** Scene from *4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane directed by Alexandra Felseghi, Raluca Lupan, The Box (Create. Act. Enjoy) Hall, 2016

The curating process involved this steps:

- a) Evaluating the costs
- b) Evaluating the auxiliary costs (sound, lights)
- c) Promoting costs
- d) Strategy costs
- e) Copyright costs. The actor's intention was to continue the master research with PhD studies. Since the project turned into a PhD thesis included in an educational programme, there were no copyright fees
- f) Setting-arranging the room/hall
- g) Rehearsal program
- h) Date of performance

In 2013 the show became part of the repertoire of *Create. Act. Enjoy* - Independent Film and Theatre Company where both the director and the actor worked. The place that this theatre company had to offer at that time was a 30 square meter Hall called –The Box. The Box was actually a room in an early 20th century bourgeois townhouse with white walls and parquet on the floor.

We have to mention that in 2011 and 2012, the Maican Hall from FTT (Theatre and Television Faculty) and the Small Hall from The Paintbrush Factory both had walls painted black. So the first transition was made inside the scenography of the performance, because we had to change the objects used by the actor: the white chalk was replaced by a red one. Therefore shifting from a black walled studio to an immaculate white stage made a difference in approaching scenography, lighting designing as well as the acting process.

The color of the walls could not be changed because other shows were played there so, in order to keep the white features intact, we had to come up with a solution. We made the decision to glue on the walls 12 1mx1m pieces of white cardboard. This decision was approved by the *Create. Act. Enjoy* manager. But this decision increased our production costs and understated our promoting resources. Can we say that distorting the space can influence the costs and resources? The answer is definitely yes.

A little element changed a lot. A small change that was voted by the whole company corrupted the management and the creative process.

The color and the density of the chalk interchanged the relation of the actor with the object and with the space. The moves that the character made to sketch the people on the walls and on the floor had to be made with a

bigger physical effort so that the chalk could remain on the wall and floor. The unblemished image of the character- the suicidal girl- was marked with red chalk at the end of the performance. This new image generated by a change in the means of production made a stronger impact on the audience. If in 2011 and 2012 you could see the character with small white dots on her skin and cloths, in 2013 you saw an all- red covered body of a girl shouting her last words in 48 minutes. That is a powerful image that suggested the mess of a dead body and the struggles of a human that fights for his/her last breath.

Regaining the public's empathy by reducing the distance between the actor and his audience had a huge outcome on both sides. The actor's interaction was more condensed and focused, and the audience's attention was sharper. Even though the performance was produced as a one woman-show, minimizing the distance between actor/performer and audience reconfigured this relationship. The public became a partner in the actor's stage moves, thoughts, actions, decisions. The need of interaction with the audience grew as the actor was performing. The glimpse of someone else's eye intensified the scenic thought and action. Eye-contact was a significant acting unit that the actor played with. Involving every member of the audience and engaging them to keep the eye-contact for more than a few seconds made them a part of the story, a partner in developing the character's emotions and actions. Although there were people who rejected a deep eye-contact with the actor, their refusal was, for the actor, a positive response. It meant that the new scenic situation pictured by the actor and designed by the director was a "loud" and heavy one, just like in any respectable *In-Yer-Face*<sup>5</sup> play.

From the actor's perspective, this tiny change intensified the spectrum of the imagination. Every picture created in his imagination had another meaning than in the performance from 2011 or 2012. Changing the space influences the image flux or flow of the imagination. For me, moving from a black room to a white wall room took on another conceptual meaning. The room I was imagining as the character's room in 2011-2012 became in 2013 a clinical, psychiatric hospital room in which the character was put in and could be watched like an animal at the zoo. Thus we can say that space can sway the act of imagination, on what the actor chooses to see and his operating means and also what the audience will see. Of course, in the context of an independent theatre company, space is a temporary asset and it must be regarded as so.

---

5. See Ozana Budău-Tunyagi, "The Psychological Mechanism of Trauma and Its Effects on Sarah Kane's Experimental Theatre," *Studia UBB Dramatica* LIX, no. 2 (2014).

The harsh change of spatial location intervened in the heart of the artistic re-adaptation and the re-creative work. This step was taken when the slam of the door in one of the rehearsal time drew the actor in another set of images sliding before his eye. So the flunk of the door created the final picture of a tragic finale. In this regard, the director and the actor made the decision to replace the last song that the audience would hear at the end of the performance: The Heart Black Procession- When you finish me.

Space and “audible space”<sup>6</sup> was a magnificent element that allowed the actor’s playfulness to rejoice in new body shapes and plastic images. A white wall or the sound of the slamming door made the grains of imagination blossom. A freed imagination was reinstated and the creative process was linked to a wider view. After the first performance the audience sat in silence for almost 3 minutes. No applause, living the actor and the director in a state of an immense surprise. The initial intimacy concept was reinstituted and the original interaction with the audience was taken to a different level.

Just because the painting on the walls was white there were a lot of alterations inside the artistic and creative shape of the performance.

As an actor when you are faced with a close interaction with the public you will have to reconstruct your own training and acting method. A major face and body exaggeration can emotionally distance the audience from the character you are embodying. The choices you and the director make could reform the plastic and aesthetic composition of the performance.

Every step you take as an actor in curating a performance is essential and it can take you on a different artistic path. The managing and curating process can make you reevaluate your training and active acting just by taking a small decision as changing the space or the color of the object that you character is interacting with.

At the end of a professional day, every commitment or managerial modification could rebuild a lost sense or meaning of a show, could make the audience “see” and “feel” a diverse point of view. You could retrieve, revive, resurrect or resuscitate a stray conceptual idea that you or the director had at the beginning of your work.

Curating 4.48 Psychosis by Sarah Kane was a tough and delicate act assumed by both the actor and the director. The director’s aim was to: a) prolong the “life and the idea” of the performance; b) to find fresh ways

---

6. Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre, Terms, Concepts and Analysis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 359–65.

to resurge an old form; c) curate a part of one's soul. On the other hand, the actor's purpose was to: a) find new ways in communicating the message of the play; b) to learn how to bear the burden of such a character; c) curate a part of one's soul.

Curating a performance is an action made upon the soul of the artist.

## References

- Budău-Tunyagi, Ozana. "The Psychological Mechanism of Trauma and Its Effects on Sarah Kane's Experimental Theater." *Studia UBB Dramatica* LIX, no. 2 (2014).
- Gabriel, Sandu. "De Ce Teatrele Românești Sunt Conduse de Actori Și Regizori Cu Mandate Infinite [Why Romanian Theater Institutions Are Managed by Actors and Directors with Infinite Mandates]." *Vice*, February 2, 2016. <https://www.vice.com/ro/article/de-ce-teatrele-romanesti-sunt-conduse-de-actori-si-regizori-cu-mandate-infinite-577>.
- Pavis, Patrice. *Dictionary of the Theatre, Terms, Concepts and Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.
- Sierz, Aleks. *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*. London: Faber & Faber, 2001.
- "What Is in-Yer-Face Theatre?" *In-yer-face Theatre*. Accessed July 9, 2017. <http://www.inyerfacetheatre.com/what.html>.

**Raluca Lupan** graduated from the Babeș Bolyai University's Faculty of Theatre and Television with a BA in Acting. Between 2012 and 2017 she worked in independent theatre as a member of the Create.Act.Enjoy Theatre and Film Company. Presently, she is a PhD student at the Faculty of Theatre and Television, participating, for research purposes, in numerous workshops and international festivals, while also working as a teaching assistant at the same institution. She is interested in theatre-dance, performance and contact-improvisation.

## MISCELLANEA





## *An Approach to Teaching Digital Interactive Performance*

RODICA MOCAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** By its complexity, performance art remains one of the most expressive art forms, although difficult to define, as some would argue. The use of media technologies in performance brought a significant enrichment to the artistic expression ever since the first experiments with video art, and broke the barriers between visual arts, cinema, and performing arts. New media and the revolution in communication brought by the Internet increased the complexity of the artistic productions that incorporate digital interactive technologies, making it very difficult to assess the artistic artefacts that tend to fall between art and science. The paper is presenting an approach to teaching digital interactive performance theory and practice, by providing a framework necessary for the development of definitions and taxonomies as well as an understanding of the interdisciplinary aspect of the practice of this emerging artistic genre. The analysis of the narrative discourse that pertains to certain forms of digital performance and the discussion about the esthetic, philosophical or technological aspects is significantly improved by the identification of the main critical paradigms that subscribe them. The paradigms discussed – subscribed to performance studies, digital culture, performing arts and human computer interaction – were developed considering the Romanian context of academic performing arts studies, that focuses almost exclusively on theatre and lacks a tradition in performance studies. The synthesis research about the digital interactive performance opens the discussion about cultivating an educational context appropriate for training artists capable to develop artistic productions relevant in the context of the new arts. The current pedagogical approach needs to be replaced by a heutagogical one, where practical and collaborative projects can be tackled in an innovative, inter-disciplinary framework. Such an approach is not formally possible in the current academic settings, but can be hosted by the university in interdisciplinary research centers and other artistic production contexts.

**Keywords:** Interactive digital performance, performance studies, digital culture, performance art, human-computer interaction.

---

1. Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Faculty of Theatre and Television.  
rodica.mocan@ubbcluj.ro.

## Introduction

In European and international universities, the teaching of artistic disciplines has long been outside the traditional boundaries between the arts. Although we encounter new techniques of artistic expression presented in formal or informal contexts – exhibitions, events, performances or festivals – there is no academic framework in Romania for the formal, programmatic study of non-traditional art genres. Artistic education remains bound to art fields and classical disciplinary specializations, insignificantly changed from the beginning of the last century. This research proposes an integrative and interdisciplinary vision to facilitate a formal understanding and openness to the phenomenon of adopting and integrating new digital media technologies into artistic productions.

The main objective is to identify an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for the analysis of performative artistic productions incorporating digital technologies in order to equip the artists with the skills and competences needed in a multidisciplinary team able to perform intermedia productions. The theorization of intermedia / multimedia artistic expressions, on the one hand, and the development of an academic training program in art from an interdisciplinary perspective, on the other hand, create the premises for the development of new models of artistic education in Romania, aligned with the European and international standards.

## Literature Review

The first author to publish a reference work that places performance arts in the history of arts is Rosalee Goldberg<sup>2</sup>. Goldberg defines performance as being “live art, by artists”, and is offering a historical look on performance as a form of art. Starting with “The Untamable” manifest event of the Futurists and the provocative cabaret of the Dadaist, she is addressing the notion of the idea as a basic element best expressed through performance and the importance of conceptual art.

Marvin Carlson<sup>3</sup> continued the attempts to define and delimit performance as a concept and he set the basis for what performance studies

---

2. Rosalee Goldberg, *Performance. Live Art from 1909 to the present*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1979).

3. Marvin Carlson, *Performance: a critical introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996).

would become as an academic discipline that analyzes performing arts from the perspective of sociological, psychological, cultural studies or social issues identified in the analysis of artistic discourse. Looking for an answer to the question "What is Performance?" Carlson turns to social science issues first, following a number of anthropological and ethnographic hypostases in culture. He also addresses sociological and psychological perspectives, while his linguistic approaches speak about the performativity of the language. "Performance by its nature resists conclusions, just as it resists the sort of definitions, boundaries and limits so useful to traditional academic writing and academic structures."<sup>4</sup> Carlson looks at performance in terms of contemporary theories, such as postmodernism, the issue of identity, or the perspective of cultural and gender studies. Richard Schechner<sup>5</sup> contributes to the development of performance studies bringing the practitioner's perspective. His approach is the foundation of the field of performance studies, analyzing the artistic expression from an interdisciplinary perspective with approaches specific to anthropology, philosophy, psychology or sociology, but also offering new instruments, specific to theatricality. "[...] the process of seeking a possible definition [is] more relevant than trying to impose an (unlikely) absolute result," comments Saviana Stănescu in introducing the volume<sup>6</sup>.

Carlson and Schechner represent the category of theoreticians who, by focusing on theatre, theatricality and performance, have laid the foundation for performance studies as open disciplines for specific approaches in philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, cultural studies, etc.

Andre Helbo<sup>7</sup>, Henry Bial<sup>8</sup>, Johannes Birringer<sup>9</sup> and Susan Broadhurst<sup>10</sup> complete the list of theoreticians and practitioners who have consistently contributed to the development of a specialized literature that became a discipline of study in Anglo-Saxon space. Although none of these authors neglect the influence of digital technologies on performing arts, Steve Dixon<sup>11</sup>,

---

4. Ibid., 189.

5. Richard Schechner, *Performance - Introducere și Teorie*, (București: Unitext, 2009).

6. Ibid., 10.

7. Andre Helbo, *Theory of Performing Arts*, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1987).

8. Henri Bial, *The Performance Studies Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2004).

9. Johannes Birringer, *Media and Performance - Along the Border*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998).

10. Susan Broadhurst and Josephine Machon, *Identity, Performance and Technology: Practices of Empowerment, Embodiment and Technicity*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

11. Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance. A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 2007).

Chapple & Kattenbelt<sup>12</sup>, Bay Cheng & all<sup>13</sup>, Kwastek<sup>14</sup> and Koosel<sup>15</sup> paid special attention to the intermedial performance practice.

Dixon makes a review of the history of digital performance from emerging participative performance forms to the practice of contemporary interactive digital performance, challenging some classical theoretical approaches and instead suggesting the most complete presentation of digital performances identified so far. Referring to the artistic productions or artefacts that incorporate digital interactive technologies or media, Dixon consecrates the phrase “interactive digital performance”, explaining each of these terms. Ben-Cheng & all and Chapple and Kattenbelt appeal to the concept of intermediality when deciphering performance incorporating digital interactive technologies.

## Methodology

Performing art themes, in general, and interactive digital performance, in particular, are extremely generous and lend themselves to multiple approaches. The approaches range from historical, monographic or critical studies centered on the work of authors, to studies stemming from practice as research, as are many of the specialized literature reviewed. In this paper, we have pursued the approach of the synthesis research<sup>16</sup>, designed to integrate empirical research in order to create generalizations. That allowed us to identify relevant theories and classifications and to make analyses of the topics covered by the literature in this field. The choice was primarily determined by the need to translate the conclusions into the Romanian academic space. Thus, taking into account the very broad context of artistic performance manifestations, the breadth of the field and the variety of disciplines involved in analyzing their content, we have sought to identify

---

12. Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt, *Intermediality in theatre and performance*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi. 2006).

13. Sarah Bay-Cheng et. al., *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

14. Katia Kwastek, *Aesthetics of Interaction in Digital Art*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015).

15. Stacey Koosel, “Surfing the Digital Wave: Digital Identity as Extension,” in *McLuhan’s Philosophy of Media Centennial Conference* (Brussels: The Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts, 2012).

16. Harris Cooper and Larry Hedges, “Research Synthesis as A Scientific Process” in *The Handbook of Research Synthesis and Meta-Analysis*, edited by Harris Cooper and Larry Hedges (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2009), 6.

some critical paradigms that subscribe common areas of interest found in the themes addressed by theoreticians and reflected in the performance practice that is representative for some recognized artists.

### **Performance art and performance studies**

When discussing performance, Powell and Shaffer<sup>17</sup> distinguish between what performance studies as a discipline **is** and what performance practice **does**. Traditionally, we refer to “performing arts” as being any kind of artistic performances such as concerts, theatre or music events, while “performance art” is more of an avant-garde genre derived from visual arts.

From this perspective, “performance” means bringing into being a fact, pronouncing a certain state, inducing the sense of becoming, affirmation. Carlson<sup>18</sup> discusses how areas such as psychology, anthropology, sociology or linguistics have influenced the concept of “performance”: “By its nature, performance opposes the conclusions, just as it opposes those definitions, boundaries and limitations that are so useful to traditional academic studies and writings.”<sup>19</sup>

In his attempt to define digital performance, Dixon states that this genre is opposed to Grotowski's approach of the “via negativa” – defined as the act of stripping the theatre of all the elements added reducing it to the essence, towards the empty space where the actor is the main element – being the very embrace of a “via positiva”, an additive process in which “new technologies are added [in performance], a new ingredient that is delicious for some but tasteless for others.”<sup>20</sup>

The complexity of the elements involved in building interactive digital performances requires complex interdisciplinary technical and conceptual approaches, so that the analysis of the artefacts and performance genres can be addressed from the perspective of disciplinary paradigms that subscribe common themes and theorizations.

In our study, we stopped at four such paradigms.

---

17. Benjamin Powell and Tracy Stephenson Shaffer, “The haunting of Performance Studies,” *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 5, no. 1 (2009).

18. Marvin Carlson, *Performance. A Critical Introduction* (2nd ed.), (New York: Routledge, 2004).

19. *Ibid.*, 189.

20. Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance*, 28.

## Performance studies paradigm

From the perspective of performance studies, performance is seen as a concept derived from theatricality, indicating the ability of speech to be more than communication, to be an agent capable of building an identity, consuming an action. In this sense, performance reverses the idea that gestures and actions are the result of individual identity and address identity as the result of a construct determined by behavior, gestures and actions.

### *Philosophy of technology*

Together with Goldberg, Dixon, Carlson, Schechner or Helbo – who have laid the foundation for performance studies as open disciplines for specific approaches to philosophy, anthropology, linguistics or cultural studies – Andrew Feenberg emphasizes the importance of understanding the context of the philosophy of technology and the mechanisms that determine how the individual is relating to the technological developments.

Feenberg systematizes the answer to two basic questions in a matrix that includes the four categories of technology philosophies that represent the major theories about technology and its relation to the human being. The first question is: “Can people control the technology? Is it autonomous or subject to human control?” The second question addresses the nature of the technology: “Does the technology have value in itself or is it value-neutral? Is there a connection between means (technology) and purpose (values)?”<sup>21</sup>

First of all, *determinism* considers that technological development is autonomous and largely neutral, rather as a positive force that contributes to the development of society, but technology has no value in itself, and people have no control over its development. Technological development is autonomous and the society is determined and even controlled by technological change, which shapes it according to the needs of progress and efficiency.

For others, technology has no value in itself, but its development can be controlled. Today, most tend to support this position, known as *instrumentalism*. Even if technologies help us achieve our goals, we can and must control their development and use. According to this perspective, technology alone does not have the power to influence, but the way we use it, does. One of the favorite slogans of the instrumentalists is: “not weapons kill people, but people kill other people.”

---

21. Andrew Feenberg, “What Is Philosophy of Technology,” in *Defining Technological Literacy*, ed. John Dakers (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Theories that regard technology as being loaded with value are called *substantivism*. According to these theories, we do not choose technology just to make our life more efficient, but we choose a lifestyle. Once committed to technological development, society will be transformed according to its values, such as efficiency and power. Traditional values hardly survive the challenges of technology.

*Critical theory*, more nuanced and strongly advocated by Feenberg, believes, like instrumentalists, that people have the opportunity to control the development of technology and influence the consequences of using it by setting up appropriate institutions to exercise control over them.

All of these concerns about technologies and how they affect lifestyles in the information age are at the heart of the narrative discourse of artistic expressions in digital-embedded performances.

A very good illustration of the anxieties generated by the effects of digital technologies on human life in the information age and the dynamics of their control is *Le Sacre du Printemps*, an interdisciplinary artistic production by Klaus Obermeier, an intermedia artist.



**Figure 1:** Klaus Obermeier – *Le Sacre du Printemps* (2006)



The images described by the dancer performing live on a stage are captured and generated in real-time by stereoscopic cameras and by a sophisticated computerized system, so that a complex image is projected into three dimensions in a virtually immersive space accessed by stereoscopic glasses.

Thus, the human body becomes the interface between the real world and the virtual one. Through 32 microphones, the entire orchestra is integrated into this interactive process, because musical motifs, individual and instrumental voices influence the shape, movement and complexity of the dancer's projections. Music is no longer just a starting point, but a complement to choreography, in a very successful illustration of the anxieties produced by the digital world, which, spinning out of control, leads to self-destruction and dissolution in an infinite number of entities.

### **The extension of the human body**

The theme of the extension of the human body or of its faculties through technology is an important philosophical starting point, but also a favorite theme in experimental artefacts that incorporate digital technology. The theory of extension – consecrated by McLuhan<sup>22</sup>, but previously formulated in similar form by Kapp and Rothenberg<sup>23</sup> – predicted the impact that new media technologies would have on human life, including increased immersion into media and dependence on digital stimuli.

After a phase that leads to a self-amputation form, the overloading of sensory circuits due to stimuli coming from the new environments determines the gradual installation of a numbness process. "Almost 50 years after McLuhan explored the effects of our technologies on the psyche, research has yet to move forward significantly, and we are still poised to rediscover the same idea. This scenario would suggest a trend where technology may be infiltrating our lives and sense at a much greater pace than our ability to understand the effects and pressure they place on our sensorium and psyche."<sup>24</sup>

Adopting generally a deterministic positivist perspective – understood as a separation of means from purpose<sup>25</sup> and representing a positive view of

---

22. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

23. Philip Brey, "Theories of Technology as Extension of the Human Faculties," *Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Technology. Research in Philosophy and Technology* 19 (2000).

24. Koosel, "Surfing the Digital Wave: Digital Identity as Extension," 3.

25. Feenberg, "What Is Philosophy of Technology."

the impact of technologies on humanity – posthumanism has a particular impact on art in the information society and forms the basic concept of some articulated performance instances.

Representative for post-humanist performing art, Stelarc is particularly influenced by McLuhan's theory of extension of the human body through technology and the developments in the field of artificial intelligence that have triggered these openings. Illustrative to detail, his first performances described more than two decades ago the effect of extension that technology may have, from expanding the mechanical functions of the human body to giving up control over it altogether and delegating it to the extended human community.

Stelarc takes literally McLuhan's notion that technological media are extensions of the human senses, and all of his recent performances demonstrate a perverse insistence on body modifications and the redesign not of the space surrounding the body's kinesphere but of the body's architecture, skin, and internal body spaces themselves – 'the physiological hardware', as Stelarc calls it.<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 2:** Stelarc – *Ear on Arm*, Media Gallery, Concorde University, 20

---

26. Johanis Birringer, *Media and Performance - Along the Border* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 61.

From the *Amplified Body, Laser Eyes and Third Hand* (1975) to the ongoing *Ear on Arm* (2010) body-modification performance, Stelarc is using innovative performance practices to express his posthumanistic view regarding the human body as being obsolete, inadequate and imperfect within the context of a digital age.

By the complexity of his performative interventions - and here we are not only referring to the degree of sophistication of the used technologies and the chosen artistic solutions, but also to the depth and complexity of the ideas represented and the application of the performance as a social concept - Stelarc is defined as one of the most Representative artists of our times and the most important exponent of Transhumanist art.

### **The digital culture paradigm**

The second paradigm addresses the performance from the perspective of digital culture, understood as the set of values, beliefs, artifacts, rituals and other general characteristics of a culture, which develops as a consequence of digital technological developments in the last decades and which form the context of the current information society.

Although launched in the 1960s and introduced as an academic discipline by Dick Higgins in 1968, the concept of *intermedia* was not included in the dictionaries and is much less known and used than *multimedia* - a concept that designates the use or integration of multiple media in an artefact.

Although only a limited number of specialists, most of them academics, are concerned about the property of these terms, Friedman<sup>27</sup>, a practitioner who becomes a theoretician, tries to clarify the differences between the meanings of these concepts. In practice, the two are often confused or interchangeable. Intermedia is a term used mainly in the academic environment, and may be found in biology, chemistry and medicine publications. Multimedia appears in databases a hundred times more often than intermedia, and although there is a tendency to link the definition of new technologies lately, the term is much broader.

However, while using *intermedia* and *multimedia* when describing the complexity of the relationships between different types of media and how

---

27. Ken Friedman, "Intermedia, Multimedia, Media," *Artifact*, 2007, 4.

they are exploited in the context of different arts, most authors appeal to similar definitions and meanings<sup>28</sup>.

Practitioners such as Johannes Birringer, Susan Kozel, and Lisa Naugel<sup>29</sup> (Mullins, 2013) suggest that the digital technology they interact with during digital performances can be perceived as a silent partner that influences them and determines the course of their actions. Digital technologies allow the building of fluid, dynamic spaces within which performers can evolve, while at the same time determining the construction of new spaces through bi-directional interfaces.

This perspective allows for a first classification of interactive digital performances.

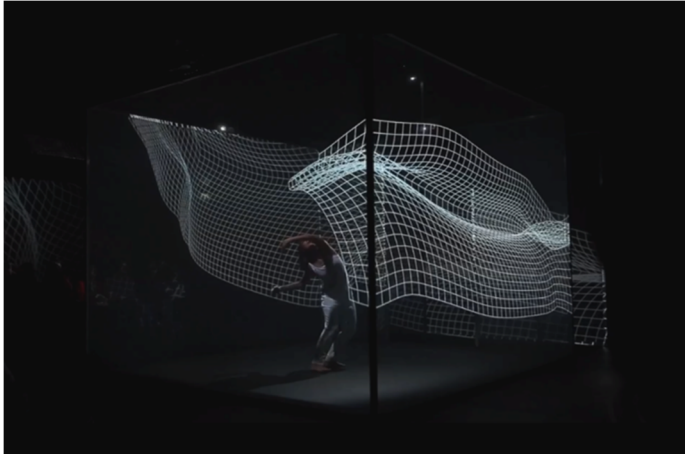
### Derived performance

In derived performances, the movements of the dancer are captured through an interface and then translated into digital information that is processed through the computer. The final images generated by algorithms are projected back to the surface of the performance space, all of these processes occurring instantaneously in real time. Klaus Obermeier – one of the first intermedia artists that experimented with responsive video projection ever since the early 2000s – reached a high level of artistry with his complex stereoscopic projection of *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Gideon Obarzanek and the Chunky Moves Company have consecrated this genre with *Glow*, an intermedia production presented at the Venice Biennale in 2011. Another example of derived performances are the productions of Adrein M / Claire B, a dance company that creates performances where the dancer is performing within a three-dimensional space created and continuously transformed by the movements of the dancer.

---

28. Sarah Bay-Cheng et al., eds., *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010); J Sage Elwell, "Intermedia: Forty Years On And Beyond," *Afterimage* 33, no. 5 (2008); Friedman, "Intermedia, Multimedia, Media"; Hans Breder and Herman Rapaport, "Intermedia: A Consciousness-Based Process," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 33, no. 3 (September 2011): 11–23, [https://doi.org/10.1162/PAJJ\\_a\\_00051](https://doi.org/10.1162/PAJJ_a_00051).

29. Eric Mullis, "Dance, Interactive Technology, and the Device Paradigm," *Dance Research Journal* 45, no. 3 (2013).



**Figure 3:** Adrien M / Claire B - *Hakanai*. (2013).

### **Immersive performance**

When the performer is transposed through digital technologies and performs in a digitally built virtual reality space, we are dealing with an *immersive performance*. Stereoscopic glasses, body sensors, digital gauntlets - are interface elements that collect motion-related data that your computer uses to interfere with virtual space.



**Figure 4:** Gromla – *Dancing with a Virtual Dervish* (1993).

Bi-directionality also exists here, the performer sails and explores a “fluid” virtual reactive landscape. In this case, the audience cannot see the interaction in which the dancer / performer is engaged, but may later be invited to experience this kind of immersive interaction. Representative in this sense is *Dancing with a Virtual Dervish*, a virtual reality work created in 1992 by designer Diane Gromala and choreographer Yacov Sharir.

### Telematic performance

*Networked performance* – also called telematic – is a form of performance that takes place on online, over the network, and involves the ability to create telepresence through video and sound systems that capture movements from remote locations and project them on a performing space.

In 1991, Troika Ranch produced the performance *An Adjacent Disclosure*. The dancers were performing live in completely different locations, though not so far apart from each other. The captured images were projected onto a screen in which the two dancers seemed to dance together, though they could not at all touch it.



**Figure 5:** Troika Ranch – *An Adjacent Disclosure* (1991)

Technological challenges are complex in telematic performances, varying from distortion of image and sound due to remote transmissions to echoes or distortions of the sound. While the technical aspects were improved as technologies advanced, and the use of broadband networks solved many of the issues of the early productions, the fascination of interaction between performers in different spaces and the effects of digital technology mediation remains. In such experiments, the process is more important than the final product.

Interactive digital performance – derived, immersive or telematic – involve the use of technologies that affect in real time both the environment in which it performs and the space shared by the public and the performer. The dancer experiences a movement articulation that is amplified by technology and affected by the environment that his movements create<sup>30</sup>.

### **Performing arts paradigm**

The analysis of digital performance from the perspective of the paradigm of performing arts inevitably touches some of the most important themes specific to the theories of theatricality. Three of these are of the utmost importance and are present in the analysis of the most important authors (Birringer, 1998; Dixon, 2007; Kwasek, 2013; Bay-Cheng & all, 2010; Broadhurst, 2012). These are: body - embodiment, space - spatiality and time - temporality.

### **Body – embodiment**

The dualist-Cartesian vision of the body is strongly influenced by the antiquity writings of Socrates, Plato, and then by Rene Descartes, who – in his *Discourse on the Method* – consecrated the philosophy of separation of mind from body and the superiority of mind over body. “If we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself [...]”, said Socrates<sup>31</sup>.

This philosophy, which would dominate Western culture for many centuries, continues to influence modern thinking, although it is overcome by other holistic approaches to the body, such as that which includes, along

---

30. Mullis, 113.

31. Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance. A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 212.

with body, mind and self. This explains the extremes we are witnessing in relation to the human body in today's society, and obsession with the various aspects of corporeality that contemporary cultural theories have.

On the one hand, we are witnessing an obsession fueled by the engines of the Western marketing machine, linked to "body beautiful" - the perfect body. On the other hand, many forms of artistic expression, collectively reunited under the title of "body art", creatively illustrate different views on the body, especially in the antithesis, those that oppose the widely accepted standards of beauty and ridicule them.

### Body art

Some artists choose to use the body as a performing space, reducing it to object status and thus negating the aspects that define humanity<sup>32</sup>. Liviu Malița presents several categories of performances that represent extreme cases of body art. In his opinion, "Orlan decisively intervenes in the identity debate and in the one dedicated to the destiny of man in the societies of the future. The comparison of a body with an object is a way to cancel the sexual and social footprints, to neutralize it ideologically"<sup>33</sup>. In her performances, Orlan underwent a series of aesthetic operations aimed at acting against the established standards of beauty, which she considers "the expression of a dominant ideology".

Beyond the finality – re-building the physiognomy through aesthetic remodeling of the anatomical components – the artist adds the performance aspects: during the works, sometimes broadcast live on the Internet, the artist lectures texts of philosophy, psychoanalysis, literature or Sanscripte writings from the authors consider yourself representative of the statement you make.

Another artist who transforms his own body into performing space is Stelarc. In 1993, Stelarc made an "exhibition" in the space circumscribed by the inside of his stomach, ingesting a mechanized object considered "sculpture". The performance, which put his life in jeopardy, was shot and presented at the 1993 Melbourne Sculpture Triennial, the theme of which was site-specific works.

---

32. Francesca Ferrando, "Humans, Cyborgs, Posthumans: Francesca Ferrando at TEDxSiliconAlley" (TedX Talks, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGjMUw03Bv0>.

33. Liviu Malița, *Extreeme Artei* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Accent, 2010), 75.





**Figure 6:** Stelarc – Stomach Sculpture (1993), Melbourne Australia

## Digital Double

With the introduction of digital technologies in performance and the use of new types of media, the expressive potential of the notion of body / corporeality is multiplied even more so as the reality has more dimensions or, more precisely, becomes a virtual reality. The possibility of having the body in a space other than the physical one has strong metaphysical and artistic valences, because it actually illustrates real-world emotions experienced by the modern user that spends most of the time in virtual space.

In the virtual space there are several approaches to the notion of body. One of these is the “embodiment” - or “re-embodiment” - in the form of an avatar. The avatar is a computer graphics, more or less realistic, that performs in a virtual space created in an artificial, drawn world, where it lives and behaves like a human character. Very often, he has human traits, similar to those of the person he emulates. Obviously, the avatar can assume another genre, other features, another look, and other behavior. Through it, we have, at once, an infinite number of solutions. Moreover, it is possible to use several avatars on different platforms, in different games or virtual social contexts, while in the immediate reality the person carries out his / her own social role.

This detachment from our own body, which we find in games, and the transfer of consciousness and self to an avatar - on an unreal character that you can manipulate in virtual space - can even lead to suicide, because it depends on the ability of the mind and Self to detach and ignore bodyness.

In fact, all of these elements have a tremendous experimental potential in telematic digital performance, “redefining our senses and resensibilising our perception through bodily encounters with [digital] technologies”<sup>34</sup>.

Such performance is also *Aki Anne II*, described by Koski<sup>35</sup>, in which four performers perform in a play in Second Life, projecting their actions across multiple screens in front of an audience. Two of them manipulate live the avatar of the character Anne, one of them controlling the movements of the body, and the other representing her mind, with the emotions she is experiencing.



**Figure 7:** *Aki Anne II* (2007-2008)

In this way, the division of the control mechanisms between the two performers is reduced by identifying with the avatar: The first performer moves it using the carpet, and the second controls the other actions of the avatar, including the image of Second Life. The third performer simultaneously plays the roles of the storyteller and the avatar's mother, but without physical or virtual presence, while the fourth performer is Anne's everyday self, present on stage as a player interacting with Anne's avatar Second Life. While the

34. Bay-Cheng et al., *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, 28.

35. Kaisu Koski, “Instances. Performing an Avatar: Second Life on Stage,” in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, ed. Sarah Bay-Cheng et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

scenes unfold as game levels in a relatively choreographed sequence, the rebuilding of events that took place in Second Life and the improvised encounters converge to the final stage – an orgy – in which Anne's avatar interacts with other Second Life avatars, engaging in sexual relations.

The performer manipulating Anne's avatar refuses to engage actively and leaves the [real] scene. At this point, a spectator is invited to animate the abandoned avatar, which, once revived, through the act of engaging in orgy, steps over the threshold of an initiation ritual in the virtual world, assuming its status as a virtual being fully owned by Second Life.

### **Presence and significance in time**

One of the issues that arise when talking about time in the context of any type of performance is related to the concept of live or real live time. The concept was born with the advent of media technologies. Until then, an event simply takes place in real time. The possibility of transmitting a signal at a distance through electronic media (radio and then television) generated for the first time the need for a distinction between live, and mediated, or recorded.

When talking about livens, some emphasize the notion of temporality - when the show happens, while others emphasize the presence of the performer - where the performance takes place. In this regard, we can refer to the state experienced by a player in electronic games where there is no physical presence - we are talking about a virtual world - and yet the feeling of a live event is as alive as the system's reaction in real time to the user's in-put.

The discussion of livens and the notion of presence or absence is perfectly relevant in the context of interactive digital performances, given that we are dealing with a variety of means of expression that take full advantage of the meanings of presence and of digital technologies that can simulate, recreate or facilitate new relationships, new forms of livens.

Dixon addresses the issue of presence extensively<sup>36</sup>, discussing how the physical presence exercises its supremacy over the virtual, not the physical substance of the actual body on the stage, but insofar as it is engaged in a speech that has significance. Thus, a virtual character present through a video projection can prioritize the spectator's attention by successfully conquering the character physically present on the stage if he does not impose his presence in a meaningful way.

---

36. Dixon, *Digital Performance. A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*, 131–33.

Once mediated and remediated by digital technologies, time and space become relative notions. A recorded moment can become, by staging, present. Technology makes the space extend beyond the space of performance, with the audience being hundreds of miles away - or in the adjoining room.

### **Performance art in liminal spaces**

The discussion of presence and virtual reality opens the subject of space in interactive digital performance. The concern to explore new artistic paradigms in the generous contexts offered by new digital technologies and other fields of science has led to the development of new forms of artistic expression in performing arts. Talking about space, Doyle<sup>37</sup> identifies in the performing arts practice of the past two decades two main directions for exploring the relationship between corporality and space. The first has to do with the ability of the human body to perform in a physical space free of gravity (zero gravity), while the second explores the virtual space in which the artist performs in a space without gravity and where, although the body is not real, the sensations experienced by the performer can be perceived as real.

### **Non-gravitational performance**

A series of creative laboratories have conducted experiments exploring the movement of the body in spaces where the effects of gravity have been altered in parabolic flights or in water basins. French artist Kiotsu Dubois is one of the first researchers to experience the impenetrable movement since the 1990s, using dance-specific techniques to train astronauts at the French National Center for Scientific Research. Here's how she describes her experience: "It was necessary to put oneself in a state of dance, this is to say to concentrate on internal bodily space and the relation this holds with the surrounding space as well as on the imaginary that emerges directly from this new body-space-time."<sup>38</sup>

---

37. Denise Doyle, "Out of This World: Exploring Embodiment and Space through Artistic Processes and Practice," *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 11, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14794713.2014.998097>.

38. Ibid.



**Figure 8:** Kiatsu Dubois – *Apesanteur* (1994)

### Exploring the telematic space

In his 1997 *Ghosts and Astronauts* production, Susan Kozel performs a telematic performance by applying both concepts from the phenomenology of Merleau Ponty's perception of the body and the surrounding world as well as the results of Dubois's experiential experiments in zero gravity spaces. In this performance - through the reciprocal projection of an artist in Riverside Studios, the body of another performer, located in London's Place Theatre - creates the context for exploring concepts related to intimacy, altered materialism and impenetrability.

The alteration of the notion of space by constructing some forms of telematic mediated presence was the theme of the first telematic performance experiments. Dixon<sup>39</sup> designates Paul Sermon as the first artist to define telepresence. Telematic Dreaming was conducted in 1992 in an exhibition room where there was a bed on which a picture could be projected, captured from another room, 5000 kilometers away, where an artist performs in front of the room.

---

39. Dixon, *Digital Performance. A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*, 220.



**Figure 9:** Paul Sermon – *Telematic Dreaming*. (1993)

Someone from the audience in the exhibition room could lie down in bed, alongside the projection of the artist's image, who could see what was going on in the exhibition hall. Thus, without physically touching the two, they could react and interact with one another, even though you are at a distance. In this experiment, through digital technologies, the artist could be present in a remote space.

### **Spectatorship**

Another important theme within the paradigm of performing arts is audience and spectatorship. In the context of digital performances, the spectator is often no longer passive, but becomes an active user. Abercrombie & Longhurst<sup>40</sup> addresses audience analysis from a sociological perspective, arguing that "[...] a new way of understanding the development of audience research and, more importantly, for conceptualizing the current accumulation of evidence on audience processes."

---

40. Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian J Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1998).

Runcan<sup>41</sup> lists some of the mutations suffered by the public characterized as the “digital generation”: a dramatic decrease in interest and spectatorial practices, due to a shortened attention span and a diminishing appetite for the traditional narrative; decreased interest in reading, coupled with increased interest for developing skills and finding information in the virtual world; alteration and compression of the vocabulary and the development of a slang specific for the digital worlds, including words, phrases and syntaxes borrowed from English; the abandonment of traditional values related to autocracy or copyright due to the evolution of new media and digital technologies, often more rapid than the adoption of rules or legislation to regulate them.

This audience is no longer docile, patient or lenient, but wants to be surprised, seeks novelty and is open to innovation. Interactive digital performance is the kind of show that meets these expectations, nourishing the appetite for new forms of media, to overcome the over-stimulation caused by a technological extension through a new one.

### **The paradigm of human-machine interaction**

The fourth paradigm identified in the intermediate performance study describes the concern for performance theories and what is called the “the aesthetics of interactivity”, identified in the field of human computer interaction (HCI). In the design of human / machine / technology interaction and in the research that addresses this field, performing arts and theories of theatricality are being considered as playing an increasingly important role, even though they do not address all aspects involved in the design of digital technologies<sup>42</sup>.

Beyond the functionalist approaches that have dominated the early development of digital technologies and the design of interactions between individuals and technology, the cultural approach has highlighted the role of aesthetics in developing the strategies and principles that govern the design of interfaces and user assimilation of cultural, and their appropriation as identity objects.

---

41. Miruna Runcan, “Teorii Ale Receptarii Spectacolului - Suport de Curs,” 2011, 95.

42. Lars Erik Udsen and Anker Helms Jørgensen, “The Aesthetic Turn: Unravelling Recent Aesthetic Approaches to Human-Computer Interaction,” *Digital Creativity* 16, no. 4 (January 2005): 205–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14626260500476564>.

In other words, if a first wave of attention was focused on the functionality of technology, a second wave was directed to the professional, productive context in which technology was to be used, while the third wave approached the non-productive and non-rational, which dominate the directions of development of the recent period<sup>43</sup>.

Within the context of the second and especially the third wave of human-machine interaction approaches, some researchers focus on the theories of performing arts and performance practices that can contribute to the development of superior digital products and performance experiences.

### Digital live art

Sheridan defines *digital live art* as the “intersection between live art, computing and human-computer interaction”<sup>44</sup>. She argues that methods and theories used in performing arts can be used to evaluate and measure the man-machine interaction.

Sheridan's live digital art example is *The Talking Quilt*, a collaborative work by Sarah Heitlinger in London, which, within an intergenerational project, has sought to explore the links between community concepts and food / feeding. The project involved the development of a workshop in which a quilt was made (a textile work made of small pieces assembled together in a unitary project) by the contribution of several people in the community, in a sort of seating. During the workshop, the participants were recorded as they talked about the specific habits of their culture, especially around the preparation of food. “The quilt represents a framework stop to the notion of a farm at a given point in time, and involves different communities, including people from hard-to-reach places, such as a Somali community, but also young people or the elderly”<sup>45</sup>.

---

43. Jocelyn Spence, Stuart Andrews, and David M Frohlich, “Now, Where Was I? Negotiating Time in Digitally Augmented Autobiographical Performance,” *Journal of Media Practice* 13, no. 3 (2012): 269–84, [https://doi.org/10.1386/jmpr.13.3.269\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jmpr.13.3.269_1).

44. Sara Heitlinger and Nick Bryan-Kinns, “Understanding Performative Behaviour within Content-Rich Digital Live Art,” *Digital Creativity* 24, no. 2 (June 2013): 112, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14626268.2013.808962>.

45. *Ibid.*, 113.





**Figure 10:** Sara Heitlinger – The Talking Quilt (2011).

In the final work, through the technology embedded in the material, several areas were created that could be activated by a technology embedded in a glove so that a visitor could turn into a participant and activate the recordings.

Alongside the exposed work of art, the context has been created to access a performance experience that includes narrative recorded and rendered based on interaction rules with the object. The reception of such a work goes beyond the frame prescribed by the reception of an artwork exposed in a particular space, because the work itself is far more than the actual object.

### **Experiential performance**

Benford and Giannachi<sup>46</sup> believe that *Rider Spoke*, a work by Blast Theory company, sets the foundation for a “dramaturgy of performance” to express the different ways in which digital technology can be integrated into the performance experience. In this performance, which takes place on the stage of the whole city, the audience is an active participant, being both spectators and those who make the text.

---

46. Steve Benford and Gabriella Giannachi, *Performing Mixed Reality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 23.

Participants can use their own bicycle or borrow one from the project site together with a mobile device mounted on it. Then they get a question and are invited to a secret location where they can record the answer using a map on the mobile device that also works as a geo-location device. In addition, at that location, they will also have the opportunity to discover through the geo-location system the places where other participants have recorded and submitted their answers.

Once in the physical proximity of the place where the responses of other participants were recorded and submitted, the participants can access their content, but only with the equipment received. The participants are both the public and the creators of the content of this project, which is currently available on the web page, so that although it is built according to the classic mixed reality performance model, the performance experience can also be seen in the form of a digital artefact.



**Figure 11:** Blast Theory – Rider Spoke (2007)

In 2011, Blast Theory expanded the original project by launching Riders Have Spoken, a project that contains an archive of several tens of thousands of recordings made so far during project tours around the world. By accessing the points marked on a series of maps of the cities in which the project was run, the audience can witness the recorded stories, this time through the computer, no matter the location. In this case, we are no longer dealing with an experimental performance, but with a multimedia viewing experience specific to the digital media.

These types of performances provide the context for the development of research directions in man-machine interaction that are claimed in the field of performing arts. The analysis of the roles assumed by the user in the performance experiments, as well as their alternation, benefit from the theories specific to public performances in the performing arts as well as in the design of digital games. The value of some “game” approaches is supported by theoreticians in the field of performance studies and established performers such as Schechner or Rosalee Goldberg. Also, in the context of studies related to the aesthetics of man-machine interaction, it is appreciated that theories pertaining to corporeality, temporality or presence, specific to performing arts, can not be ignored.

In conclusion, we believe that – within the context of the development of digital technologies and their omnipresence through mobile technologies in all areas of social life, including art – performance arts and performance theories are of interest not only to the artistic cultural context or to certain subjects in the sciences but also for certain areas of technical sciences.

In particular, the field of human-machine interaction is at a stage of development in which it turns to arts-specific theories and performance studies in an attempt to understand the behavior of the individual in interacting with digital systems and how artefacts that incorporate digital technologies are adopted, used and assimilated. In the same way, performing arts can no longer be studied without taking into account aspects of the integration of digital technologies, the nature of interactions between man and technology, and how cultural artefacts made in the context of new media are integrated and assimilated into the information society.

## Discussion

We have covered four different critical paradigms that map the approach of the digital interactive performance study, each of which covers one or more domains that form part of the multi- and inter-disciplinary character of intermedial performance.

At one point or another, each of the areas covered by the paradigms discussed addresses some aspects of the influence of the digital technology on social life and on the individual, especially in the context in which the ubiquity of digital technologies permeates all areas of life and influences the way we live, we socialize, we learn or we create cultural and artistic values.

From this perspective, we can consider that the way in which digital interactive performance can be taught in a formal educational context, could be approached from the pedagogical perspective of any of these paradigms.

It is difficult to discuss about digital culture without addressing the field of digital arts, be it live performance, or other curatorial models specific for the digital content distributed on different media platforms. The philosophy of technology touches aspects that influence the post-humanist art, and the theories specific to the sociology and anthropology specific to the digital age have a decisive influence on contemporary performance practice. Rapid developments in the field of artificial intelligence introduce new variables into the equation that describes the information society. The regarding the way in which human-machine interaction is built into interface design is increasingly focused on models and experiences that come from theatricality and performing arts.

It would be simple to say that any of the pedagogical models of the mentioned domains can provide the framework for teaching the respective aspects involved in interactive digital performance. But this is one of the areas in which the sum of the parts does not equal with the whole. New solutions should be applied, through a paradigm shift in the educational approach.

In the context of the current crisis facing educational systems around the world, a crisis driven by technological developments and unprecedented access to information, there is a consensus that classical pedagogical methods need to be revised and adapted to new demands in society.

From the point of view of theories and methods, pedagogy focuses on child's formation through leadership, and andragogy, on adult development. None of these approaches sufficiently explain the fact that the learning environment is permanently affected by the development of new technologies.

Hase and Kenyon<sup>47</sup> extended the concept of andragogy, introducing the term "heutagogy", within the context of distance learning. The word comes from the Greek ευρετικός (heurista) - "to discover", εφευρετικός (heuretikos) - „inventive“, εύρημα (heuriskein) - „to find“ and άγω (ago) - „to lead“. Heutagogy designates learning strategies that target mature subjects. Through mentoring processes, existing knowledge can be developed and modified, leading to the creation of new horizons of knowledge. Heutagogy diverts attention from learning as a stage-based process to the ultimate goal of learning, the final product or stage.

---

47. Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon, *Self-Determined Learning: Heutagogy in Action* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

To the extent that we want to train practitioners able to achieve relevant artistic productions in the context of the new digital arts, an innovative, interdisciplinary framework needs to be developed, in which the pedagogical approach should be replaced by a heutagogical one that would enable a practical, collaborative approach.

In the Anglo-Saxon area, since the 1980s, disciplines have been developed in the performance studies that cover the need to analyze narrative discourse from complex perspectives, so today there is a very consistent academic literature. Theoretical constructions have started from the performing practice, and practitioners have come to theorize and discuss in detail both their artistic approaches and the contexts in which they have taken place.

Until recently, in Romania, there was no such concern, the performing arts being concentrated exclusively on theatre studies. Although in recent years this problem has been approached at academic level in various university centers, the approaches are just beginning and there is a lack of tradition in the theoretical discourse formalized at the academic level.

The heutagogical approach is centered on providing learning experiences relevant to the aspirations of the mature learner, motivated and oriented towards a clear goal. Thus, by creating a context that attracts learners from the most diverse contexts, it is possible to build interdisciplinary teams in which the competences of the instructors – experienced practitioners – are complemented by the competencies of the learners, acquired in previous formal or informal contexts. With the most diverse media and technologies available, such a team can have a valuable creative and educational experience, without the formal academic constraints.

The context we have described can be an intensive workshop where learners make direct contact with various digital technologies and where they can build artefacts which illustrate various digital performance categories. The key to success is attracting motivated learners who come with experience or interest in different artistic and technical fields - visual arts, performing arts, music, literature, architecture, but also computer science, communication, cinema, media – and who are opened to new solutions.

## Conclusions

The discussed paradigms incorporate many more themes than those mentioned, but circumscribe the appropriate framework necessary for the opening of research directions and for providing methodological solutions to

the analysis of interactive digital performances. We consider that the grouping of themes within these general paradigms facilitates both the analysis of the narrative discourse around certain forms of performance and the discussion of the aesthetic, philosophical or technological perspectives of the content.

At the intersection of arts and technology, in the context of the information society and the continuous development of digital media, digital interactive performance is an area that can no longer be ignored and academics are challenged to discover new interdisciplinary methodological approaches that address the complexity of this genre.

It is our hope that this study will contribute to such developments.

### Acknowledgements

This paper is a summary of *Critical Paradigms in Digital Interactive Performance*, a doctoral thesis defended in 2016 at The Theatre and Film Doctoral School of Babeş-Bolyai University, from Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Our gratitude goes to the thesis advisor, Prof. dr. Miruna Runcan and to Acad. Sabina Ispas for their encouragement and generous support.

The research was supported by the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed from the European Social Fund and by the Romanian Government under the contract number SOP HRD/1599/1.5/S/136077.

### References

- Abercrombie, Nicholas, and Brian J Longhurst. *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. SAGE Publications, 1998. <http://www.google.it/books?hl=en&lr=&id=WtMPSmNkaYUC&pgis=1>.
- Bay-Cheng, Sarah, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender, and Robin Nelson. *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*. Edited by Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender, and Robin Nelson. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010. <https://books.google.com/books?id=IHgfaL6P0QwC&pgis=1>.
- Benford, Steve., and Gabriella. Giannachi. *Performing Mixed Reality*. MIT Press, 2011. <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/performing-mixed-reality>.
- Bial, Henry. *The Performance Studies Reader*. Psychology Press, 2004. [http://books.google.com/books?id=9\\_EWvlnrxp0C&pgis=1](http://books.google.com/books?id=9_EWvlnrxp0C&pgis=1).

- Birringer, Johanis. *Media and Performance - Along the Border*. Bltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998. [http://books.google.ro/books?id=Sp-uWarorw8C&pg=PA9&dq=video+art/performance+a+border+theory&hl=en&sa=X&ei=SFjMT4z-ItGA-wbn8txg&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=videoart%2Fperformanceaborder theory&f=false](http://books.google.ro/books?id=Sp-uWarorw8C&pg=PA9&dq=video+art/performance+a+border+theory&hl=en&sa=X&ei=SFjMT4z-ItGA-wbn8txg&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=videoart%2Fperformanceaborder theory&f=false).
- Brey, P. "Theories of Technology as Extension of the Human Faculties." *Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Technology. Research in Philosophy and Technology* 19 (2000). [http://www.utwente.nl/bms/wijsb/organization/brey/Publicaties\\_Brey/Brey\\_2000\\_Extension\\_Faculties.pdf](http://www.utwente.nl/bms/wijsb/organization/brey/Publicaties_Brey/Brey_2000_Extension_Faculties.pdf).
- Broadhurst, Susan, and Josephine Machon. *Performance and Technology: Practices of Virtual Embodiment and Interactivity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. [http://www.amazon.com/Performance-Technology-Practices-Embodiment-Interactivity/dp/0230293654/ref=pd\\_sim\\_b\\_4?ie=UTF8&refRID=0PVWNNVKGAK9DPX0G5YJ](http://www.amazon.com/Performance-Technology-Practices-Embodiment-Interactivity/dp/0230293654/ref=pd_sim_b_4?ie=UTF8&refRID=0PVWNNVKGAK9DPX0G5YJ).
- Carlson, Marvin. *Performance : A Critical Introduction*. Routledge, 1996. [https://books.google.ro/books/about/Performance.html?id=bqJoDx0vXPkC&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.ro/books/about/Performance.html?id=bqJoDx0vXPkC&redir_esc=y).
- Carlson, Marvin. *Performance. A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Chapple, Freda., and Chiel Kattenbelt. *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*. Rodopi, 2006. [https://books.google.ro/books/about/Intermediality\\_in\\_Theatre\\_and\\_Performanc.html?id=3skQBmRZBVwC&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.ro/books/about/Intermediality_in_Theatre_and_Performanc.html?id=3skQBmRZBVwC&redir_esc=y).
- Cooper, Harris, and Larry V. Hedges. "RESEARCH SYNTHESIS AS A SCIENTIFIC PROCESS." In *The Handbook of Research Synthesis and Meta-Analysis*, edited by Harris Cooper and Larry V. Hedges, Second edi., 1–16. New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2009.
- Dixon, Steve. *Digital Performance. A History of New Media in Theatre, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*. E-Book kin. Cambrdige, Massachusetts and London: Amazon.com, 2007. <http://archive.neural.it/init/default/show/1613>.
- Doyle, Denise. "Out of This World: Exploring Embodiment and Space through Artistic Processes and Practice." *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 11, no. 1 (2015): 1–17. doi:10.1080/14794713.2014.998097.
- Elwell, J Sage. "Intermedia: Forty Years On And Beyond." *Afterimage* 33, no. 5 (2006): 25–28,30. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/212135676?accountid=15533>.
- Feenberg, Andrew. "What Is Philosophy of Technolgy," 2003. <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B-gZ6gxdu8PeZE9Eb2YwQ0ktb0U/edit>.
- Ferrando, Francesca. "Humans, Cyborgs, Posthumans: Francesca Ferrando at TEDxSiliconAlley," 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGjMUw03Bv0>.
- Friedman, Ken. "Intermedia, Multimedia, Media." *Artifact*, 2007. <http://www.intermediamfa.org/imd501/media/1232972617.pdf>.

- Goldberg, Rosalee. *Perforamce. Live Art from 1909 to the Present*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1979.
- Hase, Stewart, and Chris Kenyon. *Self-Determined Learning: Heutagogy in Action*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013. <https://books.google.com/books?id=SUCaAAAAQBAJ&pgis=1>.
- Heitlinger, Sara, and Nick Bryan-Kinns. "Understanding Performative Behaviour within Content-Rich Digital Live Art." *Digital Creativity* 24, no. 2 (June 14, 2013): 111–18. doi:10.1080/14626268.2013.808962.
- Helbo, André. *Theory of Performing Arts*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1987. <http://books.google.com/books?id=CQtCAAAQBAJ&pgis=1>.
- Koosel, Stacey. "Surfing the Digital Wave: Digital Identity as Extension." In *McLuhan's Philosophy of Media Centennial Conference*, 2011. [https://www.academia.edu/2048738/Surfing\\_the\\_Digital\\_Wave\\_Digital\\_Identity\\_as\\_Extension](https://www.academia.edu/2048738/Surfing_the_Digital_Wave_Digital_Identity_as_Extension).
- Koski, Kaisu. "Instances. Performing an Avatar: Second Life on Stage." In *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, edited by Sara Bey-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavander, and Robin Nelson, 49–55. Amsterdam: Amsteradam University Press, 2010.
- Kwastek, Katja. *Aesthetics of Interaction in Digital Art*. Katja Kwastek, 2013. [http://www.amazon.com/Aesthetics-Interaction-Digital-Katja-Kwastek/dp/0262019329/ref=pd\\_sim\\_b\\_6?ie=UTF8&refRID=09GNGZR5SKMA8R7YB17M](http://www.amazon.com/Aesthetics-Interaction-Digital-Katja-Kwastek/dp/0262019329/ref=pd_sim_b_6?ie=UTF8&refRID=09GNGZR5SKMA8R7YB17M).
- Malita, Liviu. *Extremele Artei*. Editura Accent, 2010.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
- Mullis, Eric. "Dance, Interactive Technology, and the Device Paradigm - ProQuest Central - ProQuest." *Dance Research Journal* 45, no. 3 (2013): 111–24. <http://search.proquest.com.ux4ll8xu6v.useaccesscontrol.com/pqcentral/docview/1541678692?OpenUrlRefId=info:xri/sid:summon&accountid=15533>.
- Powell, Benjamin D., and Tracy Stephenson Shaffer. "The Haunting of Performance Studies." *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 5, no. 1 (2009).
- Rapaport, Herman. "Intermedia: A Consciousness-Based Process. Hans Brader in Conversation with Herman Rapaport." *PAJ* 99 99 (2011): 11–23. [http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/PAJJ\\_a\\_00051](http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/PAJJ_a_00051).
- Runcan, Miruna. "Teorii Ale Receptarii Spectacolului suport 2011," 2011.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance - Introducere Şi Teorie*. Bucureşti: Unitex (Uniter), 2009.
- Spence, Jocelyn, Stuart Andrews, and David M. Frohlich. "Now, Where Was I? Negotiating Time in Digitally Augmented Autobiographical Performance." *Journal of Media Practice*, January 6, 2014. [http://www.tandfonline.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/doi/abs/10.1386/jmpr.13.3.269\\_1#abstract](http://www.tandfonline.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/doi/abs/10.1386/jmpr.13.3.269_1#abstract).
- Udsen, Lars Erik, and Anker Helms Jørgensen. "The Aesthetic Turn: Unravelling Recent Aesthetic Approaches to Human-Computer Interaction." *Digital Creativity* 16, no. 4 (January 10, 2005): 205–16. doi:10.1080/14626260500476564.



**Rodica Mocan** is the vice-dean of the Theatre and Television Faculty, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj. Her undergraduate studies in engineering were followed by a master in art in the United States where she developed a special interest for applications of new media technologies in various domains of life. She holds a PhD in Sociology, focused on e-learning from a sociological perspective, and another one in Theatre and Performing Arts, with a thesis on Multimedia in Performance. She is the recipient of a doctoral grant from the Romanian Academy. During her academic career she developed and delivered courses involving new media technologies in online journalism, e-learning, e-government, multimedia design and, more recently, multimedia in performance and new media documentary.

## *In Search of the Theatrical Unit of Meaning: Exploring Mnemonic by Simon McBurney*

ANA BOARIU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract<sup>2</sup>:** The author is searching for the theatrical unit of meaning exploring the way Simon McBurney builds up the performance in *Mnemonic*, a Complicite Theatre production created for the 1999 Salzburg Festival. Inspired by head-driven phrase structure grammar and Chinese pictograms, the paper looks for verbs and actions that define a matrix, where each element determines the complex theatrical sign. Any change of one single sign-element causes the meaning of the whole to change.

**Keywords:** Simon McBurney, Mnemonic, Complicite, theatre semiotics, morpheme

*"Theatre is about the collective imagination... Everything I use on-stage is driven by the subject matter and what you might call the text – but that text can be anything, from a fragment of movement or music to something you see on a TV."*

Simon Mcburney

The beginning of the performance: A few objects and, suddenly, a world is born. How? When we watch a performance, do we understand it only through emotions or do we perceive it as another kind of language? Can we analyse it from the viewpoint of the signs used, and, if so, we should then ask ourselves: What communication code is used? What kind of signs are present? How can we understand the signs paradigmatically

---

1. Université de Lorraine, Metz, France; Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. ana.boariu@gmail.com.  
2. Translated into English by Camelia Oana

and syntagmatically, as they appear simultaneously and successively? How is the meaning of the performance built? Can we identify one unit of meaning in theatre, as there is one in spoken languages? What would this be? The question of the theatrical unit of meaning is a very debated one and several researchers, among which Anne Ubersfeld<sup>3</sup>, deny its existence or, at least, the capacity of a theatrical unit of meaning to function similar to a morpheme in natural languages. We will discuss here, from a semiotic point of view, a production of *Complicite* Theatre, *Mnemonic*, a performance created in 1999 for the Salzburg Festival, later played at Riverside Studios, London, after a two-year long tour in Europe<sup>4</sup>. The scope is to see how signs function, how minimal units of meaning are built through a complex sign and how this complex sign can switch meanings, when only one component of it is changed, through the permanent re-semantisation of objects on stage.

### *Mnemonic*

(Original) cast: Katrin Cartlidge, Simon McBurney, Tim McMullan, Eric Mallett, Kostas Philippoglou, Catherine Schaub Abkarian, and Daniel Wahl

Set Design: Michael Levine

Lighting Design: Paul Anderson

Sound Design: Christopher Shuff

Director: Simon McBurney

Duration: 2 hours, no intermission

### **Just a Chair**

As indicated in the stage directions in the printed version, the performance begins with an empty stage, on which there is a chair. Simon enters the proscenium – and Simon is not the name of a character, but the very author, director, and co-founder of *Complicite*<sup>5</sup>. McBurney asks the audience to turn off their phones and introduces the theme of the performance. The author-

---

3. Anne Ubersfeld, *Lire Le Théâtre* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1978).

4. Author has seen the performance during the European tour, at Bobigny, in 2001.

5. *Complicite* is a British group founded in 1983 by three former students of the Paris international school led by Jacque Lecoq, i.e. Simon McBurney, Annabel Arden and Marcello Magni. At the beginning, their performances were based on scripts written by McBurney, such as *A minute too late* (1984), *A disappearing number* (2007) or *Mnemonic* (1999), but also on classical texts, like *The Master and Margarita* (2011/12), *Endgame* (2009), *Measure for Measure* (2004), *The Chairs* (1997). <http://www.complicite.org/>

director gives a short speech on memory, in which scientific information intertwines with anecdotic details, everything connects, or rather does not connect, just like memories, he jumps from one thing to the other and ends up presenting the chair on stage. It is not just a chair: it is the chair that the director inherited from his father, a chair he used in a previous performance, *The Chairs*. The author invests the chair with an emotional charge, shares personal memories with the audience, individualizing the object and granting it an identity. Later on, this information will help spectators perceive the chair as a sign. A sign of the absent, who has left, and, at the same time, a sign of the expected, who isn't coming, a presence-absence. Later on, when scientists present their theories and point towards the empty chair as if Ötzi were there, the semantic charge of the object not only turns it into an indexical sign for the iceman. It becomes a symbolic sign of the presence-absence. Through this chair, the iceman who lived 5,000 years ago can also be identified with the absent father, who will never come back. At the same time, the empty chair is waiting to be occupied, it calls for a presence. The expectation is finally met when Simon-Virgil "lends his body" to signify the iceman, becoming a sign by resemblance, an icon of the perfectly preserved mummy studied by the scientists. And which they cannot know.

Finally, all the actors become Ötzi: one by one, they lie on the table, freeze, are exposed, the previous gets up, joins those walking, projected like shadows on the wall behind the stage, a wave that propagates and returns. The people walk. They each stop for a second, lying on the table in Ötzi's position, then start walking again. Repetitively. Once again. Once more. For the last time.

### **The Sleeping Mask and the Leaf in the Plastic Bag**

Let's go back to the director's speech at the beginning of the performance<sup>6</sup>. Entering the proscenium and starting a dialogue with the audience, Simon McBurney engages the spectators by asking them to take the plastic bag they found on their chairs, to put on the "sleeping mask" (similar to the one you receive in a plane), to hold the leaf in their hands, and to try and feel its

---

6. Simon McBurney: in an interview for Studio 360, the actor recites the monologue at the beginning of the play again. You realize it sounds very realistic, not at all like a monologue – you actually have the feeling that it is the beginning of a conference and that the speaker is a passionate scientist.

ribs. The "sleeping mask" is just a scarf, the leaf is just a leaf. Everyone is invited to go back in time, imagine they are children on a beach, their parents at their side, their grandparents behind them. They are asked to imagine all their ancestors, one by one, to the most distant. To feel the ribs of the leaf and compare them to the lines of a family tree. To watch the lines of ancestors come down to each of us from the depths of time.

After the chair, the leaf is the second object invested by McBurney as a symbolic sign, leaf-family tree; it is not abstract, but a very concrete symbolist sign for spectators, emotionally charged with the memory of their own parents, grandparents, great-grandparents. In the end, the line of people succeeding one behind the other, evoked at the beginning through the leaf-sign, materializes. The mere line of actors becomes the sign of your own ancestors, succeeding like a wave, always coming. They become... us! By taking two objects and investing them with – his own and the spectators' – personal memories, McBurney invites the spectator to open up and be part of a process of signifying, remembering and imagining. For each person there, the performance that is about to take place will resemble a memory process like a game of imagination.

SIMON: Modern theories of memory evolve around the idea of fragmentation. Different elements are, apparently, stored in different areas of the brain. And it is not so much the cells that are important in the act of memory, but the connection between the cells, the synapses, the synaptic connections. And these connections are being made and remade. Constantly. (...) Anyway, our job, the job of remembering is essentially not only an act of retrieval but a creative thing, it happens in the moment, it's an act, an act... of the imagination.<sup>7</sup>

Back then, and even today, it is striking to use a direct speech at the beginning of the performance, held by the leading actor (who also happens to be the author and director), which, throughout the performance, blends with the cast's stunning cohesion, with an exceptionally qualitative impro based on physical actions, with a power of suggestion based on just a couple of props and set elements and with an apt use of light, sound and video projections to tell the story. The theme of the performance – as announced by Simon McBurney – is memory and identity; a feeling of

---

7. Simon McBurney, *Mnemonic* (London-New York-Sydney: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 15.

uncertainty connects the two, by the impossibility to determine one or the other. The only real thing left is imagination, theatre. Watching the performance, the audience perceived it as a wonderful speech about the meaning of theatre: a fusion of memory and imagination, with the complicity of the spectator. Talking about the meetings with the audience after the performances in the European tour, McBurney states:

It is like this everywhere: outpourings of individual stories provoked by the 'memory journey' on which we take the audience. I remember that was one of the ways in which we made the show in the first place, going on our own memory journeys.<sup>8</sup>

What is *Mnemonic* about? Two main narrative threads intertwine, connected by the story of Virgil (Simon McBurney), the main character, a distant witness of the two stories. One night when he is alone in his flat, Virgil telephonically finds out about the drama that Alice, his fiancée, is going through while in Russia, where she is looking for her father, whom she thought dead. The same night, the TV shows the heated debate of the scientific community trying to identify the iceman, Ötzi, an intact mummy found in the Alps in 1991, at the border between Austria and Italy. The two parallel stories begin with an attempt to discover the identity of a lost person, starting from some remains, some signs, which can be interpreted in very different ways. One of the searches is intimate and personal, while the other is public and scientific, and gradually becomes metaphorical. The theatrical discourse combines the plan of the emotional speech with that of objective-scientific rhetoric, but eventually neither of the two, no matter how hard they try to retrieve the memory, can truly determine the identity of the other, of the hero. Or ours.

In "Performing Europe: Identity Formation for a 'New' Europe", Janelle Reinelt identifies the way in which the theme is reflected in the stylistics of the performance, where:

The transformation of objects and bodies is central to the idea that we humans carry the past concretely within our container-selves, in our brains, our postures, our nakedness. (McBurney's body is his, Virgil's,

---

8. Kurt Andersen, "Actor Simon McBurney on Memory" (Studio 360, 2001), <http://www.wnyc.org/story/150603-actor-simon-mcburney-memory/>.

and the Iceman's, but the more arresting substitution is a chair which becomes McBurney's grandfather, a chair from the group's previous production of Ionesco's *The Chairs*, and the body of the Iceman under examination and exhibition.)<sup>9</sup>

The permanent re-semanticization of objects is a central element of the show. Subtly and progressively, it goes from iconic signs – the chair is a chair, whether in a conference hall or in a tram – to symbolic signs, passing through indexical signs – a mere capsized object indicating an obstacle, which, read in the paradigmatic plan alongside other signs, can be understood as a rock climbed by the mountaineers who find Ötzi. Anne Ubersfeld says, as quoted by Miruna Runcan:

Any theatrical sign, even if it is only marginally indexical and purely iconic, can be involved in an operation we call re-semanticization: any sign, even one created by accident, functions as a question asked of the spectator.<sup>10</sup>

The chair – the first object-sign of the performance, will be permanently re-semanticized, defining time and space (always imaginary). The actors grab some chairs, place them in a row, facing the audience, and suddenly become scientists holding a conference; they line them up single file, one behind the other, wobble while seating and become simple travellers in a tram. And the same chairs, turned over, next to the table, which the actors climb, dressed as mountaineers, become the dangerous cliffs on a mountain. Lights and sounds help them create the space and time, but, first and foremost, they are helped by the complicity between actors and spectators, who have to follow them and to accept the sign's permanent re-semanticization. Objects always become a new thing, through the way in which actors use them. They play with them like a child plays with a piece of wood. And actually, in the main character's imagination, everything happens in a flat where an emotionally wrecked man spends a night alone watching TV.

---

9. Jannette G. Reinelt, "Performing Europe: Identity Formation for a 'New' Europe," *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 3 (2001): 375.

10. Miruna Runcan, *Pentru O Semiotică a Spectacolului Teatral* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 2005), 68.

### **Blackout. The Actor Becomes a Character. The Stage Becomes a Flat**

The performance *per se*, a game of imagination, begins with a blackout. The lights go out, which the spectators should not even truly perceive, as their eyes are covered with the scarf. The voice of Simon, who was just talking on the microphone, goes on – this time recorded – as he makes the speech about memory. He asks the spectators to remove the scarves. Simon, now Virgil, is a spectator whose phone is ringing; he picks up, goes up on stage... and the stage becomes his world.

The third major stage of “visible” semanticization happens when Simon the actor-director becomes the character Virgil and – during a conversation – turns the stage into his own apartment. Space and time are first and foremost instituted through the character's words. To begin with, he describes the real space and time, i.e. that of the theatre he is in: Simon-Virgil starts by telling his friend that he has to exit the hall to talk to him; he came to the theatre hoping to see something interesting, but he is watching a show that began with a conference and an odd scene, where the spectators’ eyes were covered and they were told to remember their childhood...

Virgil goes up on stage. He tells his friend he got home. It’s evening. The space of his flat is drawn up around him before our eyes: a bed, a sink, a table and a TV set are brought in. Lights and a transparent plastic curtain isolate the bedroom.

### **Types of Discourse. Linguistic Functions**

In *Mnemonic*, the subtlety of the author-director consists of playing with several types of discourse, using several types of signs and placing one function of the linguistic discourse or the other at the forefront. According to Jakobson’s general schema<sup>11</sup>, six elements constitute the message, i.e. the sender and the receiver, the message is sent through a code, into a context and requires a contact between the sender and the receiver. The fundamental linguistic functions occur by placing the accent on one or the other of the six elements. In *Mnemonic*, the surprising thing is that, instead of being engaged into a poetic world, the audience seems to be watching a conference. The first text seems to be highlighting the context, thus first emphasizing the *referential* function. At the same time, the end of the monologue, when

---

11. Roman Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Style in Language*, ed. Sebeok Thomas (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1960).



Simon makes the audience participate, highlighting the contact between the sender and the receiver, the actor and the audience, emphasizes the *phatic* function and then immediately the *conative* function. The actor asks the spectator to participate. The second scene, when the set is constituted under the eyes of the spectator, and when the accent falls on the code, the *metalinguistic* function becomes fundamental. Almost throughout the entire show, each change of set, the way in which objects are visibly re-semanticized highlights the metalinguistic function, creating a rhythm and permanently rousing the audience's imagination. Last but not least, the *emotive* and the *poetic* function are also used in the discourse of the performance.

The *poetic* function is evident when the accent is placed on the message. As the show unfolds, we notice that the *referential* function fades away gradually, giving way to the *poetic* function. It all happens like a game – the whole performance is a game, right? – and McBurney induces this subtle shift by changing the way in which the video projection is used. At the beginning, an element characteristic of Virgil's space is the TV set. It signals that we are in a modern flat at also that it is the middle of the night. An important referent: scientific documentaries are broadcasted in the dead of night! At sound level, the TV preserves the reference to the context: the study of memory... We can see the light play in the box, even though, visually speaking, we can't clearly perceive anything from this world which constitutes the context.

The video projection returns later on. For the first time in the show, a poetic and emotional moment takes place. All evening, Virgil waited for Alice, his fiancée, to call. At the sound level, we receive lots of signals: his nocturnal talks with his friend, the messages he leaves on Alice's phone. Finally, Alice calls. She is in a phone booth, parallel to him on stage and quite close to the bed where Virgil is. Still, they are far away from each other. Alice has her back turned to him, we see her in profile. Virgil is at the front of the stage, looking in the distance, over the audience. He is almost naked, as he usually when at home, only wearing boxers and nothing else above the waist. And during this dialogue so longed by Virgil, Alice's face is projected on his chest. The projection on Simon-Virgil's chest is no longer a reference to the referential context, but draws the attention on the message itself, as it is. Touch-non-touch, proximity-distance, remembrance-presence, materiality-immateriality, body-image, this highly poetic moment simultaneously evokes all antinomic pairs.

At the end of the performance, the use of video projections will reveal the very theme-metaphor, the man projecting himself in the past of his own species, i.e. over 5,000 years ago. This time encompassing the entire wall at the back of the stage – the show was also played in Bobigny on a huge stage, as big as the one at the Bucharest National Theatre –, the projection shows a window frame which, once again, should open outwards, to the performance's reference-universe. On the contrary, all the actors step into the light of the projector, with their iconic bodies, signs of the iceman, of the man who lived 5,000 years ago, and their bodies become a shadow projected on the window.

### **The Problem of Minimal Unity or of Minimal Theatrical Sign**

Going back to the beginning of the performance and to the way in which the author-director makes up codes, we shall now discuss what a sign is, how it is built in theatre, remind how complex it is, and briefly stop upon the problem of minimal unit.

In a theatre performance – just like in film – the message is sent through different channels, through multiple signals, and:

signification is born from the systemic relation (intersection) of two axes, the syntagmatic axis (the horizontal succession of signs) and the paradigmatic axis (the vertical of associative relations between signs, in relations of opposition, continuity, alternating, etc.)<sup>12</sup>

Because of this, determining a minimal unit, so that theatre is considered "a language" in itself, seems impossible. Anne Ubersfeld provides a reason for the impossibility of these units' existence, stating that, in theatre, one cannot identify phonemes, those minimal linguistic units (audible in any natural language) that, together, make up morphemes, the minimal unit of meaning. Nevertheless, Ubersfeld thinks that theatre is a language and describes its syntax using actants and the relations between them, using concepts from Greimas' semantics and Propp's narratology. This way of reading theatre seems to be tributary to European linguistic structure and to the syntax of European languages. Through the way in which we create writing, we are structured to consider that abstraction is the norm, that the connection between sign and signifier is very arbitrary, based, in natural languages, on a randomly selected sound and a sign, which in its turn, is arbitrarily chosen to represent a sound.

---

12. Runcan, 65.

We have a sign for each phoneme; together, they form a morpheme, the minimal morphological unit, which can be a word in itself or not, can have a content or can be a determinant. Of course, since theatre uses different channels parallel: gestural and physical activity, movement, text, lights, scenography, costumes, music, and, in each plan, we can identify signs that work parallelly, completing or opposing each other, – a context is born, where the attempt to define morphemes seems like a useless, absurd effort. This might be so, as, if the definition of language itself is based on the experience of natural, mainly European languages, theatre can only be considered a *parole* at best, not a language.

However, both Tadeusz Kowzan, and Miruna Runcan try to define a semiologic unit of meaning. For the first, this equals to: “a slice containing all the signs emitted simultaneously, the duration of which equals that of the sign that lasts least.”<sup>13</sup>

Miruna Runcan completes his words, defining a possible minimal unit as that chosen by both partners involved in the discourse “based on a meaning homogeneity established between the elements, and homogeneity is set by the sign with the greatest contextual domination force related to the discourse flow.”<sup>14</sup>

The problem that may arise is that, when presented via different channels, signs or signals have different durations. And drawing a line between minimal units, if they exist, would mean that both the sender, and the receiver accept and recognise it, deciding whether duration or intensity, or maybe both, are decisive in order to establish the separation criterion.

A minimal unit is absolutely necessary for the sender to structure his message, and based on this unit, if it is well structured, the receiver will find it easier to decode the message. Regardless of the different duration of the signals on different channels, it is enough that one message is significantly modified on one channel for the meaning of the entire ensemble to change. Despite the fact that there are no “constant discreet and coded fixed units”, theatre “has the advantage of being able to generate, even during the communicational flow, a synchronic sequencing of sign ensembles, into meaning units equal to complex signs”<sup>15</sup>.

---

13. Ibid., 70.

14. Ibid., 72-73.

15. Ibid., 73.

## Theatrical Sign

We can understand the theatrical sign itself as a minimal unit of meaning, made up of a set of signs, which, through juxtaposition, acquire a different meaning. A change within this set changes the meaning of the whole, as we could see in the analyse of *Mnemonic*.

Can we think theatre similar to a language in which each written morpheme breaks down not into phonemes, but into other signs, as it often is a compound sign? Looking at a sign, you decode its components, which always represent something, until you get to a simple line. In Chinese, for example, each constituting element of a complex sign represents a very concrete object that can be touched, drawn. But together, they acquire a totally different meaning.

好 — a woman next to her son. Means: "Good".

问 — what do we see? A mouth inside an open gate. It means "to ask".

回 — and here, a mouth inside a closed gate, which means "to answer".

In theatre, a minimal unit, which makes sense, works just like a sign in Chinese writing, which, in its turn, is made up of elements that also have an independent meaning. It is true that there is no rule based on which to identify a finite number of units of meaning in theatrical language. Just as, in the past, Chinese writing was almost unsystematizable: with over 40,000 signs, whose number could increase infinitely, in theatre, new "units of meaning" can be created all the time. And when we can read a sign from one performance to the other, we think we are dealing with dead theatre.

Communication would be extremely difficult if the author of the performance would not "rely" on minimal units, which make sense, if he wouldn't somehow, more or less evidently, emphasize the border between these units. The borders may seem "fluid", if the tears are not marked well enough. Perhaps they are never perceived. They exist, just like in film. Or they should exist.

In *Mnemonic*, units of meaning are suggestively individualized and well marked by tears, especially at the level of sound. Analysing the first complex theatrical sign in *Mnemonic*, we can understand how, by changing an element within the sign, a new sense is created, different from that of its constituting parts. And at the same time, that the signals perceived on different channels, although they may be signs, lose their individual meaning and acquire a new meaning in the context, simultaneously with other signs.

### Virgil's Flat – the Minimal Unit of Meaning at the Beginning of the Story

On the almost dark stage, behind a plastic curtain, we can distinguish the light coming from a TV set and the presence of a bed. Together, these become the sign of a disillusioned young man, left by his wife. The bedroom where the main character spends his days alone is signified. It is evening and he is watching TV. News about some American scientific research is on. About how we might get to find out what happened 5,000 years ago.

Despite several objects being present on stage at the same time, they do not work as independent signs, although they each mean something. Together, however, they acquire a new meaning and constitute one unit, a unit that has a meaning. If we modify anything in the above-described image, any one of the signs, the final meaning will change.

Let's play a game. We have the same elements: bed, table, TV set, light, hero, characterized through a costume and gestural activity. Let's change the character's costume: he is no longer in his boxers, but lying on the bed in a suit. There's a suitcase next to him. All the other elements stay the same, and still we're no longer in the bedroom of a single young man hit by melancholy (we'll find out later why), but we might be in a hotel. Another change regarding the costume: he might wear prison clothing or handcuffs. The situation changes radically. We will understand he is in prison. Let's suppose that the sound coming from the TV changes. Or the light. The ensemble of signals or signs reaching us via various channels, read by association, in a paradigmatic plan, only mean something together. Individually, they are nothing but set elements and props.

In *Mnemonic*, the actors constantly use the same objects: bed, table, chair. The TV is off. Virgil is lying on the floor. Alice is on the bed. At sound level, we can hear the loud noise of a moving train, it seems real. Nevertheless, the fact that Virgil is still in this space, but asleep, suggests that he is dreaming. The bed is, at the same time, the one in Virgil's flat, but also the one in Alice's berth. And, in reality, it is just an object-bed on a stage, the extraordinary object that does not only signify itself, but is open to being invested, through the complicity between actor and spectator, with any signification.

For it to have a meaning and to be decoded, it obviously needs what Miruna Runcan suggests and what Simon McBurney calls *complicity from the spectator*. A common referent must exist, through which the elements

chosen to signify are absolutely necessary and, at the same time, enough to create a sign that is understood. Any noise, any extra element disturbs attention. Any missing element gives the sign a degree of indeterminacy.

McBurney characterizes the state he aimed at suggesting at the beginning through: "Emotionally unhappy, you can't sleep!"<sup>16</sup>

General situation: A man is alone in his flat, after his girlfriend left him. He walks around, calls his friend, can't sleep, watches TV. At a certain moment, his girlfriend calls in the middle of the night and tells him where she is and what happened to her.

The idea behind the play was to mimic this chaotic theories on memories. For example, in my flat in London I often watch TV... at three o'clock in the morning, and you get these amazing programmes about all sorts of factual stuff.<sup>17</sup>

This experience, lived by the author, can only make the theatrical sign intelligible if shared by the audience. If the spectator is not part of the same world, for example coming from a quiet, isolated village where he doesn't even have a TV set, everything happening from this moment on might be completely unknown and unintelligible.

### Theatrical Convention and Codes

In the case of *Mnemonic*, Simon McBurney chooses to announce and implement the theatrical convention at the beginning. He implements it in complicity with the spectator. He presents it in the monologue at the beginning of the performance. As mentioned before, the discourse covers several functions – referential, phatic, and metalinguistic – and announces the theme of the show: exploring the way in which memory works and defining our identity. At the same time, the spectator is invited to join the actors' imaginary game, using very few, permanently re-semanticized objects, through which stories are created; these stories overlap in the mind of a Londoner insomniac and all have to do with an identity search. In the case of *Mnemonic*, the set was made up of a bed, a table, some chairs, and a phone booth at a certain moment. There was nothing else on stage. And

---

16. Andersen, "Actor Simon McBurney on Memory."

17. Ibid.

successively, or even parallelly, we are in Simon's bedroom, in a train or a tram in a Russian city, in a conference hall where scientists talk about Ötzi, in a dissection room, on a mountain. Everything is fragmented and fragmentary, identities changes, synapses and connections between objects are recreated. Using memory and imagination, using Virgil as a pretext, McBurney invites us to explore our identity. "Theatrical conventions will never equal to an inventory of codes used to produce and interpret the message in the continuous flow of theatrical discourse."<sup>18</sup>

In the performance, we see clothing codes, based on which we recognise social or professional categories: mountaineers, researchers, the police officer. Behaviour codes are also present: the scientists at the conference take a rigid stand, in a line on a stage, presenting their papers in front of an audience.

Making use of these socio-cultural codes, the group quickly suggests to the spectator who or where the characters are, especially as their role and location changes so quickly. Besides the two main characters played by Simon McBurney and Katerin Kartridge, the other actors do not play one character, but almost work as a whole body, improvising and, through suggestion, always recreating other situations, other groups of characters, with no distinct individualities. As mentioned above, the socio-cultural code plays an important part: a spectator who does not have the same referent as the author, who has never experienced a sleepless night in the middle of a big city, will not understand the state of the main character, the anxiety of a townsman who was left by his girlfriend, is an insomniac watching TV in the middle of the night, whose mind makes whirly connections. Stories intertwine, he recalls memories, fragments, details, impressions...

The idea behind this piece was almost like a geometrical structure. And I thought of seven different stories, essentially four. And the first line of a story is a story of a woman who goes East, looking for her past.... The second story is a man going West, looking for his future, who is the Greek taxi driver who happens to have picked both myself and my girlfriend in two separate situations. The third story is almost like a vertical line, which is the story of a five thousand years old body that is discovered on the Austrian-Italian border in 1991. And the fourth story is the story that I have already mentioned, of the man who is alone in his flat, who is both heartbroken and obsessed by all sorts of ideas as to

---

18. Runcan, *Pentru O Semiotică a Spectacolului Teatral*, 65.

what constitutes our lives. And I tried to literally fragment all the stories and then interweave them so that it mimics how our brain works.<sup>19</sup>

After bringing about, through a metalinguistic discourse, some signs (an iconic and symbolic sign as the chair, an iconic sign as himself, Simon-Virgil, and an indexical sign as the flat), the minimal units of meaning succeed. And, although we are not talking about a language, they follow certain syntax rules.

### On Syntax

Regarding syntax, our normal syntactic grammatical model places the subject on the first place and then the predicate. It is not by chance that the syntax proposed by Ubersfeld, which is very functional and applied to the construction and analysis of a text, starts from the actant. But from the point of view of someone who every now and then builds a performance, a syntax based solely on actants is not very helpful. When building a performance, you start from a text, and the actants are given. If you improvise, you make them up. But still, all you have is a text. To move from text to performance, as the actors would say when passing from reading to the stage, you have to start moving it. In the syntax of a theatre performance, the verb comes first, not the noun, the predicate, not the subject, the action, not the actant. Another model, another language serving as a model might be of help.

In an ancient language – and by that, I mean another ancient language, Hebrew – sentences begin with the verb. And the rest of the words, all the other words, are formed based on the verb. If we would first try to identify not the actants in a theatre performance, but the transformations, we might find it easier to identify minimal units of meaning. And the minimal unit of meaning will be that in which a transformation can be identified, defined by a verb.

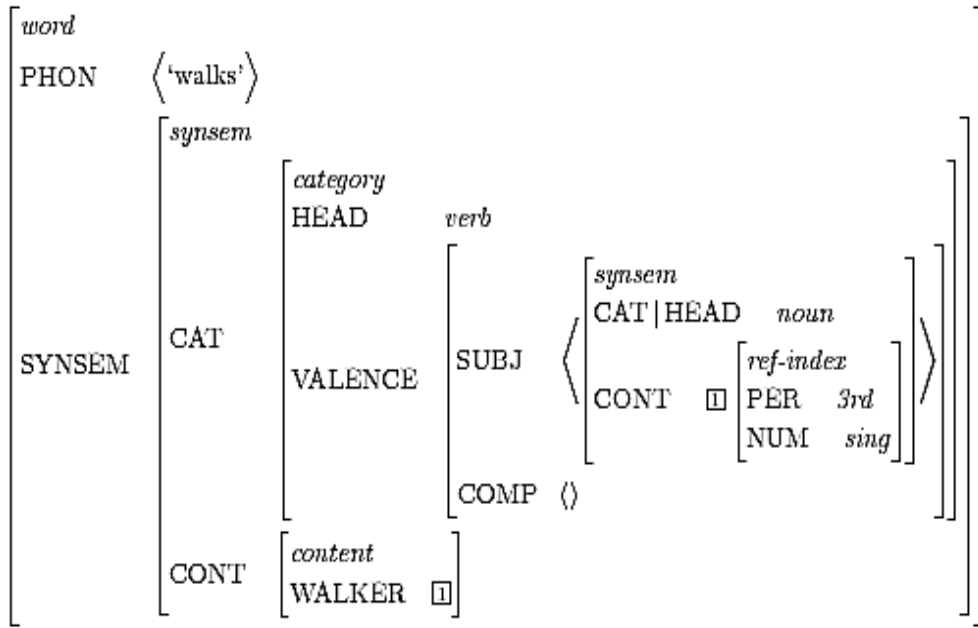
A useful mathematical matrix model might be that of a grammar whose sentences are structured through keywords, i.e. HPSG – *head-driven phrase structure grammar*<sup>20</sup>. This model uses keywords (“heads”) to make up matrices which in any human language determine both the syntactic form and the semantic interpretation of the sentences they appear in. An example of such a matrix for English is the one below, starting from “walk”:

---

19. Andersen, “Actor Simon McBurney on Memory.”

20. Carl Pollard and Ivan Sag, eds., *Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994).





**Fig. 1:** Example of an attribute value matrix for “walks”

In a natural language, a verb-based matrix entails that the semantic contents and the syntactic connections required by the verb are determined: whether it requires a subject or not, whether it requires a direct object or several types of objects. This could be a model for the creation of a complex theatrical sign.

Let us go back to the theatrical sign at the beginning of *Mnemonic*, as described by McBurney himself: “Emotionally unhappy, you can’t sleep!” Turning it into a verb-based matrix, we get two units in the first scene, the main scene built starting from the main verb “can’t sleep”, and a subdivision, a determinative verbal clause, “emotionally unhappy”, expressed through another series of actions, which, in turn, become a sign:

Phon/Verb: can't sleep (you lie down, get up, lie down somewhere else, etc.) – insomnia

SYNSEM: Category: HEAD: Verb: can't sleep  
valence: subject: Virgil: a man, single  
objects:  
    where: in his flat:  
        signs: a bed, a table, a sink  
    when: at night –  
        sign: a certain type of light,  
            a night documentary on TV  
        why: emotionally unhappy  
            (another HEAD: verb)  
        sign: a phone that doesn't ring  
(Virgil calls in vain, then a friend rings...)

The signs in this matrix, although it seems like they have an independent meaning, only exist simultaneously, like a constellation of signs, which can only create the main theatrical sign, which is also a unit of meaning, together. Mutually, when, as a spectator, you look at the stage, and the signs you are trying to decode do not make up a matrix led by a "head" that is the verb, you will have trouble finding the unit of meaning!

The first verb: "can't sleep!" And then what happens? "You climb a mountain."

These units of meaning succeed, creating a syntax by alternating rhythm and movement. Evidently, signs can also be analysed separately at the end of the performance, by channel, but their meaning would have arisen from the context. We can analyse the stylistic unit, the way in which the message is coherently sent by the artists on each channel, parallelly. Whether they use counterpoints, or agreements etc.

### **Who Produces the Meaning? The Sender or the Receiver?**

Let's go back to the spectator and to meaning. Simon McBurney is a founder of the theatre group *Complicite*. He chose its name and the name expresses the way in which he understands making theatre. To him, it is not the actor who gives a meaning to the gestures and the objects on stage. Meaning is born from complicity with the spectator.

Theatre is not even what you see on the stage. It's all about how the audience imagine. And with the idea of complicity... It's not only the idea of complicity between the people on the stage. But between the people on the stage and the people in the audience.<sup>21</sup>

McBurney keeps repeating this: "It's the audience who creates theatre. It's an imaginative act on the part of the audience. And that is theatre's appeal, that's why theatre continues."<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

We have explored in this analyse of *Mnemonic* how an object on stage can be permanently invested with meaning by the complicity between actors and audience. In the same time, we saw how the performance is built by a succession of complex signs, which the audience perceives in synchronicity, but also in time. Whenever one single object is reinvested with another meaning - be it clothing, light, sound etc. - the complex sign changes its meaning. This functioning of a theatrical unit of meaning brought us to make a parallel to languages which uses pictograms, like the Chinese, where a new meaning is derived from the association of individual signs: mother and child, mouth and door brought together loose their original meaning and gain a totally new one, only through their association. Further, in order to understand how the syntax of a minimal theatrical unit can function, we turned towards the head-driven phrase structure grammar, using verbs and actions to structure all other syntax elements around them. The difficulty of perceiving minimal units of meaning in theatre, which can create a syntax and a grammar of their own, could be tributary of a way to perceive and think of language as an arbitrary association of signs and meaning, proper to the European thinking. Turning towards Eastern languages and writing systems that use pictograms might be helpful to start thinking differently about theatre and its units of meaning.

---

21. Andersen, "Actor Simon McBurney on Memory."

22. Carol Rocamora, "McBurney Meets Miller: The Acclaimed British Experimentalist Stretches an American Classic to New Dimensions," *American Theatre* 25, no. 10 (2008): 32.

## References

- Andersen, Kurt. "Actor Simon McBurney on Memory." Studio 360, 2001. <http://www.wnyc.org/story/150603-actor-simon-mcburney-memory/>.
- Dickson, Andrew. "Simon McBurney on His Theatre Group, Complicite." The Guardian, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnbPAGeA6Ec>.
- Jakobson, Roman. "Linguistics and Poetics." In *Style in Language*, edited by Sebeok Thomas. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1960.
- Matt, Trueman. "Interview: The Founders of Complicité." *Financial Times*, May 24, 2013.
- McBurney, Simon. *Mnemonic*. London-New York-Sydney: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.
- Pollard, Carl, and Ivan Sag, eds. *Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994.
- Reinelt, Jannette G. "Performing Europe: Identity Formation for a 'New' Europe." *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 3 (2001).
- Rocamora, Carol. "McBurney Meets Miller: The Acclaimed British Experimentalist Stretches an American Classic to New Dimensions." *American Theatre* 25, no. 10 (2008).
- Runcan, Miruna. *Pentru O Semiotică a Spectacolului Teatral*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 2005.
- Ubersfeld, Anne. *Lire Le Théâtre*. Paris: Editions Sociales, 1978.

**Ana Boariu (Aka Anca Berlogea)** is a theatre and film director born 1968. She is currently a PhD student at the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj. After graduating theatre directing in Bucharest in 1994, and theology in 1997, she finished her master degree at the Catholic Institute in Paris in 2002, with a paper on "Memory and testimony in the Gospel of John as starting point for a theatrical representation". Theatre and Bible remains her main research area, both at a theoretical level, and in practice. But her practice is far larger, including journalism as well as television, documentary and film production.



## **INTERVIEWS AND PROJECT REPORTS**



“I’ve always believed that a critical spirit comes with  
creative features”

*Interview with Cristina Modreanu, theatre critic, curator,  
editor in chief of Scena.ro magazine*

MIRUNA RUNCAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The present interview with Cristina Modreanu focuses on her project Comedia Remix, a project meant to revive the Bucharest Comedy Theatre’s archives and present them in new formats to the contemporary audiences. The project consists of an exhibition, the publishing of a bi-lingual catalogue of the exhibition, a documentary and a series of conferences based on themes inspired by the research. The project places the evolution of the art of theatre in the larger context of ‘60,’70 and ‘80 decades from a cultural, sociological and anthropological perspective. The curator discusses the evolution of the project, the methodologies employed and the relationship between critics and curators in the current context of cultural journalism.

**Keywords:** performative archives, curating, Comedia Remix

**Cristina Modreanu** (b.1974) is a curator, theatre critic and expert in performing arts based in Bucharest, Romania and New York, USA. She holds a PHD in theatre from the Theatre and Film University in Bucharest and she is the author of five books on Romanian Theatre. Modreanu is currently the editor of the Performing Arts Magazine Scena.ro which she co-founded in 2008, curator for theatre and performance events and an associate professor at Center for Excellence in Visual



---

1. Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.  
runcan.miruna@ubbcluj.ro.



Studies, Bucharest University. She is also a Fulbright Alumna and she was Visiting Scholar at NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Performance Studies Department, New York 2011-2012.

**Miruna Runcan:** *How was the idea of the Performative Archive dedicated to the Comedy Theatre born? Did you have any pre-existing models in mind, or was everything elaborated/structured in progress?*

**Cristina Modreanu:** In 2014-2015, when we started the project *Comedia Remix* at the Comedy Theatre together with Maria Drăghici, we had several models in mind, especially those of our Polish friends and colleagues of the "Zbigniew Raszewski" Theatre Institute in Warsaw, as well as the exhibitions at Maison Vilar, Avignon, which I had visited every time I went to the Festival there. I remember one thing they have in common, which I would one day like to find in Romania as well, in a possible theatre archive open to the public: on the sunbeds on the grass in front of the Warsaw Institute and at the tables in the yard of Maison Vilar in Avignon, people found each other in conversations about what they had seen/read/found out and, through these discussions, they brought the past of theatre into contemporaneity. I think that this "derived effect", imposed by no one, but naturally generated by the fact that the exhibitions, mediatheques, libraries created by these institutions are alive and interesting, is the supreme result of all the effort put into opening an archive. To this end, in the upstairs lobby of the Comedy Theatre, we have created dialogue tables whose purpose is to generate the same effect; unfortunately, it didn't work, as access to the theatre is limited to the hours when performances are scheduled, which has actually isolated the theatre, reducing its possibility to communicate with the audience.

**M.R.:** *What methodology did you use, or how did you combine methodologies?*

**C.M.:** From the very beginning, I combined research in the archive of the Comedy Theatre with interviews with people who have lived in the heyday of this theatre, contributing to it directly. The second exertion was more difficult, as, in the meantime, people have left for different countries, and some of them are unfortunately no longer with us. But, in the end, we managed to interview key persons in the recent history of the theatre: Radu Beligan, David Esrig, Lucian Giurchescu, Sanda Toma, Stela Popescu. As I was saying, at Maria Drăghici's suggestion, we tried to use a methodology

she had used in the project regarding the archive of the Rahova community, as well as in Sweden, also in her work with communities, i.e. the so-called “dialogue tables”, aimed at bringing people from different backgrounds to the same table - in the case of *Comedia Remix*, we brought people with different trainings and from different generations, who shared their own experience related to the theatre, in order to reach a new level of understanding of a phenomenon, in our case, the impact of history and of ideologies on the daily activity of a theatre in Romania.

**M.R.:** *How did the team form, and what responsibilities did each of you have?*

**C.M.:** The team was very small, basically made up of two persons: Maria Drăghici and I, but we had the support of the Theatre’s Literary Secretariat, especially of Corina Constantinescu and Ana Teodorescu, who helped us research, sort, index and digitalize the archived material. The theatre’s technical team helped us with the exhibition panels, while the tailoring workshops remade two costumes from the famous performance *Troilus and Cressida* directed by David Esrig, starting from Maria’s drawings. Judy Florescu also contributed by translating the materials for the bilingual catalogue of the exhibition into English, and throughout the work we have enjoyed the support of the theatre managers, George Mihăiță and Traian Petrescu. Besides, the Comedy Theatre Gala on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 was directed together with Vlad Massaci and Cătălin Ștefănescu, with the latter also hosting the Gala alongside me; the Gala was attended by all the people we interviewed, from the country and abroad. The video recording was then used in the documentary *Comedia Remix*, that Maria and I made in the second part of the project. To me, the documentary is the biggest achievement, as it is very difficult to access the archives of TVR (Romanian National Television) and it was a miracle that we managed to get hold of the epoch recordings - thanks to the intervention of George Mihăiță, and the support of Demeter Andras and Claudia Duca of TVR Production Company. It was very difficult to search this archive, because many of the old materials are still kept on reels, and digitalising them is expensive and takes a lot of time. At the same time, this epoch footage that we found after many hours of watching old programs are extremely precious and evoking; without these, should reconstitutions only include words, or even photographs, contemporary viewers would find such an endeavour uninteresting, too stodgy.

**M.R.:** *What were your initial targets and did they change as the project unfolded? In other words, what was kept, what was lost, and what came on top of the initial idea?*

**C.M.:** The format changed quite a bit; to begin with, we reduced the size of the effort. Initially, the exhibition was designed for a museum, and our aim was to reconstitute several performances considered to be legendary, one per room, remaking costumes, video projections, reconstituting sets, etc. We had to cut back on the dimensions and adapt to the theatre foyer, but this way things were somehow more organic. The only downside in this case was that you could only access the exhibition before scheduled performances, we could not convince them that, in order for the place to become attractive for people who don't normally come to the theatre, access should be allowed outside of these hours. As they were not used to such exhibition, the theatre staff did not cooperate as they should have: they either forgot to turn on the screens projecting short edited videos of the interviews we had made, or, if they did turn them on, they forgot to connect the headphones, which meant that the viewer heard nothing, they did not encourage the spectators to also watch the exhibition in the upstairs foyer, etc. It's not that they were ill-willed, this was simply not a part of their routine when welcoming spectators, which is anyway quite poor in state theatres. I am sorry that the exhibition was only seen by people who are already in the habit of going to the theatre, thus becoming an addendum to their experience of seeing shows, rather than a self-standing cultural offer. The documentary was luckier, as it "travelled" in other cities in the country too, such as Cluj (thank you for the invitation!), but also abroad: this very spring, it was projected for Romanian communities in New York and Seattle. Its life surpasses that of the exhibition itself, and I hope it will also be useful to future generations.

**M.R.:** *How to do you think your future self will relate to this experience? Has it had any effect on your own vision as a critic? How about your career?*

**C.M.:** Although, through the nature of my job, I'd had an interest in archives before this project too, *Comedia Remix* further opened my appetite for reinterpreting and reviving theatre archives. Subsequently, I made *Arhiva Remix. Revival of Theatre Archives*, a project in which, together with students, I reconstituted 10 legendary performances of Romanian theatre in creative formats, later publishing a file documenting the project in *Scena.ro*. At present, I am again working with Maria Drăghici at a new idea based on

theatre archives and on the broader, social role of theatre in communism; I am very enthusiastic about this new project. I increasingly believe in activating archives, in the regeneration power that old sources can have on contemporary projects, and in the role of the creative knowledge of the past, without which we cannot imagine the future. *Comedia Remix* has had a beneficial effect on my vision as a critic, as I was “bitten” by the bug of looking back to the past, by the wish to gather as many testimonies of those who created the theatre of yesterday and to analyse the role played by theatre in the Romanian society from a subjective perspective, of personal histories. For now, I’ve only gone back in the past to the communist period, after 1956, but I’d love to take such trips as close as possible to the beginning of theatre in Romania. I have recently seen the collection “The History of Romanian Theatre”, which is temporarily hosted by the “Mihai Eminescu” Museum in the Copou neighbourhood, Iași, as the house where the Theatre Museum used to be was reverted. This collection, including fabulous pieces from the beginning of theatre in Romania, has been crammed at a storey of a building in Copou for seven years now, in unfavourable conditions, which could cause us to lose some of the more fragile objects, especially costumes. In Bucharest, the Museum of the National Theatre was never opened after the very expensive renovation of the building was over, in 2015, and nobody ever explained why. Under these conditions, I can’t help thinking that we are the only country in the former Communist Bloc that has no Theatre Institute or Museum salvaging the past of this art for the contemporary public, despite theatre having played an essential part of Romanian social life, going through spectacular transformations and repositions depending on the political regime. If next year, when we celebrate 100 years of existence, we are not able to retrieve and salvage this extraordinary resource by using contemporary means, we never will. At least not at an institutional level, as there are independent initiatives, various projects striving to salvage as much as possible. What I find flagrant is the lack of a uniform strategy and of coherent state funding aimed at saving theatre archives and reopening them to the audience.

**M.R.:** *Considering the very fast and very deep mutations that have taken place in the professional field of theatre criticism all over the world, how do you see the relation between critics and curators?*

**C.M.:** The position of performing arts curator, borrowed from visual arts, has become more and more popular over the last years; it draws a lot on the experience of the theatre critic, an endangered occupation in the form that we know it. Just like the hierarchies of theatre institutions have seen constant status modifications, reformulations of “job descriptions” to fit the changes in consumption habits and relations with the audience, the theatre critic has to transform accordingly. Their influence through writing has dropped, as now only niche journals need specialists in this field, but their expertise can and has to be harnessed in other ways: in research, in curating interdisciplinary projects which also include theatre, in education (including alternative education). To this end, personally I have constantly used my experience as a theatre critic in the projects I created, from the performing arts magazine *Scena.ro* (which will be celebrating 10 years of existence in 2018) - itself an archive of a decade of theatre, to the creation of an *International Theatre Platform* (which reached its fourth edition this year), and even to a project which apparently does not have a lot to do with theatre, like *The Sensory Map of Bucharest* (after two editions in the Capital, we will make a *Sensory Map of Iași*). As a coordinator of culture pages in the daily press for over 15 years, I have exercised my critical spirit from the outside, by commenting on what others did, better or worse, until I realised this role was no longer satisfying to me and I joined the ranks of the doers. I have always believed that a critical spirit comes with creative features, which are worth exploring in as many ways possible; thus, I see this transformation of the position of critic as good news and a reason to work harder at the same time.

Translated by Camelia Oana

## *The Future of Memory Project*

OLGA ȘTEFAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Due to the specific theme of this issue of Studia Dramatica dedicated to new perspectives in the critical and historical approaches in theatre and film, we invited Olga Ștefan, the curator of one of the most interesting and complex projects of performing archives ever built in Eastern Europe, The Future of Memory (coordinated by Quantic Association), to write for our Journal a detailed descriptive presentation. The project had an impressive number of local partners in Romania and the Republic of Moldavia and was awarded a grant by the National Administration of Cultural Fund of Romania (AFCN). We thank Olga Ștefan for her consistent contribution.

**Keywords:** performative archives, holocaust, memory, biography

*"The traces were still there. But time would slowly  
blur them and nothing would be left."*

Edgar Hilsenrath, Night, 1966–

**Olga Ștefan** is a freelance curator, writer, and lecturer originally from Chicago. Since 2009, she is living in Zurich, Switzerland. Before this, from 2005-2008, she was the executive director of the Chicago Artists' Coalition, and the executive director of Around the Coyote Arts Festival from 1998-2003. She also served as juror for several festivals, shows, and granting agencies and she contributes regularly to ArtReview, Frieze Magazine, Art in America, Flash Art, Sculpture Magazine, Artslant, Artmargins, and TurnOnArt.



---

1. Freelance curator. [olgastefanconsulting@yahoo.com](mailto:olgastefanconsulting@yahoo.com).

Edgar Hilsenrath was born in Halle, Germany, then migrated to Siret, Bukowina with his family in 1941 in order to escape Nazi persecution, only to be deported in 1942 by order of Marshall Ion Antonescu and interned in the ghetto of Mogilyov-Podolski until March 1944, when the Russian troops took over. He was then arrested by Russians and nearly deported to a coal-pit in Donbass; but after faking his identity documents, he was let go. He slowly made his way back to Siret, then to Palestine - as an idealist Zionist youth - where he stayed a few years before returning, disillusioned, to France, to reunite with his family who had emigrated illegally through post-war Europe. He wrote *Night*, one of the most harrowing novels about war-time captivity, mass death and unlikely survival in the cruellest of conditions and facing unimaginable deprivations, also because he felt "guilty for surviving" when most people around him didn't. He speaks of loss, remembering and forgetting, the traces that were left and that will disappear, and of course about human depravity. His biography and *Night*, not yet translated in neither Romanian nor Russian, were included in our Kishinev exhibition at the end of July 2017.

This story of migration, self-questioning, analysis of identity, disillusionment, and search for meaning in such overwhelming meaninglessness, is common to all the biographies included in the transnational multi-city platform for Holocaust and Porajmos (the Roma Holocaust) remembrance through art and media, *The Future of Memory*. The interdisciplinary platform, whose unique approach is to combine contemporary and modern visual art practices with historical research, literature, film and performance, tackles the themes from different angles.

Firstly, the biographies are organized in geographically specific groupings, growing out of the cities in which our team operated. The events in each city feature little known, and in many cases entirely unknown, personalities who were first introduced to the general public in the frame of *The Future of Memory*, or, if they are already known as personalities, we introduced new work of theirs. The events were symbolically scheduled to occur on the days commemorating pogroms or mass deportations.

### **Bucharest, January 20-27, 2017**

In Bucharest, at Casa Filipescu-Cesianu (part of the Municipal Museum of Bucharest), we featured projections of paintings and photographs by artists Hedda Sterne (b. Bucharest, 1910, d. New York, 2011), Willy Pragher

(b. Berlin, 1902, d. Freiburg, 1992), Marcel Iancu (b. Bucharest, 1895, d. Tel Aviv, 1984), and some original watercolours and sculptures by Leon Misosniky (b. Bucharest 1921, d. Bucharest, 2007). The video *Fragments of a Life*, the documentary *My Illusions/Iluziile Mele*, which was produced especially for the platform, as well as *Daniel Spoerri: The Wild Child of Jassy*, the filmed interview with the internationally acclaimed artist, all works on which I personally contributed in collaboration with other colleagues, were shown on monitors, while a rich archive featuring books, articles, interviews, and other documents was also displayed, establishing an exhibition format that would be repeated in all five cities, but containing content drawn from local histories and biographies.



**Fig. 1:** Vernissage, The Future of Memory, Casa Filipescu-Cesianu, January 20, 2017. Ioana Florea, Olga Stefan, David Schwartz and Katia Pascariu present the concept of the project. Photo: Nina Mihaila.





**Fig. 2:** Installation shot of The Future of Memory Bucharest exhibition. Left on monitor: Fragments of a Life, video. Center projection on wall: Memories of Romania, Hedda Sterne. Right projection on wall: Bucharest Pogrom, Marcel Iancu. Center table: Head, Leon Misosniky. Photo: Olga Ștefan.

Some of the texts included were *Diary 1935-1944* by Mihail Sebastian, *The Seamstress* by Sara Tuvel Bernstein, *The Long Balkan Night* by Leigh White, *Orasul Macelului* by Filip Brunea Fox, *Noapte de Pogrom* by Scarlat Callimachi, *Despre pogromul de la Bucuresti* by Marcel Iancu, with an introduction by Vlad Solomon, *The Balkan Trilogy* by Olivia Manning, *Baroane* by Tudor Arghezi, *Journal de Guerre* by Rene de Weck, *The Black Book* by Matatias Carp, *Of Fortunes and War: Clare Hollingworth*, by Patrick Garrett, *Leon Misosniky Paintings*, and *Marcel Janco Paintings and Sketches*. Documentation about the Roma Holocaust was also presented.

The individuals and the work included were all either from Bucharest - and recounted their experienced events from the pogrom and the Iron Guard (Garda de fier) rebellion -, or their biographies were affected somehow by the atrocities.



**Fig. 3:** The archive of The Future of Memory in Bucharest.  
Photo: Nina Mihaila.

Our film program, composed of eight films carefully selected to represent the diversity of stories and experiences resulting from the various anti-Semitic policies in the different regions of current day Romania (which now includes Northern Transylvania, under Hungarian authority from 1940-1944) and former Bessarabia and Bukovina (under Romanian occupation starting in July 1941 until March 1944). This film program, featuring many national premieres, was shown in all of the five cities where we were present, thus introducing the local public to the histories of other regions of the two countries, to new biographies and witness accounts, and to the variety in which the racist laws were implemented. In Bucharest, the films were screened at the Romanian Cinematheque and at Macaz Bar and Theater.

**Oradea, May 24-28, 2017**

*The Future of Memory* partnered with local organizations, including Tikvah Association, the University of Oradea Art Department, and Ars Nobilis Association to implement its exhibitions and events at places of memory, such as synagogues, in former Jewish neighbourhoods, and the ghetto, long abandoned after the Jewish population's annihilation at Auschwitz. These took place on the dates when the Hungarian regime, under Nazi occupation, commenced the deportations of the Jews in 1944.

We collaborated with Ars Nobilis Association to exhibit original work by Oradea modernist artists of national and even international repute, most of whom were killed in Nazi death camps: Alex Leon, Paul Fux, Tibor Ernő, József Biró, József Klein, Ernő Grünbaum and Barát Móric. Besides these paintings, some of which allude pictorially and even thematically to the persecutions that would lie ahead, the show at the Sion Synagogue also included an archive similar to that in Bucharest, but featuring material from local figures: Bela Szolt, Magdalena Klein, Eva Heyman, Salamon Juliska. Several others' personal experiences, who did not necessarily leave artistic material behind, were noted and documented through *The Future of Memory* platform. To reactivate the memory of these perished and forgotten individuals, poems by Magdalena Klein, fragments of Eva Heyman's journal, and letters by Juliska Salamon from the Oradea ghetto to her children in Bucharest, were recited and performed publicly by Katia Pascariu and David Schwartz at Viznitz Synagogue and Ars Nobilis Gallery in the former ghetto. We also worked with local contemporary artists, Miklos Onucsan and Laszlo Ujvarossy, who developed their projects especially for *The Future of Memory* platform, addressing the specific theme of the deportations, but also undertook more abstract and poetic treatments of memory, traces, and disappearance: for example, in Onucsan's action, "The Persistence of Memory", a block of ice with this title carved on its surface, was left to melt in the sun.



**Fig. 5:** Miklos Onucsan, *To the Persistence of Memory*, Sinagoga Viznitz garden.  
Photos: Stefan Gaie.



**Fig. 6:** Sion Synagogue exhibition. Work by: Paul Fux, Tibor Ernő, Grünbaum Ernő, Klein Jozsef, Leon Alex, Barat Moric, Biro Jozsef and the video "Fragments of a Life". Photo: Stefan Gaie

### Cluj, May 27-June 2, 2017

Our events in Cluj also unfolded on the dates of the deportations from the ghetto, where more than a third of the city's entire population had been interned before transports began to Auschwitz. Here we hosted all the events at Casa Tranzit, a former synagogue fallen into disuse and independently transformed into one of the first contemporary art spaces in the country. We collaborated with contemporary local artists Miklos Szilard and Razvan Anton to develop research-based projects on forgotten aspects of regional history: a presentation of films by documentary film-maker Istvan Fisher, and an installation focusing on forced labour policies to which the Jews of Medias were subjected. Andrea and Matei Bellu, artists based in Germany with Romanian origins, also produced art work especially for the show referring to the flow of the river Someş - a metaphor for time and space; while Belu-Simion Fainaru, born in Romania and living in Israel, showed a video alluding to the victims of the Holocaust. We also included the long-term research project on the disappeared Cluj Jews initiated by Casa Tranzit, *Missing Since 1944*, and of course exhibited our archive alongside the videos *Fragments of a Life*, *My Illusions/Iluziile Mele* and *Daniel Spoerri: The Wild Child of Jassy*.

Much of our research and attention in Cluj focused on the Kasztner Case: this led us to invite Ladislaus Lob for the first time in an official capacity in Romania to join the panel about this chapter of Holocaust historiography. Lob was a passenger on the Kasztner train at the age of eleven. Many books, articles and documentaries in our archive point to this episode, including Ladislaus Lob's own *Rezso Kasztner: The Daring Rescue of Hungarian Jews: A Survivor's Account*, which combines personal testimonies of other survivors, including Professor Lob's own memories, with historical documents. Lob's original research focuses on the financial transactions and negotiations Kasztner carried out with the Nazis to save more than 1600 Hungarian Jews from the gas chambers, bringing them to neutral Switzerland, while hundreds of thousands of others were left behind, marking this as one of the most controversial chapters of the Holocaust and reshaping Israeli politics since the late 1950s until today.



## THE FUTURE OF MEMORY PROJECT



**Figs. 7, 8, 9:** Three images above: installation shots from The Future of Memory Cluj. First image: Fabric work by Andrea and Matei Bellu, in the back is "Missing Since 1944" and in the front plane is Razvan Anton's project on forced labor conditions for Jews in Medias. Below: the archive with books and documents but also personal journals and photos. Photos: Casa Tranzit

The situation of the Jews in Northern Transylvania under the Horthy regime is represented in our film program by the documentary *Jeno Janovics: A Hungarian Pathe* by Zagoni Balint and by the drama movie *Son of Saul* by László Nemes.

**Iasi, June 27-June 30, 2017**

On the days commemorating the 1941 Iasi pogrom, *The Future of Memory* launched its events at the Institut Francais with a piano recital of a Sonata by Iasi-born and internationally acclaimed modernist composer Anatol Vieru (b. 1926, d. 1998, Bucharest), whose music had not been played in Iasi before. A friend of Sorana Ursu and a member of the Iasi “colony”, a group of friends that met regularly at the house of Lidia Iliesu, as described in *Fragments of a Life*, Anatol Vieru experienced the pogrom personally and composed several symphonies about the Holocaust. We also featured an exhibition of drawings by Samy Briss (b. 1930, Iasi, lives in Paris) a series started in 1948, during the trials of the Romanian Popular Tribunals against war criminals, and continued until 1956. The drawings feature scenes from the Iasi pogrom. Books and texts by descendants of victims or survivors, like Theophil Spoerri (the youngest brother of Daniel Spoerri), Jil Silberstein and others, retracing their own biographies to the city, as well as interviews and historical analyses of the events before and during the pogrom were part of the archive. At Teatru Fix, besides a special section of the film program, we hosted an associative game, developed for the platform by Katia Pascariu and Ioana Florea, that used photographs and images from the platform’s exhibitions: the aim of the game was to prompt players to consider their positions on different social and historical issues.

THE FUTURE OF MEMORY PROJECT



**Figs. 10, 11, 12:** Above: The Future of Memory Iasi. First image: the archive with recordings and testimonies. Second image: "Iluziile mele/My Illusions". Third Image: Drawings and artist book by Samy Briss.





**Fig. 13:** Above: Associative Game by Ioana Florea and Katia Pascariu at Teatru Fix.  
Photos: Mihai Apostol

One of the films in our film program that refers to Iasi history and the Holocaust is the biographical documentary, *Natan* by David Caines and Paul Duane. It tells the story of the forgotten Iasi-born Jew, Natan Tannenzaft, or otherwise known as Bernard Natan, who became the French Pathe. *Scarred Hearts* by Radu Jude draws from the writings of Max Blecher, the Jewish Romanian avant-gardist who died in 1938 in Roman, a town close to Iasi (and one of the stops of the 1941 death train where Viorica Agarici, a nurse with the International Red Cross, helped the dying Jews with water). This was also the year when the Iron Guard was gaining major popular support and antisemitism was becoming ever more normalised societally, illustrated by the laws passed by the Goga-Cuza government dispossessing almost half of Romania's Jews of their citizenship, thus starting the racial laws that ultimately led to the Romanian Holocaust.

### **Kishinev, July 26-30, 2017**

The Romanian army reoccupied Bessarabia in July 1941, and immediately started massacring the local Jewish population. After about 10,000 were killed on site, the rest were ghettoized: then, after a few months, the survivors were

deported to deserted areas in Transnistria, a region so-called by the Germans which is disputed nowadays by the Republic of Moldavia and Russia. There they were shot, left to die of hunger and disease, or worked to death. More than 50% of the 350,000 deportees from Bessarabia and Bukovina died in the first two months. A similar fate awaited the 25,000 Roma that were deported from various areas of Romania and other occupied territories.

At Zpatiu, the contemporary art space of Oberliht Association, our local partner, we exhibited a series of drawings by Benno Friedel (b. 1930, Chernowitz, lives in Hadera, Israel), a survivor of the camps of Transnistria. We also screened two documentaries about the Transnistrian deportations: *The Bessarabian Persecution* by Sergiu Ene and *Transnistria: The Hell* by Zoltan Ternier. The former movie addressed the Roma Holocaust, while the second featured Jewish survivors who turned to art, among whom was also Benno Friedel. Also at Zpatiu we hosted two discussions, one with Benno Friedel and Dr. Eugen Brik about the Jewish Holocaust in Transnistria, and the second with Dr. Ion Duminica and Nicolae Radita, the director of the National Roma Center in Chisinau about the Porajmos. In other cities, we showed *The Valley of Sighs* by Mihai Andrei Leaha, an anthropologic documentary addressing the Porajmos through the personal testimonies of survivors.



OLGA STEFAN





**Figs. 14, 15, 16, 17:** Above: The Future of Memory Kishinev at Zpatiu. First image: Benno Friedel discussing his series, "Childhood Memories". Second Image: Nicolae Radita, Director of the National Roma Center in the Republic of Moldovac, and Dr. Ion Duminica, The Center of Ethnology, The Institute of Cultural Patrimony of the Academy of Sciences in Moldova. **Third image: the archive of The Future of Memory Kishinev. Fourth image: Vernissage, discussion with Benno Friedel and Dr. Eugen Brik, Judaic Institute of the Republic of Moldova.**

Two additional screened documentaries that refer to this geographical region are *Das Kind* by Yonathan Levy, and *Mamaliga Blues* by Cassio Tolpolar. *Das Kind* is the story of Irma Miko, born in Chernowitz, Ukraine (former Bukovina) who reaches Paris and becomes a Communist French resistance agent. Her mission is to convert German soldiers occupying Paris to become active anti-fascists. *Mamaliga Blues* is the story of a Brazilian Jew who takes his father on a trip to Moldova in search of the grave of his great-grandfather.

A second approach in each exhibition, besides the geographical organization, is the treatment of the themes mentioned earlier, namely migration, identity, and disillusionment, but also memory, one of the most dominant themes, as can be presumed. Owing to the fact that today we see

yet another fascist turn in democratic societies - one that we need to be keenly aware of and actively engaged in countering - we paid special attention to also include biographies of antifascist combatants: "Illegalisti" (members of the illegal Communist Party of Romania, 1921-1944), or members of the "Resistance", focusing on Socialists and Communists whose ideals of a more equitable future society led them to taking extraordinary personal risks in already extreme war-time conditions, many being caught by the Nazis or their allies, and deported, tortured or killed. Of those who survived the war and entered the new society led by the Communist regime, numerous were themselves either purged by this regime, or became disillusioned over time with what their dream ultimately became: yet another criminal dictatorship that advanced the interest of a privileged elite at the expense of the masses.

### Disillusionment

Following this theme, we selected and presented the film, *Das Kind*, about Irma Miko, but also *My Illusions/Iluziile Mele*, whose title comes from the song "Unde e Iluziile Mele? / Where is my Illusions": featuring residents of the Moses Rosen Retirement Home who discuss the Bucharest pogrom, forced labor and other aspects of Jewish persecution during the war, but also about life under Communism and their Jewish identity during that regime and post-89.

We added to this thematic framework the video piece *Fragments of a Life*, featuring a discussion with my grandmother, Sorana Ursu, telling of her idealistic activist days in the first post-war years, and her disillusionment starting in the late fifties, the 1985 murder by the Communist regime of her husband, Gheorghe Ursu, a political dissident and former "Illegalist" himself; or the autobiography of the former resident of Cluj Egon Balas, *Will to Freedom: A Perilous Journey Through Fascism and Communism*, describing the author's life as a member of the underground Hungarian Communist Party during the war, his anti-fascist wartime engagement and torture by fascists, then after the war by the Communist regime; also the films of Isztvan Fischer, the documentary filmmaker from Cluj.

However, through their accounts of struggle, we are reminded that we too need to continue fighting for new, more just societal forms, beyond the ones based on neoliberal capitalism and the illusion of democracy that we



are fed. The individuals we present through our platform did not risk and sacrifice their lives for these ideals in vain - it is due to the influence of Socialist ideology, including their efforts, that the Western world was for many decades more democratic and equitable than it would have been had capitalism been let to run unchecked. In the last thirty years, however, we have experienced the deterioration of the social protections that were gained through struggle. As a result of this neoliberal ideology taking control, millions of people have been disenfranchised through the elimination of jobs and manufacturing, and the placement of value exclusively on profit at the cost of people's well-being. It is this systematic economic disenfranchisement that has contributed to anti-globalist neo-nationalism and fascist tendencies throughout the world. To counter this wave of hatred, we must pursue the emancipatory visions of the individuals we present in our platform and correct the deficiencies in, and failures of, our current society.

### **Jewish Identity**

The question of an uncertain Jewish identity in the aftermath of the Holocaust is very eloquently expressed by Iosip Cotnareanu, one of the residents at the Moses Rosen Retirement Home in Bucharest, who appears in the documentary, *My Illusions/Iluziile Mele*, when he asks, paraphrasing Einstein, "What is left of a Jew without his own language, without his own nation, and without a religion (referring to secular, unreligious Jews)? Oh, so very much still..." After the formation of Israel in 1948, this question of identity and belonging was meant to be resolved, with most of the Jews that decided to make Aliyah finally feeling like they had a home, becoming Israeli. Although the transition to this new world was not an easy one, Israel made European Jews feel safe and protected, no longer victims of anti-Semitic persecution. And yet, as we have seen in Edgar Hilsenrath's case, as well as others', not all European Jews managed to adapt to the culture of this new nation, one based on forgetting the past and looking only toward the future, shaping a new ideal human, strong and determined, in charge of its destiny. Israel was another Utopia that became yet another illusion for so many. The idea of a Jewish identity is also addressed by Sorana Ursu in *Fragments of a life*, where she claims to have been a "great Romanian patriot" once upon a time, despite the persecutions that she suffered as a Jew.

Assimilation became the *modus operandi* for most of the Jews that remained in Romania, erasing their Jewish identity and trying to become entirely Romanian. This behaviour is echoed among the Hungarian Jews, who proudly viewed themselves as Hungarians, and were convinced that nothing bad would happen to them as Hungarian citizens, despite the horrifying news out of Poland and Czechoslovakia starting as early as 1941. Bela Szolt, the Hungarian writer, journalist and politician who escaped from the Oradea ghetto with his wife Agnes Szolt, and who were also saved from the gas chambers of Auschwitz on the Kastzner train along with Ladislaus Lob, and more than 1600 privileged others, writes about this illusion of belonging and profound identification with the Hungarian culture in his autobiographical book included in our Cluj and Oradea exhibitions, *Nine Suitcases*, one of the first publications to treat the Holocaust through a personal account (issued as serial articles between 1946-1947) and to try to answer the question of why the Hungarian Jews allowed themselves to be deported.

## Migration

Migration is, clearly, a common life experience in all the biographies we present. It is mostly the result of the violent historical events, persecutions and upheavals of the war and thereafter, with the changing national borders and new regimes - but for some, also the result of economic necessity. The war saw millions of refugees, not only Jews or Roma, but despite knowing that the Jews particularly would face certain death if returned, Western democracies, including the United States, i.e. the "Allies", refused safe haven to the overwhelming majority, leaving them to their fate. Even those that made it to the shores of the United States were turned away, and most of these indeed died in the camps. Illegal emigration was organized to Palestine, but the journey was perilous, the passengers were generally captured by the British and interned in detention camps or even deported, and only very few made it. Ships were blown up at sea, or otherwise sabotaged. One of the most famous examples is the Struma, a ship that sailed from Constanta and was bombed, killing all but one of the more than 700 passengers. This lone survivor, David Stoliar, eventually made his way to the United States where he died in 2016.

Artist Hedda Sterne's peripatetic migration through war-torn Europe after the Bucharest pogrom in 1941, to join her husband in New York, reveals her privileged position. At a time when hardly anyone was able to

escape, and those that managed to get out did so in terrible conditions, Hedda was able to even take a plane at one point to reach her destination. Once in New York, she produced the series of paintings *Memories of Romania* which were shown as projections in Bucharest, and thereafter distanced herself from her past, preferring to no longer speak about it or treat it artistically.

In the book *The Road to Auschwitz: Fragments of a Life* by Hedi Fried, included in the exhibition in Cluj, we are shown another possible migration trajectory: after the liberation of the camps, the author was a refugee in Sweden, then moved to the United States.

The condition of the migrant is treated artistically in our project - we highlight its connection to identity, longing and belonging, displacement, and memory. Irma Miko, who takes a journey from Paris back to Chernowitz with her son, stops in Bucharest, where she was active in the "underground" Communist Party, and ponders how her life in Romania would have been had she returned when the new Communist government invited her. She doesn't feel French, but doesn't feel Romanian anymore either. For her, Chernowitz remained home, although she revisited only once, during filming the documentary. For Sorana Ursu, in *Fragments of a Life*, migration is a complex phenomenon that is at once liberating and destructive.

## Memory

The disappearance of memories is addressed by Benno Friedel, among many others, in his series of works on paper called *Childhood Memories*. Here we see only disconnected images from his experiences in the camps of Transnistria, with no linear narrative. They are but mere fragments - a mother carrying a child, people on a forced march in which Benno's uncle is carrying him in a knapsack, or a play performed in a barn. The artist describes the images as "flashes of memory" that crossed his mind before putting them to paper. Aharon Apelfeld's autobiographical novel *Story of a Life* also describes his memories of Transnistria as impressions, pieces, feelings, sensations, even smells - incapable of presenting linear history. "For kids", he writes, "memory is a reservoir that never empties. It renews itself and brightens over the years. It's not a chronological memory, but an abundant and ever-changing one."

This sense of the disintegration of memory, and with it the loss of the past, is also conveyed in the video *Fragments of a Life* and in the book by Hedi Fried. Sorana Ursu states at one point: "I told myself over and over



that I would never forget, and look! Now I forgot!" Samy Briss also relied on memory, although his family's and not his own, to paint the scenes from the Iasi pogrom, where the horror on the streets is expressed in dark colors and in an abstracted figurative style.

How we choose to remember and what, an approach that spans from the individual to the national, shaping identity and historical narrative, is illustrated in a tense moment of conversation between my uncle and my grandmother, in the video piece *Fragments of a Life*, where she claims that it was "the Germans" who carried out the pogrom in Iasi, while my uncle urges that it was the Romanians. My grandmother identified as Romanian her whole life, and was unable to bring herself to believe that her neighbours and co-citizens were capable of such barbarity, her memory-making being an emotional response to an inconvenient truth; while my uncle cites history to clarify that it was mostly Romanians who carried out the murders and Antonescu's orders to implement the pogrom. This is an essential moment, because this narration's conflict is reflected in historiography as well. Since the late 1950s until recently with the 2004 Report produced by the Elie Wiesel Institute, the official narrative absolved Romania of implication in the Holocaust, placing the guilt entirely on German Nazis, the ultimate foreign enemy. Education of the Holocaust, if any, spoke exclusively of the Nazis, eliminating mention of Romania's autonomy of decision and initiative in carrying out the mass murder of more than 400,000 Jews and Roma during the Holocaust. Under Ceausescu and in the 1990s, Marshall Ion Antonescu was even rehabilitated. It is now known and accepted that Marshall Antonescu ordered the pogrom, and local Romanian authorities carried it out along with the civil population, supported in a logistics capacity by the Germans stationed in Iasi.

\*\*\*

*The Future of Memory* is a very complex and multi-faceted project, functioning on multiple levels, containing many personal stories, bringing new life to those individuals who have been long forgotten, trying to capture the transient and record what is left of fading memories of the last witnesses. The platform commemorates not through the building of monuments and commemorative plaques, an activity more appropriate for the local and national authorities, but rather by reactivating the public's memory through the performance of artistic works, re-enacting past events, researching and

exhibiting forgotten figures, thus integrating marginalized spaces and people into the official narrative, and creating place for the excluded. We conduct our activity through artistic means because we believe that art can convey emotion and provoke affective responses, something that historical facts and cold statistics cannot. It is art and the personal narratives we present that evoke empathy in the public, and brings us together. Art has the power to help people transcend their particular condition and connect to more universal issues. Art helps us identify with others.

We intentionally worked with local partners to implement the exhibitions and events, and thus instil a sense of assumed responsibility towards their city's history, and also to connect people and institutions preoccupied by the same subjects. Inherently educational in its sheer breath and in the new content it discovered and presented, *The Future of Memory* intends to function on yet another level too: to connect the past to the present.

We want the stories and exhibitions in the project, which reveal the systems of oppression that were implemented not only by the "enemies", but also by those people seen as "good guys", namely the "Allies", to serve as lessons for how we can combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry today. As we write these lines, we are in the midst of a struggle against neo-Nazi and white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, some of whom violently attacked counter protesters, killing three and injuring tens of others. We cannot permit the normalisation of this hatred, neo-Nazi terrorism, and continued violence against, and oppression of, minorities and society's vulnerable, as is happening more and more.

What economic and foreign policies we support, how we treat minorities and immigrants, today's refugees and migration in general, will be the deciding factors in the course we choose for a democratic, tolerant, and inclusive Europe and United States, so we ensure that the horrors of the past are not repeated, nowhere, and for no one.

*The Future of Memory* website: [www.thefutureofmemory.ro](http://www.thefutureofmemory.ro)

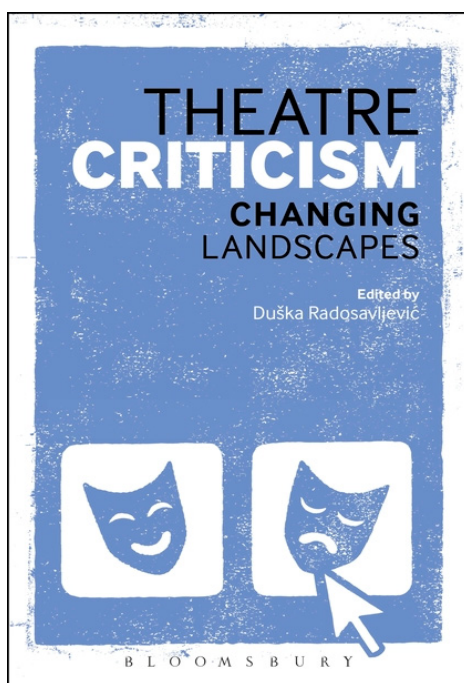


## **PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS**



## *Surviving Change. On the Metamorphoses of Theatre Criticism*

**Book review: Duška Radosavljević (Ed.) *Theatre Criticism. Changing Landscapes*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016**



Nowadays, when thinking about the practice of theatre criticism, one tends to unknowingly equate it with the ownership of an inherited title, like that of a crown prince in a newly proclaimed republic. Both the unfortunate former future monarch and the critic hold a certain distinction, seeming unapproachable by the commoners, but not quite finding their place in the modern world. A regular theatregoer finds it just as hard to clearly define the role of the professional reviewer as any republican would to yield to the authority of a crownless king. Thus, is a shift of paradigm likely to occur? Can theatre criticism adjust to the ever-changing landscapes of theatre and, even more importantly, journalism? As it happens, the change is already taking place, right before our

eyes, and it already constitutes a full-blown phenomenon, thoroughly examined in a comprehensive new book edited by Duška Radosavljević: *Theatre Criticism. Changing Landscapes*, published by Bloomsbury in 2016.

Even though the topic might seem impossible to tackle outside the academic realm, this volume manages remarkably well to balance a scientific, well-documented approach with a laid-back attitude from its contributors, making it easy to read even by those completely uninvolved in the theatre industry. One of its many strengths lays in the fact that all authors aim to pose questions about their profession, expressing their own curiosity and offering not only solid bits of research for answers, but also part of their life-long experiences as critics. Moreover, none of the essays are pedantic and none claim to hold the definitive truth. In a laudable collective effort, professionals from varied cultural backgrounds have gathered (or have been gathered by the editor) in order to better understand their own craft. This, in itself, is proof enough that theatre criticism has not yet died.

At a first glance, one can't help but notice how well-thought-out the book's structure is, adding clarity and unity to otherwise (apparently) thematically disparate texts, and thus making it an enjoyable read for anyone interested not only in theatre criticism per se, but also in media history or, more precisely, in history of ideas at large. Therefore, the four parts are, in order: „Contexts and Histories of Theatre Criticism“, „Critics' Voices“, „Changing Forms and Functions of Criticism“ and, last but not least, „Samples of Critical Practice“.

Duška Radosavljević's introduction serves as more than a simple justification of the decisions she had to make as an editor, regarding, of course, the articles that were eligible for publishing, the necessary final cuts, and the choice of a title. In her deep-laid foreword, the author proceeds to draw a very elaborate picture of the evolution of theatre criticism in the last decades, also underlining a series of questions, or more accurately, personal/professional curiosities regarding the state of the aforementioned profession in our digitalized world. Her analysis encompasses various forms of criticism, adapted, of course, to just as many platforms, from academic publications to blogs, the main objective being that of stirring the public's interest in this overlooked field and, also, inciting the actual critics to start a real debate about their status in the contemporary theatre world. Actually, if we take a look at the passionate essays sent to her by professionals from different sides of the globe (Great Britain, Western and Eastern Europe, the United States, Canada and so on), we are entitled to conclude that a first crucial step was made in establishing the long-awaited dialogue.

The first part of the volume deals with the historical evolution of theatre criticism, both in content and form, set against various cultural and geographical backgrounds. As a matter of fact, it is quite fascinating how different, yet remarkably similar the texts included in this section are.

While George Hunka remarks, in the first chapter, the lack of substance (or, the way he puts it, the „triumph of style over substance“) in American drama reviews, from 1945 until today, Latvian critic Valda Čakare analyzes the way critical discourse is highly altered by the socio-political and personal context in which the critic/reviewer was brought up. What makes her demonstration especially interesting is the way she manages to find striking connections between Soviet drama reviews, heavily politicized, and contemporary critical texts, more subtly influenced by the current state of affairs in Latvia. Unknowingly, Savas Patsalidis has an identical starting point for his study of Greek criticism in the light of the economic crisis. Kristina Matvienko's conclusions about the Russian school of theatre criticism, likewise viewed in its historical evolution, reflect a polarized guild, oftentimes in the disservice of contemporary and experimental theatre itself.

Margherita Laera, on the other hand, presents the „get-your-hands-dirty“ form of criticism, patented in Italy, which involves a militant approach and even engaging in the making of the production; the author questions, and rightly so, the deontology of the movement nowadays, enunciating another one of the profession's current dilemmas: how involved should a critic actually get?

Vasco Boenisch has quite a different approach when discussing German criticism, specifically taking into account the public's expectations and what the readers wish to find in a review. His survey of German theatregoers is, from this point of view, quite compelling. Andrew Haydon concludes the section with a paper on online criticism in Great Britain, showing how, in different stages, the displacement of critical discourse from the printed media to the Internet has affected critical thinking itself, changing established hierarchies and challenging authority.

The second part of the book is based on an imagological endeavor, namely that of showing snapshots of today's theatre critic, as seen through the eyes of artists, art lovers, other critics etc. This section also attempts to define the various roles of criticism in the modern society. Mark Fisher's essay is quite exemplary, as the author makes an inventory of various artistic representations of theatre critics, delivering a study that is both irresistibly funny and infuriating for those in the profession. Mark Brown tries to establish the state and mission of criticism nowadays, referring to the apparently never-ending dispute between print and online mediums, and arguing that, at its core, professional criticism serves the same purpose as always, albeit in an ever-changing context. Jill Dolan's text focuses on the author's experience with the feminist approach in writing about theatre, but also with keeping a blog ([www.feministspectator.princeton.edu](http://www.feministspectator.princeton.edu)).



Maddy Costa contributes with a valuable piece about „embedded criticism“, which, like the „get-your-hands-dirty“ method, entails being present for the making of a production and writing about the process, not just the final result.

The third section concentrates on new and unconventional forms of criticism, that challenge traditional views of the profession. Diana Damian Martin makes her case for criticism as a political event, offering a more philosophical approach towards the embedding (or the submergence) of the reviewer in the performance he/she witnesses. In the next chapter, Matthew Reason presents a new form of critical discourse: that which is carried on forums, by critics, spectators and theatre-makers, in a completely non-hierarchic medium and often (when it comes to the non-professionals) in a very unstructured and unfinished manner. Funnily enough, Michelle MacArthur's piece complements the aforementioned one, also tackling criticism that comes into being on forum threads and social media. Nataša Govedić and William McEvoy both advocate for a form of criticism that transcends the conventionality of the written, purely theoretical, text, transgressing into the artistic realm.

The final section of the book offers four brilliantly selected examples of unconventional critical discourse, most of them from the internet and all illustrating how art and theory can actually merge into a new and innovative form of creative criticism. On a final note, one might say that Duška Radosavljević's attempt to redefine the place theatre criticism holds in this day and age is successful not because of the answers the book offers, not even thanks to the variety of research it comprises, but because it challenges readers to ask new questions and start new polemics, to come to an agreement or to violently disagree with their peers. And this is, after all, what critical thinking is all about.

**Emma Alexandra PEDESTRU**

*PhD Student, Faculty of Theatre and Television,  
Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj.*

## *New Dramatic Structures, Negotiable Imaginary Spaces. On Assuming the Experimental Condition*

***Theatre review of M.I.S.A. PĂRUT, by Alexa Bacanu, a production of Reactor, Cluj, directed by Dragoş Alexandru Muşoiu and Reacting Chernobyl, based on texts by Svetlana Aleksievici and Wladimir Tchertkoff, a production of Varoterem Project, dramaturgy by Raluca Sas-Marinescu, directed by Cosmin Matei***

I believe that, nowadays, too little is written about *assuming the experimental condition* of a performance, in a self-standing niche of Romanian theatre, whether subsidised or independent. Because, we must admit, the last two or three seasons have shown a healthy (though still fragile) interconnection, both from the viewpoint of aesthetics and of the programme, between the two types of theatrical productions, as much as independent directors and even entire teams were invited to develop their personal projects on state theatres' (mostly studio, but not only) stages, without cutting back on their own long-term programmes. For understandable economic reasons, a reverse movement is more difficult, at least for now, but I'm sure that the osmosis process will continue...

However, it sometimes seems that reviews do not shine enough light on the innovative aesthetics of performances, which simultaneously appears at the level of the script (whether pre-existing or built on set, individual or devised) and of the direction. By insisting, at times into a full-blown cliché, on the "poor" condition to which the production is reduced, especially in independent theatre, we sometimes lose sight of the very complexity of the suggestions regarding the text, the staging, the construction of situations-relations, and the stylistics of actor's interpretation, even when the review is rather positive. The shift in co-participative load (since, in these cases, the performance is the result of a coalescent and equally assumed programme) and in the actors' interpretation techniques has been discussed multiple times, especially from the point of view of documentary or documentary-inspired theatre<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, I think that, at least every so often, we should redirect our attention and refine our analysis tools towards the binomial writing-directing, which remains essential to the aesthetic quality of the performance.

---

1. To this end, see the chapter dedicated to documentary theatre actors in Iulia Popovici's *The Elephant in the Room. A Companion to Romanian Independent Theatre*, Cluj, Idea Design and Print, 2016.

## Coral Swing

*M.I.S.A. PĂRUT* is a complex project, produced by *Reactor de creație și experiment*, Cluj, towards the end of a full season, in which, in March, the company (very imaginatively) celebrated its third anniversary. This season opened a new programme, called “*Exerciții de democrație. Investigarea istoriei recente*” (*Democracy Exercises. Investigating Recent History*). Thematic and operational, the performance openly springs from new, documentary-based writings – in this case, the basic material combines media speeches, legislation, European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) documents, and personal testimonies of members of MISA, following the 2004 huge media and police-legal campaign against the members of the “Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute” and, of course, against its leader, Gregorian Bivolaru. What do we know, what do we remember, what was the structure of public discourses, what did the authorities do, and, most especially, what do those behind the curtain say about themselves, i.e. ordinary yoga practitioners; how can we now see the gap between public and private space in this labyrinth which is contradictory up to hallucination? We must admit that this topic is among the most controversial, and the team’s courage to approach it directly deserves our appreciation indeed.



**Fig. 1:** Raluca Mara, Cătălin Filip, Bogdan Rădulescu & Oana Mardare  
in *M.I.S.A. PĂRUT*

Alexa Băcanu - a playwright with a very personal voice (who is worth mentioning more often, see also the charming performance *În 4 D* staged two years ago, *Dispariția*, part of the programme Teen Spirit, but also the inciting *Call in Art* at the Euphorion Studio of the Cluj National Theatre) - structured the documentary material into a multi-tier script, in which the dramatic content of personal testimonies rivals in a juicy and contrapuntal manner with the sometimes grotesque comic of press excerpts, but, at the same time, is counterbalanced by elegant and reflectively efficient fragments from literature (from Mihai Eminescu's pornographic poem, to witchcraft incantations or folk enchantments). The result is a supra theme of the writing and of the theatrical experiment, i.e. a discourse on the staggering combination of the superficiality, the ignorance, the prejudice, the blind brutality, and the awful hypocrisy of collective imagination, which allows for a toxic demonization of all categories or groups seen as different, and thus undesirable/dangerous. When rearranging lines from various fragments as we would in a moving stained glass, we find that the play does not have characters as such, but voices that separate and reunite like a jam session played by a highly skilled jazz quartet.

Dragoș Alexandru Mușoiu is responsible for the staging, a young director venturing in independent theatre for the first time, after having worked at the National Theatre in Craiova (*The BreakIN* by Răzvan Petrescu and *Elephant in the Room* by Sarah Ruhl) and at the Comedy Theatre in Bucharest (*The Holiday Game* by Mihail Sebastian). As meticulous as a watchmaker, he builds a multifaceted universe, where, in an equally eloquent and strenuous dynamics, each of the four actors receive multiple tasks, both with regards to interpretation (in a sophisticated game of constantly interchanging distance and empathy), and to moulding their bodies. Oana Mardare, Raluca Mara, Cătălin Filip, and Bogdan Rădulescu make up a homogenously trained group, and, at the same time, are very capable of offering outstanding individual performances. Obsessive parents traumatising their children, exorcist priests, responsible or completely unprofessional doctors who torture their patients psychologically and with drugs, politicians, stars and TV ancors, abusive judges and police officers, brutalized clerks, relatives and neighbours, victims and headsmen – the actors' versatility and their ability to easily slide from one role to the other leave spectators with the feeling that this is a huge performance, populated by tens of moving faces: a squirming, hot world in itself, spinning like a carousel, which belongs to all of us.

We must emphasize that, in this case, the director has finely engineered each gesture, as well as the way in which actors are positioned and repositioned in relation to the dynamic of the whole. Spectators are left to figure out the multiple dramatic situations themselves – the distribution technique does not follow the

classic “one body=one character” convention, but testimonies are successively taken on again and again by different actors, to show the polyvalence of destinies. More than that, the stage design constantly modifies through and from four mobile angle-iron parallelepipeds, which are redefined by light design: transparent boxes hiding reality and then shoving it in our face successively and simultaneously – plasma TV, student dorm, flat kitchen, hospital bed – it is the spectator’s task to fill the transparency with the materiality of each specific context (set design by Anda Pop, who dressed the actors in refined costumes made up of multicoloured tights and white shirts embroidered with thin traditional patterns). The deep musical moments signed by Danaga confer a fourth dimension to the visual space.

“The first statement is the most powerful.” This line is the leitmotif which is obsessively repeated at the beginning of each chapter of this polyphonic construction. *M.I.S.A. PĂRUT* does not aim at “bringing justice” to the cult-group (it seems that ECHR brought justice, by compelling the Romanian state to pay more than EUR 200,000 to the 26 members who reported the ill-treatments and the invasions of their privacy by the authorities), but at triggering the audience’s reflexive availability. This is also the why the authors place Gregorian Bivolaru, the guru who was convicted several times for paedophilia, on a rather secondary plan. On the other hand, dramatically and very humorously, this bold and aesthetically powerful performance works like a test paper, revealing the hypocrisies and fundamental, systemic imbalances, that govern our daily thoughts, whether consciously or not.

### **The Paradoxical Revisiting of the Catastrophe**

Another particularly complex experiment is the production of Varoterem Project, the Hungarian independent company in Cluj, also with a highly ambitious programme, which is worth writing about more often in the Romanian cultural mass-media, or what’s left of it. *Reacting Chernobyl*, based on texts by Svetlana Aleksievici and Wladimir Tchertkoff, is another script made up of personal stories, official documents, pieces of news, scientific and philosophical reflections, tons of references (including from books) - of bits and pieces, found and put together in an archaeological manner, after the original objects were shattered in the upheaval. The arduous reconstructive operation is the work of the playwright Raluca Sas-Marinescu (over the last few years, she has done many adaptations, including *I hired a contract killer* at the Sibiu Radu Stanca National Theatre, *La țigănci* at Baia Mare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, or *Fontana di Trevi*

at Satu Mare, as well as plays or original scripts, such as the *Promise of a Beautiful Life (as Chekhov told us)* together with the director Botos Balint at Râmnicu Vâlcea). The project was intricately built together with the director Cosmin Matei.



**Fig. 2:** Emőke Pál and Tímea Udvari-Kardos in *Reacting Chernobyl*

“The mind can take in a certain amount of horror before shutting down to protect itself. Starting from this logic, when the threat exceeds our imagination, we conclude that the danger is simply not real.” Based on this line, placed apparently by chance towards the middle of the performance, the dramatic structure follows four, consistently intersecting main levels: rearranging the memories about the disaster and its consequences, the memoirs of the survivor-victims, the more or less technical opinions of experts and managers, manipulation as political weapon. The playwright aims at taming this wide fragmentariness (by comparison to the exceptional book written by the Nobel prize winner, surely the selection effort must have been tormenting, up to exhaustion) by carefully constructing key situations, that cause an immediate human impact, as well as a reflexive, interrogative, philosophical and political reaction, as they are interconnected and contribute to building up each other’s tension.

Similarly, the work technique used by the performers' team is based on the creative participation of the whole group: the actors - Sebők Maya, Pál Emőke, Udvari Tímea, Imecs-Magdó Levente, Csepei Zsolt, accompanied by their former acting professor, Hatházi András, and seconded by the especially clever and emotional sound-vocal narration of Júlia Sipos. Each of them did previous documentation work and, as the project moved forward, improvised various solutions serving or developing the initial fragmentary structure, or reinforcing its situational nodes.

The space was created neuter, like a road between two sides demarcated by the audience, with the two ends bordered by a "technical" desk, holding sound and light organs and the materials needed for stage actions (thread, pencils, elastic, aluminium foil rolls, etc.); while the other end is a white screen set as an extension of the paper carpet, used at certain moments for the shadow play. The actors wear simple clothes, such as light grey jeans and white blouses, sneakers (although it was not specified, not even on the poster, the stage design was made by the director Cosmin Matei, who also studied fine arts).

The truly original directing element is the complete parallelism between speech and stage actions. Once again, the actor has a strenuous task ahead of him, that is nevertheless directly proportional to the spectator's task, who must simultaneously read and confer complex meanings to this parallelism between what is said and what is "done", but which, in key moments, opens towards intersecting situational bridges.

The continuity of the actors' physical discourse is ensured by the children's games (whether known or unknown, real or imaginary) – partially broken from time to time by the "incarnation" of a named or anonymous character, who tells his story in a fragmentary manner, holds a speech, or comes up with a comment, or of a group of characters reinventing a dramatic situation. Most of the time, the children's play continues between actors even during re-enacting moments, creating a continuous background, that circles and engulfs the theatrical reconstruction moment. Lots of "games" unfold before the spectator's eyes, ever more complex and dynamic, apparently not connected to the factual dramatic situations - but, in fact, intensifying them through a double stake: revealing the psychological distance separating us from the moment of the catastrophe, and counteracting, in a tense and anti-mimetic manner, the often-unimaginable tragedy of the real fact, that happened then and there. Games are finely brought back - with a smile, as opposed to the horrors bombarding us - such as: hide and seek, tag, catch, hopscotch, French skipping, ball, who steps on who, who puts their shoes on first, wrestling. Sophisticated objects and tinfoil dolls are made up in front of the audience, the dolls go to war against each other and die, or are executed by hanging, while the action unfolds; then, their remains are erased with a rubber or swept away with a broom, and so on.

The interpretational task proposed by Cosmin Matei to these wonderful actors, both as a group, and individually, is Brechtian at its core, and on edge, openly anti-Stanislavskian: the actor does not realistically “play” the character temporarily cast to him - not even in monologues or situational reincarnations -, whether the wife of a victim who is not allowed to see her husband, a woman giving birth to a monster-child, a criminal hiding in abandoned villages around Pripyat who befriends the feral nature, a scientist-public clerk coming from the capital to “investigate” the disaster, Mikhail Gorbachev, or the man requesting an audience with him. The actor slides in and out of his role as his body suggests a partly recognisable figure, in relation to which there is an almost tangible distance, like a translucid aura – a moral one, I would say, since the character can be “played”, unlike the identity status, which can only be symbolically represented.

There are some key moments when the complex interlacing between games and reconstituted facts acquire exceptional dramatic force: for example, the cutting of the moment of the explosion, while the actors play “dead”, or the two divers’ preparations for the plunge into the flooded sector of the reactor’s cooling system, in order to open the valves – their serenity completely unaware of the imminent sacrifice – while the others begin a French skipping game which the two are to join: the immersion is suggested by the gradual, acrobatic rise of the level of the elastic they must jump over. Degradation and death are suggested through the bits of protective tinfoil randomly detaching from them, due to the desperate effort of their rhythmic leaps. The divers keep playing their mad game even after the elastic is gone and the other actors begin an open, customized debate with the audience on the effects of the explosion and the very ambiguous concept of heroism. Or the almost grotesque scene when an evacuee couple visit their relatives in a less affected town, and the latter are overwhelmed/horrified with the fear of irradiation by any touch... By which time, in a *mise-en-abîme* textual intersection, while playing with their sneakers, the actresses sarcastically introduce lines from Chekov’s *Three Sisters*, about the nostalgia of returning to Moscow, or each man’s “responsibility to work” ... Or the highly fascinating scene towards the end, picturing the war between the tinfoil dolls (manufactured in plain sight), which are hanged behind the shadow screen, or destroyed one by one, imperceptibly sticking to the bodies of the fallen actors, while Imecs-Magdó Levente and Andras Hathazi resume controversial, political, social, humanitarian, and scientific perspectives on the disaster’s immediate and long-term internal and international consequences.

Quite surprisingly, the performance ends with a “civilian”, real monologue, uttered by the voice in the shadow, the musician-technician Júlia Sipos: a manifesto-monologue (picked up from some internet blog) on the responsibility of us all to take conscious action, to invest energy, as much as we know and can, in saving each and every single one.



*Reacting?* To react by reincarnating everything left without a body. A performance which is demanding up to exhaustion for the high-performance actors, as well as inquisitive and challenging for the audience – a performance worth watching at least twice, I think. Because its daring originality requires a profound participation, above and beyond the immediate circumstances.

**Miruna RUNCAN**

*Professor, PhD, Faculty of Theatre and Television,  
Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj. runcan.miruna@ubbcluj.ro.*