

DRAMATICA

STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI

2/2021



The Living Archives:
Saving and Activating the Heritage
of Performing and Visual Arts

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STUDIES AND ARTICLES

The Fetish of the Ephemeral, the Praxis of Repetition, and the Logic of the Archive

PÉTER P. MÜLLER¹

Abstract: When the very special nature of performance's evanescence gets emphasized, it is the logic of the archive that lurks beneath the argument, the logic which opposes the residue with the lost and vanished. For a good part of theater scholars, it is the lost and vanished that is valuable; for the archivist it is always the remainder, haunted forever by what's lost. This paper shall not offer a theoretical overview of the scholarship on repetition or its philosophical interpretations; instead, it will use the concept exclusively in relation with theater plays, theater art, and more broadly the so-called performance arts, in order to reaffirm the bodily dimension of preservation and archiving the theatrical experience.

Keywords: theatre, repetition, theatre communication, spectatorship, archive

Theater artists and theater studies incessantly stress that each theater performance is unique and unrepeatable. At the beginning of the 20th century, when Edward Gordon Craig questioned whether theater is an art form, among other things he referred to theater's ephemerality, unrepeatability, and the changeability of the performers' disposition. In his 1908 essay, *The Actor and the Über-marionette*, Craig argued, that

1. University of Pécs, Hungary. muller.peter@pte.hu. Translated from Hungarian by Petra Bakos.

...acting is not an art. (...). For accident is an enemy of the artist. (...) In order to make any work of art it is clear we may only work in those materials with which we can calculate. Man is not one of these materials. (...) In the modern theatre (...) all which is presented (...) is of an accidental nature. The actions of the actor's body, the expression of his face, the sounds of his voice, all are at the mercy of the winds of his emotions.²

All those characteristics which Craig mentions as the foremost features of a theater play – accidentality, contingency, being at the mercy of emotions – suggest that a performance is indeed unique and unrepeatable, and this is exactly what Craig condemns as theater's greatest fallacy. According to him theater could be regarded an art if it could create performances that are repeatable in their entirety, i.e., if permanence and not ephemerality would characterize theater production.

The present writing shall not offer a theoretical overview of the scholarship on repetition or its philosophical interpretations; instead, it will use the concept exclusively in relation with theater plays, theater art, and more broadly the so-called performance arts. It is a valid and viable question whether repetition is possible at all, or every single thing in a performance is unique and unrepeatable. "I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition. And really, how can there be?" states Gertrude Stein in her 1934 *Lectures in America*.³ Later on she adds that if, for instance, the same story is told repeatedly, it takes a different form each time. Later again, Stein argues that "remembering is repetition, anybody can know that."⁴ I shall return to this hypothesis about the connection of theater and remembrance.

From the 1960s those features of theater that Craig considered its fallacies were increasingly counted as the art form's ontological characteristics. That a theater play cannot be repeated thus became theater's *differentia specifica* with a novel theater theory placing performance's ephemeral, fleeting character in its center. Richard Schechner began to emphasize the ephemeral nature of

2. Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Über-Marionette," *The Mask* 1, no. 2 (April 1908): 3–16.

3. Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (London: Virago, 1988), 166.

4. *Ibid.*, 178.

performance in the 1970s and played a determining role in the solidification of this theory. In 1982, Herbert Blau further accentuated the vanishing, dissolving nature of theater performance by placing it in the subtitle of his book, *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point*. In the book itself, Blau arrived to the following definition: "In theater as in love, the subject is disappearance."⁵ In 1993, Peggy Phelan went as far as to argue that performance "becomes itself through disappearance,"⁶ meaning that it is impossible to repeat a performance because it vanishes as soon as it takes form: "it can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as 'different.'"⁷ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett broadened even further the scope of ephemerality: she considered that it is a feature of all forms of live action. In 1998 she argued, "the ephemeral encompasses all forms of behavior – everyday activities, storytelling, ritual, dance, speech, performance of all kinds."⁸

As Rebecca Schneider pointed out, the above quoted books were without exception written while their authors worked at New York University's Department of Performance Studies (Blau was the department's guest professor when his book was published). According to Schneider, in the 1990s, when she studied there, one of the lecturers (not listed above) ironically suggested that the department should change its name to Department of Ephemeral Studies.⁹

Obviously, Craig condemned the same feature of theater that the researchers of New York University's Department of Performance Studies fetishized, i.e., its unrepeatability. But what is exactly unrepeatable in a theater play, and does that differentiate it from other life events, i.e., is there such a specificity of performance arts?

The pianist and philosopher Thomas Carson Mark, in his 2012 book, claims that performances (like concerts) are not permanent objects, but events just like *any* action.

5. Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 94.

6. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

7. Ibid.

8. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 30.

9. Ibid.

We may talk casually of repeating an action or a performance, but that is not really possible. We can't do the same individual action again (...). All we can do is carry out another action similar to the first. A repeat of a performance is *another* performance.¹⁰

This point of view is markedly similar to Gertrude Stein's. Yet, Mark also draws attention to the fact that the concept and praxis of repetition is still present in performance arts as exemplified by the French word for rehearsal.

Répétition in French, just like *repetición* in Spanish, *Wiederholung* in German, and, although to a lesser extent, *repetition* in English, is used both for the systematic training of performers and for theater rehearsals. This is what Patrice Pavis put forward in his *Dictionary of the Theatre's* short, merely 16 lines long entry on "Rehearsal", quoting Peter Brook: "the French word *répétition* evokes a mechanical kind of work, while rehearsals are always different and sometimes creative."¹¹

Repetition and practice in theater and music has a twofold meaning – it marks the process through which a piece of art emerges, and which may last days, weeks, or months on end; and the systematic repetitions through which the performers (the actors or musicians) master the actions they shall execute in a future performance. In other words, in front of the audiences, the performers repeat something that they have already practiced beforehand.

The rehearsal (or practice) is not the only way through which repetition is present in theater. Most modern theater programs are built on repetition: the same performances are played over and over again, in repertoire or in en-suite systems. Therefore, in principle, a performance can be watched multiple times. Can it really?

In 2012, London's St. Martin's Theatre celebrated the diamond jubilee, i.e., the 60-year continuous run of Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*, advertised as the world's longest-running play. A few years ago, in Budapest, the Madách Theater's billboards and website heralded that "*The Cats* turned 30". There

10. Thomas Carson Mark, *Motion, Emotion, and Love: The Nature of Artistic Performance* (Chicago: GIA, 2012), 16.

11. Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre*, trans. Christine Shantz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 308.

are numerous more present and past examples of long running performances, so the question emerges whether the audiences visiting these plays see a different performance, each and every time. Did they see *The Mousetrap* or *The Cats* or didn't they? Are the performances so deeply affected by the autopoietic feedback loop that they take a different form each and every time?

This concept, introduced by Erika Fischer-Lichte, attempts to theoretically capture the way the physical co-presence of actors and spectators affects theater performances and allegedly turns them into different performances each time. In *The Transformative Power of Performance*, Fischer-Lichte, echoing Peggy Phelan, arrives to the viewpoint that "the performance brings forth its materiality (...) and immediately destroys it again the moment it is created, setting in motion a continuous cycle."¹²

Yes, this may be valid for performance as an event, but not for performance as a work of art. Besides staged crime fictions, musicals, dramas etc. there are further theater genres, which, though they contain no words or music only bodily motions, can be performed and watched multiple times. Dance pieces and ballets can be repeatedly performed though they are not recorded anywhere else but in the performers' bodies. For instance, in 2010 the Ballet Pécs staged Imre Eck's *Az iszonyat balladája* (The Ballad of Horror), although Eck passed away in 1999 and the piece originally premiered January 1st 1961. The so-called revivals of musical or dance pieces are actually re-stagings of earlier theatrical creations.

The view that performance is an event—and not a work of art—supports the hypothesis that performance is ephemeral. Erika Fischer-Lichte devoted a whole chapter to the characteristics of performance as an event. In order to be able to do so, she overleaped those features, which prove the presence and significance of repeatability. For instance, she argues, "we must clearly distinguish here between the intensive preparation of theatrical performances, often lasting several weeks or even months, and the performance itself."¹³

12. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskia Iris Jain (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), 76.

13. *Ibid.*, 164.

What she asks us to do is to separate “preparation” from performance. Needless to say, “preparation” is an essential condition of performance as a work of art, but not necessarily an essential condition of events. In the same chapter, Fischer-Lichte’s mantra of liminality, a leitmotiv of her previous work,¹⁴ also makes an appearance. However, when she references liminality and the rites of passage as discussed by van Gennep and Victor Turner, Fischer-Lichte forgets – or remains silent about – the fact that repetition, replay, repeated action are essential elements of liminal processes.

Wilmar Sauter, who devoted a whole monograph to theater as event, also assumes a clear separation between performance as a work of art and performance as an event, in order to emphasize the uniqueness of the performer-spectator interaction. According to Sauter “together the actions and reactions constitute the theatrical event.”¹⁵ Therefore they are unrepeatable, we may add. In which case it is easier to comprehend Craig’s stance: what kind of a work of art is that which can be modified at will by its spectators’ intentional and unintentional reactions that can challenge even the consistency of the players’ action?

Despite various scholars’ relentless advocacy of performance’s ephemeral nature, a plethora of performances and events that allegedly vanish upon inception have been repeated in practice, as examples of both artistic and everyday nature amply evidence it. Besides the obvious examples provided by theatrical or concert repertoires, we should mention the repetitions of unique artistic events and actions, such as the 23 works of art / productions exhibited / performed as part of the *History Will Repeat Itself*¹⁶ exhibition at the KunstWerke Berlin in 2007-2008, or the series of events titled *The Artist is Present* in the New York MoMA in the spring of 2010, when past performances by Marina Abramović got revived by others. The reenactments of significant social events, such as the battles of the American civil war and

14. E.g. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre*, trans. Jo Riley (London: Routledge, 2001), 36-38.

15. Wilmar Sauter, *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 11.

16. Inke Arns and Gabriele Horn, eds., *History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-Enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2007).

other historical occurrences, exemplify that non-artistic event may also be repeated.¹⁷

The stance about the changeable and ephemeral nature of performance opposes performance arts and theater with those art forms and human creations, which exist in a tangible form. This stance suggests that the specificity and value of theater is exactly its alleged impairment. Yet, the dichotomy, which emphasizes performance's ephemerality in opposition with other arts' archival features, does not take in consideration two facts. Firstly, not only performances vanish but everything else: documents, objects, artworks too. Secondly, it assumes that without materialization there is no remembrance, although – as Gertrude Stein emphasized – remembrance is: repetition.

Evanescence, disappearance, and vanishing, despite Schechner's, Phelan's and Fischer-Lichte's argumentation, are not the opposites of existence and preservation. As Rebecca Schneider pointed out, "it is one of the primary insights of poststructuralism that disappearance is that which marks *all* documents, *all* records, and *all* material remains. Indeed, remains become themselves through disappearance as well."¹⁸ When the very special nature of performance's evanescence gets emphasized, it is the logic of the archive that lurks beneath the argument, the logic, which opposes the residue with the lost and vanished. For the quoted theater scholars, it is the lost and vanished that is valuable, for the archivist it is always the remainder, haunted forever by what's lost. As Derrida put it, "the structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent 'in the flesh', neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another (...)."¹⁹

The logic of the archive is apparent in the views about theater's ephemerality also because it is the archivist who treasures materialized forms only: for them bodily gestures are irrelevant. Although Erika Fischer-Lichte and the like-minded theoreticians are ostensibly on "the side of the body," their argumentation reproduces body-negating stances. These stances hold that oration, storytelling, improvisation, or embodied ritual practices

17. See Péter P. Müller, "Színház És Háború [Theatre and War]," in *A Magyar Színháztudomány Kortárs Irányai [Contemporary Trends in Hungarian Theatre Studies]*, ed. Zsófia Balassa, Péter P. Müller, and Krisztina Rosner (Pecs: Kronosz, 2012), 21-24.

18. Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 102.

19. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, 84).

do not belong to history,²⁰ because they vanish upon inception just like the “event” of the performance.

Herein lies another contradiction. These body-based genres are passed down *through repetition*. They survive because they are repeated (told, played, done) repeatedly. Still, past that lives on in actions (as opposed to past that lives on in written or objectified form) is often considered “mythical” or is not considered memory proper (unlike documents and objects). Oral history is characterized by performative components, variability, the aim to reconstruct, and a lack of closure.²¹

In a theater performance gestures, genres, images, relations repeat past gestures and actions in the present. The event of the performance is open towards evanescence but also towards the dimension of bequeathment, preservation, and remembrance. As Rebecca Schneider put it,

...when we approach performance not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the *act* of remaining and a means of re-appearance and ‘re-participation’ (...) we are almost immediately forced to admit that remains do not have to be isolated to the document, to the object, to bone versus flesh. Here the body (...) becomes a kind of archive and host to a collective memory.²²

In other words, through the bodies involved performance, though connected with evanescence, is also connected with viability and preservation. Moreover, performance, exactly *because* repetition is its constitutive element, challenges evanescence, impermanence, and demise.

Bequeathment is about repetition hence alternations and varieties are necessarily essential parts of it. Therefore, performance would never fit Craig’s ideal about the entirely self-same and unchangeable work of art, which is a typical modernist ideal that disregards an essential feature of previous eras’ artworks, i.e., that they virtually existed in varieties only. At the same time, exactly because of its repeatability, theater performance may (also) function as the medium of remembrance and bequeathment.

20. Compare with Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 100.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 101.

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2016/17 academic years he was Visiting Professor in the USA. In 1996 and 1999 he held a research scholarship at Darwin College, Cambridge (UK), in 2014 and 2015 at the University of Kent (UK). In 1998 he awarded the four years long Széchenyi Professorship. He published eleven books so far, most in Hungarian, including, From Hamlet to the Hamletmachine (2008), From the Rite to the Media (in Croatian – 2009), Body and Theatricality (2009), Hungarian Drama at the Millennium (2014), The Conquest of Stage/Space (2015), and Theatre Beyond its Boundaries (2021).

Reviving the Archives. The Researcher as Artist and the Artist as Researcher

CRISTINA MODREANU¹

Abstract: How to make the archives live again for a contemporary audience? Based on the writings of a famous historian, Arlette Farge, and on my own experience in working with archives I am arguing in this article that the archive researcher should take inspiration from artistic creativity and artists should pay more attention to the scholar dimension of their research, while both need to understand they are accountable to the next generations for which they need to re-write the historical narrative in a responsible way, as close to the truth as possible.

Keywords: archival research, Farge (Arlette), reviving heritage, performing arts, historical narrative

Motto: *The past has no unambiguous meaning,
and nowhere is this clearer than in the archives.*
(Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archive*)

Tempted to spend as much time as possible in the archives, the researcher finds herself trapped in the past, trying to reconstruct its puzzle and sometimes forgetting one of her main missions: sharing her findings with her contemporaries in engaging forms. In contrast with historical writing which avoids to fictionalize the archival findings, when it comes to

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performing arts, one needs to find creative ways to share these results with an audience. The rigour of the historian seems not to have anything in common with artistic creativity, but the latter has certainly proved to be able to reanimate and reactivate the findings of the past, a vital aspect when it comes to performing arts archives. There is a constant struggle to find the best answers to the question “how to share the results of a niche research with a wider audience?” Some interesting comments come from the writings of Arlette Farge, who is a famous historian defending the responsibility of her peers to avoid fictionalizing the historical facts and remain within the strict margins of the truth. In the same time, Farge correctly identifies the urge of the historian to share her findings with a wider audience and draws a vivid image of the historian’s most common dilemma: “The physical pleasure of finding a trace of the past is succeeded by doubt mixed with the powerless feeling of not knowing what to do with it.”²

On the road to solve this dilemma, any historian - and I will refer to historians from now on as “archive researchers” for the purpose of this article - faces a number of traps and dangers, among which Farge enumerates the danger to become too immersed in the archive:

Accumulating an infinite number of precise details about thousands of unknown people who have been invisible for so long can be a source of such happiness that you can begin to forget that writing history is actually a different kind of intellectual exercise, one in which fascinated recollection is just not enough. But let us be clear: even if it is not sufficient, it is at the very least the soil in which historical thinking takes root. The trap is nothing more than this: you can become absorbed by the archives to the point that you no longer know how to interrogate them.³

From my own experience, I would add another danger when it comes to “not knowing what to do with it” (“it” being the findings in the archive):

2. Arlette Farge, Thomas Scott-Railton, and Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Allure of the Archives*, Lewis Walpole Series in Eighteenth-Century Culture and History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 11.

3. Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, 70.

in pursuing the academic route, staying too close to the so called “truth” of the archive, the archive researcher is in danger to miss the opportunity to share in a meaningful way what she has discovered.

But the question is how to make the archive live again? Arlette Farge, writing about the archives of Bastille prison, believes there is a risk in fictionalizing the lives of real people who are the subjects of these archives:

In the pages of these documents, thousands of fates crossed or missed each other, presenting us with a multitude of characters who have the makings of heroes or of forgotten Don Quixotes. Even the adventures of the more ordinary characters in the archives still have a tinge of exoticism. For some, there is a novel to be written here. For others, fiction is the ideal way to free oneself from the constraints of the discipline and make the archive live again.⁴

She gives an interesting example, namely a prisoner from Bastille about whom she finds out he managed to write a note to his wife with his blood on a piece of cloth, a detail which makes his story a potential material for a great work of fiction. Farge, as a historian, feels responsible for the story of this person:

The prisoner of the Bastille, whose unique traces rest in the archives, is an autonomous subject, not the fruit of someone’s imagination. His existence, if it is to take on weight and meaning, must not be turned into a novel; rather, it needs a narrative that is able to see him as a historical subject, a member of the society that gave him his words and expressions. If he is to “come alive,” it will not be through a fable, but through writing that illuminates the circumstances of his appearance in the archives and takes into account whatever remains obscure about his existence, *getting as close as possible to that which will always be missing (my emphasis)*.⁵

4. Ibid., 76.

5. Ibid., 96.

But, as Farge herself said in the phrase I chose for the motto, “the past has no unambiguous meaning”, ambiguity is much more powerful than truthfulness in the case of rewriting history, so one cannot exclude fiction from this process of filling the gaps in order to make the past understandable for those living today. There are assumptions to be made and events to be re-scripted and imagination does play a role in capturing the vibe of the times, beyond the official statements found in the documents. In the same time, if something “will always be missing”, why not trying to fill the gaps with artistic content, so that one makes sure to reactivate the archive, to make it alive again for the contemporary audiences, who are not familiar with the past reflected in the old documents? If reading between the lines is not only allowed but also encouraged in order to make as whole as possible the historical puzzle, isn’t the artistic imagination the best tool for drawing the image of the past? Farge writes about the role of the “ruptures and dispersion” and recognizes the importance of “stutters and silences” which need to be interpreted in order to be included in intelligible new sentences. These new sentences are written by the researcher, they are based not only on the past events, but also on the correlation between them made by the said researcher who gives her own account of these events, from a contemporary point of view, informed by her own beliefs and values.

In Farge’s words:

If the archive is to serve as an effective social observatory, it will only do so through the scattered details that have broken through, and which form a gapriddled puzzle of obscure events. You develop your reading of the archives through ruptures and dispersion, and must mold questions out of stutters and silences.⁶

Reviving the performing arts archives is even more complicated than rewriting history. The strangeness and the newness of those first moments when a creative pursuit reached its audience and had a splashing impact upon it, thus contributing to historical innovation in the performing arts field, can hardly be replicated only by describing it in words – no matter how

6. Ibid., 94.

powerful they can be in redrawing the context of that epoch. For that impact to be felt again there is a strong need of a contemporary equivalent of the past creative gesture/contribution, carrying its own meaning in a very different world. This is why I believe that the best way to share the findings discovered in a theater archive with a wider audience is using creative means like *reenactment*, *new experimental creations*, *improvisations* based on archival elements. There is of course a scholarly dimension, writings based on the documents discovered can be shared with academic peers via academic papers, conferences and publications; but if we are to address a non-academic audience, we need to consider the merits of an artistic pursuit.

This is why, given the role of re-construction, interpretation and personal correlation in this process of sharing the findings with the others, I cannot fully agree with Arlette Farge when she introduces a contradiction between “the poet” (the artist) and “the historian”:

A historical narrative is a construction, not a truthful discourse that can be verified on all of its points. This narrative must combine scholarship with arguments that can introduce the criteria of truthfulness and plausibility. The poet creates, the historian argues. He rearticulates past systems of relationships through the representation of the social community he studies, and through his own system of values and norms.⁷

My argument would be that, on the contrary, the historian IS a poet/artist and the poet/artist IS a historian when she bases her new creations on historical archives. They share, of course, a responsibility towards the past and towards the stories of the persons coming alive from these archives. They need to be aware of the dangers of ideological burden these archives carry with them. But they must not be afraid of adding their view of the facts discovered, nor shy away from the creative side of the reinterpretation process.

From what I have experienced as an archive researcher⁸, it is advisable to have the artists involved from the beginning in the research process, so that they can live themselves those moments of discovery and transfer some

7. Ibid., 95.

8. I curated the following research projects: *Comedia Remix* (2014-2015), *Arhiva Remix* (2015), *Teatrul ca rezistentă* (2018-present), *Dictionarul multimedia al teatrului românesc* (2020-2021).

of that energy into their artistic works. That is, of course, if the research process has started from a scholarly perspective. There are artists who start on their own this process of opening the archives with the sole purpose of accessing a new source of inspiration and illuminate a subject they are preoccupied with. This “reverse process” may not in the end be accompanied by a scholarly discourse, but the artistic results would ensure the spreading of the findings, filtered through the artistic vision, to a wider audience. No matter the starting point – a scholarly research for the purpose of reestablishing the truth about the past based on the archival documents, or an artistic research using the archives as a source of inspiration - the scholar should become an artist, and to the same extent the artist should become a scholar, thus ensuring the multiplication of their discoveries for a wider and diversified audience.

A couple of examples of such artistic pursuits based on archival research are coming on the Romanian stage from the artists of what I coined in another article “the in-between-generation”⁹. That means the first generation raised after the 1989 Romanian Revolution: they have the necessary distance to become interested in reconstructing the historical truth via artistic means. The director-playwright Gianina Cărbunariu based two of her most successful productions on her research in the CNSAS – the archives of the former Romanian secret police, Securitate. *X mm from Y km* used as a ready-made the 11 pages transcript of a conversation between representatives of the Romanian Writers’ Union and dissident writer Dorin Tudoran, punished by the state for asking to exercise his right to leave the country. The other production, *Typographic. Upper Cases*, was based on the Securitate file of a 17 years old boy who was brave enough to write slogans like „Freedom” on the walls of public buildings in his town, facing severe punishment from the regime’s representatives. In both cases she used the materials found in the archives with an artistic twist, with the effect of offering various possible interpretations for the documented facts, avoiding drawing her own conclusions and leaving this responsibility to the members of the audience. An audience enlightened by these experiences becomes capable to transfer to it not only knowledge about the past, but also emotions, thus creating a cathartic response.

9. “Gianina Carbunariu, the director-playwright”, *Routledge Companion for European Theatre*, due to be published 2022.

Cărbunariu's script for *Typographic. Upper Cases* was also used by film director Radu Jude for his production titled *Uppercase Print*, in which he added footage selected from the Romanian Public Television's Archive. The collation of this pieces of propaganda, illustrating the official narrative of the communist regime in Romania with the real story of an adolescent living in communist Romania, told by intentionally expressionless actors directly facing the camera, has a striking effect in this film. The brilliant juxtaposition proves Jude's high interest in reviving the archives with artistic means.

Another theatre production inspired by a real historic character – the torturer Ioan Ficior - and the journalistic investigations about him, is *The White Horse*, a spectacular one-woman show created by theatre director Ioana Păun and interpreted by actress Ilinca Manolache. Manolache plays all the characters in this true story, male and female, and she successfully embodies the ambiguity of a past who left disparate traces for us to collate and interpret.

These are examples of original creations emancipated as much as possible from prejudice and not impacted anymore by the direct suffering provoked by political trauma. Including the results of the archival research in new vibrant artistic productions meant to stand on their own merits is the sign of a healthy further step towards liberation from a past which has kept the artistic discourse on hold for most of the last thirty years' transition from a political system to another, as researcher Gabriel Andreescu believes.¹⁰

To come to a conclusion, while I believe the artists and the scholars should join forces in "getting as close as possible to that which will always be missing", I also believe that Arlette Farge is right about the responsibilities of the archive researcher – artist or scholar - and I am sure this responsibility, of not contradicting the facts discovered or operate outside the margins of truth, should function not only for scholars but also for artists. The ethical aspects of reviving the archives are essential for whomever is opening this "Pandora box", and this aspect deserves a separate article. But coming back to the artist/scholar dialectics, in order to conclude, Farge herself is quoting Michel Foucault who said in an interview: "I am well aware that I have never written anything but

10. Gabriel Andreescu, *Existența prin cultură: represiune, colaboraționism și rezistență intelectuală sub regimul comunist*, (*Existence through Culture: repression, collaborationism and intellectual resistance under the Communist regime*) Colecția Plural M (Iași: Polirom, 2015), 10.

fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth.”¹¹

“Make fiction function within the truth” can be the marching hymn for the archive researcher, no matter if she comes from the scholar or from the artistic field.

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11. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, 1st American ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 193.

L'Archive Dionysos : une approche méthodologique à l'iconographie théâtrale

RENZO GUARDENTI¹

Abstract: *The Dionysos Archive: a Methodological Approach to Theatre Iconography.* The article illustrates the Dionysos Digital Archive of Theatrical Iconography, created by the research team of the University of Florence directed by Renzo Guardenti. The Dionysos Archive collects more than 22,000 images accompanied by cataloguing files, relating to the history of Performing Arts from Greek theatre to the first decades of the 20th century. The cataloguing of the images contained in the archive is based on criteria aimed at highlighting their theatrical specificity and responds to a historiographic perspective that privileges the visual dimension of the Performing Arts, of which iconographic documentation constitutes a source of primary importance.

Keywords: theatre iconography; history of theatre; performing arts; digital archive; cataloguing

L'archive numérique d'iconographie théâtrale *Dionysos* est le résultat de l'une des plus importantes lignes de recherche du Département SAGAS (Storia, Archelogia, Geografia, Arte e Spettacolo) de l'Université de Florence. Créée à la moitié des années 1990 sous l'impulsion de Cesare Molinari, l'Archive *Dionysos* rassemble plus de 22.000 images, accompagnées de fiches de catalogage, concernant les arts du spectacle de l'antiquité grecque et romaine jusqu'aux années 1940 du XX^e siècle (**fig. 1**). L'archive embrasse donc une pluralité de formes scéniques : du théâtre dramatique proprement

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dit à l'opéra, de la danse au cirque, des fêtes religieuses ou populaires aux marionnettes, des spectacles de rues aux performances, du rite à la pantomime. Chacune de ces formes scéniques est représentée dans l'archive par des sources iconographiques concernant les décors, les costumes, les accessoires, les lieux théâtraux et les théâtres, la vie et les habitudes des comédiens et du public, pour documenter de la manière la plus exhaustive possible des phénomènes des arts du spectacle à partir de la catégorie du visuel.

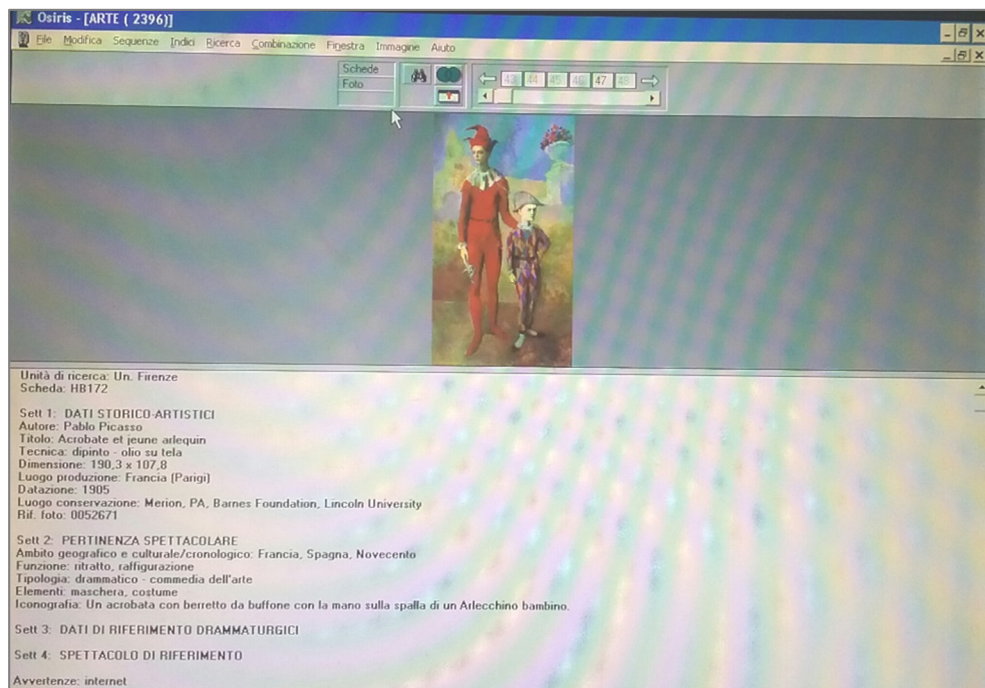


Fig. 1 : Prise d'écran de l'Archive Dionysos.

L'Archive a été présentée à la communauté scientifique internationale à l'occasion de colloques où de conférences dans de nombreuses universités étrangères², et en 2006 l'archive a été publiée en DVD-Rom³, ce qui a permis

2. On peut citer par exemple les colloques internationaux organisés entre 1998 et 2001 par l'European Science Foundation (cfr. *European Theatre Iconography. Proceedings of the European Science Foundation Network* (Mainz, 2-26 July 1998, Wassenaar, 21-25 July 1999, Poggio a Caiano, 20-23 July 2000), ed. Christopher Balme, Robert Erenstein, Cesare Molinari (Roma: Bulzoni,

de la faire connaître et de la diffuser ultérieurement au niveau national et international. Aujourd'hui, les nouveaux systèmes d'exploitation ont provoqué l'obsolescence du logiciel qui permet le fonctionnement de la base de données et, dans l'attente d'une prochaine mise à jour, *Dionysos* est consultable uniquement chez le Département SAGAS de l'Université de Florence.

À l'origine de *Dionysos* il y a une conception méthodologique qui considère le théâtre et le spectacle en tant qu'arts visuels et qui privilège, par conséquent, l'iconographie théâtrale comme une source majeure pour l'histoire des arts de la scène⁴, dans une perspective historiographique visant à l'analyse et à la reconstruction philologique des formes scéniques et du jeu des acteurs⁵.

L'iconographie comme fondement de l'histoire du spectacle : une raison donc plus que suffisante pour la création de l'Archive *Dionysos*. Cette approche méthodologique finalisée à la recherche a eu inévitablement des rebondissements dans l'activité didactique avec la constitution, à partir des

2002). L'Archive a été présentée dans les plus importantes universités italiennes ; à l'étranger *Dionysos* a été présentée à l'Université Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle, à Sorbonne Université, à la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Santiago du Chili, à la Københavns Universitet, à l'Université de Lisbonne et à l'Université de Toronto.

3. *Dionysos Archivio di iconografia teatrale/Dionysos Theatre Iconography Archive*, ed. Cesare Molinari et Renzo Guardenti (Corazzano: Titivillus Edizioni, 2006).
4. Voir, par exemple, Cesare Molinari, "Sull'iconografia come fonte della storia dello spettacolo", *Biblioteca Teatrale*, n.s., n. 37-38 (1996), 19-40; Maria Ines Aliverti, *Il ritratto d'attore nel Settecento francese e inglese* (Pisa: ETS, 1986); Id., *La naissance de l'acteur moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998); Maria Ines Aliverti, "Un breve decalogo per lo studio delle immagini teatrali", *Acting Archives Review*, a. V, n. 9 (2015) (<https://www.actingarchives.it/review/archivio-numeri/17-anno-v-numero-09-maggio-2015/76-un-breve-decalogo-per-lo-studio-delle-immagini-teatrali.html?highlight=WyJhbGl2ZXJ0aSlzImFsaXZlcnRpJ3MiXQ==>); Renzo Guardenti, "Teatro e iconografia: un dossier", *Teatro e Storia*, n. 25 (2004), 11-101; *Attori di carta. Motivi iconografici dall'antichità all'Ottocento*, ed. Renzo Guardenti (Roma: Bulzoni, 2005); *Sguardi sul teatro. Saggi di iconografia teatrale*, ed. Renzo Guardenti (Roma: Bulzoni, 2008); Renzo Guardenti, "Teatro e arti figurative", *Il teatro e le arti*, ed. Luigi Allegri (Roma: Carocci, 2017), 43-92; Renzo Guardenti, *In forma di quadro. Note di iconografia teatrale*, Imola, Cue Press, 2020.
5. Fondamentales, à ce propos, les études de Cesare Molinari : voir, par exemple, *Le nozze degli dei. Un saggio sul grande spettacolo barocco* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1968) et *L'attrice divina. Eleonora Duse nel teatro tra i due secoli* (Imola: Cue Press, 2018) (1ère édition Roma: Bulzoni, 1985).

années 1970, d'un fonds de diapositives qui a été constamment utilisés dans nos cours universitaires : quelques trois-mille images, du théâtre grec au XX^e siècle, recueillies scrupuleusement par Cesare Molinari.

Vers la fin des années 1980, quand le nombre des diapositives a atteint le chiffre de cinq-mille pièces, on a commencé à se poser la question du catalogage de ce répertoire iconographique, sollicités aussi dans cette démarche par la diffusion des technologies informatiques.

Il s'agissait donc de travailler à deux niveaux : d'un côté on avait la nécessité d'une technologie flexible, capable de rassembler dans la virtualité de l'espace électronique une quantité considérable d'images, très difficile à gérer avec des supports traditionnels, et de l'autre on a commencé à s'interroger sur les critères qui auraient dû nous permettre d'accueillir, ou de ne pas accueillir, des sources iconographiques à l'intérieur de l'archive.

Le principe qui nous a guidé dans le choix des sujets a été celui de la documentation "directe", c'est-à-dire des documents qui proviennent du contexte de réalisation du spectacle ou qui contiennent certains éléments qui peuvent les rattacher sans aucun doute au domaine des arts du spectacle : des esquisses de décor, des dessins de costume, des portraits d'acteur, des scènes théâtrales, des illustrations de la dramaturgie, des plans et des relèvements architecturaux, des photographies de comédiens, de spectacles, de théâtres, à la limite des imaginations théâtrales, mais de toute façon des images caractérisée par une théâtralité intrinsèque. Une fois délimité ce champ d'action, on a donc rassemblé les images qui pouvaient être considérées des témoignages des aspects phénoménologiques du spectacle, aussi bien des documents avec le statut de projet que des documents qui fixaient *à posteriori* les résultats d'un événement : la mémoire du spectacle, du jeu de l'acteur, d'une forme scénique, ou la trace visuelle de thèmes, scènes, personnages de la dramaturgie. Quelque chose en somme qui ressemblait à ce répertoire général de l'iconographie théâtrale qui avait été envisagé d'une façon utopique par Heinz Kindermann à la fin des années Cinquante⁶.

6. Heinz Kindermann, "Wir brauchen theatergeschichtliche Iconographien!", in *Maske und Koturn*, III, n. 4 (1957), 289-293. Bien qu'à une échelle différente, il faut signaler au début des années 2000 la parution d'un livre qui répond à la nécessité d'organiser de façon cohérente les sources iconographiques sur le spectacle : Stefano Mazzoni, *Atlante iconografico. Spazi e forme dello spettacolo in Occidente dal mondo antico a Wagner* (Corazzano: Titivillus Edizioni, 2003). L'*Atlante*

La création d'une archive numérique d'iconographie théâtrale comporte nécessairement un problème de langage, concernant avant tout les principes méthodologiques, voire idéologiques, qui sont à la base de sa structure. Dans le cas de l'iconographie théâtrale, les questions conceptuelles les plus difficiles sont le catalogage et la catégorisation des documents. L'hétérogénéité des sources, leur appartenance à des typologies différentes en termes de techniques artistiques, de fonction, d'époque de réalisation et de contextes culturels, et surtout le fait que beaucoup de ces figurations ne peuvent pas être rattachées que partiellement à la dimension du spectacle, rendent plus compliquée la création d'une grille de référence, ne serait-ce que du point de vue terminologique.

L'expérience acquise au sein de l'équipe de recherche florentine a permis d'accéder aux informations sur la base d'une grille sectorielle et d'une nomenclature tendant à classer le document figuratif non seulement du point de vue de ses spécificités artistiques et culturelles, mais aussi et surtout de celui de sa particularité en tant que document *de* et *sur* le théâtre.

Les documents ne sont jamais neutres⁷ : par conséquent, toute opération de classification et de catalogage ne peut pas nécessairement prétendre à une objectivité absolue. En ce qui concerne l'iconographie théâtrale, l'articulation des objectifs disciplinaires de l'histoire du théâtre et du spectacle ne permet pas d'attitudes neutres : les différentes approches au document figuratif, déterminées par la pluralité des perspectives de recherche, comportent parfois des choix arbitraires. Cette attitude, aussi orientée qu'elle puisse paraître, découle de la typologie particulière de ces images, dont le catalogage et le classement, surtout pour les sources dites indirectes, passent nécessairement par une démarche interprétative visant préalablement à déterminer leur nature de documents théâtraux.

Partant de cette prémisse, la fiche de catalogage à la base l'Archive *Dionysos* a été réalisée à partir de l'analyse d'un vaste échantillonnage de

propose un parcours rigoureux à travers les images concernant l'espace théâtral et les formes scéniques, du théâtre antique au XIXe siècle : une opération très raffinée et, d'un certain côté, même anormale du moment que, dans une époque désormais dominée par les éditions numériques, Mazzoni a confié ses matériaux au support traditionnel, mais beaucoup plus séduisant, du livre.

7. Jacques Le Goff, "Documento/Monumento", *Enciclopedia Einaudi* (Torino, Einaudi, 1978), vol. IV, 46.

documents iconographiques, afin d'établir des ensembles homogènes et d'identifier des séries de mots-clés capables de décrire univoquement les objets examinés, mais en même temps avec la conscience que l'extrême variété des typologies figuratives exige une structure flexible, capable de s'adapter aux caractéristiques des sujets représentés. En effet, la classification de documents tels que le célèbre vase de Pronomos (fig. 2) ou les photos de Sarah Bernhardt dans le rôle de Théodora (fig. 3) implique nécessairement l'utilisation d'outils de catalogage diversifiés.



Fig. 2: *Vase de Pronomos*, Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale



Fig. 3 : *Sarah Bernhardt dans le rôle de Théodora*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

La fiche (fig. 4) vise à analyser les images dans leur globalité et dans leur complexité et obéit à un critère qui met en évidence les éléments de la figuration qui, en général, peuvent être rattachés à la dimension du spectacle⁸.

8. Pour une description plus détaillée de la fiche de catalogage voir <https://www.sagas.unifi.it/upload/sub/labor/Archivio%20Dionysos%202017.pdf>.

Scheda: EB111

Sett 1: DATI STORICO-ARTISTICI
Autore: Léon Bakst
Titolo: Danzatore del tempio
Tecnica: dipinto - acquarello
Dimensione: 43 x 28
Luogo produzione: Francia (Parigi)
Datazione: 1912
Luogo conservazione: Parigi, Centre Georges-Pompidou AM 1982-427
Vedi anche: EB104-EB112
Rif. foto: 0020607

Sett 2: PERTINENZA SPETTACOLARE
Ambito geografico e culturale/cronologico: Francia, Novecento
Ambito (data): 1912
Funzione: figurino
Tipologia: danza
Elementi: costume
Iconografia: Danzatore siamese del tempio

Sett 3: DATI DI RIFERIMENTO DRAMMATURGICI
Drammaturgo/Librettista: Jean Cocteau e Federigo de Madrazo
Titolo opera: Le Dieu bleu (Il Dio blu)
Ambito composizione: Francia
Data composizione: 1912
Fonte: danze siamesi
Compositore: Reynaldo Hahn

Sett 4: SPETTACOLO DI RIFERIMENTO
Luogo rappresentazione: Parigi, Théâtre du Châtelet
Data rappresentazione: 13 maggio 1912 (prima)
Regia/allestimento: Sergej Grigor'ev
Esecuzione musicale: Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht
Scenografia/apparato: Léon Bakst
Coreografia: Michel Fokine
Costumi: Léon Bakst
Compagnia: Ballets Russes di Michail Diaghilev. Tamara Karsavina (la Jeune Fille), Vaslav Nijinskij (Dieu bleu), Lydia Nelidova (la déesse), Michel Fedorov (le Grand-prêtre), Bronislava Nijinska (la Bayadère ivre)

Note: figurino riprodotto sul programma-souvenir della settima stagione dei Ballets Russes. Una variante del 1922 con colori diversi presso la Robert L.B. Tobin Collection.

Università di Firenze

Archivio Dionysos



Fig. 4: Archive *Dionysos*, exemple de fiche de catalogue.

Elle est articulée en quatre secteurs :

-*Dati storico-artistici*, visant à mettre en relief la nature artistique du document et à identifier les données artistiques, tels que l'auteur de l'image, les techniques de réalisation, la datation, les dimensions, le lieu de conservation etc. ;

-*Pertinenza spettacolare*, concernant la valeur théâtrale de l'image (typologies des formes scéniques, éléments constitutifs, contexte culturel et fonction de l'image etc.) ;

-*Dati di riferimento drammaturgici*, relatifs à l'identification du texte dramaturgique (auteur du texte ou de la musique, titre, datation, données bibliographiques etc.) ;

-*Spettacolo di riferimento*, concernant la mise en scène (metteur en scène, datation du spectacle, lieu/théâtre, auteur du décor et des costumes, troupe etc.).

Les deux derniers secteurs, ainsi que le premier concernant le domaine artistique du document, ont une finalité strictement technique et, dans une certaine mesure, objective : ils sont en effet destinés à fournir des renseignements concernant l'image avec une bonne marge de certitude et, même si cela n'est pas toujours vrai, avec un effort interprétatif minimal, qu'il s'agisse du nom d'un peintre ou d'un dramaturge, d'un décor de théâtre ou d'une composition musicale, d'un texte dramatique ou du lieu de conservation.

Le but d'une archive numérique doit être celui de faire émerger rapidement et efficacement un grand nombre d'informations sur des domaines spécifiques et d'établir un réseau de relations sur la base d'accès simplifiés pouvant fournir aux utilisateurs une vaste série de documents. Les trois secteurs examinés jusqu'ici remplissent largement cette tâche. Cependant, la nature spécifique de l'iconographie théâtrale et son appartenance à des territoires liminaires nous obligent d'aller bien au-delà de ce niveau minimal. En effet, pour analyser correctement les phénomènes documentés par l'iconographie théâtrale, il ne suffit pas d'avoir des informations sur la technique d'exécution du document, sur les données concernant la dramaturgie ou une mise en scène ; il faut aussi situer l'image dans des contextes chronologiques et culturels qui ne peuvent pas être nécessairement ceux qui ont déterminé la réalisation, en termes physiques, du document. Mais il faut surtout identifier les éléments constitutifs de l'image et mettre en évidence sa pertinence théâtrale, sa fonction et sa typologie, en recueillant, sur la base de mots-clés exemplaires et d'un niveau de description satisfaisant, tout ce qui fait d'un *monument* figuratif un *document* pour l'histoire du spectacle. Le

deuxième secteur de la fiche de catalogage, relatif à la fonction de l'image, et qui sert à mettre en évidence la spécificité théâtrale du document, peut être considéré du point de vue conceptuel comme la pierre angulaire de l'Archive *Dionysos*.

L'ambiguïté semble être le terme qui caractérise une grande partie de l'iconographie théâtrale : cette ambiguïté découle d'éléments internes au document, comme la technique de réalisation, ou la cristallisation des modalités de représentation, dans le sillage de certaines traditions artistiques, qui peuvent influencer l'interprétation de la source et son classement. Pour toutes ces raisons, l'approche au deuxième secteur de la fiche de catalogage doit tenir compte de deux différentes nécessités : si d'une part il est indispensable de procéder à une évaluation critique du document afin de mettre en évidence sa pertinence théâtrale, d'autre part il est nécessaire d'établir des lemmes univoques, afin de limiter le risque d'analyses approximatives. Il s'agit donc d'utiliser une terminologie appropriée, basée sur des dictionnaires contrôlés efficaces, capable de désigner clairement les éléments dont se compose l'image et de mettre en évidence la théâtralité de la figuration.

Ces dictionnaires consistent dans des ensembles de mots-clés relatifs à des catégories spécifiques, employés par les utilisateurs de l'Archive *Dionysos* pour la recherche des documents. Par exemple, le dictionnaire contrôlé du champ *Tipologia* (Typologie) propose une série de termes capables de définir la plupart des formes scéniques et des genres occidentaux⁹ (des genres classiques au cirque, des festivals à la pantomime, de la vie théâtrale à la

9. Mots-clés du champ *Tipologia* : burattino (pantin); circo (cirque); danza (danse); drammatico (théâtre dramatique), articulé en commedia (comédie), Commedia dell'Arte, dramma (drame), farsa (farce), féerie, mélo, parodia (parodie), pastorale (drame pastoral), sacra rappresentazione (spectacle religieux); satiresco (drame satyrique), tragedia (tragédie), vaudeville; festa (fête), festa profana (fête profane); festa religiosa (fête religieuse), festa popolare (fête populaire); ingresso trionfale (entrée triomphale), processione (procession), carnevale (carnaval), kermesse; fuoriscena (hors-scène); happening; intermezzo (intermède); marionetta (marionnette); maschera (masque); musicale (théâtre en musique), articulé en: music-hall, opera (opéra), opera buffa (opéra-bouffe), opéra-comique, operetta (opérette), rivista (revue); pantomima (pantomime); parade; performance; prova (répétition); rito (rite); teatro di strada (théâtre de rue); vita teatrale (vie théâtrale).

performance, du théâtre musical à la Commedia dell'Arte), tandis que le champ *Ambito geografico e culturale/cronologico* permet de situer l'image dans son contexte géographique, culturel et chronologique.

L'analyse de l'iconographie théâtrale dépend avant tout de la possibilité d'identifier les sujets représentés : pour cette raison, le champ *Iconografia* (Iconographie) est un champ libre, qui n'est pas assujéti à des dictionnaires contrôlés, et dans lequel on décrit le sujet ou la situation représentée, en faisant émerger sa valeur iconographique (par exemple, la situation globale ou même le moment précis d'une scène) et, si le document le permet, ses valeurs iconologiques.

L'appartenance d'une image au contexte des arts du spectacle se fonde en premier lieu sur un ou plusieurs *Elementi* (Éléments) spécifiques : pour cette raison, ce champ permet une approche analytique de la figuration sur la base d'un dictionnaire contrôlé¹⁰ dont la terminologie, qui tend à être exhaustive, permet d'identifier ce qui, dans l'image, se rattache effectivement au théâtre et au spectacle. Il s'agit, pour ainsi dire, de décomposer l'image dans ses éléments constitutifs, de l'acteur au décor, de l'édifice ou du lieu théâtral au geste, du costume au masque, de la scénographie à l'éclairage.

La nature théâtrale effective du document peut être vérifiée par le champ *Funzione* (Fonction), concernant l'intentionnalité avec laquelle l'image a été réalisée : le classement de la figuration comporte une approche

10. Mots-clé du champ *Elementi* : accessorio (accessoire) ; animale (animal); apparato (apparat); attore (acteur); cantante (chanteur); buffone (bouffon) ; burattino (pantin); carro (char, char thismphal); città (ville); comparsa (figurant); coreografia (chorégraphie); coro (choeur); costume; danzatore (danseur); edificio (édifice) articulé en: amfithéâtre, circo (cirque), ippodromo (hippodrome), odeon, stadio (stade); figurante (figurant); gesto (geste); illuminazione (éclairage); luogo deputato (mansion du théâtre médiéval); luogo teatrale (lieu théâtral), articulé en: chiesa (église), cortile (cour), giardino (jardin); marionetta (marionnette); maschera (masque); mimo (mime); musica (musique); natura (nature); palco (loge); palcoscenico (plateau); pantomimo (pantomime); performer, articulé en: acrobata (acrobate); ammaestratore (dompteur), giocoliere (saltimbanque), giullare (jongleur), imbonitore (bonimenteur); personaggio (personnage); pubblico (spectateur); sala (salle); scena (scène) scenografia (décor); scenotecnica (machinerie théâtrale); sipario (rideau); travestimento (déguisement).

critique sur la base des caractéristiques intrinsèques de la source et des acquisitions de l'historiographie. Il s'agit donc d'un travail dans une certaine mesure arbitraire, qui est tempéré par l'utilisation d'un dictionnaire contrôlé, conçu avec le but d'éliminer toute ambiguïté terminologique par le biais aussi de reformulations sémantiques des mots-clés. Si, par exemple, dans le cas de reproductions photographiques de bâtiments théâtraux, de costumes, d'affiches, de programmes de théâtre ou d'illustrations de traités, les mots *Architettura*, *Costume*, *Locandina*, *Programma di sala*, *Trattato* ont une signification univoque, indiquant la fonction primaire de l'objet, d'autres définitions nécessitent de modifications conceptuelles plus ou moins profondes, élargissant ou réduisant leur réseau lexical¹¹. C'est le cas des images qui dans l'Archive *Dionysos* sont classées respectivement sous les mots *Rappresentazione*, *Illustrazione*, *Raffigurazione*. Si le terme *Rappresentazione* (Représentation) désigne une image créée dans le but de documenter un moment d'un spectacle (par exemple, les photos de scène du *Revizor* de Gogol dirigé par Meyerhold, celles du *Modellbuch* de *Un homme est un homme* de Brecht, le tableau *Théâtre d'enfants* de William Hogarth ou encore la gravure d'Abraham Bosse représentant les *Farceurs* sur la scène de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne), le mot *Illustrazione* (Illustration), d'habitude attribué aux images accompagnant un texte littéraire, dans le cas de l'iconographie théâtrale a un sens plus large, pouvant se référer non seulement aux images publiées dans des textes dramaturgiques (comme par exemple les frontispices des éditions de Molière au XVIIe siècle), mais aussi à des images qui ne sont pas dans un livre mais qui *illustrent* quand même un moment ou le thème principal d'une pièce théâtrale, comme dans le cas du tableau *La Tempête* de Hogarth (**fig. 5**).

11. Mots-clés du champ *Funzione* (Fonction): *accessorio* (accessoire), *allegoria* (allégorie), *architettura* (architecture), *bozzetto* (esquisse), *caricatura* (caricature), *costume*, *figurino* (esquisse de costume), *illustrazione* (illustration), *locandina* (affiche), *progetto* (projet architectural), *programma di sala* (programme du spectacle), *raffigurazione* (imagination théâtrale), *rappresentazione* (représentation, mise en scène), *ricostruzione* (reconstruction), *rilevazione architettonica* (relevé architectural), *ritratto* (portrait), *trattato* (traité).



Fig. 5: William Hogarth, *La Tempête*, 1735 env., Wakefield, Nostell Priory.

Le mot *Raffigurazione*, qu'on pourrait traduire avec « imagination théâtrale » se réfère à des images qui, même si elles sont caractérisées par une évidente théâtralité, ne se rattachent pas à des spectacles donnés, mais elles se réfèrent de manière plus ou moins précise à des formes scéniques ou à des idées de théâtre, souvent interprétées et réélaborées dans une perspective onirique ou sous forme de fantaisies scéniques. Théâtres de la mémoire, de l'esprit, du rêve, de la spéculation intellectuelle et artistique, ces figurations constituent un univers parallèle à celui qui sert de documentation d'un événement : c'est le cas par exemple des tableaux de Jean-Antoine Watteau consacrée à la Comédie Italienne (fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Comédiens Italiens*, 1720, Washington, National Gallery of Art.

À partir de ces considérations, on comprend aisément que l'Archive *Dionysos* va bien au-delà d'une simple proposition de catalogage, devenant un outil qui, dans une certaine mesure, peut aussi remplir une fonction critique. Cette caractéristique peut susciter des perplexités et des objections, car une base de données ne devrait pas, en principe, orienter les utilisateurs de manière critique et idéologique, mais fournir des indications objectives et neutres. Mais dans le cas du catalogage de l'iconographie théâtrale, qui sous la surface séduisante des apparences cache souvent des significations impossibles à retracer sans des outils adéquats, le classement d'une image est assez souvent le résultat d'une opération critique, qui implique des prises de position précises, comme on peut voir dans les exemples suivants.

La célèbre enluminure d'Hubert Cailleau du *Mystère de la Passion de Valenciennes* (**fig. 7**) est à ce propos particulièrement intéressante : réalisée par Cailleau en 1577, elle montre l'espace scénique aménagé par le même

Cailleau lors de la représentation de 1547, manifestation tardive d'une forme scénique typiquement médiévale, encore présente en France à l'époque de la Renaissance.



Fig. 7 : Hubert Cailleau, *Mystère de la Passion de Valenciennes*, 1577, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France

La classification de cette image ne peut pas être séparée des analyses opposées d'Henry Rey-Flaud et d'Elie Konigson. Rey-Flaud, selon lequel le dispositif scénique médiéval était modelé sur la notion de *théâtre en rond*, estime que la miniature de Cailleau est une sorte de développement graphique horizontal d'une scène qui, en réalité, devait être circulaire, alors que selon Konigson l'image reflète exactement la structure et la disposition du dispositif scénique de 1547, qui n'était pas aménagé en rond et se disposait frontalement face au public. Dans ce cas, attribuer à la miniature de Cailleau seulement le mot-clé *scena* (scène) signifierait se conformer à la thèse de Rey-Flaud, désormais dépassée par les acquisitions de Konigson, qui a démontré que le théâtre du Moyen Âge ne se fondait pas uniquement sur le *théâtre en rond*, étant par contre caractérisé par la pluralité des espaces: il est donc plus approprié associer au lemme *scena* le mot *palcoscenico* (plateau), avec un sens décidément plus précis, capable de définir avec une plus grande pertinence terminologique, l'exacte organisation de l'espace scénique et de mettre en évidence la disposition frontale, devant le public, du *Mystère de la Passion de Valenciennes*.

Autre chose encore. On a vu que les mots-clés *Illustrazione* et *Rappresentazione* sont deux termes qui ont une importance particulière dans l'Archive *Dionysos* : le premier est en général associé aux images qui décorent les frontispices des éditions de textes dramatiques. C'est le cas des gravures réalisées par François Chauveau pour l'édition de 1676 des *Œuvres* de Racine, où la seule référence à la dimension spectaculaire est déterminée par le cadre générique du « palais à volonté », et c'est aussi le cas des illustrations accompagnant les éditions de Goldoni de Pasquali et Zatta. Le second mot-clé se réfère plutôt aux images qui peuvent être considérées comme des témoignages du spectacle. C'est évidemment le cas de la documentation photographique, mais c'est aussi celui des sources figuratives réalisées avec des techniques artistiques traditionnelles. Exempla à ce propos, les almanachs publiés entre 1684 et 1688 par les frères Bonnard, qui se distinguent par leur fiabilité documentaire (fig. 8-10).



Fig. 8: Jean Baptiste Bonnard, *Arlequin Protée*, 1684, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.



Fig. 9: Nicolas Bonnard, *Le Triomphe d'Arlequin, Jason*, 1685, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.



Fig. 10: Nicolas Bonnart, *Arlequin Grand Visir*, 1688, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France,

Ces almanachs se réfèrent à trois spectacles de l’Ancien Théâtre Italien¹² dont ils documentent les scènes principales avec une intention que l’on pourrait presque qualifier comme « photographique ». Mais d’autres figurations présentent des caractéristiques qui ne permettent pas de les classer en leur attribuant des mots-clés univoques. C’est le cas des illustrations qui décorent les six volumes du *Théâtre Italien*¹³, le recueil de comédies de la

12. Il s’agit d’*Arlequin Protée* (1683), d’*Arlequin Jason ou la Toison d’Or Comique* (1684) di Nolant de Fatouville et *Arlequin Grand Visir* (1687) d’auteur anonyme. Sur les almanachs Bonnart voir Renzo Guardenti, *Gli italiani a Parigi. La Comédie Italienne (1660-1697). Storia, iconografia, pratica scenica* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1990) vol. I, 241-245 et 294-342.

13. Evaristo Gherardi, *Le Théâtre Italien de Gherardi, ou Le Recueil général de toutes les Comédies et Scènes françoises jouées par les Comédiens Italiens du Roi pendant tout le temps qu’ils ont été au service* (Paris : Cusson et Witte, 1700, 6 voll.).

première Comédie Italienne publié en 1700 par Evaristo Gherardi, le dernier Arlequin de la troupe. Sur la base de la confrontation de ces images avec d'autres typologies documentaires (textes dramatiques, sources d'archive, gazettes et chroniques) on peut supposer que Gherardi a suivi directement le travail des dessinateurs et des graveurs, réalisant ainsi une sorte de « mise en scène de l'image », afin de proposer en termes visuels un véritable témoignage des pratiques scéniques de l'Ancien Théâtre Italien. *Illustrazione* et *Rappresentazione* sont donc les mots-clés qui permettent de qualifier efficacement les frontispices gravés du *Théâtre Italien* et d'en mettre en évidence les caractéristiques dominantes. Cet exemple, qui montre clairement qu'une même image peut avoir différentes valeurs testimoniales, nous ramène à la notion d'ambiguïté dont on a parlé au début de cet article. Tout cela confirme le choix méthodologique à la base de l'Archive *Dionysos* selon lequel le traitement de l'iconographie des arts du spectacle ne s'épuise pas uniquement dans le classement des images à partir de séries de mots-clés mais nécessite, par contre, d'un travail d'interprétation et de critique.

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*Theatre Photography in Nineteenth Century France: Document, Archive or Pure Fiction?*¹

ARNAUD RYKNER²

Abstract: Indoor performance photography, which was born in France on the occasion of the Paris World Exhibition in 1889, remains a problematic theatrical and media object to this day. But at the Belle Epoque and until the Second World War at least, it requires to be approached with all the more caution because it is always the fruit of multiple manipulations, either at the time of the making of the shots (mandatory posing of actors, specific lighting, etc.), or at the time of their “post-production” (printing, but especially edition in review or volume). A complex and particularly rich object that must be studied in its context (publications or archives), stage photography is then offered as much as a document to be deciphered as a fiction to be deconstructed.

Key Words: theatre photography, France, Belle Epoque, document, photographic archives.

In January 1898 there appeared in Paris the first issue of what would remain for a long time the leading French theatre review, *Le Théâtre*. Its distinctive feature was that between 60% and 80% of it consisted of photographs, either portraits of actors or photographs of performances. The policy statement by Francisque Sarcey at the beginning of the first issue makes the peremptory claim:

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1. This article is part of a wider work about *La Photographie de théâtre, du Second Empire à la Belle Epoque*, to be published by Cohen & Cohen art editions, Paris. Translation from French by Sue Boswell.
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This journal aims to irrevocably fix past events like a shadow on a wall and to keep them for our descendants.

Thanks to it they will be luckier than we are. They will have before their eyes incontestable documents³.

Such affirmations should however not blind us to the real documentary significance of the photographs in question, nor lead us to forget their capacity to create effective *fictions*, capable of stimulating the imagination of those who see them. Shadow is not reality, and far from being the “incontestable documents” so lauded by “Uncle” Sarcey (a largely backward-looking protector of the theatre, including in his understanding of the medium), the creations made possible by Niepce’s and Daguerre’s invention, or more precisely that of Talbot (making multiple prints possible from a single negative) must still be treated with caution. Even after the numerous technical improvements which continue to be made, the creations must, *a fortiori* in the case of theatre, be subject to a critical approach and scrutiny, which is impossible, as Sarcey would have wished, if they are seen as irrefutable proof. Whether it is a question of their creation or of their dissemination, these constructions are in reality equally indexical, imaginary and symbolic.

Retouching, for example, is involved not only in portraits of actors wishing to be shown in the most favourable light. It can interfere with all sorts of photos, including those of the least “noble” settings, or the least expected or the least necessary *a priori*. Thus, the more or less dusty or unchanging wooden floor, which constitute the floor of the majority of theatre sets (and which can reappear from the start to the finish of a performance, in a totally unrealistic way equally for exterior as for interior scenes) are preserved in some rough prints of photos destined to be cheaply distributed (**fig. 1**); on the other hand they are regularly corrected by reviews such as *Le Théâtre* or *L’Art du théâtre*, in accordance with what the reader’s imagination expects of the floor of a convent, or of a palace or of a park, as with the Luxembourg Gardens (**fig. 2**). These editions assume then a uniform style which literally ‘cleans’ from the actual décor the errors which could taint the décor of the *story* proper (it is equally the case with the prompter’s desk which almost always disappears

3. Francisque Sarcey, “Le théâtre instantané”, *Le Théâtre*, n°1 (January 2018):1.

in the photographic reproductions, whilst Antoine was at first the only one to actually abolish it. Thus what is seen corresponds to the fiction shown, not to the actual live performance; so it comes at the expense of truth and the real circumstances of the production.



Fig. 1: Photos by Jean Larcher, 1902. *Le Billet de Joséphine* by Georges Feydeau and Jules Méry (first performance on 23 February 1902 at the Théâtre de la Gaîté). Two stereoscopic views. © Private collection, all rights reserved.



Fig. 2: Photos by Jean Larcher, 1902. *Le Billet de Joséphine* by Georges Feydeau and Jules Méry at the Théâtre de la Gaîté. Extract from *Le Théâtre* (n° 79, April 1902/I). Same photos as previous number.

On the other hand, however, the post-production editorial work can attempt to compensate not for the actual imperfections of the production, but for those of the photographic medium. The most frequent interventions (even if they are not systematic, doubtless for reasons of cost and the time taken) consist amongst other things in removing the shadows cast by artificial lighting. The unrealistic nature of shadows coming from several directions at once, or reflected in the sky itself, can thus be erased (**fig. 3-4**).



Fig. 3: Photo by Paul Boyer, 1904. Jean Coquelin, Péricaud, Réjane, Coquelin, Francq and Monteux in *La Montansier* (first performance on 24 March 1904 at the Théâtre de la Gaîté).

Acte III. Argentic print on paper mounted on cardboard ; 21,2 cm x 29 cm.

© Private collection, all rights reserved.



Fig. 4: Same photo as the previous number, retouched in *Le Théâtre* (n°128, April 1904/II), 25.

Sometimes, on the other hand, rather than removing what is overdone, the touching up aims to add elements which are present in the performance but cannot be captured in photographs (because of insufficient sensitivity). That is the case, for example, with the snow which was falling at the Châtelet, at the end of 1903, in the eighth scene of *L'Oncle d'Amérique*⁴. *Les Annales du théâtre et de la musique* mention it specifically⁵, but it does not appear in

4. Victor de Cottens and Victor Darlay, *L'Oncle d'Amérique*. First performance at the Théâtre du Châtelet on 20 November 1903.

5. Edmond Stoullig (dir.), *Les Annales du théâtre et de la musique*. 1903 (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1904), 355.



Fig. 5: Photo by Paul Boyer, 1903. *L'Oncle d'Amérique*.
Extract from *Le Théâtre* (n°136, August 1904/II), 22.

Boyer's photograph reproduced in n° 136 of *Le Théâtre*. (**fig. 5**) On the other hand, it is certainly there, although obviously added manually, in the reproduction which appeared in the January 1904 issue of *L'Art du théâtre* (**fig. 6**), thus in a way *repairing* the imperfections of the medium and restoring, if not actual reality, at least a possible version of it. But it is only by checking with other documents that we can arrive at such a conclusion⁶, which in no case is justified solely by the indexical nature of the photograph.

6. One could easily imagine that no artificial snow fell on the stage, and that, as with the floorboards transformed into a palace or garden floor, the flakes were added for conformity with the story, not its scenic representation.



Fig. 6: Photo by Paul Boyer, 1903. Same photo as the previous number, retouched (snow added) in *L'Art du théâtre* (January 1904), 9.

But it is often even before the editing process, at the moment the photograph is taken, that the purely documentary and objective aspect is destroyed. Artificial lighting and the lack of sensitivity of photographic film emulsion are themselves enough to require a more or less lengthy exposure time and so inevitably an initial shaping of the construction of images. But the deceitfulness of stage photography sometimes goes beyond this deception inherent in the technology. Thus it is not rare for photographs claiming to be of actual scenes to be nothing in fact but a concatenation of scenes which the audience could not at any time have witnessed. Anyone who is at all familiar with the story of *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* (*Take care of Amelia*) by Feydeau could only be amazed to see characters brought together in the same photograph (taken at the time of a performance at the Théâtre-Français in Bordeaux, shortly after its first performance in Paris) in such positions that are not supposed to come together at any time of the play. (**Fig. 7**) At first glance, it involves the very beginning of Act I, scene 5:

*The same [Amélie and Adonis], Etienne, Palmyre, Yvonne, Boas, Bibichon, Valcreuse, then Pochet. Etienne, who appears first, recoils in shock at seeing Adonis on Amélie's knees. – Oh!
All, like an echo, with the same recoil – Oh!
Adonis, seeing Etienne, twists around on Amélie's knees, trying to free himself from her arms. – Let go of me! Let go of me!
He rushes away stage left.
Amélie, without getting up, speaking quite naturally. – Well, what? What?
All, aghast. – Oh!
Pochet, appearing at the door at the back of the stage. – Well! How's it going?
Etienne, furious, coming to the front of the stage, to Pochet. – Look, monsieur, I hope you're happy! I've just found madame with her servant on her knees!...⁷*



Fig. 7: Unidentified photograph (maybe Panajou in Bordeaux), ca. 1908-1909.

Occupe-toi d'Amélie by Georges Feydeau, Théâtre-Français of Bordeaux.

Argentic print on paper mounted on cardboard; 23 cm x 34,4 cm.

© Private collection, all rights reserved.

7. Georges Feydeau, *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* (Paris: *L'Illustration théâtrale*, nr 174, 25 March 1911), 6.

In reality, this opening is clearly “condensed” in our photograph, which readily sacrifices the story and especially the staging imagined by the author⁸: Adonis is still there on Amélie’s knees, whilst Pochet has already entered and seems to say “Well! How’s it going?” whilst Etienne de Milledieu comes forward as if to reply: “Look, monsieur, I hope you’re happy! I’ve just found madame with her servant on her knees! ...” In other words anyone wanting to rely on such a photograph to gather information about the Bordeaux staging could only fail. The comparison with the photograph which appeared as an illustration of the first edition of the text in *L’Illustration théâtrale* in March 1911 (fig. 8), confirms this confusion, at the same time as aiming to

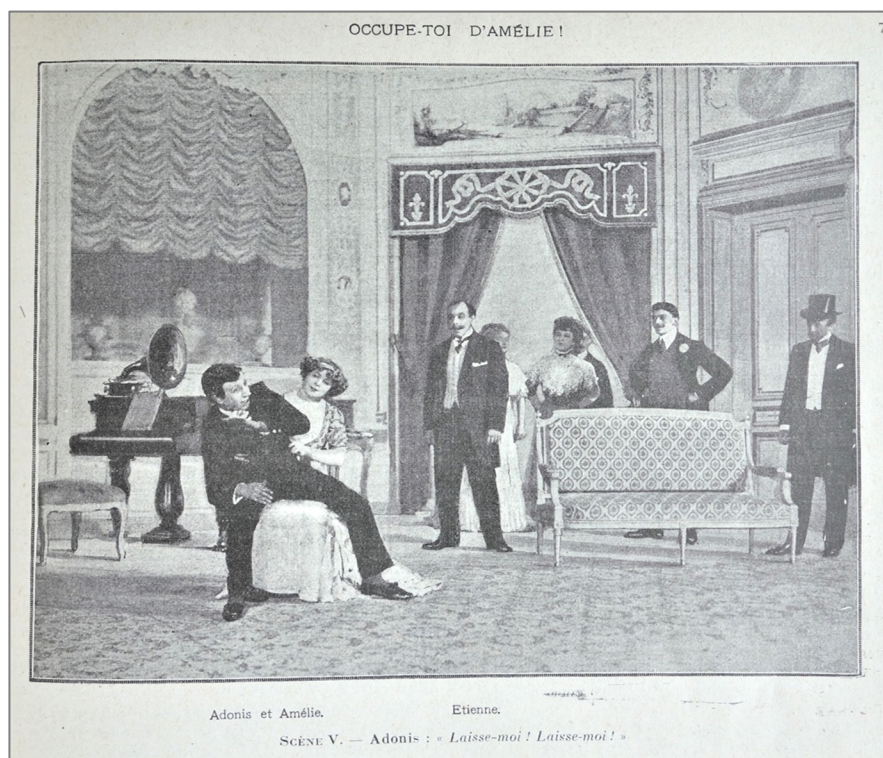


Fig. 8: Photo by Auguste Bert, 1908. *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* by Georges Feydeau (first performance on 15 March 1908 at the Théâtre des Nouveautés).

Extract from *L'Illustration théâtrale* (n°174, 25 March 1911, 7), first edition of the play, following the revival of 25 February 1911.

prove that Bert's photographs taken at the time of the 1908 production are closer to what the audience would in fact have seen ... *in theory*. For even the series published in n° 226 (May 1908/II) of *Le Théâtre* (which does not show the photograph from *L'Illustration* but others from the same collection), is a series less unreliable *a priori*, but is still problematical. One of the photographs in question, showing Amélie, Marcel, the maid, Irène, Pochet, Etienne and the Prince wearing a mask, in Marcel's room in Act II, becomes a real 'mystery photo', as Romain Piana⁹ has shown, since it does not correspond at any time to the published text and despite illustrating a long account of the early performances:

Could there be an intermediate version of the play – which would be the stage version of the production [...] Or else in order to conform to the principle of visual alternation between stage setting and posed illustration which rules the play's illustrations included in *Le Théâtre*, could the photographer(s) have organised or arranged for a grouping which extended the *dramatis personae*?¹⁰

If this last hypothesis is correct, and even if the presence in all cases of the masked prince proves the existence of a different text from the one published (of which the photographs despite everything would be *proof* – although one could not say of what ...), this brings us back to the case of our photographs of the Bordeaux production. The situation is repeated around the same time and unambiguously, notably in the images of another performance at the Bordeaux Théâtre-Français, *Le Passe-partout* (fig. 9). The photograph concerned on this occasion gathers together, this time against a set which cannot be other than that of the second act of Georges Thurner's play (the only one of the three acts which takes place in the offices of the newspaper which gives the work its title) more or less the whole list of characters: Lionel Régis, the editor of *Le Passe-partout* (stage right), Jacqueline

8. The staging quoted and the positions of the actors are indicated in detail as early as the first edition of the play, in *L'Illustration théâtrale*, which points out that the text is accompanied by 'a complete staging suitable for the production' (half-title page), accompanied by a sketch of the décor (*op. cit.*, p. 2).

9. Romain Piana, 'Between suggestion, "tradition", and testimony' in *La Photographie de scène en France*, ed. A. Rykner (Paris: *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, nr 283, 2019-3), 131-144.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 142.



Fig. 9: Photo by Panajou frères, ca. 1909. *Le Passe-partout* by Georges Thurner, Théâtre-Français of Bordeaux. Argentic print on paper mounted on cardboard; 17 cm x 28,2 cm. © Private collection, all rights reserved.

Hélouin (known as Minerve), Martineau (the editorial secretary), Louis (“the impressive office boy, with his chest covered with medals¹¹”), with his hand on the shoulder of a character wearing a hat who cannot be other than Brézin, coming to ask for explanation from Lionel Régis who himself asks him to remove his hat for “there are ladies present” – that is to say Minerve on the one hand and Madame d’Allonval (one of his mistresses) on the other, who has entered just before Brézin and who can be no other than the woman wearing a hat played by Bertrande Berthet –, and finally, towards the back, the bellboy, who normally only appears occasionally during the previous scene (scene 3) to briefly introduce a different character. But in scene 3 there are only five other characters, not including either Brézin or d’Allonval, whilst the bellboy himself only reappears later, equally briefly, at the end of

11. Georges Thurner, *Le Passe-partout* (Paris: *L’Illustration théâtrale*, nr.105, 26 December 1908), 15.

scene 9 in which besides only Brézin, Lionel and Minerve appear ... Even if one can place the episode as being most likely at Brézin's entrance in scene 8, the character who, stage left, dragging another by the sleeve, can only be Luzancy who, in scene 2, "exits left dragging Lambert", the same Lambert who had begun to submit to his chief a request from Luzancy who, fearful at the irritation of Lionel, asks him for a postponement and drags him away: in other words, and to sum up, what appears in the Panajou brothers' photograph is a *completely unreal mixture of the story and the staging between different scenes of Act II*. Consequently, the justification of such a composition cannot be the desire to portray a specific moment of the specific production; it is simply a question, for the photographer, of composing a tableau capable of maintaining the interest of someone who might have seen a production, or of arousing the interest of someone who has not yet had that opportunity. The arrangement of the actors in a V-shape, around an axis created by the empty armchair placed towards the rear of the stage as if to emphasise the perspective, demonstrates this purely iconic concern; far from the performance itself the photograph provides its own staging, almost allowing the photographer's voice to be heard directing his subjects in the studio, which thus has taken on the dimensions of a theatre ...

If not all of the theatre photographs from the Second Empire to the Belle Époque are fabricated, with such an underdeveloped taste for accuracy, it is obvious that such examples (chosen from amongst many others) invite the eye to look for something other than the "incontestable" evidence as claimed by Sarcey. That is why it is appropriate to cite the content of some major photographic French archives in order to better understand both their intrinsic interest and the necessity of subjecting them to a careful analysis. To this end, we shall consider two of them, one already fairly well known to researchers and the other which has paradoxically acquired a sort of mythical status yet without having, as far as we know, been subjected to a real investigation along the approach we have taken.

The first constitutes the plentiful documentation gathered by the Association de la Régie Théâtrale (A.R.T. – Association of Theatre Directors), created in 1911, and now in the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris (History Library of Paris) since 1969. Containing programmes, posters, directors' notebooks, models, etc., the collection includes tens of thousands

of photographs, many of them belonging to our period of interest. The collection has already been the subject of some important publications¹², but we wish to emphasise here some of the issues relating to the questions we are interested in. Amongst the staging and set plans prior to 1918 to be found there, several are accompanied by photographs, generally in the form of press cuttings or post cards. That is the case, for example, with the staging plan of Courteline and Norès' *Le Gendarme est sans pitié*¹³. If the play was created on 26 January 1899¹⁴, the plan with various sketches or annotations was in fact inserted into the pages of a copy of the edition which appeared the same year in the collection "Les pièces à succès" ("Successful plays", Flammarion publishing) (**fig. 10**). Cautin and Berger's photographs, clearly taken at the time of its first performance, are interspersed with comments made by a stage manager/director. Elsewhere, in the text itself, stage directions are underlined in red and footnotes are introduced on the opposite page, referring to movements around the stage and completed where necessary by small diagrams. One could imagine that it is a question there of a plan based on the staging of the original play, which was put back into the text published at more or less the same time in order to keep its memory alive. At first sight, the photographs and the insertion correspond. However, on looking more closely some important differences become obvious: the photographs never show the table stage left at the back (diagram n° 7), nor the filing cabinet stage right (n° 5), and the bookcase stage right (n° 6), instead of being a real piece of furniture in front of the backdrop (as specified in the diagram) seems itself to be painted on the cloth. In the same way, the door hidden behind a curtain stage right (c) seems to have been replaced by a

12. Françoise Péliisson-Karro, *L'Association des régisseurs de théâtre (1911-1939)* (Villeneuve- d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2014); Jean-Marc Larrue and Giusy Pisano (dir.), *Les Archives de la mise en scène : Hypermédialités du théâtre* (Villeneuve- d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2014); Pascale Alexandre-Bergues and Martin Laliberté (dir.), *Les Archives de la mise en scène: Spectacles populaires et culture médiatique (1870-1950)* (Villeneuve- d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2016), and Jean-Marc Larrue and Giusy Pisano (dir.), *Le Triomphe de la scène intermédiaire. Théâtre et médias à l'ère électrique* (Montréal : Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2017).

13. Cote: 8-TMS-01052 (RES).

14. The date given by *Les Annales du théâtre et de la musique*, which is generally reliable. However, the catalogue of the ART gives the following day, 27 January 1899.

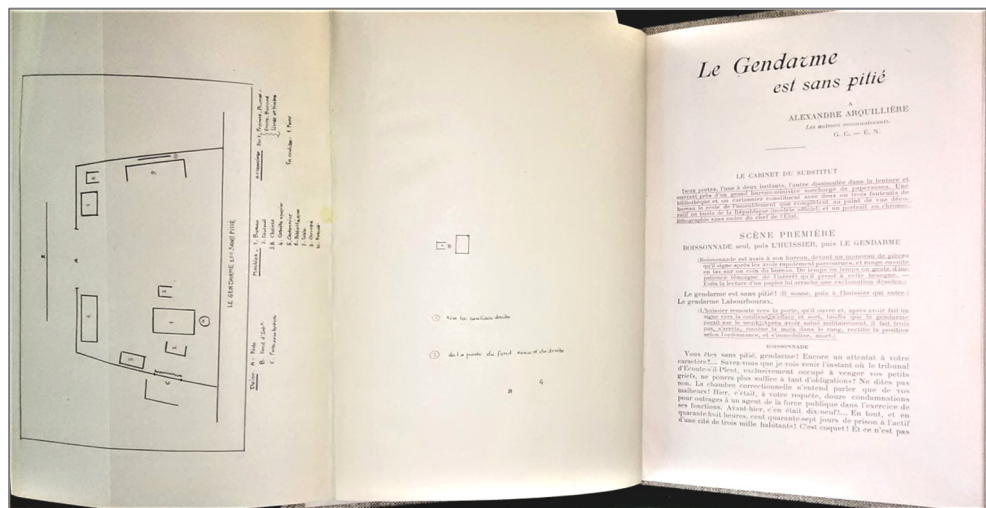


Fig. 10: Staging plan for performances of *Le Gendarme est sans pitié* de Courteline et Norès. Unknown year. First pages of the plan inserted into the pages of a copy of the edition in the collection 'Les pièces à succès' (Flammarion publishing, 1899). Association de la Régie Théâtrale, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris. © BHVP.

fireplace, with a door on its right side which does not appear in the diagram. One may conclude then that the plan and the stage directions date from a later production. But what matters here is that if the plan and the stage directions do not correspond to the photographs, and if the illustrated edition can still be used to preserve some of the original production, it is because the director himself *does not trust* the photographs to have a real documentary value. So they become more or less vague indicators, without providing vital guidance for a future production (which would respect the "tradition" whose lines Sarcey wished to be fixed by photography), nor guidance on stage directions of a past production (as described in the staging plan). The very loose connection thus established shows fairly well the place of photography in people's imaginations: it does not prove a reality, but that does not make it superfluous, even when it does not correspond.

An almost contrary example however appears in a different collection, giving rise to the idea that not all theatre directors treated the photographs accompanying *de facto* their staging plans with the same lack of rigour or the same flexibility. Thus, a plan of the production of *Roule ta bosse*, apparently

by Léon Lemaire, includes a document of special interest. As Lemaire seems to have been a director of the Grenelle, Montparnasse and Gobelins Theatres, the plan could refer to one of the performances of this play which was given in these three theatres in 1909. As for the document in question, it consists of a postcard of a photograph (probably one of Larcher's) of the production at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu in 1906¹⁵ (fig. 11). Included in the edition of the play published by Stock in 1907, with handwritten annotations along the same lines as those of *Le Gendarme* previously mentioned, the photograph here serves not



Fig. 11: Unidentified photograph (probably Jean Larcher), 1906. *Roule ta bosse* by Jules Mary and Émile Rochard (first performance at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu on 11 May 1906). Picture postcard with handwritten annotations by a stage manager (Léon Lemaire ?), file 8-TMS-02118 (RES), A.R.T., Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris. © BHVP.

15. One can be sure that it is this production, for several photographs in the series (which also lead to its probable attribution to Larcher), some of which include the set and certain actors involved, appeared in the press or on postcards which were in circulation in 1906.

as a vague reference but as an open contrast: the angry comment “It’s a poor production” and the warning that “they are not there at that moment”, are completed by a vengeful hand-drawn crossing out of two actors, giving one the impression that, paradoxically, the director takes the illustration *as literal truth*, so to speak – as if it were supposed to be a faithful representation of the production. On the contrary, it is clear that it belongs to the same category as the two images previously analysed of *Le Passe-partout* and *Occupe-toi d’Amélie*. In other words, it was not a question for the photographer of showing what the spectator could see on the stage at a given moment, but of producing once again a sort of secondary staging, capable of bringing together in a single photograph characters separated in the story and in disconnected positions. Actually, the protagonists Bastien and Bastienne should be found alone, in an intimate scene where Bastien, tenderly reading Bastienne’s palm, speaks of the future of their love for each other, whilst Jean-Jeanne, the confidante, downstage and close to them in the photograph, should be tactfully sitting upstage (at the stone table stage left); for the same reasons, the two characters crossed out by the director, the Duke and the Marchioness, should have discreetly disappeared at the end of the preceding scene, failing which the amorous and private episode becomes outrageously public and deeply obvious. In his way, Léon Lemaire, if these are indeed his comments, is thus playing the role of the critical spectator required by all the theatre photography of the period under consideration. As with all documents, the photographs concerned must be seen in context and in a way *deconstructed*.

One might think that there is less risk when it is simply a question of showing the sets in order to demonstrate the reality of a performance, indeed to encourage its more or less precise reproduction in the future (always in the name of “tradition”). Boyer and Mairat, who are however mainly interested in “animated” scenes (that is to say, those containing actors, even if they have to pose), are always ready to complete their stories with images of an empty stage (**fig. 12**). The latter have the advantage, unlike the photographs with actors on stage, of providing a sort of objectivity, if not transparency, which is generally (although wrongly, it cannot be over-stressed) expected from a photograph. Closer than portraiture to the photographs of monuments,



Fig. 12: Photo by Paul Boyer, 1907. *Fortunio* by Gaston Arman de Caillavet and Robert de Flers (first performance on 5 June 1907 at the Théâtre National de l'Opéra-Comique). Set of act I. Argentic print on paper mounted on cardboard; 16,5 cm x 26,2 cm. © Private collection, all rights reserved.

which constituted a large part of the works produced in the early days of the medium¹⁶, the stage photographs are a part of a form of basic theatricality which involves, in a way, not “theatre minus the script” as Barthes referred to theatricality in general, but “theatre minus the actors”... Certainly, even this kind of photograph is based on a form of manipulation of reality: with the spotlight on the stage, leading necessarily to the removal of all the tricks of lighting (or of chiaroscuro¹⁷), an even more frontal framing than in the usual stage photographs, etc; the photographer’s intervention is never neutral.

16. One thinks of those produced by the Mission héliographique which was given the task in 1851 of making an inventory of French architectural heritage.

17. See the article by Mireille Losco-Lena, “Quand la photographie de scène masque l’innovation scénique” (When stage photography masks scenic innovation) in our volume *La Photographie de scène en France*, notably: 99-103.

Nevertheless, even if they do not always provide clear information about the reality of the performance and the way in which the set was presented to the audience, and about its *imaginary* and *symbolic* effects, these images retain essential documentary value concerning the purely *technical* layout. That is what led *L'Art du théâtre* to accord them a position of particular importance (fig. 13), in keeping with its programme, by publishing them regularly, whether or not accompanied by preparatory diagrams, unlike *Le Théâtre*, which used hardly anything other than photographs of performances. Thus in a way the set photographs illustrate the difference between the approaches of the two reviews: if *L'Art du théâtre* was anchored in the process of production, *Le Théâtre* was more interested in the way performances were received and in their standing in contemporary media circles – media circles to which Manzi's other publications actively contributed, conceived on the same model but dedicated as much to fashion as to the arts or sport¹⁸.

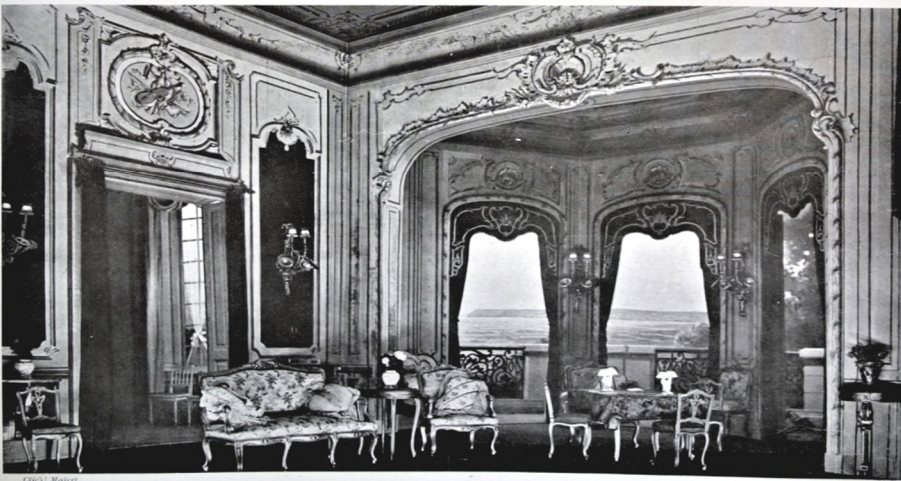
Besides, this is apparently¹⁹ one of the characteristics of the photographic archives of the Théâtre de l'Odéon, deposited in the French National Archives, and particularly those connected with funds linked to the administration of André Antoine: photography there is methodically used as a way to account for the changes to sets and their re-use as much as, or indeed more than, the actual productions (even if there are also photographs of performances in abundance there). Tracing work which is literally made possible by photographic impression, is pushed to the limit of a certain logic, inviting the researcher to track the different architectural, pictorial or furnishings elements which comprise a specific décor. From this point of view the reviews and editions

18. *Les Modes. Revue mensuelle illustrée des Arts décoratifs appliqués à la femme* (Fashions. Monthly illustrated review of decorative art as applied to women) (1901-1937), *Les Arts. Revue mensuelle des Musées, Collections, Expositions* (Arts. Monthly Museums Review, Collections, Exhibitions) (1902-1920), *Les Sports modernes* (Modern Sport) (1898-1920).

19. See 'Répertoire numérique de la sous-série 55 AJ', Élisabeth Gautier-Desvaux, Yvette Isselin, Odile Krakovitch, Brigitte Labat-Poussin and Sylvie Nicolas, reviewed and completed by Yvette Isselin and Brigitte Labat-Poussin. Cf. Emeline Rotolo : "Usages techniques et administratifs de la photographie au sein des archives des théâtres nationaux" (Technical and administrative use of photography in the archives of national theatres), in *La Photographie au théâtre. XIXe-XXIe siècles (Theatre photography 19th-21st Centuries)*, ed. B. Joinnault (Villeneuve d'Ascq : Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2021), 76-81.



Décor du 1^{er} acte de *la Veine*, par M. ROSSIN.



Décor du 3^e acte de *la Veine*, par M. LEMEUNIER.

Fig. 13: Photo by Henri Mairat, 1901. *La Veine* by Alfred Capus (first performance on 2 April 1901 at the Théâtre des Variétés). Sets of act I and act III (par Lemeunier).
Extract from *L'Art du théâtre* (1901, 83).

of the scripts themselves make a contribution, although more modestly and requiring a good deal of work of systematic comparison to weave together the strands of the relevant historic sets and costumes. What leaps off the page for someone systematically leafing through the fifty volumes of the Flammarion collection “Les Pièces à succès” (Successful dramas) is confirmed by detailed studies, as when the photographs of Cautin and Berger indicate that the sets of *Le Gendarme est sans pitié* at the Théâtre Antoine move with few changes to the Grand-Guignol stage, to appear in *Les Oubliettes*²⁰ at the end of the same year (volumes 13 and 39 respectively of the collection): not only the general arrangement of the set is preserved (including the position of the table stage right), but the filing cabinet moves to the right of the door upstage, whilst the curtain above this door and the large curtain to the left are preserved, as is the door itself. The photographs thus demonstrate less the detail of a particular production as such than the way it is transferred to form a continuity and tradition.

The case of the different volumes of the Mosnier collection²¹, the second work of particular interest here, reveals partly the same process, and partly a different model. Worked on by Charles Mosnier, and through him invoking the backing of an actor who had participated in the creative process, the volumes aim to bear witness to the art of Antoine, at least in its visual aspects from 1897 and the opening of the Théâtre Antoine. Their interest consists, other than in the manuscript notes, the texts, the signed manuscripts and the press cuttings which complete certain volumes, in the apparently unofficial nature of the collected photographs. Leaving aside the press cuttings inserted

20. Marc Bonis-Charancle, *Les Oubliettes* (Paris : Flammarion, “Les pièces à succès” (Successful dramas), nr. 39, 1899). Production of 13 octobre 1899 at the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol. Several productions at the same theatre feature in photographs published in the collection, starting with the production of *Lui!* by Oscar Méténier, the edition of the text of which opens the first series, or the revival of *En famille* by the same author, or again the production of *Monsieur Adolphe* by Ernest Vois and Alin (*sic*) Montjardin (*sic* – Monjardin).

21. Mainly volumes 3 to 6 where the great majority of the photographs are contained. Bibliothèque nationale de France, cote 4-COL-113. The collection contains in total seven volumes. Charles Mosnier (1865-1924) was a member of the Antoine troupe from 15 September 1902 (see his annotations, vol. 3, p. 273). The first volume of the collection includes a preface (p. 3) dated 1st April 1917, indicating the date of the total composition.

in certain volumes or the rare photographic proofs reproduced in reviews²², the photographer or photographers concerned remain – as far as we can tell – to be identified (could it be Mosnier himself?). The very great majority of proofs contained in the various volumes thus differ from the photographs published elsewhere. Comparing one with another, each time that that is possible (there not being, unfortunately, illustrated accounts of all Antoine's productions) allows us in several cases to better appreciate the choices made by the 'official' photographers, often led to distort reality to meet the criteria required by publication. Even if the photographer²³ who produced the photographs assembled by Mosnier cannot himself escape the technical requirements of stage photography, they still offer more than once an unusual image which initially one might believe to be closer to the actual conditions of the productions. Several images seem thus to confirm the hypotheses put forward by Mireille Losco-Lena concerning rearrangements to the focus and the layout which are the subject of a number of published photographs, which at the same time "hide the scenic innovation"²⁴ of Antoine. The reviews had an irritating tendency to rebalance certain photographs to give the impression of sets which were more or less symmetrical. Thus, the two photographs of *Maternité* included in the fourth volume of Mosnier's collection can be compared with those which appeared in n° 138 (September 1908/II) of *Le Théâtre* (specially dedicated to Antoine), not only for the moment which they capture but also for the feeling they give of a more complicated stage set than that which appeared in the first photo of *Le Théâtre* (one of the rare stage photographs signed by Reutlinger): this photograph, very significantly (and even though it is counterbalanced by the photograph reproduced on the following page) rearranges the focus and the layout of the image, by hiding the different angles in the left-hand wall. The same principal is found again in the photographs of *Papa Mulot*. Where the same issue of

22. As in the third volume which contains the original of a photograph of *Les Tisserands* by Boyer, reproduced in *L'Art du théâtre* (1901, p. 146).

23. For practical reasons there is assumed to be only one, although the question is in no way settled, as previously mentioned.

24. Mireille Losco-Léna, "Quand la photographie de scène masque l'innovation scénique. Le cas du problème « réalisme photographique » d'Antoine", (When stage photography masks innovation on stage. The case of Antoine's problematical "photographic realism").

Le Théâtre shows a very refocused and rearranged photograph followed by an enlarged photograph, Mosnier's collection provides only two enlarged photographs giving both a view of the roof with cut off corner to the left. However, inasmuch as in the two case quoted Manzi's review takes care to provide also a comprehensive (and therefore slightly unbalanced) image, it is important to emphasise the tension which exists between the photographs formatted, *a priori*, in accordance with the expectations of the public, and the photographs which one might despite everything believe to be closer to a certain documentary truth.

Unfortunately the reality is even more complex. Mosnier's collection, however closely it reflects the creative process, must be considered no less prudently. Certainly, several of the photographs are shown in the "untouched" form (with whatever inverted commas seem necessary), unlike those which appeared in reviews or editions of the text. Thus, the photograph of *Le Capitaine Blomet* which is included in the third volume leaves the window to stage right completely in the shadow (of the hangings), unlit in its corner by the camera's flash²⁵ (fig. 14); the same set photographed by Larcher, in other parts of the play, shows on the contrary perfectly clearly a splendid park whose trees and lawns have obviously been painted onto the photographs for the purpose of publication²⁶ (fig. 15).

What did the audience really see? How far did Antoine highlight this glimpse of the outside? In reality it is difficult to tell. Both images should be treated with the same caution. That is equally confirmed by a detailed examination of the photographs available of *Les Oiseaux de passage*. Those of Larcher, published in the same volume of *Le Théâtre* (n° 138, pp. 6, 8, and 10), of Acts II and IV, cut out systematically the right side of the set, in order to rebalance it and centre it on the mirror at the back of the stage, giving the impression of a perfectly balanced set arranged symmetrically around an axis

25. It is however not the case with a photograph in *Le Baillon* (1901), p. 223 of the same volume, a strict reproduction of the same set, with other props but the same fire screen. In this image the canvas depicting the park is more clearly visible ... even though it is partly and completely illogically on the story plan hidden by the shadow of the curtain, which is shown clearly there as if the light was coming not from outside but from inside...

26. The photograph found in *L'Art du théâtre* reproduced here is seen also in nr. 90 (September 1902/II) of *Le Théâtre*, along with another photograph of the same set where the retouching is also very noticeable.



Fig. 14: Unidentified photograph, 1901 or 1902. *Capitaine Blomet* by Emile Bergerat (first performance on 3 December 1901 at the Théâtre Antoine). Argentic print on paper mounted in the third volume of 'recueil Mosnier', p. 226 (detail).

BnF, département des Arts du spectacle, 4-COL-113(3) © BnF.

[<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10462767k/f126.item>]

passing through that mirror; on the other hand, the photograph included in the fourth volume of Mosnier's collection shows it extended to the right with either a window with huge curtains (why not the same window as in *Le Capitaine Blomet* ...), or an alcove which, in every case, deliberately deflects the eye away from the centre of the room. The problem is that it would still be incautious to come to a definite conclusion about the lack of symmetry possibly adopted by Antoine. A fifth photograph, signed by Larcher which appeared in *L'Art du théâtre* (1904, p. 65) provides on the contrary an image skewed to the left, with a fireplace which appears in neither Mosnier's collection nor *Le Théâtre*, and which leads one to suppose that the set was indeed well balanced in respect of the axis of the scenery and the mirror.

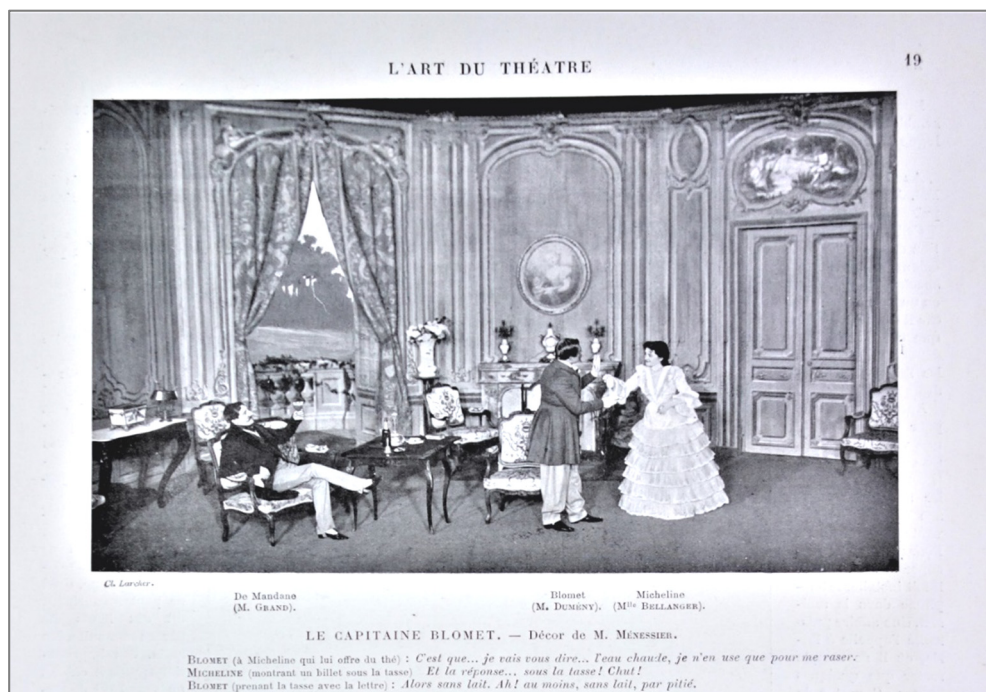


Fig. 15: Photo by Jean Larcher, 1901 or 1902. *Capitaine Blomet* at the Théâtre Antoine. Extract from *L'Art du théâtre* (1902, 19).

What goes for *Les Oiseaux sauvages* (of which there is no photograph to show the whole of the set or its layout) goes perhaps also for a number of other performances of which the photographs were collected by Mosnier or published, refocused and retouched, in reviews. The paradox then is that perhaps only the (two- or three-dimensional) models made by the set designers, when there are any, could otherwise portray the reality, or at least allow to become obvious the manipulations involved necessarily in photography, which change the image seen. Thus trust in the apparent indicators is once again noticeably placed in doubt, if indeed after a more thorough investigation one still has such trust.

For purely documentary use of the medium proves once again – if it were still necessary – that in the end it is no more ‘objective’ than other sorts of testimony or archives, and that stage photography, like an actor’s portrait,

is no more than a construction which must above all be acknowledged as one, and placed each time in its context. The sort of proof which it delivers, *even if it is unassailable by any other*, nevertheless requires that each photograph be compared not only with others of the same performance, but also with other media, both textual and visual. It is these conditions, rather neglected by some theatre historians, understandably misled by the apparent authoritativeness of photography, which must be applied so that it can take its full place in a historiographical, critical or theoretical approach.

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What Can Be Said: The Jenő Janovics Archive in Cluj

ANDREA TOMPA¹

Abstract: This paper focuses on the documents kept in archive of Jenő Janovics, an artistic director in Hungary and Romania for 30 years. The rich archival materials, kept in Cluj, of this important public figure reflect the turbulent times of history of Hungarian Theater in Cluj in the first half of the 20th century. The study presents a possible approach to this material, also introducing Janovics's diary's hermeneutical problems.

Keywords: Jenő Janovics, Hungarian Theater Cluj, diary, Hungarian theater history, Jewish

The archive is first the law of what can be said.
Michel Foucault

Jenő Janovics was one of the most important directors of Hungarian and later of Romanian theater history whose oeuvre belongs to both countries. Born in 1873 in Ungvár (today Uzhgorod, Ukraine), Janovics studied theater arts in Budapest, and moved to Kolozsvár/Cluj to become a theater leader first in Hungary then in Romania. Between 1940-1944 he was persecuted as a Hungarian Jew, yet, he died as the artistic director of the Cluj theater in 1945. His was a very prolific career of a person of high moral standards who tried to be faithful to the "cause" of theater in difficult times.

Thanks to two Hungarian state funded Eötvös Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (2008 and 2011), I had the opportunity to do research and collect data from the Jenő Janovics Archive in Cluj. The results of this research

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period I already presented in various publications in different genres from scholarly papers to novels.² After the opening of this archive the most important publication from his archival material Jenő Janovics *The Hunyadi Square Theater* [A Hunyadi téri színház] in 2001 originally written in 1942, the author was unable to publish his book his Jewish origin and new perspective on the idea of the National Theater promoted by the Hungarian state. While that research focused on the moments of trauma and transition in Janovics's career, the present paper offers a general historical, descriptive presentation of the archival materials followed by a closer look at the hermeneutical problems represented by a significant piece of archival material, the so called Janovics diary. In other words, the first part of this paper aims to offer an introduction to the archive's physical reality, while the second tackles its symbolic value.

The Jenő Janovics Archive represents a rarity in both countries. There are not many similar archives of Hungarian theater makers, and, on the other hand, no other Hungarian theater leader has such a rich archive in Romania. The archived materials came in the ownership of the Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület (Transylvanian Museum Society, from now on TMS), Cluj through Lajos Jordáky, a former dramaturge of the theater in Cluj and the author of a biography on Janovics and his wife, the actress Lili Poór³. After Lili Poór's death Jordáky bought the belongings of the couple and subsequently discovered the manuscripts, which he gave to the TMS.⁴ The material's archival catalogue was created in 2006 by the historian Nándor Bárdi, and it is still part of the Jordáky's archival heritage.⁵ Beyond the contents of this archive there are some further Janovics documents, e.g. letters, in different archives in Hungary,⁶ including the National Library, the Hungarian Theater Museum and Institute, the National Film Institute and the National Archives of Hungary.

2. Scholarly papers: Andrea Tompa, "Ami Megszakad," *Színház*, September 2013.; Andrea Tompa, "Az Üres Hely," *Korunk*, November 2021. Janovics's story made part of my novels, too (*A hóhér háza*, 2010; *Fejtől s lábtól*, 2013).

3. Lajos Jordáky, *Janovics Jenő És Poór Lili* (Bucharest: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 1971).

4. I am expressing my gratitude to the historian Nándor Bárdi who provided the details.

5. See the archive here: <http://adatbank.transindex.ro/cedula.php?kod=357>

6. I am expressing my gratitude to theater historian Tamás Gajdó, researcher of the Hungarian Theater Museum and Institute, who provided details about other archival materials.

Jenő Janovics was born in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as the fifth son of a poor Jewish Hungarian family. In his childhood the family moved to Budapest, where he later studied acting at the Academy of Theater Arts. After his studies he received a contract from the National Theater in Kolozsvár/Cluj in 1896. From that time on his whole life, both his good and bad fortune were linked to this city. From 1905 he held the position of the National Theater's artistic director and remained the leader of the institution for three consecutive decades – and under different consecutive state formations.

Janovics not only had a long and rich career as a theater and film director and producer, he was also a very prolific researcher and theater historian, especially in those periods when he was not active as a director. He had completed two major books on the history of Hungarian theater in Cluj, and at least three others on the history Hungarian drama, his first book being his doctoral dissertation on the playwright Gergely Csiky.⁷ Besides, Janovics was an important public figure, which is also reflected in this archive. During his long career Janovics could experience what it means to have a leading position as a responsible and very well-organized cultural actor, but also experienced the subaltern position⁸. He acted as a responsible theater leader in turbulent historical moments too: in 1919 did not leave the new country, Romania, but stayed with his company as a leader of the theater until he resigned in 1932. In 1940, when Northern Transylvania again became part of Hungary, Janovics aspired for a leading position once more; but due to his Jewish origins he got rejected. Also because of his Jewish background his achievements as a cultural leader were erased from public spaces⁹, including museums and articles and exhibitions on theater history. Still, Janovics became a theater leader again in 1945; moreover, he was the

7. Janovics's published books: Jenő Janovics, *Csiky Gergely Élete És Művei* (Budapest, 1900).; Jenő Janovics, *A Magyar Dráma Irányai* (Budapest: Révai, 1907).; Jenő Janovics, *A Farkas-Utcai Színház* (Budapest: Singer és Wolfner, 1941).; Jenő Janovics, *A Bánk Bán Nyomában* (Kolozsvár: Minerva, 1942).; Jenő Janovics, *A Hunyadi Téri Színház* (Kolozsvár: Korunk Baráti Társaság, Komp-Press, 2001).

8. I use the notion of subaltern according the Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak for discribing a situation when somebody is becoming silenced or voiceless.

9. I studied how Janovics's 'official memory' is disappearing from public space in my research *Ami megszakad*.

first Hungarian artistic director to premier a play on the Holocaust, Ignác Weinréb's *Cowards and heroes*, opened in the Hungarian Theater in Cluj in July 1945. Thus, Jenő Janovics became a subaltern twice due to dramatic historical changes: in 1919 he found himself and his company within a dramatically changed environment in the new position of a minority theater, and in 1940 he became a persecuted Jew (although he was admitted to Christianity in 1895¹⁰). Among the archive's most interesting and rich materials are those, which concern Janovics's efforts to exempt himself from under the oppressive anti-Jewish laws; lots of petitions, appeals, applications, letters to officials can be found in that section.

The archive consists of 9 different document types: I. Personal and family documents (182 pages); II. Manuscripts (1110); III. The theater's administrative documents (1221); IV. Film direction and production related documents (426); V. About Jenő Janovics (1004); VI. Letters (192); VII. Photographs (416 pieces); VIII. Miscellaneous documents (18 pages); IX. Index of names and institutions. Altogether the archive holds 4,569 documents. The original manuscripts, the copies of manuscripts, clippings, and published articles are held in boxes. Most of the manuscripts are typewritten.

Having surveyed the archives I established that thus far their most important publication was Jenő Janovics's *The Hunyadi Square Theater* [A Hunyadi téri színház] published in 2001, a theater history book. Although it was originally written in 1942, the author was unable to publish his book partly because of his Jewish origins and partly because of certain Hungarian state-promoted new views on the role of the National Theater.¹¹ The archive holds further unpublished important documents concerning the Hungarian theater in Cluj, the situation of Janovics as a theater leader, as well as his exchanges with different institutions, ministries and authorities.

But there are also things one cannot find in this archive. As Michel Foucault, the theoretician of the archives stated: "The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events."¹² What can be said is there at least partly. What cannot, is

10. According to his letter of baptism, copy issued in Budapest in 1941.

11. This context I analyzed in my paper Andrea Tompa, "Ami Megszakad," *Színház*, September 2013.

12. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 129.

missing. Having this in mind in the followings I will present a few major findings and also some possible directions for future investigation. A major future task concerning this archive would be its digitalization and its opening for the larger public.

Based on this archival material Janovics was primarily a public figure. The whole archive reflects his professional activities and career, i.e. one cannot find here any personal material without relevance to his activity as a theater leader, film and theater maker, researcher. Two – very different – interpretations seem plausible for his heritage's exclusively public and professional nature. The practical explanation would be that his relatives did not give their consent to expose their member's personal life, feelings, troubles, relations etc., i.e. they tailored the archive to preserve the image of the "big national theater director". The other possibility is that Janovics did not have private materials or manuscripts to be archived: that his attention and life activity was indeed exclusively focused on professional issues. In either case Foucault was right: private life cannot be expressed and archived.

Materials informing on Janovics's political attitude and activity are also missing; they are part of what cannot be expressed. Documents referring to Janovics's political activity and affiliation are not to be found here, although after 1918 he was a leader of the Hungarian National Committee (*Magyar Nemzeti Tanács*)¹³. Unlike the private documents, the documents concerning Janovics's political activities are missing for a known reason: after 1949 the original donor of the manuscripts, Lajos Jordáky, as a member of the Social Democratic Party was persecuted and subsequently imprisoned. When Janovics's wife died, in 1962 Jordáky was still in a delicate situation; documents of political nature might have been harmful for him, too.

There are some historical questions, which I also tried to find answers to among the archival documents, but to no avail. For instance, it remained a question whether Jenő Janovics was a freemason. Although there are at least two items – an object and a document – hinting to his involvement, it is well known that freemasonry could offer grounds for very tough accusations in the 1940ies that could easily lead to somebody's persecution or arrest.

13. See Péter Sas, "Janovics Jenő Feljegyzése 1919. Február 27–28-i Beidézéséről És Kihallgatásáról," *Lymbus, Magyarságtudományi Forrásközlemények*, 2014.

Besides, it is in the very nature of freemasonry to be secretive, too. What we know for a fact is that there were denouncing articles in the newspapers claiming that Janovics was a freemason, and that he could have had good reasons to hide his affiliation while others could have had good reasons to falsely accuse him. Tellingly, materials concerning his affiliation to freemasonry are kept in a different archive – in the National Archives of Hungary.¹⁴

There is one important document I would like to focus on. In the archive under number 81 I came across 84 pages of Janovics's diary. The typewritten manuscript was placed among the documents detailing the situation of the theater in Cluj through different decades. The "beginning" of the text, i.e., the first 6 pages do not belong to the diary, it is mistakenly put there. The text is not identified as a diary, but as a "Summary of theater conditions after 1918". The document contains reference to the destiny of Janovics's diary. The typewritten diary pages are typed probably by a professional person, with few mistakes. The author had commissioned somebody to complete it in order to present the text in a certain situation. The 84 pages cover a short period of time: the turbulent spring and summer of 1919 when Janovics was the artistic director of the Cluj Hungarian National Theater soon to become Romanian National Theater. It describes the struggle of the director and his company to keep the theater and not to hand it over to the Romanian authorities. The leader of the theater did not acknowledge the new Romanian administration, claimed the rights of the company and the director itself to the Hungarian National Theater's building and belongings. The text is obviously not a private diary, but it is meant to document a certain historical situation from the perspective of the leader of an institution.

Janovics states at the beginning of the text that he kept the diary hidden for 22 years (i.e., the period of Romanian rule from 1918 to 1940). During this time the diary was either in the attic folded among clothes or stuck between logs of firewood. As it is apparent from his opening remarks the text has two-time layers: the unfolding events of 1918-19 and the "present" of September 1940 when the Hungarian army arrived to Cluj and North Transylvania got

14. See the study of Árpád Kupán, "Az Erdélyi Magyar Szabaddóművésesség Története a Két Világháború Közötti Időktől Napjainkig," *Várad* 3, no. 2 (2004).

under Hungarian rule again. Some names are deliberately concealed in the text but Janovics indicated that the original of the diary would disclose these. This remark suggests that the copy stored in the Janovics Archive is not the original. In my understanding it was created in 1940, while the original went missing.

From a footnote the reader can learn that another copy of the diary was handed over to the University Library of Cluj, but according to the author's will it can be opened only after 25 years. However, there are no traces of the Janovics diary in the Cluj University Library, nor in Sibiu where the library was evacuated after 1940. There is no Janovics diary in the Hungarian archives either, thus we may assume that the only pages preserved are those held in the Janovics Archive. If a copy of the diary was indeed kept in the Cluj University Library, it was there probably only until 1944/45, when either Janovics himself withdrew it or the authorities took it away together with many other manuscripts.

Janovics told many times the complex story of how he resisted giving up the theater to the Romanian authorities in the spring and summer of 1919. His efforts, conflicts, diplomatic proceedings, the closing of shows, and the different forms personal and institutional persecution took can be followed in a day-by-day account in his diaries. According to his diaries a key moment of his persecution was when in order to flee the Romanian authorities Janovics took refuge in the Cluj Psychiatric Hospital, an institution lead by the legendary doctor, Károly Lechner. He was there from March 30 to May 3, 1919, when one of the most theatrical moments of the persecution occurred. When Janovics was eventually taken away by the police (later identified as the court-martial), a doctor gave him a powder, which would allegedly calm him. But this was all deception and theater: the powder made him very weak, he started strongly sweating and made the impression of a very sick man. Seeing that the police took him back to the hospital, thus he was saved.

The reason why two decades later, in 1940 Janovics recounted this story of struggle and resistance against the Romanian authorities was twofold: Janovics wanted to return to the position of the artistic director of the new Hungarian National Theater and he also wanted to prove his patriotism and readiness concerning the "Hungarian case". It is telling that he, among many other Hungarian intellectuals, was also issued a proof stating his loyalty to

the Hungarian community during the Romanian administration; this certificate issued by the Hungarian Party is preserved in the archive. Janovics did not necessarily know at this point that soon his life would be at stake as a Hungarian Jew. The certificate – together with many other documents – indeed became very needed when Janovics was trying to convince Hungarian authorities that the Anti-Jewish laws should not apply to him. After a long and futile struggle, to survive deportation, Janovics fled to Budapest – in vain.

His diary – if ever existed in a more complete format, then these 84 pages – was meant to reach the public. This diary is far from being a private one, but in accordance with the autobiographical pact (Lejeune¹⁵) it was meant to shape the image of an exclusively public figure of strength, resistance, correctness. No private persona is pictured here, no dilemmas, fears, uncertainties. At a closer look at the wording and rhetoric of the diary it becomes clear that all events were recorded quite some time after they happened; there are no traces of notes taken during the events, thus no trace of dilemmas or hopes for different outcomes. Small details, wanderings are not part of these pages; all is very straightforward. Only the situations, decisions, public relations of a public figure were deemed important enough to be recorded. The fact that the narrative unfolds around historical-political events further emphasizes the retrospective nature of the diary. Hungarians in Cluj generally perceived their situation in 1918/19 in a different way than later: in 1919 they considered the newly established Romanian administration a temporary situation. In Janovics's diary, the events of 1919 were heavily reworked (reformulated) from the perspective of later events. The language often reaches heroic heights as he details the story of a community ready for sacrifice, i.e., the way he wrote was tailored for the new Hungarian era of the 1940s.

But the new power, the Hungarian administration and cultural leadership did not need his service, his name disappeared from the history of the theater, and it was also missing from the events and exhibitions celebrating

15. Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, Theory and History of Literature, v. 52 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

the 150 years of Hungarian theater in Cluj. The public space was increasingly transformed into a national space where Janovics, not being Hungarian enough, had nothing to do any more.¹⁶

If his diary ever existed as a whole it could be openly accessed only after 1990 in Romania as well as in Hungary. Till then it contained that “something”, which, as Foucault has formulated, “cannot be said”. Janovics’s resistance toward the Romanian administration was something to hide, as was his persecution as a Jew during the war. And the two communist countries made a silent pact not to touch the “minority question” especially after their deal made in 1956. However, his diary still did not surface, although it could be of a great value. And such great values are indeed threatened.

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16. This process of erasing Janovics’s memory and transforming Transylvania into a national space I have analyzed in detail in my article *Ami megszakad*.

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Structure and Methodologies of Research in the Arnoldo Foà Archive

ROSA CARBONE¹

Abstract: The focus of this paper is the presentation and description of the Arnoldo Foà archive and its importance as the main documentary source for studying the contemporary actor: through the analysis of the sources contained therein, in fact, it was possible to conduct an in-depth study of theatrical career of Arnoldo Foà. The work is part of the Phd in Storia delle Arti e dello Spettacolo (History of Cinema, Music, Fine and Performing Arts) in Florence, a context in which I carry out a research dedicated to the artistic profile of Arnoldo Foà, protagonist of the theater from the second half of the twentieth century. Starting from the description of the archive in which the research was conducted, some significant examples are examined that can demonstrate how archival sources have managed to reveal unpublished and fundamental information for the study. Furthermore, the value and the high potential that the archive assumes as the main study tool for the performing arts are highlighted.

Keywords: contemporary theatre; performing arts; archiving systems; acting; artistic biography; documentary sources; recitative style; historical memory.

The Arnoldo Foà archive, conserved at the Centro Studi Teatro della Toscana in Florence, currently represents the main archive related to Foà's entire career. He was a protagonist of the performing Italian scene of the second half of the twentieth century, as well as a versatile and polyhedric figure. The Centro Studi di Teatro della Pergola, founded in 2015 in the

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buildings and from the experience of the abandoned Alfonso Spadoni Theatre Library, is the place of preservation and enhancement of the library and archival heritage of the historical Florentine theater, open to an audience of researchers, students and enthusiasts. The library holds more than 20,000 ancient and modern volumes – constantly increasing and updating thanks to donations and new acquisitions – on performing arts and history of costume; the historical archive preserves materials that document the activity of the theater from its foundation, in the mid-seventeenth century, up to the management of the Ente Teatrale Italiano. In addition to the mentioned archive dedicated to Arnolfo Foà, there are also some other archives of personalities related to the florentine theater scene and, more generally, to the local and national artistic-intellectual scene, such as Orazio Costa, Andreina Pagnani, Paolo Emilio Poesio and Antonio Sferlazzo. A place of conservation of artistic memory, but also a rich instrument for the historian who wants to reconstruct moments and episodes as unique as those related to the performing dimension.

The Arnolfo Foà archive was donated to the Centro Studi from February 2016, on the occasion of a photographic exhibition dedicated to the actor, who was particularly attached to the city of Florence; strongly desired by the family, this exhibition collected unpublished pictures from the family archive and recalled some of the fundamental phases of Foà's life, both artistic and private. In this occasion the significant and rich archive was born. The documentation included in the archive keeps track of the entire artistic biography of the actor from Ferrara, his important career articulated both by chronological extension and by variety of experiences: Arnolfo Foà, in fact, begins to work in the theater as an actor, and then devote himself to cinema and television. The archive is therefore divided into three main sections, each dedicated to a sector: theatre, cinema, television. Each of these sections, in turn, has an internal articulation, so the collection is divided according to the reference category.

The research project I'm working on, entitled *L'attore italiano nel secondo Novecento: il profilo artistico di Arnolfo Foà (The Italian Actor in the Second Twentieth Century: the artistic profile of Arnolfo Foà)*, inserted in the scope of the Phd in Storia delle Arti e dello Spettacolo (History of Cinema, Music, Fine

and Performing Arts) at the University of Florence and followed by Professor Renzo Guardenti, investigates the stages of the theatrical experience carried out by Arnolfo Foà during his long career. The purpose of the research is indeed to reconstruct the artistic path of Foà in his different roles of actor, playwright and director. The study also intends to analyze and evaluate, in the face of individual theater tests, the artistic evolution that the actor accomplished during his career and the multiplicity of interests and skills developed in the theater environment. Although Arnolfo Foà is a well-known figure in the contemporary spectacular panorama (also for his transversal works), yet there is no study dedicated to him able to reconstruct his biography: hence the idea of examining the direct sources kept in the florentine archive and start an in-depth study of his artistic figure.

The research carried out in the first two years of doctorate was divided into several phases, considering the evolution of the theatrical path of Arnolfo Foà, starting from the first moments of his career. The documents related to the years of training were taken into account, as well as the first contacts with the theatre and the world of performing arts in general; and finally, I studied the more mature experiences and the writing experimentation for scene and direction. For all the points here briefly listed, it was necessary to consider, together with the critical bibliography, the high quantity of archival sources that embrace almost entirely the path of the actor since his first moves.

The first stage of the research was concentrated mainly in the Arnolfo Foà archive at the Centro Studi Teatro della Toscana: inside the archive I made a first and necessary (although not definitive) selection, that was to focus the investigation only on the theatrical dimension. The section dedicated to the theatre consists of more than 3000 documents; which are divided into as many sectors according to their typology. The work within the archive provided for the finding of these documents, their organization and the beginning of a transcription work, currently in progress. The sections are in total six: press review, scripts, performance programs, correspondence, playbill, contracts: each of them has a further division into folders organized according to a chronological criterion. The press review section, containing 6 folders, contains 1900 digitized articles that start in 1938 and arrive in 2014;

the scripts, in all 220, are divided into 7 folders; the theatre programs are 950 documents divided into 3 folders; the correspondence counts 156 documents, finally, there are about 500 contracts.

The initial operation of finding and digitizing these sources was followed by a register of shows that Arnaldo Foà worked on, through the drafting and compilation of a table that takes into account his entire teatrography. This, together with other work tools made during the research, was a first result of the activity carried out in the location: the intersection, in fact, of the numerous types of documentary sources, it allowed me to put together some key data relating to Foà's theatrical experiences and thus to take the first steps towards the definition of his artistic biography. The lack of a specific critical bibliography related to my subject of research has addressed the work within the archive: here, in fact, I had the opportunity to find and connect between them materials almost never used or studied before and to build, in this way, a series of tables and schemes that shed light on various aspects of Foà's career and, therefore, on his style as an actor, author and director of the twentieth century.

The examination and acquisition of documents revealed the potential of the archive as the main source of documentation on the actor: collecting the materials in their chronological sequence, my work started from the early years lived by Arnaldo Foà in the theatrical context, since his official debut. The years of formation, of which Foà himself speaks in his autobiographies², are marked by a first encounter with the world of performing arts: a young Foà approaches acting through theater and film studies carried out between Florence and Rome. The debut at the theatre is dated 1935, with the play *La serenata al vento* by Carlo Veneziani, directed by Alberto Bracaloni; concerning the first plays, the reviews I found inform us of the fact that he recites using various pseudonyms (such as Puccio Gamma, Arnaldo Galli, Carlo Arnoldi and Alberto Benini), because of his Jewish origins. Early theatre experiences reveal an extremely diverse repertoire: from classical dramas to modern operas, from the role of the prince in *La vita è sogno* by Calderon de la Barca (1939) to that of a servant in Schiller's *The Masndieri* (1941).

2. See his two autobiographies: Arnaldo Foà, *Recitare. I miei primi sessant'anni di teatro*, (Roma: Gremese, 1998); Arnaldo Foà, *Autobiografia di un artista burbero* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2009).

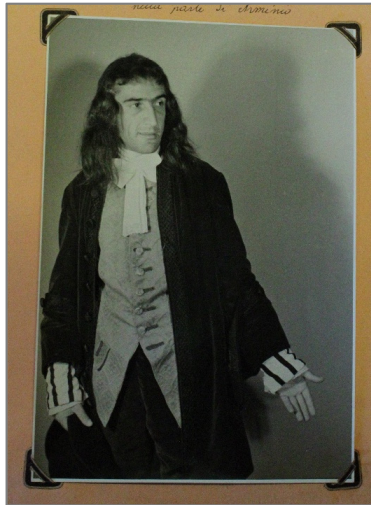


Fig. 1: Arnaldo Foà in the role of the servant Arminio, show *I Masnadieri* by Friedrich Schiller, directed by Guido Salvini, 1941. This image and the following are kept in the Centro Studi's archives. I thank Mrs. Procaccini-Foà for allowing me to publish these photos.

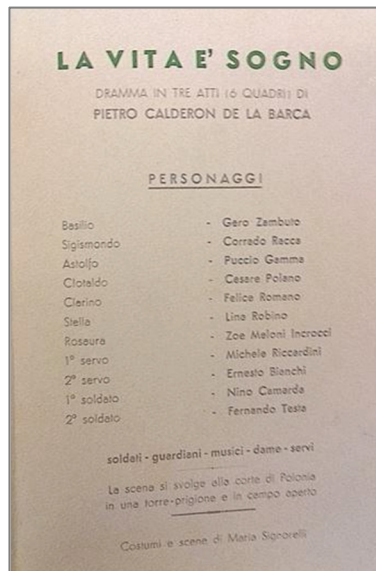


Fig. 2: Performance program relating to the show *La vita è sogno* by Calderon de la Barca, directed by Nino Meloni, 1939. In the list of characters you can see the role of Prince Astolfo played by Puccio Gamma, pseudonym used by Arnaldo Foà to hide his identity.

In the first performances Foà plays mostly secondary roles, the critics spends few words for his acting tests, while immediately praising and in many cases his interpretive qualities; always in these years (except for the forced interruption of theatrical activity, which leads Foà away from the stage for a short time) he works with the most famous companies of the time, such as the company Cervi-Pagnani-Morelli-Stoppa, Ninchi-Barnabò, Adani-Cimara, Maltagliati-Cimara. The period between the 40s and 60s is the most fruitful for the theatrical career of Foà: during these years he had in fact the opportunity to work with the greatest directors of his time, with personalities such as Luchino Visconti, Guido Salvini, but also with Giorgio Strehler, Luigi Squarzina, Luca Ronconi. These events, examined specifically, allow us to understand how the recitative style of Foà is defined.

With regard to Arnaldo Foà's first theatre experiences and the early stage of his career, the consultation of the archive has oriented my research towards a specific direction, that is the evaluation and analysis of the link between the actor and the voice. The vocal style represents one of the traits of the recitation used to define the style of an interpreter: in the case of Foà, the insistence by the critics on his vocal skills and, in general, on the sound dimension, (insistence that is noticed since his first performances), is a valuable element to decipher the actor characteristics. Although in the reviews of early plays there are sporadic and brief references to his acting (often limited to simple appreciations), it's possible to identify in them a leitmotif: starting from these documents, and within a specific chapter included in the thesis, the research deepens the relationship of Foà with his voice, even beyond the specifically theatrical experiences (think of the work on radio and television). To shed light on this aspect and to motivate the choice to investigate its developments, I have selected some examples in which the vocal datum emerges as a peculiarity of the recitation of Arnold Foà. In a passage of the article *Pagine eroiche di lotte fratricide*, review of the play *La quinta colonna* by Ernest Hemingway, directed by Luchino Visconti in 1945, we refer to the expressive modes of Foà, and how his way of reciting a line had been so well executed that he obtained silence in the audience: «... you will remember how the actor Foà said this joke. Admirably, and you will remember that silence in the room and that sense of tragedy in the air»³. Two other reviews, still from the same period, focus on the same aspect: the shows in question are *Non rinuncio all'amore*

3. *Pagine eroiche di lotte fratricide*, in «Il popolo», (Roma, 23 marzo 1945).

of Giovanni Bokay and *Enrico IV* by Luigi Pirandello. Ten years after his debut on the theatrical scene, the critics express a first unanimous judgment on an actor still "minor" compared to others – if you think that in this period Foà plays alongside Luigi Cimara, Laura Adani or Paolo Stoppa – but whose qualities are well found. In both documents, in fact, the authors speak of the young actor and praise, among his most evident qualities, the tone rude and pleasant, with an energetic style and they exalt his perfect diction. The sources briefly described here represents examples of how the archival materials consulted were able to open a "trail" in the research conducted, of how they shed light on a fact that, compared with the critical bibliography⁴, is able to direct research towards unexpected outcomes. Starting from these suggestions, my work has been so oriented towards a new perspective, that it will be deepened thanks to the use of further documents and materials from other archives.

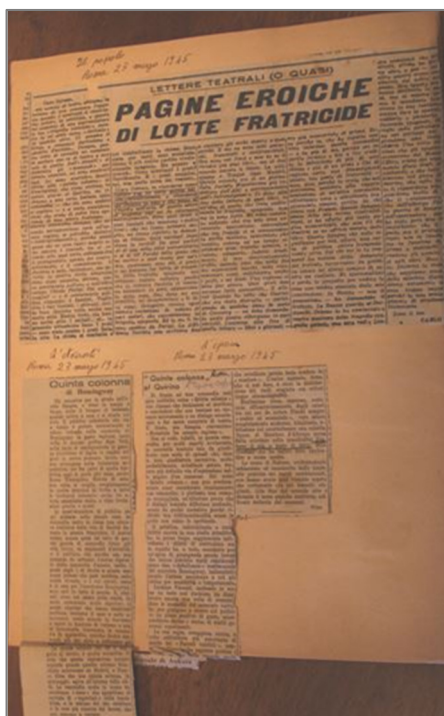


Fig. 3: Review *Pagine eroiche di lotte fratricide*, in «Il popolo», Rome, 23 march 1945.
Here we refer to the vocal skills of Arnaldo Foà.

4. See, for example, the volume Leonardo Bragaglia, *Pirandello e i suoi interpreti* (Siena: Trevi, 1984).

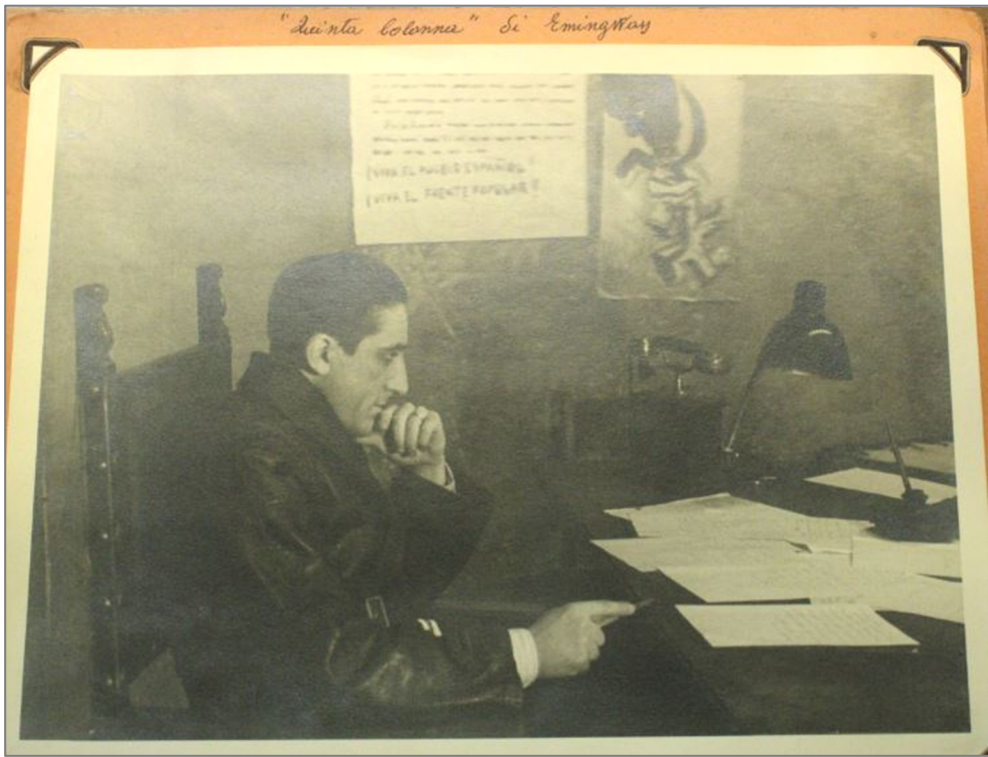


Fig. 4: Arnaldo Foà plays the role of the head of security in the show *La quinta colonna* by Ernest Hemingway, directed by Luchino Visconti in 1945.

If the beginning of my study coincided with the preliminary phase of Arnaldo Foà's career, at a later moment the research project will examine further aspects of his theatrical career, namely those relating to the dramaturgical and the directional dimensions. The object of study from which this path starts corresponds to the opera *Signori, buonasera*, staged for the first time at the Teatro Odeon in Milan on 18 March 1957 with the company Pagnani-Villi-Foà-Ferzetti. It is the first time that Foà engages with both writing and directing; the main information about the show derives, once again, from archive materials. Through the examination of the two scripts preserved it emerges, thus, that Foà plays inside the comedy and plays the role of the playwright Lele, the protagonist of the opera; Foà imagines that the author is present on stage along with the characters he gave birth to (in total four) and that he will manipulate them at his pleasure, but they will not obey him,

but rather rebel against his will, developing their own life. The immediate reference to the Pirandellian style and themes is confirmed by the consultation of the reviews following the first performance: a title, among all, becomes explanatory to this similarity. The article published in the magazine «La notte» on March 19, 1957, has as its title *È una variazione pirandelliana sugli attori e sui personaggi* (*It's a Pirandello variation on the actors and characters*)⁵ and makes, therefore, explicit reference to the sicilian playwright, in particular to his most famous work, the *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*. To confirm this analogy are also other reviews, which recall the echoes of Pirandello; in general, the performance gets several criticisms and the opinions are divided, as the work of Foà is appreciated (we have to underline at this time he was already a well-known and esteemed actor), but overall it is not convincing and incisive. Starting from this first experience, the research will continue on this direction and will be investigated the work of Foà who becomes a playwright and director of numerous operas (the last direction dates back to 2005); it will be necessary to isolate some significant episodes able to describe the artistic idea developed by Foà and also the position he occupies as a writer and director in the contemporary theatrical landscape. In order to identify the specific cases, my research relies on the documents belonging to the archive, which are able not only to complete the overall picture of the subject, providing information and details, but also and especially, if properly interrogated, reveal new and interesting aspects and facets.

About the director's experiences and the relationship with Pirandello, one of the depths within my research is dedicated to the relationship between the Ferrara actor and the Sicilian playwright. The first part of the study concerns the Pirandello interpretations in the repertoire of Arnaldo Foà (altogether he works in six plays from the works of Pirandello) and refers to his acting activity. In a second phase, the study focuses on Foà's work on *Diana e la Tuda*. The presence of the Pirandellian theatre in the course examined is primarily determined by the predilection expressed by Foà himself⁶ towards his repertoire. In particular, the choice to study specifically the case of *Diana e la Tuda* was the examination of the materials related to the plays of Foà: the recurrence of the opera emerged, to which the director Foà dedicates himself three times in his career, with a time gap

5. E. Ferdinando Palmieri, *È una variazione pirandelliana sugli attori e sui personaggi*, in «La notte», (19 marzo 1957).

6. See the biography Anna Procaccini, *Io, il teatro. Arnaldo Foà racconta se stesso* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2014).

of about ten years. This fact has attracted my attention, leading me to ask the reason for this artistic choice, the reason that encouraged Foà to return to the same work: from here the decision to shed light on any similarities and differences between the different versions. The play was staged for the first time at the Teatro Stabile in Palermo on 6 February 1971, while the other two premieres were performed in Rome in 1979, and in Milan in 1999; in all three versions Arnaldo Foà always plays the same role, that of the old sculptor Nono Giuncano, while, in every direction, the female protagonists change. The consistency of the materials found in the archive allows this case study to rest on solid foundations: we have access to various and diversified types of documents (in different quantities according to the direction to which they refer), from stage photography to sketches of the scenography, from the scripts to the reviews up to the DVD of the last show of 1999. The intersection of archival sources – both between them as well as associated with the bibliographic ones – is the main criterion in which the work is articulated and the starting point for clarifying a decisive aspect in Foà's theatrical career.



Fig. 5: Performance program of the first performance of *Diana e la Tuda*, staged at the Teatro Stabile in Palermo on February 6, 1971.



Fig. 6: Sketch of the costume of the character Nono Giuncano designed by Arnaldo Foà himself for the direction of *Diana e la Tuda*.

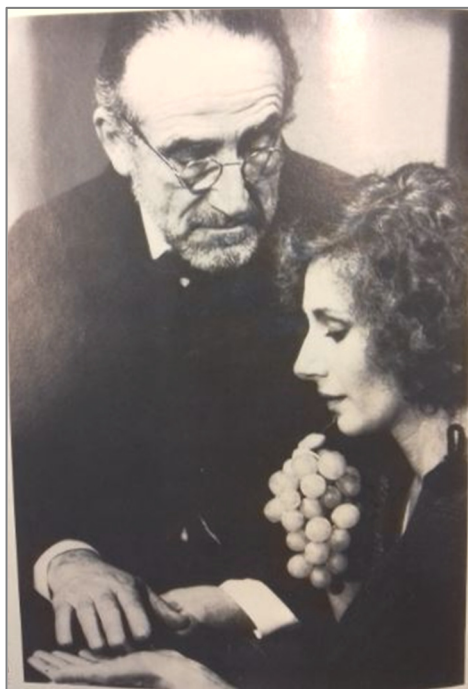


Fig. 7: Scene photo of *Diana e la Tuda*, represented in the 1983/84 theatrical season. In the photo we see the two protagonists: Arnaldo Foà in the role of the old sculptor Giuncano and Paola Pitagora in the role of the model Tuda.

The examples dealt specifically here and the principles on which my doctoral project is based are part of a broader discourse related to the enhancement and preservation of archives, in particular those that preserve the "delicate" performative memory. My research wouldn't have been possible without Arnaldo Foà's archive and the documentation here stored and organized. Arnaldo Foà himself worked in this perspective, creating memories of his theatrical career, putting together, physically, the traces of his figure as an actor, playwright and director. The study of contemporary theatre takes advantage of many more archival materials than the past and this represents, at the same time, a potential but also a great risk: the high quantity of sources available and their heterogeneity expose research to the danger of easy misunderstandings and it requires the use of a rigorous historical method. Hence the need to make the necessary selections, which privilege documents and leave others aside, as well as deepen only some of the many aspects related to the study of the actor. The aim behind my project is to reconstruct the theatrical biography of an artist who has worked for about seventy years and to exploits the potential of the archive Arnaldo Foà and, at the same time, intends to give a new and more functional placement to the numerous and precious documents that compose it.

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Pagine eroiche di lotte fratricide, in «Il popolo», Roma, 23 marzo 1945.

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Andres Neumann's Theatrical Archive. Sources for the history of contemporary performing arts

ANDREA GIOVANNI STRANGIO¹

Abstract: The paper, at the conclusion of the work conducted during the first year of the PhD course in Storia delle Arti e dello Spettacolo (History of Cinema, Music, Fine and Performing Arts) at the University of Florence, briefly describes the structure and content of the theatrical archive of Andres Neumann, preserved at the il Funaro Centro Culturale of Pistoia. The fund is a precious instrument of historiography, because it contains documents relating to the main plays of the international theatre of the last thirty years of the twentieth century. After having presented and discussed some examples of documentary types contained in the archive, in particular regarding Tadeusz Kantor and Anatoly Vasiliev, the paper illustrates the prospects for development of this research project.

Keywords: Andres Neumann, contemporary theatre, Tadeusz Kantor, Peter Brook, Pina Bausch, Anatoly Vasiliev, il Funaro Centro Culturale, Rondò di Bacco.

The PhD project I have been working on is provisionally entitled *L'Archivio Andres Neumann: memorie digitali e storiografia teatrale* (*Andres Neumann's Archive: digital memories and theatrical historiography*). The object of this investigation is the theatrical archive of Andres Neumann, preserved in Pistoia at the il Funaro Centro Culturale, which documents his activity as a theatrical curator, producer, organizer and distributor.

The fund is a valuable instrument of historiography, as it preserves documents relating to the main plays of the national and international

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performing arts of the last thirty years of the twentieth century, with important protagonists, including Tadeusz Kantor, Peter Brook, Pina Bausch, Anatoly Vasiliev, Robert Wilson, Dario Fo, Franca Rame and Vittorio Gassman. The archive, donated in 2009 by Andres Neumann to the Funaro, today consists of 532 archival units, divided into 11 series, containing heterogeneous documentary types: printed publications, correspondences, administrative and organizational acts, *brochures*, programmes, posters, technical sheets, scene sketches, notes, photographs, audio-visual material, for a total of over 75.000 documents.

In the first place, we should briefly recall the main phases in the life of the archive from the year of its donation to the Funaro. In 2009 a first arrangement of the archive was created by Giada Petrone, a close collaborator of Neumann from 2009 to 2019, who, previously, starting from 2005, had also rearranged Renato Nicolini's archive relating to the Estate Romana (1977-1985). Since 2010 the archive has been the object of study within the framework of the project *Memorie digitali dello spettacolo contemporaneo in Toscana 1970-2010*, directed by Prof. Renzo Guardenti, which has led to the digitalization and cataloguing of part of the documents, as well as to the publication of the volume of Maria Fedi, *L'Archivio Andres Neumann. Memorie dello spettacolo contemporaneo*². From 2014 to 2015, a general inventory of the archive³ was realised, curated by Andrea Ottanelli, and, from 2017, it is also available on-line⁴.

As regards the structure of the archive, the first series contains the documentation referable to Neumann's formative years in Uruguay⁵. The second one includes documents concerning his collaboration with Jack Lang, since 1972, at the organization of the Festival Mondial du Théâtre de Nancy.

2. Maria Fedi, *L'Archivio Andres Neumann. Memorie dello spettacolo contemporaneo*, presentation of Renzo Guardenti, with a testimony of Giada Petrone (Corazzano (Pisa): Titivillus, 2013). See also Renzo Guardenti and Maria Fedi, *Dall'Archivio di Andres Neumann. Scene di un teatro contemporaneo*, catalogue of the exhibition in Pistoia (21-23 October 2011) (Pistoia: il Funaro Centro Culturale, 2011).

3. Andrea Ottanelli, *Inventario dell'Archivio teatrale Andres Neumann* (Pistoia: il Funaro Centro Culturale, 2015).

4. Cf. www.archivioteatraleandresneumann.org.

5. For a profile of Andres Neumann see Giada Petrone, «Viaggio nell'archivio di un maestro: una testimonianza», in Maria Fedi, *L'Archivio Andres Neumann. Memorie dello spettacolo contemporaneo*, 121-142.

The third series preserves the sources relative to the three theatrical seasons curated by Neumann, between 1975 and 1978, at the Rondò di Bacco, a theatre space located in a wing of Palazzo Pitti. In the series IV-XI are placed the documents relating to Andres Neumann International, the theatre agency founded by Neumann in Florence in 1978. In the tenth series are preserved heterogeneous documents that could not be included in the others. Finally, the eleventh series contains the posters and the playbills acquired by Neumann during his working life.

Some questions animated and oriented the work conducted in the archive during the first year of the PhD course in Storia delle Arti e dello Spettacolo (History of Cinema, Music, Fine and Performing Arts) at the University of Florence. Which portions to circumscribe and which sources to select among the over 75.000 documents kept? Which information to draw from the different types of documents and how to use them? Which theatrical sources to make emerge and which topics to present and discuss? Which digital "object" to realize, wanting to value the sources not in a massive way but in relation to archival research and, therefore, in a historical-theatrical perspective?

In the first months, in the impossibility of accessing the archival documents due to the health emergency, an indicative bibliography was compiled on the main protagonists of the archive. Subsequently, since the end of January 2021, a first recognition of the materials has been started, aimed to identify the documents to work on, to guide the bibliographical research and to understand the structure of the archive. In particular, we highlight all the archives boxes of the third series (AN, III, 1-12)⁶, which preserves the sources relating to Neumann's experience at the Rondò di Bacco, where, between 1975 and 1978, among others, he had brought: the Living Theater with *Seven Meditations on Political Sadoomasochism*; Peter Shumann and Bread and Puppet with *Our domestic resurrection spectacle* and with whom he organised the exhibition *Masaccio*, at the Art Institute of Florence; Robert Wilson with the play *Dialogue network*; Tadeusz Kantor with the Italian *première* of *The Dead Class*. Among the Italian plays staged at the

6. The placement of the documents has been shortened as follows: AN (Andres Neumann's Archive), n. series (in Roman number), n. archive box (in Arabic number).

Rondò experimental theatre seasons, we remember, for example, *Morte della Geometria* by Pierluigi Pier'Alli (on poetic text by Giuliano Scabia), *Sacco* by Claudio Remondi and Riccardo Caporossi and *Proust* by Giuliano Vasilicò.

Some portions of the fourth series were also consulted, among which we point out the archives boxes relative to the organization of international *tournées* of Vittorio Gassman (AN, IV, 10-11) and Dario Fo and Franca Rame (AN, IV, 7-8, 12, 26), the units relating to *Six Characters in Search of Author* by Anatoly Vasiliev (AN, IV, 36-38), to *Mahabharata* and *La tragédie de Carmen* by Peter Brook (AN, IV, 14-16, 20-22), to *Gebirge*, *Palermo Palermo* and *Danzon* by Pina Bausch (AN, IV, 46-51, 135-136) and the units regarding the collaboration of Neumann with Renato Nicolini to the realization of the Estate Romana between 1977 and 1981 (AN, IV, 1-4). Obviously, given the amount of documents, the consultation will also continue during the next year.

In reference to the expansion of the digital archive, the digitalization of the entire press review relating to the seasons of the Rondò di Bacco (AN, III, 1-12) has been started. Furthermore, in July, in agreement with Prof. Renzo Guardenti, tutor of this research project, and Dr. Massimiliano Barbini, head of the Library and Documentation Centre of the il Funaro Centro Culturale, it was decided, for the moment, to work on the portions of the archive concerning Tadeusz Kantor and Anatoly Vasiliev and the digital "objects" to be realised were defined. But, shortly, I shall return to this last point in detail.

Now, let's look at some *exempla* of documentary types offered by Andres Neumann's Theatre Archive⁷. In the third series, with regard to the staging of Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dead Class* at the Rondò di Bacco (11-16 January 1978), are stored, for example, performance programme (**Fig. 1**), the poster (**Fig. 2**), the press review, two sketches of the plan (one original and the other in photocopy) depicting the spatial organization for the staging of the play (**Fig. 3**).

7. The illustrations presented in this paper are published by courtesy of the staff of the il Funaro Centro Culturale and, in particular, of Dr. Massimiliano Barbini, head of the Library and Documentation Centre of the Funaro, to whom goes my sincerest thanks.

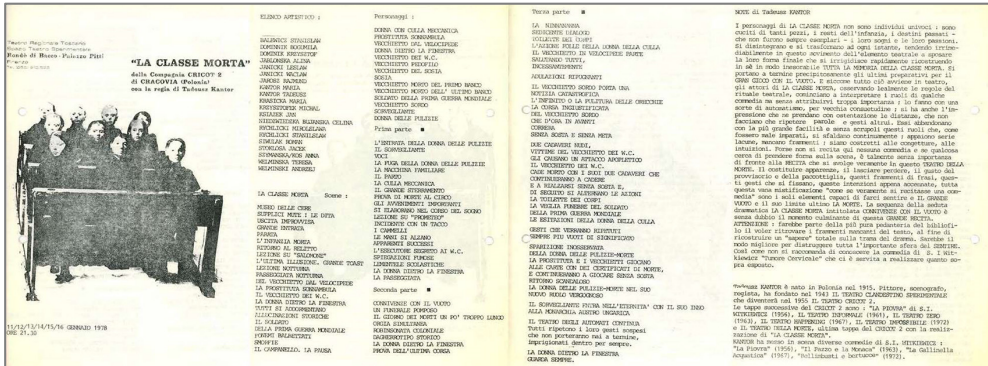


Fig. 1: Performance programme (cyclostyled leaflet) of *The Dead Class* of Tadeusz Kantor (Florence, Rondò di Bacco, 11-16 January 1978) (AN, III, 10).



Fig. 2: Poster of *The Dead Class* by Tadeusz Kantor (Florence, Rondò di Bacco, 11-16 January 1978) (AN, III, 10).

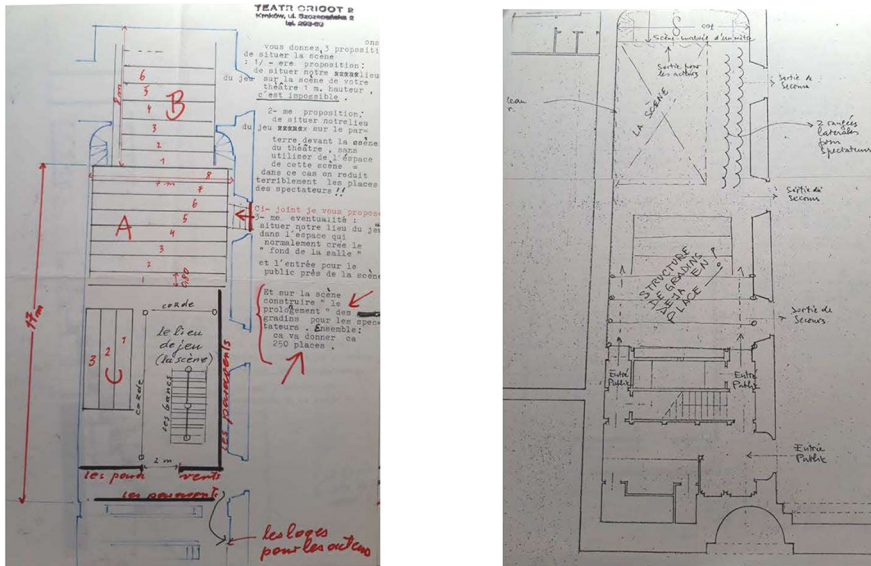


Fig. 3: Sketches of the plan depicting the spatial organization for the staging of *The Dead Class* by Tadeusz Kantor at the Rondò di Bacco (AN, III, 12).

One of the two sketches (**Fig. 3**, on the left), accompanied by typewritten and manuscripts notes, highlights Kantor's hypothesis of placing the scenic space in the area that is normally the «fond de la salle» at the Rondò. Therefore, it is proposed to place the terraces for spectators on the opposite side, extending it also on what is normally «la scène». The other sketch (**Fig. 3**, on the right), instead, illustrates an opposite spatial organization. What was the definitive arrangement of the theatre space? This will be one of the problems to be solved.

Also, in the third series, is preserved a photograph (**Fig. 4**) which portrays the arrival of Kantor's company at the Roma Fiumicino airport in 1979 (Neumann is the first from the left, Kantor is the second from the right). This type of documents moves us away from the fetish of opera and reduces the discourse on the poetics of the director, reminding us that the theatre is made primarily of spaces and bodies. In this case, of bodies that travel. We are also reminded, therefore, of the *theme of the journey*, which is so important for the material history of the performing arts.



Fig. 4: Tadeusz Kantor's company at Rome Fiumicino airport, 1979. Andres Neumann is the first from the left, Tadeusz Kantor is the second from the right (AN, III, 11).

Regarding the core issues of theatrical profession, we read the conclusion of an interview, also preserved in the archive, made by Sara Mamone to Peter Brook on the occasion of the staging of his *Mahabharata* at the Spazio Polivalente Il Fabbricone of Prato in 1985. The scholar wrote: «Peter Brook, ai piedi della scalinata, ha un guizzo: “Ma di questo spettacolo, in giro, se ne parla? Ha l'impressione che lo stiano presentando bene?”». Sara Mamone commented: «Benedetto professionismo, al di là della filosofia e dell'anima!»⁸.

8. Sara Mamone, «L'intervista. Peter Brook a Prato presenta “Mahabharata”, un viaggio spettacolare di nove ore sulla storia dell'uomo. “Sulla scena cerco l'anima”», in *L'Unità*, 19 September 1985 (AN, IV, 15): «Peter Brook, at the foot of the staircase, has a jerk: “What about this play, is it talked about out there? Do you have the impression that they are promoting it well?”». Sara Mamone commented: «Blessed professionalism, beyond philosophy and soul!».

Among other documents, in the archival fund there are also a handwritten and autograph letter (**Fig. 5**) by T. Kantor to A. Neumann, dated 20 August 1979, and the typescript attached to it, entitled *Conditions artistiques de la participation des acteurs du Théâtre Cricot 2 au programme de Florence*. Two documents referring to the phases of work, curated by Neumann, aimed at creating a double of the Cricoteka of Krakow in Florence, which was inaugurated in November 1979 at the deconsecrated church in Via Santa Maria n. 25 in the Oltrarno, made available by the municipality of Florence. It is an important theatre space, which, later, in the eighties, was also the site of the Bottega Teatrale of Vittorio Gassman and that, today, is the site of the Centro Nazionale di Produzione della Danza Virgilio Sieni. It was there that the production and realization of the play *Wielopole, Wielopole* by Kantor began, debuting on 23 June 1980 (**Fig. 6**).

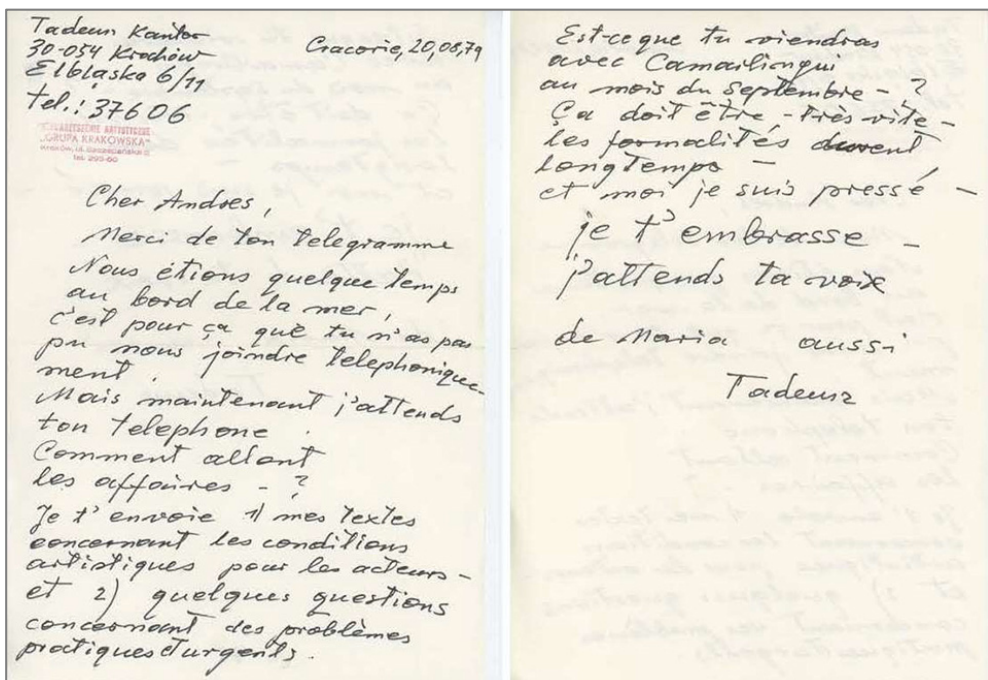


Fig. 5: Tadeusz Kantor's handwritten and autograph letter to Andres Neumann (20/08/1979) (AN, III, 11).

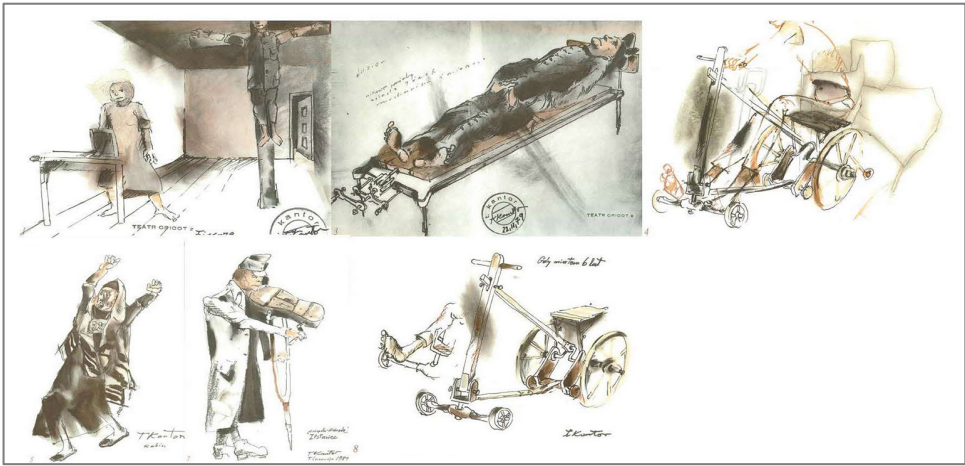


Fig. 6: Preparatory sketches by Tadeusz Kantor for the staging of *Wielopole, Wielopole in Florence* (Via Santa Maria n. 25, 23 June 1980) (AN, III, 11).

In the fourth series, for example, among the documents relating to the staging of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Anatoly Vasiliev (AN, IV, 36-38), there are four preparatory sketches: two represent the plan and the sections of the theatre space (**Fig. 7**), two illustrate the perspective view of the scenography for the *mise en scène* at the Moscow Theatre School of Dramatic Art on 27 February 1987. In particular, observe the diagonal curtain, which, since its graphic rendering, is *dramaturgically active* (**Fig. 8**).

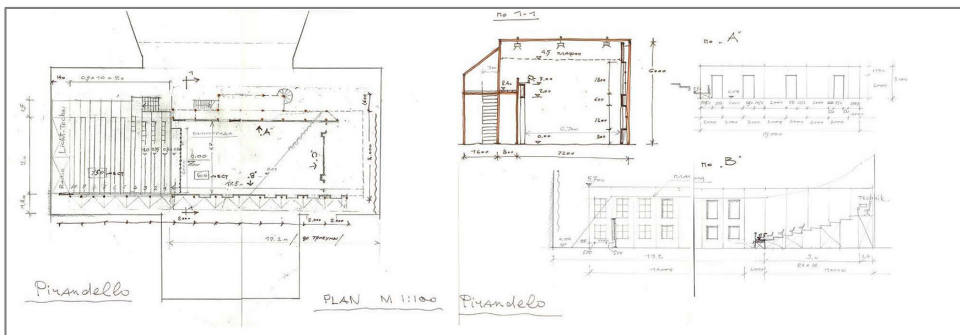


Fig. 7: Original preparatory sketches by Anatoly Vasiliev depicting the plan, on the left, and sections, on the right, of the theatre space for the staging of his *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in Moscow (Theatre School of Dramatic Art, 27 February 1987) (AN, IV, 38).

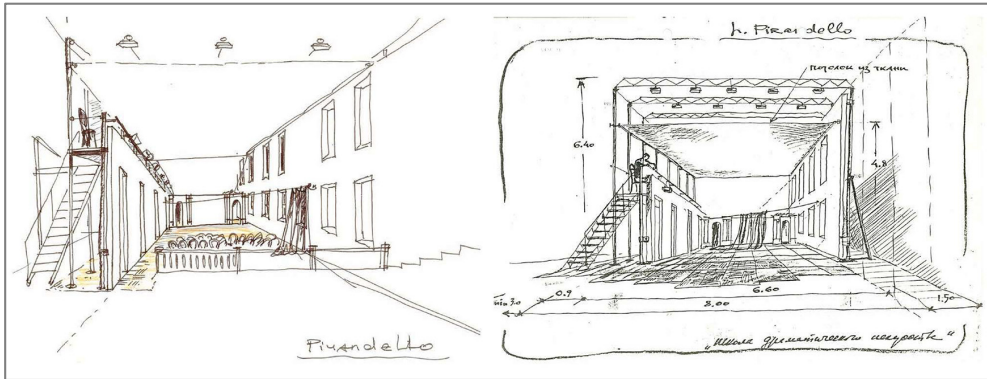


Fig. 8: Preparatory sketches (one original, the other in photocopy) by Anatoly Vasiliev depicting the perspective view of the scenography for the staging of his *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in Moscow (Theatre School of Dramatic Art, 27 February 1987) (AN, IV, 38).

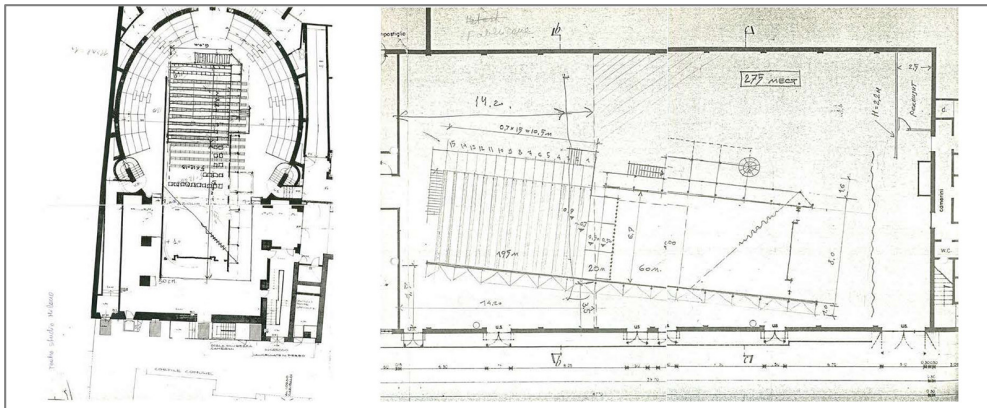


Fig. 9: On the left, the plan of the scene and the stalls area relating to the staging of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Anatoly Vasiliev in Milan (Piccolo Teatro Studio, 06-10/07/1988) (AN, IV, 38). On the right, the plan of the scene and the stalls area relating to the staging of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Anatoly Vasiliev in Prato (Spazio Polivalente Il Fabbricone, 23/02-01/03/1989) (AN, IV, 38).

Regarding the Italian productions of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by A. Vasiliev, the archive preserves, for instance, two photocopies of the plan of the scene and the stalls area depicting the spatial organization of the staging at the Piccolo Teatro Studio of Milan (06-10/07/1988) (Fig. 9, on the left) and

at the Teatro Fabbricone of Prato (23/02-01/03/1989) (Fig. 9, on the right). It is clear that the Russian director had exported his Muscovite “theatrical-box” – or, better, his *scenic device* – in the Italian theatres where he had set up the play. It is a sort of *mise en abyme*, a “theatre within the theatre”, more than appropriate since it is the direction of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Luigi Pirandello.

Furthermore, among the audio-visual documents kept at the Funaro, we find the video of *The Dead Class* by T. Kantor, enacted in Milan at the Centro di Ricerca per il Teatro in April 1979, and the one of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by A. Vasiliev, performed at the Piccolo Teatro Studio of Milan in July 1988 (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10: Two frames of the videos kept in the Andres Neumann’s Theatrical Archive relating to the Italian stagings, from left to right, of *The Dead Class* by Tadeusz Kantor in Milan at the Centro di Ricerca per il Teatro in 1979 and *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Anatoly Vasiliev at the Piccolo Teatro Studio of Milan in July 1988.

Unfortunately, both the U-matics are in a bad state of conservation, but the visible fragments are, however, precious. Obviously, relating to the historiographical use of the sources, also for audio-visual documents and for the scene photos, we must take into account their “never objective” nature of *documents-monuments*, always partial and never neutral. In this regard, it must be remembered – in agreement with Jacques Le Goff – that every document is a lie and that, therefore, it is up to the historian, case by case, not to be naïve⁹.

9. Cf. Jacques Le Goff, «Documento/Monumento», in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. V (Torino: Einaudi, 1978), 46.

From the methodological point of view, it is necessary to inform that the present project, also inserting itself in the context of the so-called digital humanities, has been declined in an exquisitely historical perspective, in the awareness that digital humanities are not a new research paradigm¹⁰, but a *tool-bridge*¹¹ that must combine the method of analysis of sources with the innovations that the digital world has brought to historical practice¹², in order not to confuse the means with the ends¹³. In this case, digitalization will be exploited, in the second degree, as a useful bridgehead, an additional accessory to the “toolbox” and the *Nouvelle Histoire* techniques: investigation, imagination, analysis, interrogation, comparison¹⁴.

Considering the archive as a valuable tool of historiography, the development perspective of this research project is articulated in three directions. From the philological point of view, and regarding the PhD thesis, the archive will be studied in a multiform epistemological perspective, in order to valorise its potential in historical-theatrical key, reconstructing, on the one hand, some phases of Andres Neumann’s work profile, and, on the other, highlighting the strategies and creative processes of some plays, especially regarding the reception and the whole of the spatial and performative dimension.

In the second instance, by contextually crossing the paper sources related to the space (stage sketches, plans, technical sheets, stage photography etc.) with the audio-visual material, we will proceed to the virtual reconstruction of the spaces of some plays (for example, *The Dead Class* by T. Kantor and

10. Cf. Maria Cassella, «Biblioteche di ricerca e digital humanities», in *Biblioteche oggi*, n. 1 (2017), 44. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3302/0392-8586-201701-044-1>

11. Cf. Serge Noiret, «Storia contemporanea digitale», in *Il web e gli studi storici. Guida critica all'uso della rete*, edited by Rolando Minuti (Roma: Carocci, 2015), 268. See also Anne Burdick, Johanna Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner, Jeffrey Schnapp, *Umanistica_Digitale*, Italian translation (Milano: Mondadori, 2014).

12. In this regard, cf. Enrica Salvatori, «Digital (Public) History: la nuova strada di una antica disciplina», in *RiMe. Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea*, n. 1 (2017), 57-94. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.7410/1291>

13. In this regard, cf. Jeffrey Schnapp, *Digital humanities*, edited by Maria Grazia Mattei, Italian translation (Milano: Egea, 2015), 20-22, 61-62.

14. Cf. Jacques Le Goff, «Documento/Monumento», 38-48; Carlo Ginzburg, «Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario», in *Crisi della ragione*, edited by Aldo Gargani (Torino: Einaudi, 1979), 59-106; Georges Duby, *Il sogno della storia. Un grande storico contemporaneo a colloquio con il filosofo Guy Lardreau*, Italian translation (Milano: Garzanti, 1986); Marc Bloch, *Apologia della storia o Mestiere di storico*, Italian translation (Torino: Einaudi, 2009).

Six Characters in Search of an Author by A. Vasiliev). In this perspective, the iconographic sources will be used in order to obtain a theatrical iconography of the second degree, built by the historian who, thanks to the surviving documents, sets in motion those faculties of *imagining* and *abstracting* in a controlled way of which Marc Bloch, first, and Georges Duby, subsequently, had spoken¹⁵. From the operative point of view, the Rhinoceros software will be used to obtain direct three-dimensional reconstructions of the theatre space. Afterwards, these volumetric models will be imported into the rendering software Maxon Cinema 4D, in order to be characterised in terms of colours, materials, textures, obtaining reconstructions enjoyable in different formats (images, videos, models for virtual reality).

Thirdly, a documentary on the archive, that valorises the Neumann's fund and illustrates the historiographical results, will be realised by means of virtual reconstructions of the spaces, the visual presentation of the archive sources, the realization of some interviews and, therefore, the writing of a script that relates in a dialectical way to discourse through images. The intention is to valorise the archive also in relation to its conservation context: the il Funaro Centro Culturale, whose conception and realization the same Andres Neumann has contributed, accompanying the activities of the centre until 2013.

But, if in some points the documentary rather than verbally reconstructing the theatre space, relating to a precise *mise en scene*, shows it by means of a virtual animated reconstruction and, therefore, as no artificial written verbalization could do, couldn't we reconnect, in part and with all the cautions of the case, to the theories of Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and to his *critofilm*?

Starting from the thirties of the twentieth century, in spite of a logocentrism still not totally overcome today, Ragghianti, eclectic art historian, argued that the theatre realizes art in a way completely independent from the literary form¹⁶, by means of an essentially visual language¹⁷. And he came to underline, with militancy, that theatre is *figurative art* and that, instead, poetry is poetry¹⁸. They were precisely these preliminary considerations that led Ragghianti to

15. Cf. Marc Bloch, *Apologia della storia o Mestiere di storico*, 110; Georges Duby, *Il sogno della storia*, 40-52.

16. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, «Cinema e teatro», in Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *Arti della visione. II. Spettacolo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976), 9.

17. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, «Cinema e teatro», 19.

18. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, «Cinema e teatro», 22.

experiment with a genre of film he had called «critofilm»¹⁹, warning that the initial component of the new lemma («crito») intended to inform that it was a critical film²⁰ and that, also, *critique* was to be understood as an activity of penetration, interpretation and reconstruction of the peculiar process of the artwork or the artist through images rather than by means of words²¹.

Certainly, we do not intend to acquire his experience as a model and, therefore, it is not our intention to realize a «critofilm», but to highlight a debt to some of theoretical considerations of Ragghianti, that, in part, inspired the ideation of this digital “object”. The intention is, instead, to make a documentary that considers the archive as a cultural object: a documentary intended as a magnifying glass to reflect again on some episodes in the history of contemporary performing arts, also thanks to the structuring of a discourse through images and the simulation capabilities offered by digital.

Finally, returning to Ragghianti again, the historian also interests us when, in *Arti della Visione*, he reflected firmly on the civil and social function to which the scholars are called. It is worth reading the whole passage:

Nella civiltà di massa che caratterizza il periodo storico che viviamo, si può intervenire verso il pubblico in diverso modo: con la «propaganda», per esempio, ma anche con strumenti e metodi che non lascino passivi e in stato di fede gli ascoltatori e i lettori, e invece contribuiscano allo sviluppo del loro spirito critico, offrendo una materia di dati rigorosamente accertati, e l'esempio di un atteggiamento razionale, esigentemente distintivo nell'elaborarli e nello sceverarli²².

19. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, «Film d'arte, film sull'arte, critofilm d'arte», in Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *Arti della visione. I. Cinema* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), 225-240. C.L. Ragghianti, from 1948 to 1964, had realised twenty-one critofilm, today all preserved and viewable on reservation at the Archivio della Fondazione Ragghianti in Lucca. On the critofilm made by Ragghianti see, at least, *I critofilm di Carlo L. Ragghianti. Tutte le sceneggiature*, edited by Valentina La Salvia (Lucca: Edizioni Fondazione Ragghianti Studi sull'Arte, 2006) and *Carlo L. Ragghianti. I critofilm d'arte*, edited by Antonio Costa (Udine: Campanotto, 1995).

20. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, « Film d'arte, film sull'arte, critofilm d'arte », 240.

21. Cf. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, « Film d'arte, film sull'arte, critofilm d'arte », 231.

22. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, «Informazione sul critofilm d'arte», in Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *Arti della visione. I. Cinema*, 247: «In the mass civilization that characterises the historical period we live in, we can intervene towards the public in different ways: with “propaganda”, for example, but also with tools and methods that do not leave listeners and readers passive and in a state of faith, and instead contribute to the development of their critical spirit, offering an

Ragghianti invited to look at the images to see with different eyes different points of view.

As far as we are concerned, making a documentary means to go back looking at the documents, on the ground, in their context, in order to propose not a mercantile valorisation, but a valorisation linked to the research between the archive sources and the place that preserves them. Besides, considering the scope of the third mission to which the university is called, having the opportunity to share research also with the general public means, consequently, to be able to legitimize the higher education and the university in front of the same community. And, perhaps, to be able to eradicate the still too widespread *cliché* among the non-experts according to which the archives are “dusty places”. As well as pointing out, certainly forcibly, that, instead, the understanding of an archive, starting from the root that is the basis of his word, always leads to a new ἀρχή (*arkhê*), to a new “beginning” of studies. In our case to new and precious historiographical reflections on a specific chapter of the past of the civilizations of the spectacle.

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Resistance through Culture. Satirical Student Groups of the Last Decade of Communism and the Silence of Theatre Critics

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Abstract: In the '80s, satirical student groups, the so-called artistic “brigades”, were one of the most dynamic subversive artistic phenomena against the communist system. This paper aims to shine a light on the dimension of this phenomenon, to find explanations for the apparently privileged status enjoyed by such groups, as well as to clarify the reasons why theatre critics of the time so stubbornly ignored them.

Keywords: theatre, cultural policies, camps humour, political humour, theatre criticism

Let us not mistake laughter for dissidence.²

The line in the motto was uttered by a former activist on the payroll of UASCR (Union of Romanian Communist Student Associations) and UTC (Union of Communist Youth): Corneliu Dumitriu³. It is an excerpt from a

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1. Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. daniela.gologan@ubbcluj.ro. Translated from Romanian by Camelia Oană.
 2. A line of Corneliu Dumitriu in Andy Lupu and Eugen Oprina, *Puterea râsului. Umorul studenţesc în anii 80*, Documentary (TVR1, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trk8A9isop8&t=122s>.
 3. Corneliu Dumitriu was the vice-president of the Bucharest Municipality organization of UASCR (1972-1974), a UTC Central Committee activist in Nicu Ceauşescu's team, and coordinator, among many others, of the Costineşti AMFITEATRU Galas in the 1980s. After 1990, he miraculously became a university professor at the Bucharest National University of Theatre and Film “I.L. Caragiale” (UNATC), the head of the Romanian Centre of ITI/UNESCO, and later “retired” as the head of the Theatre Department of “Dunărea de Jos” University in Galaţi.

documentary produced by the Romanian National Television (TVR) in 2014, dedicated to the Romanian comedy groups of 1975-1989, as we find it emblematic for the way in which an overwhelming majority of our intellectuals and almost all theatre critics of the time referred to the productions of one of the most interesting and courageous levels of the cultural life of the last 15 years of the Ceaușescu regime: comedy groups, most often defined – so as to fit into the standard circuit of public diffusion – as “artistic student brigades”.

Should we not mistake laughter for dissidence? To a certain extent, we couldn’t argue with the interviewee, although, in the documentary, his line comes as an answer to the question on how their respective groups were controlled and harassed by representatives of the *Securitate*, which Corneliu Dumitriu pertinaciously denies, unlike his colleague Mircea Ursache, the former head of the UASCR Committee for culture (1987-1989), who admitted to having practised censorship, and that the *Securitate* always kept an eye on the students’ representations, and even confidently stated that “*student brigades posed the strongest opposition to the system*” [s.n.].

Of course, not any form of humour equalled dissidence, as the aesthetic “fulfilment” of official theatre performances did not necessarily equal subversion. However, it cannot be denied that there was a phenomenon of *subversive* student humour which persisted for over a decade and a half, with huge audience numbers (live, in venues with a capacity of thousands of spectators, only rarely censored, and even reaching the small screen). At the same time, it is clear that this phenomenon, through its most talented representatives, from *Ars Amatoria* or *BUM* in Cluj, *Divertis*, *Siringa* in Iași, *TCM* in Timișoara, *ASE*, *GEOF*, *Tact*, *Fics*, *Vouă*, *Energeticii* in Bucharest, *Mecanica* in Galați, and many others, repositioned and reorganized themselves quickly after 1990, creating especially TV formats of their (serial) comedy performances and shows, which were hugely successful, regardless of the different audiences addressed. Naturally, the political-critical dimension of their discourse after the fall of communism rose exponentially, and they are still notorious to our days, even though most of these groups are no longer part of the schedules of our many TV networks.

Three systemic questions arise from this: first of all, *how did these groups develop and what did their performances offer from a scenography and theatrical point of view?* Secondly, how was it possible for them to achieve success and

notoriety, *what socio-political factors concurred to the survival and even the evolution of the subversive dimension of their artistic discourse*, considering that “professional” theatre was under constant surveillance and regularly shaken by censorship and interdictions? Not least, and perhaps the most important question for our research: *what is the explanation for the utter silence of the theatre world and, most especially, theatre critics, on this phenomenon?*

1. Student Comedy Groups

Since, to our knowledge, no critical or historical paper has so far tackled the topic of student humour in the late communist years, it is quite difficult to gather systematic data on the matter. Nevertheless, we worked with disparate information collected from TV or radio interviews with some of the members and founders of these groups (Ioan Groșan, George Țâra, Toni Grecu, Florin Constantin, Doru Antonesi, Cristian Grețcu, Ghighi Bejan, Fiți Arieșanu, Lia Trandafir, Andy Lupu, Viorel Gaiță, Paul Nancă, etc.), from the few documentaries created by TV networks, or even as student projects. Besides, considering the permanent connections between student publications and comedy groups, we used several longer interviews conducted in 2015 by Simona-Ioana Cucuian, a researcher from Brașov, as part of her doctoral research, which has not yet been published: *Reviste studențești în comunism: Universitas/Universitatea comunistă și Convingeri Comuniste (Student Magazines under Communism: Universitas/Universitatea comunistă and Convingeri Comuniste)* (Transilvania University of Brașov, coordinator: prof. Virgil Podoabă, PhD, 2015). Luckily for this paper, over the last years, Simona-Ioana Cucuian published the transcriptions of these interviews on the online platform *ecreator*.

Ars Amatoria was a group I set up in my first university year⁴ at the Cluj School of Philology, alongside my late friend Radu G. Țeposu, Lucian Perța – the best Romanian parodist of our times, George Țâra from Prundu Bârgăului, Ioan Buduca, who was two years older than us, and, in the theatre group, we did theatre first and foremost alongside Emil Hurezeanu, who, as everybody knows, became one of the most active

4. The speaker refers to the university year 1974-1975.

editors of *Europa Liberă*. An interesting fact is that Țeposu came up with the name of our group in the very first year of university, when we studied Latin – as should be mentioned.

Many people thought and still think that *Ars Amatoria* translates as “amateur art”, and back in those days, this was a good thing: amateur art, *Cântarea României*, and so on; but in fact, it’s one of the expressions for which Ovid was exiled to Tomis. It is the vulgar equivalent of *ars amandi*. The first one to understand this, as we also wrote columns in *Scânteia Tineretului* magazine, and who asked how we were able to publish under such a name, was Mr. Paleologu, who knew Latin and thus grasped the meaning of *ars amatoria*. In simple words, it means the art of fucking. So, we set up this group and wrote texts together – by brainstorming, as it would be called today. We were successful with some plays I wrote, but which we all performed together. We even won the grand prize of *Primăvara studentescă Festival* for my play, *Școala ludică*, instead of the folk ensemble *Mărțișorul*, headed by Dumitru Fărcaș in Cluj, which had won this award for years on end.⁵

We started off with *Ars amatoria* not necessarily out of local patriotism, but because, in all the interviews and documents we have read through, it popped up as one of the first student comedy groups that broke the small troublemaker mould associated to the “artistic brigades”, in other words, the first one to leave left behind dorm jokes and the usual self/criticism of their immediate university world, playing on truants, quibbling professors, failed exams, and idle management. And also because, as per this interview, as well as others, during their student years in Cluj, the group’s activity was directly connected to theatre productions, as Groșan evokes both types of performances under the same umbrella.⁶ This will be of interest in the subsequent discussion regarding the relationship between comedy groups and theatre criticism (see below). Naturally, the members of *Ars amatoria* also signed written (comedy)

5. Ioan Groșan, *Interviu cu Ioan GROȘAN*, interview by Simona-Ioana Cucuian, Web, June 29, 2020, https://ecreator.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4821:interviu-cu-ioan-grosan&catid=23&Itemid=131.

6. Based on my personal experience with the Bucharest School of Philology in the very same period, it was frequent for some of the students who took part in theatre activities to also get involved in “brigade”-type satirical performances.

works – as Ioan Groșan continued to do later on his own, under the very name *Ars amatoria*, in student publications (*Amfiteatru*, *Convingeri comuniste*, and even, as Groșan points out, *Scânteia tineretului*). The interview suggests that the group merged with or was integrated into by the theatre group led by professor Ion Vartic, who back then was a university assistant, and with whom the group members had a tight, faithful friendship that stood the test of time.

It's rather difficult to retrace how sharp-subversive these texts created collectively – *devised*, as we would now call them – were, since our only sources are disparate memories gathered after a long period of time. According to the writer, as well as to the interview with George Țără, who after graduation became an artistic trainer at the Bucharest student club in the Tei complex, most of the times, their jokes relied on word play or on a mix of argots generated by the specific environment of humanities schools, especially the school of letters. The few examples that remained in the authors' memory reveal political connotations. For instance, the one attributed to Lucian Perța, entitled *Vremea recoltei*: "*Se recoltează orezu-n mai / Un om, un pai / Un om, un pai.*" (At the May rice harvest: a man, a straw, a man, a straw.) Or a more daring one, as it alludes to both the fixation of Ceaușescu's national epic, as well as the obsession of emigration, the patriotic poem *Ștefan cel Mare întrebându-și fiii* (Stephen the Great To His Sons), attributed to George Țără: "*Fiind mari, ce vreți să fiți, copii?/Spahii, Măria Ta, spahii!/Dar fiii voștri peste ani?/Americani, americani...*" ("What do you want to be when you grow up, my dearest children?/Soldiers, Your Grace, soldiers!/How about your children, years from now? Americans, Americans...")

With or without political allusions (for example, as a guest of TVR's *Amfiteatrul artelor* show in 1975, the group had to let go of any attempts of the kind⁷), *Ars amatoria* coagulated many talents and brought a breath of smartly playful fresh air to audiences at the end of the '70s, which in itself could have been a form of (masked) opposition to the gloomy frown which preceded and followed the establishment of the mammoth that was the *Cântarea României National Festival*.

7. George Țără, *Interviu cu George ȚĂRA*, interview by Simona-Ioana Cucuian, Web, June 9, 2021, https://ecreator.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4950:interviu-cu-george-tara&catid=23&Itemid=131.

However, it was this very colossal machinery elaborated by the party apparatus with a view to preventing professional arts from staying afloat to the benefit of amateur creation – which implied a huge not only organizational, but also economic effort, in times of self-induced economic crisis – that seems to have indirectly favoured the emergence and the inner dynamics of subversive student humour. In other words, the perverted effect of *Cântarea României* was an unprecedented meeting between “brigade”-type events, some of them having subversive dimension. This happened as student groups competed not only in student-dedicated stages of *Cântarea României*, but the best, most-awarded ones also went to the plethora of comedy festivals that had taken over the entire country, or were constantly invited to entertainment events organized in the big resorts that included student camps: Costinești, Pârâul Rece, Izvorul Mureșului, Slănic Moldova and others (most of the times, students’ transport expenses were reimbursed and accommodation and meals were included, so they enjoyed a tad of paid holidays)⁸.

Sometimes, competitiveness was stimulated by the management of certain academic institutions itself: while an overwhelming majority of the students involved in the creation and distribution of performances were volunteers, some trainers were paid by the school, the university, or the institute (for instance, the comedy group of the Academy of Economics, *Brigada ASE*, winner of many prizes, even had an accompanist for musical training, their own choreographer, dedicated costumes, and the group leaders, such as Fiți Arieșan or Andy Lupu, stayed in the brigade long after they graduated), or were on the payroll of the student houses of culture. Still, in most cases, a professor was delegated as leader of the teams, with no pay, evidently. It is certain that, after the opening of *Cântarea României*, comedy groups not only grew in number, but also entered a fierce, yet friendly competition, and willingly or not, their audiences and prestige consolidated: if until then most of them were improvised “brigades” that only performed

8. On the other hand, in order for us to understand why, unlike amateur theatre groups in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, or Poland, Romanian student theatre seems to not have had a subversive discourse, we must admit that, in Romania, in the case of theatre, censorship always kept monitoring texts, as it did in the case of professional theatre; plus, the chance of theatre groups travelling with money from UASCR or UTC was infinitely smaller.

a couple of representations (one at the school's club, another at the university competition, and, if they were lucky, a last one at the Student Art National Festival), gradually, due to successive amalgamations⁹ and inevitable internal changes, some of them (*BUM*, *Divertis*, *Fics*, etc.) reached an independent travelling life, going around the country, whether on tour or at festivals, to the benefit of forever renewed audiences that were not limited to students. And they were sold-out everywhere they went¹⁰.

Right after 1980, the impetus of some teams – of which the most visible among the constellation of others were probably *Divertis*, *Seringa* or *Opt fără cârmaci* of Iași, *Brigada ASE*, *GEOF*, *Energeticii*, or *Brigada Facultății de drept* (Brigade of the Bucharest School of Law), *BUM* of Cluj, *Tact* Timișoara, *Proparodia* of Craiova, or *Mecanica* of Galați –, is confirmed not only by the prizes they won, but also the affluence of young spectators, who anxiously waited for those jokes, sketches, monologues that hinted at politics. Some of them were captured on home-video-like films recorded by the group members or fans, but most were inevitably lost. Amateur footage and interviews reveal that some texts were based on student life, but very often touched on the food shortages faced by the whole country – a sure way to coagulate the audience; as it happened with the short song below by *Brigada ASE*, accompanied by well-known folk music:

Anicuța neichii dragă / De ce ești așa de slabă? / - Slabă sunt de felu-nțai / De la supă cea de pui / Felul doi eu îl impart / Cu vecina mea de pat (Dearest Ana, why are you so thin? - Because of the first-course chicken soup / As the second-course I share / With my bed-mate)

followed by a dialogue between the two girls:

Chicken soup recipe: – Onion? – Check! – Carrots? – Check! – Potatoes? – Check! – Chicken? – That's enough, no need for chicken!

-
9. Like some theatre student groups, certain Bucharest comedy groups involved students from the Institute of Theatre and Film (IATC) or the Conservatory, whether they wanted to get experience, or were tempted by the small advantages of the tours, festivals, and paid camps.
 10. Lucian Revnic, leader of the *BUM* group of the Cluj House of Students, in Andy Lupu and Eugen Oprina, *Puterea râsului. Umorul studențesc în anii 80*, Documentary (TVR1, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trk8A9isop8&t=122s>.

On the other hand, other texts were more or less subtle in referring to party policies: from the mandatory agricultural chores to the female students' exasperating military training, and even travelling abroad; more than that, GEOF alluded to Ceaușescu himself, though not saying his name, in a sketch in which three "workers" with a ladder tried to drive a nail in a wall to hang an empty picture frame. Of course, as they only had a hammer, they failed to drive the nail in the concrete wall. "Is it in? – No! – Listen, it can't simply be hammered in, it should be shot!" (Younger readers should know that, at the time, there were special machines used to shoot nails or spikes into concrete walls.) After several other scenes, the sketch ends with the three going off the stage uttering the dialogue below referring to the same troublesome painting, in which all spectators saw Ceaușescu's ubiquitous portrait: "– Oy, you forgot to take it down! – Leave it, mate, it'll soon fall down on its own!"¹¹ Or, about the freezing cold houses in 1984-1989, the *Tact* brigade in Timișoara:

I remember the floods of yore. So much water in the pipes that it spilled over!... The whole dorm was flooded. I still have a bottle of hot water essence and use it whenever I take a shower... Two drops per cold water tone!

Or, directly alluding to the economic crisis caused by the "external debt", *Brigada ASE*:

Our activity is based on the concept of saving, regardless of the costs.

In a press interview (as well as in other radio or TV public talks), Toni Grecu, a founding member and long-time leader of Divertis, stated loud and clear:

One of our highest purposes was to meanly allude to irritating communist policies. Life in the "80s was very tough because of huge material shortages. There was no heat, no electricity, no hot water, and students' life in the common dormitories was rough. We made certain

11. Viorel Gaiță, in Andy Lupu and Eugen Oprina, *Puterea râsului. Umorul studențesc în anii 80*, Documentary (TVR1, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trk8A9isop8&t=122s>.

jokes in the paper, not saying names, of course. The university environment was deliberately more relaxed. It was way for people to blow off steam and stay off the streets.¹²

Or:

Unless you made jokes hinting at the events around you, there was no point in doing student comedy.¹³

Most of those who were interviewed, whether in the written press or on TV, confirm a similar attitude, regardless of the university they went to. Of course, the main question this raises is how was it possible that censors allowed such performances based on such texts that would never have been permitted on a professional stage? “We were playing cat and mouse”, says Călin Husar¹⁴, one of the leaders of *Brigada ASE*. There were permanent negotiations between the students” and the government’s representative (in Bucharest, the famous comrade Olivia Clătici, of the University Centre, while at the big festivals, comrade Mircea Ursache).

The students sometimes resorted to the classic method of the “white dog”: as it happened in theatre, they introduced a shocking, provocative situation, which was certainly going to be cut out, in order to deflect attention from the subversive strong point the team was aiming for. Other times, they replaced the cut sentences or words with negotiated elements that turned situational humour ten times funnier or simply made the joke’s point of interest even darker. In the same TV documentary, Ciprian Fachiru, of the *Mecanica* group in Galați (which was strictly monitored at a local level), told an exemplary story in this sense:

The text sounded something like: “We turned to our work companion, the computer, to put your wishes on cards, so they are now in the programme.” The references were evident: the (computing) cards hinted

12. Toni Grecu, interview by Alexandru Șerban, *Adevărul*, 14 November 2015

13. Toni Grecu, in Andy Lupu and Eugen Oprina, *Puterea râsului. Umorul studențesc în anii 80*, Documentary (TVR1, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trk8A9isop8&t=122s>.

14. Călin Husar, Toni Grecu, *Ibidem*.

at bread and food ration cards, while the programme alluded to the Romanian Communist Party's programme... This man from Galați said to me: Listen, it's not ok to talk about cards, as people can understand something else; let's change this word." "Well, at our university, we have cards, you know the Romanian computer Felix...", we said... "Yes, yes, I know, but things have modernized now... [*the censor n.n.*] Let's say as follows: *We've got everything on tape so all your wishes are now recorded!*" Our faces simply fell off! Taped? It was a direct reference to the *Securitate*, which we really didn't aim at...¹⁵

Other times, the student group reacted to an act of censorship by using in the show the very censored directions (as Toni Grecu and Florin Constantin recall doing in the show they presented at the 1983 Student Art Festival in Iași): by verbally or non-verbally highlighting the various interventions on the text, you caused uproars of clapping. As Toni Grecu puts it: "The greatest satisfaction came from making fun of censors themselves!"¹⁶ All things considered, it seems that the existence of backstage censorship raised the groups critical potential and the audience's complicit reaction:

Censorship brought us a huge service. How? Before going on stage at a festival, they had to see the text. The person in charge of propaganda read it and said: "What does this say? What do you mean this toolbox costs 500 dollars? You can't say the word *dollars*!" It was forbidden. There were rules against saying certain words in public, including Western currencies. Romanians were not supposed to know other currencies existed. As a digression, if *Miliția* found a dollar on you, you went to jail for years! Back to our story: the censor cut the word "dollars" and wrote above it: [any other currency], of the communist bloc, of course." When I was on stage, I said: "This toolbox costs 500 any other currency." And my colleagues performed the entire text reading the censor's corrections out loud. The audience was on the floor with laughter. They got it. Which brought us the first prize.

15. Ciprian Fachiru, *Ibidem*.

16. Toni Grecu, *Ibidem*.

In fact, some censors paid attention to the moments of the show where the audience laughed and highlighted them in red on the script, in an attempt to later diminish their subversive value¹⁷, which of course led to counter-reactions from the artists: one of the most commonly used and most efficient ways to make people think of politics, thus avoiding script censorship, was to “meaningfully” perform certain classic texts as part of monologues, as per the testimonies of both certain artists, and the censors themselves. For instance, they mention *Cinci pâini*, by Ion Creangă, or *Iarna pe uliță* by George Coșbuc; they simply took the text as it was, with no changes at all, and by employing expressive pauses corroborated with a nonverbal discourse that showed irony or even sarcasm to the original work, caused huge comic contextual effects, all directly connected to politics. Ghighi Bejan¹⁸, for example, told that merely pausing after uttering “The Party”, before saying “Liberal” (in Creangă’s text), brought him standing ovations; the same with the finger counting gesture after saying “We’ve got no...” (Suggesting the shortages of everyday life) before going on saying “... son. But we’ve got... each other.”¹⁹

The silent battle with censorship – minimized by the activists who accepted testifying but marked by a range of examples from the former students involved – intertwined with surveillance by the state police, *Securitate*. Evidently, a former top activist, head of UASCR’s Committee for press and culture, Corneliu Dumitriu, vehemently denies the presence of the *Securitate*, which... “was a busy institution and had no time to monitor students”. However, hand-filmed footage from a student festival in April 1989 (at the last Student Art Festival, which took place in Cluj) shows the members of

17. Ghighi Bejan, *Ibidem*.

18. *Ibidem*.

19. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that, whether they were aware of it or not, the model of reading classic texts in an ironic-parodic key came from professional theatre: in 1970, Bulandra Theatre paved the way for poetry and music recitals as a form of intellectual entertainment, and Florian Pitiș debuted this method in his “reinterpretation” of *Scrisoarea a III-a*, by Mihai Eminescu. In 1970-1971, at Cassandra Theatre Studio, students from several departments (drama and directing) of IATC proposed a performance type called *Divertisment 71* (*Entertainment 71*), which was the result of their playful improvisation exercises, some of which used classic texts performed ironically and parodically.

Brigada ASE daringly mocking a sharp “interview” “by the dean” (employing multiple clichés hinting at a beating in the basements of the secret services: “Talk...!”). Another sketch, by the group of the Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiești, includes the line below, as the audience rolled on the floor with laughter: “Whoever speaks for longer than five minutes at a seminar... meeting... is capable of doing worse things!...”

Unlike his colleague Dumitriu, Mircea Ursache, also an UASCR responsible for the activities of the “Grigore Preoteasa” Student House of Culture in Bucharest, admits that the *Securitate* always monitored that “certain lines weren’t crossed”. In different interviews (one for DIGI FM in 2019, the other for TVM in 2017), both Toni Grecu and Florin Constantin stated that, after 1990, they were approached by a *Securitate* worker who monitored the Iași student house of culture and offered them *all* the tapes of the Iași representations of the Divertis group²⁰.

2. With the Emperor’s permission?

Still, did any of the many participants to these entertainment shows that rose to such fame among young people suffer any consequences? According to the responsible activists, no. Nevertheless, it’s true that there were local differences – in the big centres, such as Bucharest, Cluj, or Iași, the authorities were of course much more tolerant than in small university centres, such as Galați. But, since they “couldn’t detain the students off the stage” (as Toni Grecu said in his interview with DIGI FM²¹), according to several artists, they took action through the school or university management, whether the dean, the chancellor and so on. Ciprian Fachiru, for instance, tells how, following the pressure on the TCM Galați Dean’s Office, he was blamed by public meeting vote and obliged to repeat the year.

20. In fact, samizdat tapes of performances held by the Divertis group or of concerts by Alexandru Andrieș – songs that were subsequently released on the album *Interzis (Forbidden)* in 1990 – recorded especially in clubs or houses of culture, circulated during the last years of the communist regime. Yours truly probably still has a couple of such tapes in a dusty box.

21. Toni Grecu, *Oameni de colecție - Toni Grecu*, interview by Cătălin Striblea, Video, February 19, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mb7gA1NH6Mc>.

It was a “democratic” meeting. They brought my whole year, i.e. a hundred plus people, in a big room. Several people took the floor saying... “He dispraised and mocked our accomplishments...” And the audience started asking questions: “But what did he say?” “We can’t repeat his words!”
*Laughs.*²²

On the other hand, this reflex endeavour of comedian students, in years of terrible shortages and absurd political dictatorship, brought the audience a temporary (illusory?) sentiment of freedom, or at least hope for freedom. Hence the (self-)heroizing of those who constantly engaged in such spectacular contributions: “Back then, you felt like a sort of James Bond of comedy; saying things that were almost forbidden, that people criticized was cool... It could certainly cost you your future...”²³

Or, in the words of Lia Trandafir of the Brigade of the Bucharest School of Law: “The student comedy movement was a protest, a form of resistance, a safety net, the impudence of youth... and all of the above at the same time.”²⁴

However, the question of “how it was possible” for such a movement to grow so big remains essential. Many of those who spoke in the TVR documentary, as well as in other materials, whether written or audio interviews, now – more than three decades later, admit that the system itself allowed humour to act as a *safety valve* and release the negative energies accumulated because of material shortages and political constraints. Since some authors of the comedy texts written for the stage collaborated, were editors, or simply close to student publications of the UTC (*Viața Studențească*, *Amfiteatru*, *Universitas*, *Convîngeri comuniste* in Bucharest, *Alma Mater/Dialog*, *Opinia studențească* in Iași, *Echinox* in Cluj, etc., or even *Scînteia tineretului*, especially through its cultural supplement, *SLAST*), it is evident that, despite the censorship, cultural and media productions dedicated to young people were surrounded by a broader margin of tolerance/respite regarding critical discourse and subversive allusions. “We made certain jokes in the paper, not

22. Ciprian Fachiru, in Andy Lupu and Eugen Oprina, *Puterea râsului. Umorul studențesc în anii 80*, Documentary (TVR1, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trk8A9isop8&t=122s>.

23. Dragoș Moștenescu, *Ibidem*.

24. Lia Trandafir, *Ibidem*.

saying names, of course. The university environment was deliberately more relaxed. It was way for people to blow off steam and stay off the streets.”²⁵

In a long interview in the same series collected by Simona-Ioana Cucuian in preparation of her doctoral thesis on student magazines, Paul Nancă, editor-in-chief of the magazine *Convingeri comuniste* of the Bucharest CUASCR (Council of Romanian Students Associations) during the last years before the fall of communism and later a member of the *Phoenix* magazine and editorial group, paints a clear picture of the “90s ambiance and the tight, though silent, collaboration between young writers, student journalists and comedy groups; however, he also cannot clearly explain the coercive bodies’ lack of reaction (especially after *Cenacul de luni* was forbidden in 1983, which was partly reborn in a new formula, under the umbrella of the magazine itself):

... It was our means of resistance in a time when you had a choice between doing nothing and doing whatever could be done, but still doing something to support the idea of culture and people’s spirit alive in general. And we chose to do this... We will never know to what extent we tricked our censors and how much they allowed... This remains a mystery insofar as student comedy groups go, too...²⁶

Evidently, this space of respite was limited by a sort of clear, unspoken net, on the one hand demarcating the things that could be said and those that were forbidden (first of all, jokes and hints to the presidential couple were to be avoided), and on the other hand, through the concessive attitude of the censors themselves, by the editors-in-chief, the leaders of the houses of students or of the festival juries. In the TVR documentary, Ion Cristoiu, deputy editor-in-chief of the magazine *Scânteia tineretului* in 1980-1987, member of countless such juries, and coordinator of the transient publications related to the Amfiteatru Galas, states that the truly important thing was “to avoid a

25. Alexandra Șerban, “Toni Grecu, umorist, liderul grupului Divertis: ‘În comunism, cenzura ne-a făcut servicii colosale,’” *Adevărul*, November 14, 2015.

26. Paul Nancă, *Interviu cu Paul Nancă*, interview by Simona-Ioana Cucuian, Web, October 2, 2020, https://ecreator.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4875:interviu-cu-paul-nanca&catid=23&Itemid=131..

scandal”: crawl through, both as an artist, and as an official, so as not to stir an acute reaction that may have reached the top of the pyramid, i.e. the Central Committee’s Special Department for Propaganda, Press and Print. Moreover, the journalist (who at some point was “punished” by being demoted to editor-in-chief of the *Teatrul* magazine), describes the procedures of this particular (and consistent) kind of evasion: “The main concern of the juries and the organizers was for political nuances to not be discussed, [even] if those on stage said jokes about Nicolae Ceaușescu. We simply turned a blind eye.”²⁷

Still, how can this relative tolerance be explained from a political, institutional viewpoint? Considering that, even at the level of other “amateur artistic brigades” that developed around plants, factories, and enterprises of all kinds, which were scattered throughout the country, especially as *Cântarea României* developed so much, *such slips were impossible* – even if, at certain comedy festivals, groups of workers and students competed against each other – the phenomenon certainly requires applied conjunctural explanations. As we have seen, there are no interdisciplinary historical studies. These should look at both testimonies, press and TV documents, and corroborate them with the archives of UTC and UASCR or CNSAS (National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives).

A majority of the participants themselves admit, intuitively, but repeatedly, that in the ‘80s, and especially in 1983-1987, when UTC was headed by Nicu Ceaușescu (who surrounded himself with a whole suite of greater or smaller activists, from the leaders of *Scântea Tineretului* to those of the UASCR cultural committees), the drag of censorship and the monitoring system were much laxer than in other sectors of artistic life:

Once again, it was a freedom about which we will never know how much we had earned and how much was allowed by the system to keep us within the limits of a time when everything closed down at 10 p.m., from TV programmes (which lasted two hours, between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m.) to restaurants; night clubs were unknown to us back then. However, student clubs were open until later at night. So, after all this time, I ask myself whether this was allowed by the Emperor, in an

27. Ion Cristoiu, in Andy Lupu and Eugen Oprina, *Puterea râsului. Umorul studențesc în anii 80*, Documentary (TVR1, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trk8A9isop8&t=122s>.

attempt to keep us all there and avoid that we went out and played other tricks. [Nicu Ceaușescu] was the head of the UTC, the first secretary of the UTC Central Committee, and it is true that, as a young, open spirit, he allowed certain things, such as this freedom that students enjoyed compared to other Romanian social classes of the time, which extended around an entire seaside resort, such as Costinești, not mentioning the other mountainside camps, like Izvorul Mureșului, Pârâul Rece and certain others, where, once again, performances, festivals, discos took place, the latter also prohibited really everywhere else on Romanian soil. In fact, a few clubs, or discos – call them whatever – in Costinești and the other resorts were actually equipped quite well for the time, with UTC funds.²⁸

However, it remains for proper studies to prove whether this impression/intuition advanced by direct participants regarding the role of that “safety valve aimed at releasing society’s negative energies” is true or not. In any case, to quote Bogdan Teodorescu (writer, former member of the *FICS* group), “Back then, we had no idea we were valves!”²⁹. On the contrary: “We knew we wouldn’t die under communism. We knew it. And we were preparing for the day when we’d be rid of them.”³⁰

3. “This is not theatre!” Criticism and student comedy groups

The contempt displayed, whether openly or not, by Romanian literary and theatre criticism towards comedy in general is not a novel phenomenon, as it has stubbornly travelled across our modern cultural history in a type of (hypocritical) reflex relative to the preferences of audiences, which, from the mid-1850s, favoured comedy plays and shows. Let us remember that Caragiale’s comedies were first rejected by the audience and the critics, as they were considered vulgar. The world of comedy and even of satirical/humorous

28. Paul Nancă, *Interviu cu Paul Nancă*, interview by Simona-Ioana Cucuian, Web, October 2, 2020, https://ecreator.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4875:interviu-cu-paul-nanca&catid=23&Itemid=131.

29. Bogdan Teodorescu, in Andy Lupu and Eugen Oprina, *Puterea râsului. Umorul studențesc în anii 80*, Documentary (TVR1, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trk8A9isop8&t=122s>.

30. Lia Trandafir, *Ibidem*.

lyricism was traditionally marginalized by the past century's literary histories. Very few comedy performances (except for the sophisticated readings of Caragiale) enjoyed an exceptional status in the eyes of theatre critics of Communist times, no matter how smart and surprising the proposals of playwrights and directors. This happened despite the strong, highly vocal presence of subservient comedy writers, such as Aurel Baranga. To our days, valuable playwrights, such as Marin Sorescu, Theodor Mazilu, or Ion Băieșu, are in fact very rarely read and brought to the limelight. The phenomenon is ever more bizarre, as, throughout the years, humour, satire, even buffa works were not only acknowledged and theorised by classic critics, from Titu Maiorescu and George Călinescu, to, for instance, Ov. S Crohmălniceanu, but, especially after 1965, dozens of colloquia, round tables, conferences dedicated to comedy and humour were documented, and starting the turn of the "70s, a multitude of such festivals were organized, both for professional, and amateur performing arts institutions.

Despite the fact that, in 1977-1989, the cultural press throughout the country, as well as *Teatrul* magazine, published (out of obligation, of course) dozens of synthetic articles and accounts dedicated to amateur festivals, the theatre critics willing to look at the phenomenon rarely or not at all focused on student humour. I am referring not to activist journalists who wrote as directed, but to real critics, such as Valentin Silvestru, who supported and even theorised comedy performances³¹ (who otherwise wrote in a 1985 journal page that, for five years, he had been the president of the *Cântarea României* jury for the sections "artistic brigades, satirical groups, amateur light shows"³²), or Victor Parhon, who, for years, wrote a column dedicated to amateur

31. In this sense, see, among many others, Valentin Silvestru, "Dificultățile umorului pe scenă [Difficulties of Humour on Stage]," *Contemporanul*, May 17, 1979, Valentin Silvestru, "Formula de viață a brigăzii artistice [The Formula of Artistic Brigades]," *Contemporanul*, July 29, 1979, as well as Valentin Silvestru, *Umorul în literatură și artă [Humour in Literature and Arts]* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1988).

32. Valentin Silvestru, "Pagini de jurnal 1944-1985 [Diary 1944-1985]," *Teatrul* 6 (1985), 87: "At the same time, it is the broadest space for the manifestation of popular irony, the most representative – due to its sharpness and optimism – critical expression against everyday shortages, anachronistic mentalities, the masses' hottest, most efficient plea for labour, honour, and justice, through artistic means."

festivals in the *Contemporanul* magazine³³. Of course, the exception were the accounts and reports in *Viața studentască* or *Scânteia tineretului* (which claimed to be critical publications, so to say). In the rare cases when they did mention these (in *Contemporanul*, or in the local press, when the Student Art Festival unfolded outside the capital city), the section dedicated to “brigades” was treated superficially or was completely inexistent, to the benefit of the section dedicated to theatre groups.

We find it equally interesting, and at the same time symptomatic, that, during the two years when the former deputy editor-in-chief of *Scânteia tineretului*, Ion Cristoiu, was appointed editor-in-chief of *Teatrul* (1987-1989), despite the fact that the editorial policy changed completely and the young generations of artists and students from IACT or Târgu Mureș received unprecedented attention, the articles and columns dedicated to amateurs, even those at *Cântarea României*, disappeared almost in full; while comedy performances and festivals were *not mentioned at all*, although the new editor-in-chief had been and continued to the very end to be their shadow supporter, a member of almost all juries, and coordinator of the transient publications at Costinești or Pârâul Rece, and even turned to many writers directly connected to the student (comedy) movement who wrote in *Suplimentul Literar Artistic al Scânteii Tineretului* (*Artistic Literary Supplement of Scânteia Tineretului*), such as Ioan Groșan, Ioan Buduca, Radu G. Țeposu, Toni Grecu, Doru Antonesi, Paul Nancă, etc.

In other words, willingly or not, theatre criticism ignored student humour. The fact that a privileged system journalist who had worked in youth press for a long time maintained this ignorance as chief of the specialized magazine – despite bringing at *Teatrul*, from time to time, a plethora of former collaborators from *Scânteia tineretului*, from George Stanca and Mihai

33. Nevertheless, we can refer to a review signed by Traian Pop Traian in 1985, “În obiectiv, teatrul studentesc” (*Focus of Student Theatre*), following the Timișoara Student Art Festival, when a dramatization of Mircea Nedelciu’s exceptional parodic sketch “*Tânguire de mior*” was performed in the Amphitheatre of the School of Agronomy (p. 15-16, as a short, yet enthusiastic regional stage of the “Grigore Preoteasa” Student House of Culture brigades), created by radio producer Dragoș Șeuleanu, “Jocul serios de-a satira [Serious Game of Satire],” *Teatrul* 7–8 (1985): 36–37.

Tatulici, to Paul Nancă, Radu G. Țeposul, Eva Catrinescu, Aurelia Boriga, Graziela Bârlă, or Doina Berchină – seems to confirm that *this was not the critics' reaction to protect the youngsters' attempts at subversion*, but a rejection that rather conveys that *"This is not theatre!"* And the new editor-in-chief treated it as a natural fact.

There is one single exemplifying intersection between student humour and professional theatre, i.e. Ștefan Iordache's 1989 recital entitled *Astă seară stau acasă* (*I'm Staying Home Tonight*), performed at *Teatrul Mic*, based on a text by Toni Grecu and Doru Antonesei. Until new testimonies, how Dinu Săraru chose this reportorial option remains a mystery. All in all, the performance was a fiasco, as critics reprimanded the text's very bubbly fragmented character that raised the spirits of young audiences in houses of culture or open amphitheatres of student camps:

In spite of all these more than promising premises, we must state from the very beginning that the recital *Astă seară stau acasă* was disappointing. [...] First of all, there is no doubt that, due to its inconsistent character, the text signed by Toni Grecu Arhire and Doru Antonesei who made up of a series of little jokes that were somewhat funny (some of them), unoriginal (many others), all of them fleeting, was not enough for a performance of over two hours. Naturally, the punchlines are not the highlights, the adornments of a narrative structured designed to be funny but substitute the situation itself. We have no doubt that the text was written precisely for this performance, but it is evident that it lacks any dramatic structure.³⁴

Who commissioned the "text written precisely" for Ștefan Iordache and why? It is clear that it was somebody who was already familiar with the kind of humour they had produced for years in totally different spaces than those of professional theatre, but did not anticipate that both the audience and the critics or the journalists at the premiere were not accustomed, nor had the taste, or the proclivity for such a text format, especially considering

34. Cristina Dumitrescu, "Ștefan Iordache în *Astă seară stau acasă*," *Teatrul*, no. 2 (1989), 61-62.

that, as it is easily understandable, on a famous stage in the capital city centre it was depurated of all political-subversive allusions.

Present-day historians, critics, and sociologists should take a closer look at this contemptuous attitude of the critics towards popular comedy performances, including those created by theatres or revue departments all around the country, which, when discussed, were placed in less visible spots of publications. For it is rather clear that, for about two hundred years, the fabric of the Romanian theatre movement preserved a silent, strange contradiction – from the end of the 19th century on – with the system that coagulated a bourgeois aesthetic *canon*: in its understandable attempt to “educate” the public by marginalizing theatre discourses considered as “commercial”, the post-romantic aesthetic canon granted privilege to the obsession of the masterpiece, of “great *dramatic art*”, both in specific literature and in terms of performances³⁵. The of 20th-century canon’s gradual coagulation around broad, metaphorical directing art that included several levels of meanings and overbid allegoric stage images thus exiled performance types that were greatly appreciated by the public (revue, “variety”, stand-up, etc.), all the way to a type of insignificant limbo that can be regarded as irrelevant or inexistent – a form of supreme contempt that explains why the intellectual world only devised proper specific tools to evaluate “minor” genres after the year 2000. And even since...

Of course, this systematic underestimation of popular culture, first and foremost aimed at entertaining, is not specific to Romanian art criticism, as by the end of the 1980s, it reigned over almost all cultural and even academic environments in both Europe, and across the ocean, including film studies, a young art that is – one would say – popular by definition. It is the result of several sociological, ideological, and not least political factors that – following the post-WW1 assumption/assimilation of various avantgarde aesthetics – deepened the fault line between high culture (protected under

35. For instance, regarding dramatic literature, see Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, *Literatura română între cele două războaie mondiale [Interwar Romanian Literature]*, vol. III (Bucharest: Minerva, 1975), and the unpublished doctoral thesis by Miruna Iacob, “Umorul literar al experienței comuniste [The Literary Humour of Communist Experience]” (PhD Thesis, Braşov, Transilvania University of Braşov, 2018).

the opaque umbrella of the autonomy of aesthetics) and popular culture³⁶; all this despite the academic-dictatorial pressure exerted by totalitarian ideologies before and after the Second World War, as both fascism and communism more than overbid the very “popular”, “mass-oriented” character of artistic products. Naturally, propagandistic pressure causes equal reactions³⁷.

Moreover, in our case too (decades later), as in the cases of other European cultural spaces, the contemptuous lack of interest in so-called “minor” genres, such as duos, sketches, stand-up comedies, imitations-impersonations, etc., was to a great extent deepened by how quickly they turned from live performances to TV shows. The very fact that these authors/scriptwriters/actors rose to fame extremely fast when they were picked up by TV stations (in the West, often getting control over production, contracts for series, or, in former Communist countries, reaching an icon status), led to their decline from “great artists” to “minor entertainers” – a faulty opposition of adjectives that, in fact, lacks a well-grounded axiological and theoretical system.

“*This is not theatre!*” is a consistent label-like assertion through which, in other spaces, too, but specifically in Romania, the theatre world has looked at all types of theatricality and performance that don’t quietly fit the often museified shelf of “art theatre”; or, with due generous tolerance, the back row of “sensational theatre” (which at least, willingly or not, takes place in theatre venues). The sentence “*This is not art!*” is a conviction which in no way considers that in entertainment shows, too, by using theatre means, certain artists address an audience, sometimes the same, other times different from, and at times including spectators of professional theatre. As a direct

36. For the major/minor experience in other cultural spaces, see Jean-Marc Moura, *Le Sens Littéraire de l'humour* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2010); Daniel R Smith, *Comedy and Critique: Stand-up Comedy and the Professional Ethos of Laughter* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2019); Eric Weitz, *Theatre & Laughter* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

37. For example, see Alison Dagnes, *A Conservative Walks into a Bar: The Politics of Political Humor*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Gregory Williams, *Permission to Laugh: Humor and Politics in Contemporary German Art* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Rachel V. Kutz-Flamenbaum, “Humor and Social Movements,” *Sociology Compass* 8, no. 3 (March 2014): 294–304.

consequence, such a claim, so deeply rooted in mentalities, cannot outline, through consistent evasion, a coherent, efficient evaluation system for the qualities of *other forms of theatre communication*.

Leaving theory behind, one may rhetorically, yet exemplifyingly, raise simple, heritage questions, such as: are the short monologues written by Dan Mihăiescu or Octavian Sava for Toma Caragiu, whether intended for live reading or TV shows, theatre texts or not? Is Toma Caragiu's interpretation, which has by now become truly popular, like the texts themselves, specific to theatre art or not? Are the sketches and duos created by Mihai Maximilian for Stela Popescu part of theatre art in general? How about Stela Popescu who, like Toma Caragiu, was able to perform any kind of roles, from comedy to drama, from Brecht to Chekov – is she an actress or has she lost this status for having been hugely successful in both revues and on TV? And so on, to *Divertis*, *Vacanța mare*, *Vouă*, or *Las Fierbinți* groups, considering the necessary, infinite nuances of any evaluation, on condition that it is an honest, argument-based, professional assessment. Evidently, a mere honest interrogation shows that judgements such as “This is not theatre” are downright superfluous as long as we agree that these types of entertainment *are theatre, a certain kind of theatre*, as technically and phenomenologically speaking they can be regarded as nothing else.

Going back to our student comedy groups, many of which competed as “artistic brigades”: the theatre critics’ superior attitude of ignorance can actually be explained by that fact that the “genre” itself had been, in the minds of most intellectuals in the “80s, already depreciated from the “60s, when specific, urban theatre audiences saw it as a mainly propagandistic genre, reminiscent of the sad “agitational” times. Critics themselves, especially those who were trained and enjoyed a certain level of authority after 1965, could not make an exception. And young critics followed or took on the unsaid rule. Especially after the unprecedented expansion of *Cântarea României*, taking part in and writing about amateur festivals and competitions had become a chore, and avoiding “brigades” most likely started as a defence mechanism of both the critic himself and of professional theatre, implicitly. This is why, except for the explosion of satirical and comedy groups on TV, after 1990, the amateur movement, oversized because of the great national festival, does not seem to have left visible marks on Romanian theatre life.

However, as it is evident, this self-protective reflex of theatre critics missed that which likely was the most interesting and freshest phenomenon to turn a typically propagandistic artistic formula into an open, outright platform that showed visible, systematic subversion against the political regime, if not contested it altogether. A platform that saw the participation of thousands of sympathetic spectators, one that still awaits proper critical research.

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Using Archive Work in Live Stage-Directing

RALUCA BLAGA¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Andrei Elek's Ciulei essay

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

6. Popescu, *Dinăuntru*, 31.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Gabriel Petre's *Moisescu reloaded*

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

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

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

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

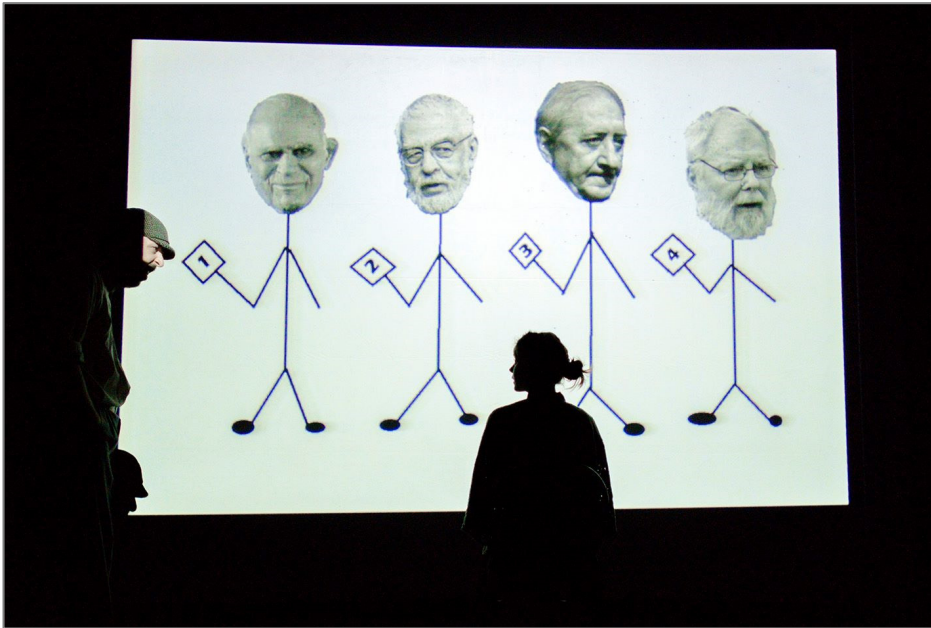


Fig. 2: Gabriel Petre, *Moisescu reloaded* – performative essay using as a starting point *Five sketches/ The Bald Soprano*, directed by Valeriu Moisescu, exam/performance, Theatre directing master class, 2014/2015, University of Arts from Tirgu-Mures.
Photo by Cosmin Ardeleanu.

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

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

Adi Iclenzan's untitled exam

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

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

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



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

Photo by Cosmin Ardeleanu.

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

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

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

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

Andrei Raicu's *Wonderful*

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Performing Archives: Documentary Theatre, Transition and Adaptation to a New Lifestyle in Romanian Society

ALEXANDRA ELSEGHI¹

Abstract: The change of political regimes and the long period of transition that followed afterwards brought dramatic, even tragic shifts in common people's lives, who were born and raised in the Eastern Bloc. These experiences, which were strikingly common in Eastern European countries, have left significant marks in nowadays society, which historians and artists alike are trying to analyze and explain to their audiences, in a personal and accessible form. This article aims to analyze the manners in which recent history themes, like the period of transition, economy and the essential lifestyle changes which came as a consequence, are researched and handled in Romanian documentary theatre. As follows, two theatre productions of this kind will be presented. They were considered to be a real success in the independent theatre scene in the past five years and their specificity is the shared socio-political context between stage and audience².

Keywords: documentary theatre, archives, transition, recent history, non-Aristotelian theatre, independent theatre, consumerism, society.

In her book, *Secondhand Time: The last of the Soviets*, Svetlana Alexievich transcribes a former USSR citizen's testimony about how ordinary people experienced the '90s. Among other ideas, this citizen said that most of the

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people, in their naivety, didn't take the Transition Period too seriously (although they should have); being blinded by an illusionary victory, most of them missed an important opportunity of transforming the entire society and also the meaning of freedom³. I interpreted this statement as being fairly broad and able to summarize in waste terms, every individual's experience with the Transition Period. In Romania, as well as in other former Communist countries, the installation of Capitalism arrived together with important financial gains for a few select members of the society, and with great loss for the main part of the population. The vast majority of citizens learned democracy and its rules 'on the go', and tried to adapt, with great difficulty, to a new socio-political context. There is a huge archive material about the Transition Period, from social studies to anthropological, historical, economic analysis, and in recent years, especially in the independent cultural sector, there is a tendency to treat and dissect this theme in documentary theatre productions.

The explanation for this is not complicated, nor is it difficult to understand. First of all, the average age of the Romanian independent artist is around 30, which means that his or her formative years took place in the last decade of the 20th century, which was marked by a general confusion both social and political. Therefore, one of the motivations might be of a personal nature: these artists are trying to probe at a more profound level the context in which they grew up. Another argument refers to the need of analyzing the debut of Capitalism in the society, in order to explain and understand the shortcomings of the current system - let's not forget that the main purposes of documentary theatre is to create debates concerning a socio-political phenomenon, to educate and to develop the spectators' critical thinking. Lastly, the necessity of performing such themes in theatre performances arrives in order to support the artists' connection with their audience, both sharing common experiences that they are trying to understand, to accept or to condemn with the help of a live event.

In this regard, I chose two examples of documentary theatre productions that are using archived material to present important aspects of the Transition Period in Romania: (1) the phenomenon of privatization by changing the planned economy with the market economy and (2) the monetary inflation

3. Svetlana Aleksievici, *Vremuri second-hand* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2017), 289.

in Romania during the '90s decade. The two productions were created between 2017-2019 in Cluj-Napoca and Zalău: *Factories and Plants/Fabrici și uzine* (directed by Adina Lazăr and produced by The Center for The Study of Modernity and the Rural World/Centrul pentru Studiarea Modernității și a Lumii Rurale, in partnership with Museum of History and Art, Zalău/Muzeul Județean de Istorie și Artă - Zalău, 2019 - a project in which I signed the dramaturgy), and *The Miracle of Cluj/Miracolul de la Cluj* (directed by David Schwartz and produced by Reactor of Creation and Experiment/Reactor de Creație și Experiment, within the program *Exercises of Democracy. Investigation of recent history/ Exerciții de democrație. Investigarea istoriei recente*, 2017, with a dramaturgy signed by Petro Ionescu).

In both cases, the script was based on a rigorous research, by consulting archives consisting in: local and national old newspapers that could be found at the county's libraries (as for example in *The Miracle of Cluj/Miracolul de la Cluj* case - the lists published in *The Transylvanian Messenger* newspaper/*Mesagerul transilvan*), social studies and analysis articles published online or on paperback (for example, Vladimir Pasti's book from 2006, *The New Romanian Capitalism/Noul capitalism românesc*⁴, which I considered to be of great help during my research period for *Factories and Plants/Fabrici și Uzine* script, along with Bill Browder's book, *Red Notice. A true story of high finance, murder, and one man's fight for justice*⁵). Together with our project consultants, a professional journalist and an anthropologist, we created a follow-up of the historical phenomenon, with events and facts as they were presented in the local and national press. Finally, an important part was played by the interviews that the two artistic collectives took during the entire process. The interviewees, consisting of people who directly witnessed or experienced the historical events, were transformed into characters. At the beginning of *Factories and Plants/Fabrici și Uzine* rehearsals, we spent a lot of time reading the whole transcript of the interviews and dissecting the possible meanings of phrases, even if the final draft consisted in only about 20 percent of the entire testimonies. It was an important phase in the overall construction of the theatre play, because it gave consistent information to the actors about the

4. Vladimir Pasti, *Noul capitalism românesc* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2006).

5. Bill Browder, *Alertă roșie* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2018).

characters they were about to play. Creating a documentary theatre script is extremely different from constructing a classical play. But first, I find it crucial to explain the argument for treating these themes in a very specific, anti-Aristotelian manner.

Why documentary theatre is not an Aristotelian theatre?

We are commencing from the idea that every art is political: Augusto Boal demonstrated that the definition of tragedy in Aristotle's *Poetics*, which refers to the imitation of virtuous people's actions, had as its main purpose the support and maintenance of a predetermined class order. The wealthy ruling class of the citadel was also financing these entertainment events for the general public - therefore, it had no interest in destabilizing the state's hierarchies. Since the main purpose was maintaining order, Aristotelian theatre was not, nor will it ever be suited for the theatre of the Revolution. The attempt to avoid a revolution in theatre was perpetuated especially during the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, where abusing censure committees managed to almost completely distort the meaning of a work of art or ban it altogether. According to Aristotle, *Hamartia*, or the protagonist's flaw that creates conflict (also known as the tragic guilt) - is attributed only to the ones that are being 'different', who end up being punished for it. In short: the individual who opposes the order imposed by the State will suffer the consequences⁶ or, paraphrasing Ibsen, the strongest man is also the loneliest.

This is why, through its own structure and its own set of values which it promotes, documentary theatre rather rallies to Brechtian Aesthetics - a revealing experience at the level of conscience, where dramatic action clarifies the real one, as Boal puts it. Between 1939-1955, Brecht conceived an important work which was published under the name of *Der Messingkauf*, or *Messingkauf Dialogues* or *Buying Brass*. Written as a Socratic dialogue between a playwright, a technician, two actors and a philosopher, Brecht describes his vision of theatrical practice. The imagined debate that takes place over four nights, post-performance, attacks subjects like: socio-political context,

6. Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 34.

vision, drama, reality versus fiction, acting. Regarding the environment in which this new theatrical form is born, the *Messingkauf* Philosopher states:

Bear in mind that we are living in dark times, when people's behavior towards one another is particularly abhorrent and the deadly activities of certain groups of people are shrouded in an almost impenetrable darkness so that a great deal of thought and organization is needed in order to shed some light on people's social behavior.⁷

It should be noted the fact that the period in which Brecht began working on this text was the one when Fascism erupted in Europe, generating the Second World War. Even if we are not experiencing today an ascension of such dimension of totalitarianism and the imminence of a global conflict, we cannot help but notice the extremist actions of some political parties such as Fidesz in Hungary, Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland or Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, which attack fundamental human rights and freedom; as a consequence, making documentary theatre forms looks essential to the present context.

As in Brechtian epic theatre, documentary theatre proposes distancing (*Verfremdungseffekt*) instead of empathy born of Aristotelian *catharsis*, pushing the dramatic act towards storytelling and postdramatic techniques. The characters portrayed on stage have the status of symbolic characters, depicting an entire social class or category, with its struggles, dilemmas and experiences within a society and a context that the audience is already aware of. Concerning this context and the manipulation of the archive material (also known as the 'raw' material), director Robin Belfied states the following in his practical book, *Telling the Truth. How to make Verbatim Theatre*:

I would argue that there is a difference between **narrative** and **story**. When I approach verbatim work, the 'narrative' for me is linked to the structure and can be defined or expressed as a series of events - what happens when. The 'story' is something more profound - it is a way of

7. Tom Kuhn, Steve Giles, Marc Silberman (edit.), *Brecht on Performance* (London: Methuen Drama, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 59.

expressing what lies at the heart of the verbatim play. The structure of an event-based piece can be found very easily, but to simply perform a chronology of events would make for an ‘interesting’ audience experience at best. I can’t imagine anyone walks into the theatre just to learn about a sequence of facts; on the contrary, an audience expects to be moved by connecting with the subject on a deeper level (...) ⁸

Therefore, *narrative* and *story* are being connected, but the second term is the one that offers a unique perspective – which asks to be found and edited by the practitioners during the entire artistic process, beginning from the research phase and continuing with the rehearsals. More than that, we are witnessing the revival of a more or less neutral character (depending on the director’s vision): the Narrator. Its function is a very practical one, because it facilitates the audience’s access into the performance’s universe, and it transforms it into a participant at the events that are being narrated rather than materialized on stage. The Narrator can be an important part of the entire structure of the play, the one that presents the course of events and their historical effects with objectivity – opposed to the subjective testimonies of other characters. As a practitioner, I know this confrontation of statements to be of a great importance, because it brings an equilibrium to the whole play. An example in this direction is the introductory scene from the theatre script *Factories and Plants/Fabrici și Uzine*, which I reproduce in the following:

NARRATOR: Once upon a time... there was a town between Meseș mountains and the Valea Miții; a town surrounded by forests. And this town had a name (...) And there were people in this town (*enter characters Sandu, Mariana, Vasile*). Not too many. 15 144 people in the ‘60s. And inside people... well, what could be inside those people’s minds? Many dreams. And the world that was being built of grey concrete, and in which was the city with all the people in it, full of dreams, is today a lost world.⁹

8. Robin Belfield, *Telling the Truth. How to make verbatim Theatre* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018), 57.

9. *Factories and Plants* script, by Alexandra Felseghi (2019) - personal translation.

I opted for the introduction of this character in order to offer a framework for other characters' stories: they detach as branches from the history of the place they were born. The Narrator appears in key moments through the entire performance, and illustrates the most important ideas we selected from the archives we studied. In the following, I will resume the added context that the Narrator gives throughout the performance: as in most industrial cities, the population of Zalău has grown through the migration of the labor force which was facilitated by the local units. The Industrial Iron and Steel Fitting Enterprise (IAIFO) was the largest and most productive factory from Salaj County, and also with one of the most tragic destinies concerning the privatization. The story of its inauguration, its moment of glory and its dive is also the story of its employees who spent most of their lives in its perimeter, working in different sectors.

In our performance, it is not the *representation* that creates the essence, but the *presentation* of the real people who became characters. Throughout the spectacle, both performers and audience are aware that they are witnessing a theatrical event in which a diverse range of recognizable characters from society, or even from their own biography, will appear on stage.

At the beginning of the show *The Miracle of Cluj/Miracolul de la Cluj*, the actors enter the stage in their civil condition and inform the audience about what they are going to watch in a little while:

EVERYBODY: Good evening! Welcome! /ACTOR 1: Tonight we will be your hosts. /ACTOR 2: And together we will find out more about the miracle from Cluj. /ACTOR 3: Also known as Caritas. /ACTOR 4: Who heard about Caritas? /ACTOR 3: The pyramid-based game from the '90s, not the Greek-Catholic association.¹⁰

Another variant of the same 'recipe' of performers' interaction with their audience throughout a representation is also used by director Gianina Cărbunariu in *X mm from Y km/X mm din Y km* (a Colectiv A production, 2011).

10. *Miracle of Cluj* script, by Petro Ionescu (2017) - personal translation.

In this case, the four actors present themselves with their real names, and inform the spectators that they are going to play the real individuals that appeared in the transcript of the scandalous meeting in which the poet Dorin Tudoran was expelled from the Writers' Union in the '80s.

Establishing a clear framework in the first scenes of a representation is very important, because it presents the 'rules of the game', inducing the audience's awareness that what takes place on the stage is an act destined to be debated.

Also, this frame represents the backbone of the entire performance: the testimonies, without this context (be he given by a Narrator, or the reality of a representation, etc.) would create a structure that would collapse in searching for a purpose to bring the body of ideas and information together. And, last but not least, it introduces the effect of distancing, of which we will be aware throughout the entire artistic event. This ambiguous area between being civil and playing a character, constantly negotiated in postdramatic theatre, has led practitioners to believe that the character (understood in its classical meaning) almost died since the second half of the 20th century. However, the idea of the 'death of the character' is not necessarily typical for the postdramatic, as Elinor Fuchs states, quoting the famous preface written by Strindberg for his play, *Miss Julie*:

Of course, character has been dying for a hundred years. In his astoundingly pre-postmodern preface to *Miss Julie*, Strindberg said his "souls" were "characterless", "patchworks of the past and present stages of culture... pasted together from scraps of human lives, patched up from old rags that once were ball gowns..."¹¹

These concentrated structural forms that were first described in this preface-manifesto are being exploited to a whole new level in documentary theatre. In his *New interpretation technique*, Brecht mentions the three ways by which the actor can detach from his/her complete metamorphosis on stage, as it follows: 1. the transposition to the third person; 2. the transposition to

11. Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Characters: Perspective on theatre after Modernism* (USA: Indiana University Press, 1996), 171.

the past; 3. stage directions and comments¹². The three means are very often used in the dramaturgy of documentary theatre, among others, such as: the testimonies and data, facts extracted from official sources, archived materials (studies, audio-video recordings, articles, photographs, etc.) In documentary theatre, the main source of character construction is not the practitioners' imagination, but a real person, that becomes in the creative process a real case study, from speech to personality and appearance, filtered through specific dramatic techniques. As an example of how the real person is being transformed in a character on stage, the technique used by dramaturg and director Alecky Blythe is a very complex practice. She explains it in a discussion with Robin Belfield, that was published in the same book I previously mentioned:

My process was based on that of Mark Wing-Davey (a.n. *British actor and director*), who in turn learnt it from Anna Deavere Smith (a.n. *American actress and playwright*). To be specific, Mark taught that actors wear earphones in both rehearsals and performances, and copy exact speech patterns of the interviewees, and this is the process I used for my play at first. For Anna's process, the earphones were only used in rehearsals and the actors learnt their lines for the performance.¹³

Therefore, I consider this technique as a variant of the *V-Effekt* that can be experienced and used in contemporary theatre. The characters are understood as means/interfaces for delivering the story. Their perspective and vision are being used at an almost mathematical manner, in order to construct an 'orchestration' of the historical event's reproduction on stage. Depending on what the dramaturg and the director want to highlight, the characters are being chosen considering their input to the subject: contrasting testimonies, supporting ones, different points of view, emotional or retained, etc. Most of the time, the characters follow the story and not the other way around. The accuracy of the testimony, as well as the entire material used in

12. Michaela Tonitza-Iordache, George Banu (edit.) *Arta teatrului*. (București: Editura Nemira, 2004), 283.

13. Robin Belfield, *Telling the Truth. How to make verbatim Theatre* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2018), 67.

creating a documentary theatre is extremely important. As a consequence, in the practice of creating such a script, a dramaturg explores two directions which are interconnected: history and testimony.

Historical Direction

This direction refers to the research and the profound study of historical archives, of specialized articles, of sociological analysis, of reports, of other journalistic materials, as well as documentary film productions about a specific phenomenon, all with the aim of a vast understanding of the context of the event we are willing to expose in a show. I have explained in detail the way in which archived material is generally treated from a dramatic point of view in a previous article published in the supplement of *George Barițiu* History Institute's Yearbook¹⁴, also available on academic platforms¹⁵. In the present article, my aim is to describe it in a more specific manner.

During the research I submitted for the *Factories and Plants/Fabrici și Uzine* performance, the aspects that were pointed out by the Romanian historian Bogdan Murgescu in his book, *Romania and Europe. The accumulation of economic gaps (1500-2010)/România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010)*, seemed to me extremely relevant and important to discuss through a script. Murgescu affirms that the socialist system had achieved a real 'economic illiteracy' for most of the society's representatives, who didn't understand the financial instruments of a modern economy, or the basic economic correlations of the microeconomic or the macroeconomic levels. He also describes the inevitability of a transition crisis, caused by the shift from the planned economy to the market economy, mentioning several elements that led to this imbalance, as it follows: the above-mentioned lack of economic competence in connection with the fall of Authority, and with the short explosion of consumerism at the beginning of the '90s, along with

14. Alexandra Felseghi, „Teatrul documentar și relația lui cu istoria trăită”. *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „George Barițiu”*, Series Historica. LIX/2020. pp. 663-669.

15. More information about this article it can be found at the following link:
<https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=916340>

spontaneous privatizations in industry, agriculture and trade. All of these took place all together, amid an atmosphere of mistrust and political struggles¹⁶. Starting from this short description, we could understand the downfall of IAIFO Enterprise - a specific example we chose to explain the national phenomenon that took place in the '90s.

IAIFO, founded in 1969 in the city of Zalău, an enterprise that completely changed the social conformation of the geographical area and which in 1989 had over 7000 employees, ends up failing the privatization process. The causes were both internal (the abrupt cessation of collaboration with the American enterprise, Crane Valves, which had an attempt to buy in 1996), and external (as for example, the incapacity of presenting a real competitiveness in the market economy context: the enterprise produced more than it could sell, with low quality materials and a large number of employees - that transformed it in a very inefficient institution, which was forced to make some layoffs in the second half of the '90s). In 2003, as the factory's debts reached four times its capital, it was declared bankrupt. In 2004, the enterprise was bought at an auction by Romiserv S.A.București for approximately 6 billion dollars.

Before 1989, the worker's image was a privileged one (a basic salary was between 2600-4200 old lei - compared to a medium salary in the education, which was approx. 1700 old lei - an amount of money from which the former IAIFO's workers remember they could pay for a complete kitchen furniture or even appliances). Immediately after the Revolution, this image began to be correlated with the hatred for the old regime. The inability of professional reconversion of most of the working class, as well as the dramatic devaluation of the national currency, led to the first wave of the Romanian citizens' migration in search of a job abroad. The testimony of a former employee of IAIFO who once fired decided to leave the country became a very emotional part of the show:

MINERVA: We didn't have enough money. Because I couldn't pay for maintenance, I removed the radiators and I stacked them on the balcony. And I looked at those stacked radiators and at my children,

16. Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010)*. (București: Editura Polirom, Seria Historia, 2010), 465-466.

because they had no clothes and I had nothing to put them on the table - an entire week I didn't have money for bread, and we boiled potatoes, praising the potato fiber, saying it's healthier than bread, just to cover my desperation for them. It was 1999. I would have gone anywhere just to feed my children. So, I went to work in Israel.¹⁷

As an adjacent subject, the falling of the economy during the Transition Period could explain the phenomenon we experience nowadays: Romania has one of the highest percentage of emigrants from the EU.

In present days, the first mall in the city of Zalău was inaugurated on the site of the former IAIFO - an action that we interpreted as being almost metaphorical: a former production center was replaced with a massive consumption center.

In connection with the birth of Romanian consumerism, the Caritas phenomenon had also played a major part. In his short essay on this topic, published as a preface to the *The Miracle of Cluj/Miracolul de la Cluj* play publication, the philosopher Ovidiu Țichindeleanu states that the period of time in which Caritas deceived the population on a national level, from the spring of 1992 to the summer of 1994, was overlapped with the period of time in which the national currency was radically devalued by government policies - a cruel action that wasn't at all unaware of the mass suffering they caused¹⁸.

Likewise, the *Factories and Plants/Fabrici și Uzine* debate, in this case people's credulity came from the same background: the lack of economic education. In the early 1990s, a series of pyramid-based games appeared in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, but Caritas, founded by Ioan Stoica in Cluj-Napoca, was one of the largest, competing in size only with MMM, in Russia¹⁹. The anthropologist Katherine Verdery explains in her study from 1995 (which the creative team used as a source), that the Romanians she

17. *Factories and Plants* script, by Alexandra Felseghi (2019) - personal translation.

18. Reactor de Creație și Experiment, *Miracolul de la Cluj și M.I.S.A.PĂRUT*. (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Eikon, 2019), 9.

19. Katherine Verdery. „Faith, Hope, and Caritas in the land of the Pyramids”. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. Vol.37, no.4 (Oct., 1995), pp.625-669. Published by: Cambridge University Press.

interviewed and who enthusiastically played Caritas game were stating that only in this way they could keep up with monetary inflation. The consumerism and the gaining of large sums of money had, for a vast majority of the population in the '90s, a dose of magic realism. The reproduction of the pyramid-game formula on stage was one of the most efficient dramaturgical and directorial choices in order to educate the audience about what the phenomenon really meant. Caritas ends up being presented as a magic trick that gradually unfolds, and appears in its true light: that of a great deception, after which the winners and losers are chosen.

Another important moment in *The Miracle of Cluj/Miracolul de la Cluj* show is the reenactment of the inauguration of Avram Iancu's statue (situated today in a major square of the city) - when both the priest and then-mayor Gheorghe Funar mention the owner of Caritas as the main source of donation - funds that, according to subsequent findings in Court, they came from the players' deposits.

We could compare the Caritas experience with the famous illusion and deception scene that takes place at the Variete Theatre from Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*. However, the dramaturg Petro Ionescu states in an interview that, through *The Miracle of Cluj/Miracolul de la Cluj*, the artistic team was trying to explain, at least partially, the way in which the city of Cluj-Napoca came to be listed as one of the most developed in the country, the most expensive on real estate market, with such a consistent IT sector²⁰. At least one answer of this question can be found after participating to one representation of this performance.

The importance of testimonies

The artists must take into consideration the subjectivity that transpires through the personal testimonies. These declarations are profoundly linked with the interviewees' memory and perception, also with the conditions in which the interview took place in order to extract the biographical events. Thus, the script is always created from the confrontation of the macro history

20. Reactor de Creație și Experiment, *Miracolul de la Cluj și M.I.S.A.PĂRUT*. (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Eikon, 2019), 4.

(which is basically more objective and usually presented in the performance's frame) with micro history (most often emotional and therefore, subjective). For example, most of the former IAIFO employees we interviewed were nostalgic about the times before 1989; at a closer look, we got to the conclusion that they were in fact nostalgic about their youth. More than that, it is scientifically proved that individuals tend to bury the uncomfortable past experiences and to, sometimes, idealize past events. The accuracy of information delivered through a documentary theatre play and spectacle is given by using official sources and data - a very important element in order to avoid misinforming the audience.

Both in the case of *Factories and Plants/Fabrici și Uzine* and in *The Miracle of Cluj/Miracolul de la Cluj*, the spectators' receptivity took place on several levels, depending on the generations attending the performances. As such, the two productions had, as the case may be, *the function of educating* the young audiences who, with the help of a theatrical event, managed to learn about important episodes of recent history; and also *the function of debate*, in which the spectators with the age over forty-five succeeded to analyze and to understand their own journey; finally, *the emotional function*, in which the interviewees were confronted with their own stories illustrated on the stage. Moreover, performances with themes such as the transition period can serve as a base for a dialogue and a better understanding between generations, which is, after all, the most important function of art.

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The creative collectives of the two shows presented in the article:

Fabrici și Uzine/Factories and Plants, a production of The Center for The Study of Modernity and the Rural World in partnership with Museum of History and Art, Zalău, 2019

Production co-financed by Administration of Cultural National Fund (AFCN)
Dramaturgy: Alexandra Felseghi
Direction: Adina Lazăr
Scenography: Silviu Medeșan
Cast: Ioana Chițu, Simina Seliștean, Emanuel Cifor, Lucian Teodor Rus
Research consultants: Bianca Felseghi, Valer Simion Cosma
Poster: Paul Mureșan

Miracolul de la Cluj/Miracle of Cluj, a production of Reactor de Creație și Experiment/Reactor of Creation and Experiment, within the programme *Exercises of Democracy. Investigation of recent history*, 2017

Co-financed by AFCN
Dramaturgy: Petro Ionescu
Direction: David Schwartz
Scenography: Anda Pop

Video: Daniel Răduțu

Cast: Oana Mardare, Lucia Mărneanu, Denisse Moise, Doru Talos

Research assistant: Silvia Netedu

Illustrations: Lucia Mărneanu

Live music: Krisztina Sipos

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**MISCELLANEA:
INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES**

The Active Archive:
Interview with Film Critic Andrei Rus

MIRUNA RUNCAN¹

Abstract: The interview with dr. Andrei Rus, associate professor at UNATC Bucharest, tried to cover both the motivations and the developing process of the Active Archive projects, a work in progress activity of research, selection, digitalization, and dissemination of several old documentaries from the Sahia Studio Archives, on one hand, and several experimental movies made by students of the UNATC in the Sixties and Seventies on the other hand.

Keywords: Andrei Rus, archives, archives activation, film archives.

For this special issue of *Studia UBB Dramatica*, we invited Andrei Rus, PhD, associate professor at Theatre and Film University „I. L. Caragiale” Bucharest, to share with us the roots, the developing of ideas and the elaboration process of the project *Active Archives*, dedicated to salvaging and regeneration of old documentaries and experimental movies – a project so enthusiastically received especially by young spectators at the TIFF Festival in Cluj in 2020 and 2021.



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Miruna Runcan: *How did you get the idea to activate the archives, what motivated you, both from a personal and from a systemic/institutional point of view (if the case may be)?*

Andrei Rus: I have had a passion for the Film and Cinema Archive ever since I came to Bucharest, at 18, when I realized that it was nothing like what I had seen in Paris, the summer before I got into college. I was crazy about Henri Langlois' cinema, having read about it in the interviews published in *Cahiers du cinema* magazine in the '60s, and found out about him from my idol of the time, filmmaker Francois Truffaut. When I returned to Bucharest, after anonymously spending a couple of evenings attending the projections of the French Cinematheque, having recently become a student of the School of Film, I realised that very few people attended the Bucharest cinematheque; and through a certain series of events, I started a temporary collaboration on programming with this institution. I even began to organize a Cineclub twice a week, in the framework of which I met a lot of film lovers and colleagues from other departments, who later on joined me in setting up the Film Menu magazine and on organizing many projections in the cinema hall of UNATC (Bucharest National University of Theatre and Film "I.L. Caragiale").

However, with regard to the archive, I think an important event that marked the development of my relationship with it was the year I spent with the Ministry of Culture (2016) as the cinema advisor to Ministers of Culture Vlad Alexandrescu and Corina Şuteu; during that period, the project closest to my heart involved the coordination of a large-scale assessment of the situation of the Jilava Film Archive. At that time, dozens of filmmakers, experts of the State Archives, the National Library, and other relevant European archives visited our Archive and left behind reports of what they thought should be done to improve its situation and to preserve and present the films. That was when I started to grasp how many things had to be done and how little the Romanian government valued this archive in fact, as it was extremely poorly funded considering its huge heritage value for Romanian culture.

I literally started “digging” through the archives, looking for treasures that deserved to be rediscovered and which were only brought back to the public attention last year, in 2020, when UNATC celebrated its 70th anniversary. I suggested to my colleagues that the festive actions include a project to digitize and remaster certain student films in the UNATC archives. Thus, the project *Arhiva Activă (Active Archive)* was born, whose second edition is happening this year. Last year, myself and Ana Szel, who was part of the 2016 work groups in Jilava and later coordinated the recovery of the written archive of Sahia Studio, thought it would be interesting to research documentaries based on author-related criteria, in an attempt to look at and present to the audience fragments of the films created by important, but lesser-known directors, who had worked with a genre (documentary) that was traditionally despised by most Romanian critics and experts. That’s how, this year, a project dedicated to documentary-makers was born in the framework of One World Romania Cineclub. So far, we have uploaded on cineclub.sahiavintage.ro five documentary programmes dedicated to filmmakers such as Paul Călinescu, Jean Mihail, Ada Pistiner, or Florica Holban, and to writers like Nina Cassian, Geo Bogza, or Radu Cossașu. About two thirds of the films presented in the project were digitized especially for this occasion, otherwise they were very rarely accessible to Romanian or international spectators.

M. R.: *What are the previous experiences that influenced you? What models led you to this active recovery?*

A. R.: As I mentioned earlier, I grew up with this romantic idea of the French Cinematheque, but in the meantime, I had the chance to visit the Bologna Archive and the one in Amsterdam (called *Eye Institute*), too, and I was impressed by their resources, their impeccable organization, and their local and international importance, much bigger than the Bucharest Archive’s. Let alone that certain kinds of audio-visual archives in Romania, although extremely important, are presently not kept at all, there is not a dedicated institution, such as INA in France, which is a real disaster. I remember that a couple of years ago a friend called me to say that the cassettes of TV shows

and the videos produced by the music channel *Atomic* were about to be thrown away, as they took up too much space in an office building. She asked whether I knew of an institution that could receive them. And I didn't, because there is not such an institution.

M. R.: *I can assure you that, in theatre, things are even worse. A project of this kind, however, requires certain specific methodologies: which are these?*

A. R.: With regard to the two projects aiming to recover certain archive films (*Active Archive* and the *OWR Cineclub*), the method was straightforward. First of all, we watched the films in chronological order, starting with the oldest ones in the UNATC archive (produced in 1966), and for the first film programme, presented for the first time in Cluj at the 2020 edition of TIFF, we only selected films from the period we had looked at until that point (1966-1971). In the meantime, as I watch more materials in the archive, and as more colleagues join me in this effort, we will put together all kinds of programmes, based on thematic or other criteria. As for the *Cineclub*, the guiding principle was to conduct a research as exhaustive as possible on the non-fictional works of certain filmmakers, and to create programmes by selecting the films that we find most relevant and exciting. Of course, if we had the money, it would be worth digitizing and publicly distributing all their films, perhaps in different programmes. Because of the financial shortfalls, we have to choose a small number of films, so we stop at the most important ones in their careers, hoping to return to them when possible, and to present the rest of their creations.

M. R.: *I think it is important that you also describe to us how the projects come to being, what are their objectives, who are the beneficiaries, even the partners, if any.*

A. R.: In the case of the *Active Archive*, I hope in time UNATC will develop a dedicated department or office, with permanent staff, to manage this rich archive more closely than we are able to from the outside, and to slowly take over and process other kinds of audio-visual archives, some even private, and make them available to scholars. As for both projects, my biggest hope, which

I am currently working on, is that UNATC engages in a more active partnership with the Film archive and the Cinematheque, thus contributing to covering some of their logistical, professional and even financial needs. The ideal situation would be that, in the not-so-distant future, UNATC develops a study line dedicated to archiving and restoring, so a close collaboration in this sense would benefit both parties.

M. R.: *I share your view that art universities should have more to say and a more pro-active attitude in this sense, as part of their own research system. But perhaps it would be good to mention the difficulties you've had, how to overcome them, if possible...*

A. R.: The biggest hardship is the financial aspect, as there is little money compared to the number of films worth digitizing, remastering, and presenting to the audience. To overcome these, we need patience, though the process will give rise to all sorts of frustrations; and most of all, we need to adapt the size of the project depending on the resources available at a certain moment.

M. R.: *How do you ensure your project's visibility? Of course, this is first and foremost a question of funding, but perspectives should inevitably be considered. Any concrete suggestions (since an interview allows us for dreaming, too)?*

A. R.: I think the ideal situation would include different financial sources for the recovery and the restoration of the audio-visual works making up our national heritage. Presently, NGOs can only access limited lines of funding for small projects, such as the ones I coordinate. However, to me, the most critical aspect is that the institution itself (the National Film Archive) lacks annual resources to restore as many national heritage films as possible. I recently spoke to Rene Wolf, Head of acquisitions and programmer of Amsterdam's *Eye Institute*, that not only restores films, but can also afford to preserve them on 35 mm, i.e., the best and safest method to preserve films. It doesn't cost a fortune, but the government must be interested to invest in such mechanisms and procedures meant to preserve audio-visual works.

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*The Body's Memory Archives in the Process of Generating
an Aesthetic Movement and 'Flow Experiences' for the Audience
in the Production of the Performance tXc -TOXIC
(after F. Richter's play Rausch)*

RALUCA LUPAN¹

Abstract: The present enquiry is particularly interested in the performer's body archiving memory while generating poetic movement on stage. The main site of investigation is a theatre-dance performance and the work engaged by the performers of tXc-TOXIC (after the Falk Richter's play *Rausch*, an Insula Creative Hub production, directed by Cristian Grosu, choreographed and co-directed by me). The focal point of my argument is that, with proper and sustained body training, performers can easily incite and produce aesthetic movement after engaging the CI (contact improvisation) means of accessing movement and body memory.

Keywords: (Non-toxic) body archives, aesthetic experience, embodiment, dance, performance

Introduction

In the following article we will attempt to present an overview of the body's own efficient archive system in generating poetic movement on stage, and the selected production for this type of enquiry is tXc (Toxic, as we named it) - a theatrical poetry in motion created after an idea extracted

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from F. Richter's text *Rausch*. In the realization of this production, based on joined direction settings by Cristian Grosu and Raluca Lupan, with the choreography supervised by the author of this article, the act of archiving bodily movements had a huge impact on the creational processes. The main directions in engaging with the creative forms of embodiment that are related to the skin's ability to archive every touch given to us from birth until our last breath for the *tXc* performance were: 1. the performer's relationship with his own body and the corporeal body memory archive system; 2. the use of repetition as an archiving process or technique in the choreography sessions.

In the beginning, we need to clarify that the use of the body as a unique system of archiving movement and choreography is a notion used by the performer on stage as practice, either regarded in the training and rehearsal process, or in some specific moment of the performance. In the case of the performer's relationship with their own body and other bodies present on stage, we tend to think of the body's capacity to memorize motion and to use automated reflexes in order to produce and generate a certain type of poetic movement. When it comes to the body's capacity to archive movement, we take into consideration that the alternative fictional reality created on stage is not a mere reflection of bodily movements, but it is seen as a differential participation of all creative means present on stage. In this article, we are tracing the artistic work of the performers in relationship with concepts like: the embodied reflection, body memory, and body archiving systems in dance phrases and choreography. Engaging all these concepts in the practical, or rather physical, work of the performer in this particular dance-theatre performance had a huge impact on the entire artistic team. It is accurate to underline that in the process of producing and performing *tXc (Toxic)* we used the practice as research method, in order to document and archive our creative journey. We have identified three important phases in delivering the artistic product that will be discussed and reviewed in the following pages. In order to enhance understanding of the artistic and production processes, we must firstly spell out the conceptual and corporeal concepts linked to this specific performance.

1. Archiving movement and generating poetics on stage

For this research, we were captivated by and worked with two central ideas: firstly, the moving body on stage that has to be manipulated with particular attention, so as to sustain a constant movement flow; secondly, the human being's potential of archiving and repeating movement. These two ideas were an important part of the creative process. In addition, the lived absorption of body moving structures on stage, and the *somatic flows of movement*² are "all reflex-responses, however rapid are always gestural and condemned to meaning- and hence determined by culture as well as nature"³. These ideas are linked to the latest discoveries in the neurosciences and the most recent investigations in dance studies. So, in this light of perceiving the somatic movements of the body, we can operate with a new practical knowledge: the performer's movement on stage will always be connected to culture and nature, and it has the potential of becoming a moving poetic discourse (seen as a flow entity). The thinking flesh, bones and internal organs of the performer are able to construct, with appropriate and specific *biograms*⁴ (bodily memory of movements), adaptive and poetic movement on stage. Therefore, with a *response-able* body, we can enact, react to, and create the type of movement we need on stage.

Through activating body memory and sensory archives and by being sensible to touch and actively spatialize movement, the performers can come closer to generating a specific type of movement with the use of movement techniques. So, the functionality of the possibilities in the performer's body can engender an aesthetic experience in the audience, and therefore a representation of the body in a poetic moving form.

For the first step of our enquiry, we need to review our conceptual lexicon and the ideas that we have been operating with. In this regard, we are going to take a further dive into embodied cognition and reflection and

2. Yotam Shibolet, "Bodyminds in Movement: Embodied Cognition in the Practice and Discourse of Contact Improvisation," *Junctions: Graduate Journal of the Humanities* 3, no. 1 (March 1, 2018), 76-78.

3. Ibidem, 80.

4. Ibidem, 84.

their habitual pattern in creating movement and aesthetic experiences. The term *embodied reflection*⁵ (developed by Francis J. Varle, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch) can be viewed by the dancer or the choreographer as the human ability to bring “into inherent integrity form and matter, sense and sensuality”⁶. This human ability can be embedded into the training phases of the performers and the dancers, as a new way of creating and exploring art. When trying to find new variations in meaning concerning movement, we need to take into consideration that *embodied reflection* is connected to the habitual patterns of the performer. In a practical sense, the “exchange of information between knowledge that is already embodied and conscious perceptual inquiry”⁷ is the performer’s greatest asset on stage. This type of exchange becomes vital to the artistic process because the performer is, in a way, forced to surrender his attention to the history of former situations and the current information instated by the new artistic production. Furthermore, maintaining Ohad Naharin’s view of the concept of *embodied reflection*, the performer always is, and always should be, attached to this corporeal state that is “sensed, learned and recognized”⁸. In addition, while in training, the performer can and should learn new physical tasks “because they feel the physical sense of the tasks with their own bodies”⁹. In the pursuit of signifying with the body and practicing embodied reflection, the performer must improve his physicality by “mastering the inner familiarity with one’s own body”¹⁰.

To sum up this introductory conceptual overview, we can state the main point this article will try to analyze and observe: movement on stage is practiced with the use of embodied reflection, the body’s ability to archive sensation and movement through the use of repetition of a certain type of poetic movement that can be generated on stage.

5. Einav Katan, *Embodied Philosophy in Dance: Gaga and Ohad Naharin’s Movement Research*, Performance Philosophy (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 31-49.

6. Ibidem, 31.

7. Ibidem, 33.

8. Ibidem, 34.

9. Ibidem, 35-36.

10. Ibidem, 36.

2. Experienced and practical tendencies in tXc (Toxic) shared as a non-toxic artistic environment

Before we proceed with the practical analysis of the particular performance investigated in this article, Brian Massumi's words are worth taking into account:¹¹

Art is the technique for making that necessary, but normally unperceived fact perceptible, in a qualitative perception that is as much about life itself as it is about the things we live by. Art is the technique of *living life in* - experiencing the virtuality of it more fully, living it more intensely.¹²

All the members of the (Toxic) production team have kept these words in mind during the process of the rehearsal and the effective performance of the show. The team started to unfold the production process itself as a technique in order to incite the creation of aesthetic and flow experiences for the public. For this process to become a technique and a way of producing a performance that can be catalogued as poetic, flow, or affect event, we started by dividing our production process in three stages: documentation, factual execution, and conclusions.

Phase 1: Documentation

In this peculiar phase of generating a sustainable production technique, we revisited the works (plays) of F. Richter, Ohad Naharin's complex engagement in the art of dance and its shows and online workshops, the theoretical production of Brian Massumi and Alva Noë¹³ which addresses

11. Brian Massumi is professor of communication at the University of Montreal. He specializes in the philosophy of experience, art and media theory, and political philosophy. With Erin Manning and the SenseLab he participates in the collective exploration of new ways of bringing philosophical and artistic practices into collaborative interaction, most recently in the frame of the "Immediations: Art, Media, Event" international partnership project.

12. Brian Massumi, "The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens," *Inflexions* 1 (May 2008), 7.

13. See Brian Massumi et al., "Affect and Immediation: An Interview with Brian Massumi," *DisClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 28, no. 1 (December 1, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.28.09>.

concepts like *bodymind*, affect, movement, body actions and memory, and last, but not least, the corporeal technique available for theatre and dance. Alongside the artistic performers Paul Trifu and Dragoș Maxim Galbăn, we have deconstructed the basic tendencies of CI technique (contact improvisation) and Gaga Movement in order to build a specific inventory of exercises. This phase can be temporized within the range of three to four weeks, depending on several variables. Additionally, this part of the process contains the decoding and memorizing of the actual text spoken by the performers on stage. So, in tracking the theme of the body as an archiving system which creates a poetic or an affect event on stage and in the audience, this process has also entailed the re-creation of a personal version of the text by the involved performers.

Phase 2: Execution

The second phase of the process included practical experiments and intensive training sessions. We focused our session on the types of memory engaged in physical work. To underline and theoretically support our future affirmations, we turned to the works of Thomas Fuchs¹⁴ on the phenomenology of body memory, taking into consideration that the body is “the most multi-sensory object in the world”¹⁵. Here, we can now outline the participative types of archiving-body memory used in the performance mentioned:

Types of memory	The performers’ potential use of the body’s natural archiving system
Procedural ¹⁶ (senso-motor and kinesthetic faculties: patterned sequences of movement, well-practiced skills, skillful handling of instruments patterns of perception)	Out through all the psycho-physical processes used in rehearsal and performance.

14. Thomas Fuchs, “Chapter 1. The Phenomenology of Body Memory,” in *Advances in Consciousness Research*, ed. Sabine C. Koch et al., vol. 84 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012), 9–22, <https://doi.org/10.1075/aicr.84.03fuc>.

15. Giuseppe Riva, “The Neuroscience of Body Memory: From the Self through the Space to the Others,” *Cortex* 104 (July 2018): 241–60, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2017.07.013>.

16. Ibidem, 12–13.

Types of memory	The performers' potential use of the body's natural archiving system
Situational ¹⁷ (it extends to the space and situations in which the body will find itself also known as spatial situation that are holistic inseparable units of bodily, sensory and atmospheric perceptions)	Connected to the spatiality of sensation, it can enhance the spatial and situational awareness of the performer. Used in CI technique and Gaga Movement. In physical practices it has been used with the participation of the bodily senses: smell, sight, hearing, touch need to be performed alongside the immersive contribution of "synesthetic and expressive qualities of the atmospheric" ¹⁸ situations.
Intercorporeal ¹⁹ (embodied interaction)	Used by performers in the training process in order to enlarge the areas of the body's pre-reflective understanding. As a technique, it can be found in the CI (contact improvisation) so called "jam session". For this particular performance, the jam sessions became part of the warm-up training, and it was prolonged in the diurnal life of the performers as a mean of motor, emotional, and social development. After practicing in the rehearsal room, such training of the performers' bodies can entail another view of their own bodies – an external one. The trained body, receptive and open to all stimuli and aware of the presence of other entities in space and time, can easily become a body which is prepared to meet the audience. A body that can affect and produce poetic movement on stage and a flow experience for the viewers.

17. Ibidem, 13.

18. Ibidem, 14.

19. Ibidem, 14-15.

Types of memory	The performers' potential use of the body's natural archiving system
Incorporative ²⁰ (it is the carrier of social roles and symbols)	The usage of incorporative memory was deviated in the constructions of the performer's stage characters and the deconstruction of these characters presented on stage. We have worked on assuming different social roles and symbols with the help of situational imagination and later produce the choreographic atmosphere and movements. It was also a source, as suggested at the beginning of this subchapter. Of course, in the production process this type of body memory became the <i>habitus</i> – a system of learned internalized patterns which are required throughout the activities and experience of everyday life. Imposed by their line of work, the job of performing, beyond the stage life they had to access this restrictive memory type by always pursuing their performer status in the rehearsal room. And, in addition, for the production team to always negotiate their assumed social and symbolic roles: director, choreographer, sound and light designer.
Pain ²¹ (described by the body)	Throughout the entire artistic process, a certain type of memory pain could be observed due to intensive training and past injuries suffered by the performers. This has been seriously treated as part of the rehearsal room, taking into consideration that it could generate further and deeper physical wounds.

20. Ibidem, 16-17.

21. Ibidem, 17.

Types of memory	The performers' potential use of the body's natural archiving system
Traumatic ²² (indelible impression caused by trauma)	To preserve the mental sanity of the performers, this type of memory was excluded from the artistic process. It was only discussed in regards to the characters live-on-stage situations. At a certain level, it was carried into the rehearsal room because the performers' uses of personal archiving system as what we call – past memories. We would not recommend this access to prior traumatic events, but instead the use of the imagination as the core of an artistic process.

Conclusions

In order to adjust the theoretical use of the body's system of archiving – the body memory we can affirm that all of these types of body memory have been used in the making of the *tXc* performance, except traumatic memory due to its psychological implications. The body's self-regulated archiving system (*body memory*) has been at the center of creating the performance. Using the performer's body schemata and body image in strict relationship to time and extra-personal and peri-personal space, we could technically construct the choreography and the stage direction. Adding and magnifying the use of body memory, we could, afterwards, start the final phase of the execution process-constructing emotions on stage.

During the training part, the use of the body's archiving system through the assertion of body memory has worked to its full potential and has been the main source of making performers aware of immediate subjective sensory impressions. For further accumulation of information, we need to

22. Ibidem, 18.

address the use of episodic²³ (defined as the memory system in charge of the encoding, storage and retrieval of personally experienced events, associated with space and time context relationship encoding) and semantic²⁴ memory (which is explicit and enables the categorization of different bodies of knowledge according to their similarities and differences).

At the end of the creative process, we were able to understand that all types of memory can create, and should cooperate in, the artistic process to engender new models of behaving (movement correlated). Therefore, the use of this personal archiving system – the body memory can and will, through repetition, become a procedural dynamic in searching for new ways of thinking on stage. Moreover, activating body memory (the body's natural archiving system) and imagination in the rehearsal room is a medium of articulating poetic movement and generating flow experiences in the audience. The body has then been put to work in current conditions, imaginary as well as actual, using techniques of relations.

The logical execution of an action is an individually experienced process, and the performer is going to make personal sense of it through the actual or imaginary situations he will find himself in, either on stage, or in the rehearsal rooms. All the interconnected relational facts that will construct the performance will be brought into corporeal existence through using body memory and bodily expectation.

Repetition process (connected in the CI technique and Gaga Movement) and repetitive actions can expand the performer's awareness of the potentialities of his virtually lived relations on stage, because every action, movement, or choreography is not perceived by the body-mind unit as an "object", but as an event. In this regard, the performers must be convinced that movement is an event and be potentially open to all the interaction it affords. The body's natural archiving system will then take charge and activate body memory entirely and completely, to the point of maximum usage.

23. Einav Katan, *Embodied Philosophy in Dance: Gaga and Ohad Naharin's Movement Research, Performance Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 66-67.

24. *Ibidem*, 67.

By actively stimulating body memory and imagination in the process of creating affect events or poetic movement on stage, and also by generating adaptive movement and engaging the body in dynamic spatial relationships, we can infer that practice can surely become perception (embodied). In the creative process, dedicated attention to the constant flow of the body-mind related conceptual structures, to proprioceptive²⁵ (cumulative memory of skill, habit, posture, gesture) memory, to cellular memory (interoception or viscerality), to imagination and self-artistic affectation²⁶ (understood in the double sense of the artificial construct of the artistic self and the offering of that artistic self with affect) could be the most relevant sources for the performer, in order to create aesthetic and affect poetic events in and on the stage. Starting from the rehearsal process where the production team should commit to finding and intercepting all possible momentums or events of this type and continuing in the performative state during the actual and specific time of the show, the performers must rely on their natural archiving system, cored in the body memory, and maintain an open attitude to the stimuli that can unfold before their eyes, so to speak. The active and activated body-mind unit prepared for all that can happen on stage during a performance, applying dance and theatre techniques while taking into consideration that: "The body doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it enfolds contexts, it enfolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated. (...) How could this be so? Only if the trace of past actions, including a trace of their contexts, were conserved in the brain and in the flesh, but out of mind and out of body understood as qualifiable interiorities, active and passive respectively, direct spirit"²⁷.

25. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual Movement, Affect, Sensation*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 59.

26. *Ibidem*, 62.

27. *Ibidem*, 59.



Fig. 1: Paula Trifu & Dragoș Maxim Galbăn in *Toxic* after F. Richter,
photo by: Andrei Niculescu, 2021

As a final inference, us – the performers as artistic generators of poetic movement on stage, as presenters of aesthetic events, and influencers of the audience's flow experiences – must pay close attention to all archiving natural systems contained by our body-mind unity. We are the keepers of the divided functions of the audience's memories generated by the quality of the performance presented on stage. So, on an encouraging note, we can state that using intention and repetition, investing pleasure in acting and re-acting, imagination and archiving movement, using natural systems of archiving and embodied perception and embodied movement techniques, may be a performer's most accessible approach in providing aesthetic and flow experiences for the audience.

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The Actor in Search of Musical Forms. Case Studies

ADA MILEA¹

Abstract: This article looks at the major differences in the reception of the sounds of a musical fragment, depending on the personal experience of each individual and his profession. The musicians relate to the sound universe guided by the constituent elements of the scores, and the actors look for connections between sounds, gestures, words, characters, and stage situations. They can approach music in other ways than musicians and remember the melodic lines or create accompaniments by making connections with the context in which they find themselves.

In some examples that the article offers, the studied actors demonstrate that sound can become music even in the absence of the vocal or rhythmic qualities of the performers. Other examples refer to the way in which the personality and creativity of artists have a significant role in creating songs or the sound support they need.

Keywords: music-theatre, performing arts, music, musical training

The education, the professional training, the people in the immediate vicinity and the events that have high emotional impacts influence the unique ways in which each of us relates to words, music or to the connections between them. Neurologist Oliver Sacks noted the major differences between the brain of a musician and that of a non-musician, and his study was published in one of his books².

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2. Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia. Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

An old practice through which certain people associate sounds with their images on the staff offers them the opportunity to think up complex structures, in a musical mathematics that contains many numbers and calculations. They are thus able to observe and admire the “architecture” of the great works and the genius of certain composers in a completely different manner than the profanes of this area.

Non-musicians connect the sounds around them to their own fields of activity and they relate to certain songs through the lens of their own professions. The actor has access to music in a different way than a musician and thus, for them, the same song may seem completely different. From conductor Sergiu Celibidache’s viewpoint³, there is no music, but rather the sound may become music under certain conditions.

Sound is movement because it is a vibration, and that certain sound that becomes music is based on equal and constant vibrations. The musical tone contains the same number of vibrations on a given unit of time. There are several sounds that vibrate together with the base sound, which are called harmonics⁴. Sergiu Celibidache stated that these phenomena occur not only in space, but also in time – an aspect that has been overlooked by musicology – and the temporal structure of the sound is reflected within the human affective universe. In this sense, the musical and the actor are somewhat similar. One good song would please them both, even if one uses musical arguments to motivate their choice, while the other uses theatrical arguments in this respect. Beyond each of their tastes, the “vibration that becomes music” acts upon their affective universe and provokes emotion.

The text of a song influences its reception, depending how people make connections between sounds, gestures, situations, words and their meanings. Since the human brain is a great mystery to researchers and many of its manifestations do not yet have clear explanations, there is no information as to how that happens, precisely. Oliver Sacks was interested in the rare

3. See Sergiu Celibidache, *Über musikalische Phänomenologie. Ein Vortrag und weitere Materialien* (Augsburg: Wissner, 2008).

4. Harmonics – A vibration that accompanies the fundamental vibration of the same type and that has a frequency equal to an integer multiple of the frequency of the fundamental vibration.

neurological cases and the ones connected to music are grouped together in his book *Musicophilia. Tales of Music and the Brain*, in which he describes the way in which several patients formed an almost pathological attachment to music as a result of an accident or a surgical intervention, while others suffered epilepsy episodes, triggered by the melodic lines. In 1937, studies conducted on the cases of eleven patients whose epilepsy episodes were triggered by music established the terminology: “musicogenic epilepsy” and “musicolepsy”. Neurologist Oliver Sacks offers the example of well-known music critic, Nikonov, who was forced to give up on his profession and to avoid all contact with music.

The major difference between musicians and non-musicians is due to the different types of training, so as some things are inconceivable to some, to others they may be commonplace. The brains of non-musicians, in the absence of the exercises practiced by musicians, appeal to the personal experiences and to the training that is specific to their professions. Thus, the actor may relate to “the sound that becomes music” through theatre.

1. The case of Adrian Cucu

Actor Adrian Cucu⁵ approaches songs naturally, prioritizing the stage situations and the meanings of the words. He adapts the songs or, bizarrely, he adapts to them by using gestures through which he memorises the length and height of a sound. Instinctively, the actor uses the melodic lines in favour of the stage situations in which he is involved, transforming music into a sound support system for the words. Through his acting and his playing with the songs and texts, he resolves the musical uncertainties (the ones of which he is aware) and reaches a natural personal musical interpretation.

In his case, as well as in the cases of other actors, I noticed the usefulness of providing certain examples. If we were to use sentences that express almost the same thing and to adapt them to certain melodic lines

5. Adrian Cucu, actor of the National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca.
<http://www.teatrulnationalcluj.ro/en/company>

that similar to those they wish to depict, the interpreters can better identify the thoughts that initially generated the music. The research thus aimed to identify the possibility of reaching a melody, through the text.

Since our very first collaboration, I noticed that gestures were the ones that help this actor memorise certain difficult texts, or that imprint the desire intention to the song. The threat expressed through a short movement of the head, followed by the emphasis put on each verse ending, turned him into a dangerous character through the line: "Doamna e soția MEA... / N-aș VREA ... să aflu cumVA/ ce căuTA/ la dumneaTA."⁶ In another instance, he had certain difficulties in remembering a text fragment. He, *The Pirate* who grew wooden legs, was telling the story of how one of the became a tree "și erau cuiburi și păsări și leagănă-n el"⁷. The final part of the text posed the greater problems, since the actor could not memorise the succession of the words and the melody, until he began to mark, with logical gestures, each element: the first was the nest, depicted by holding one hand in the shape of a scoop, while the other hand mimed the flight and, in the end, the nest-hand swung back and forth beneath the bird-hand.

His musical distrust found an excellent support in the meanings present in the text and in the stage situations, and the songs were expressed naturally. For the vocal interventions that he found to be too difficult, he asked his colleagues to add certain helpful signals (a bang, a cough or a certain movement). Thus, the actor managed to synchronise his voice, attitude and gestures, painstakingly working on each musical fragment. Such an endeavour would have been difficult in the case of a large-range role, but, on our first collaboration, his character only had a few appearances, and the experiment was carried out successfully.

6. "The lady is my WIFE.../ There would be STRIFE.../ Were I to DISCOVER... / Why she was OVER... / At your PLACE" (If not marked otherwise, all translations in the present paper were made by the author of the present paper. The texts were originally written in Romanian).

7. "and there were nests and birds and swings in it"



Fig. 1: Scene from *Insula*, with A. Cucu in the role of the Pirate, National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, 2011, Photo credits Nicu Cherciu.

The opportunity to study the way in which Adrian Cucu adapted a more consistent material to his very precise way of working on songs arose a few years later, through the character of *Švejk*, from the show *Švejk in Concert*. This time, the voluminous text, containing many difficult fragments, somewhat intimidated him. The experiments by which we reached certain songs together (beginning from the stage situations and the meanings of the words) and the identification of certain useful gestures required prolonged research, and the show premier could not be postponed. We sought solutions that would allow the main character to have less interventions in the songs by using other actors for the plot development. The issue was thus resolved, postponing the research for another 3 years, until Adrian Cucu was cast in the role of *Ubu*, from *Ubu in Concert*.

In *Švejk*, the actor focused on the humour of the situations, avoiding the tragic dimension of the character, present in one of the songs. Our research was limited to the playful tone from Jaroslav Hašek's book, for a

small role. Adrian Cucu, during the show, made many connections between the songs, the meanings of the words and the gestures. The leaps from one sound to the other were accompanied by hand gestures, the actor thus “drawing” entire songs in the air. Using upwards movements for the high notes and downwards for the low, he sang using his entire being in his performance. The end of the show was based on a song⁸ in which the comedy and tragedy take place simultaneously, in a dream about death, and the actor managed to find a way to play it with humour and serenity. He described how a car that was taking him to the front line at high speed and the danger was enormous, but the driver was admiring the beauty of the road and the quality materials from which it had been built. An explosion sent the vehicle flying through the air and it thus managed to reach heaven, which was a copy of the terrestrial military organisation. Several bombings used as accompaniments⁹ determined the actors to make successive motions, which contributed to the creation of certain connections between the text, the song and the stage situation. For the flight resulted from the explosion, all of the actors slightly rose from their chairs, at the same time, with the text “fâl, fâl, zburam printre stele și ne feream de comete”¹⁰, and the verse “am văzut în față un perete”¹¹ was followed by a blow that meant to suggest the first contact with the wall of the military heaven in which the characters had arrived.

By the time of our third collaboration, actor Adrian Cucu had a lot of experience in making the connections between the text, the gestures and the music, since they had been rehearsed during our shows together (which were held periodically by the theatre). Despite the fact that I proposed a larger role (Mr. Ubu, after *Ubu in Chains* and *UbuZdup*, by Alfred Jarry and Gábor Tompa), he did not manifest his previous reservations – on the contrary, he worked as relaxed as an artist who new the rules of the “game”.

8. See Ada Milea, *Vis (repetiție cu Švejk)*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q09Sy-BI5ZL), 25.05.2020, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q09Sy-BI5ZL>.

9. Ada Milea, *Vis*.

10. “flap, flap, flying among the stars and avoiding comets”.

11. “in front there was a wall”.

The first song of the new project was a parody of Hamlet's "to be, or not to be", while the characters meditated inside a dumpster: "A puți... A nu puți... A fi, sau a nu fi kaki... A putrezi... a nu mai putrezi..."¹² I noticed that the actor did not refuse the tragic, but preferred it disguised in comedy, and the show offered the ideal context for us to experiment this direction. Once again working with the same team, I was able to continue the musical-theatre research, with respect to the creation of the songs, to communicating with the actors and to developing the orchestrations together with them. Adrian Cucu in the role of Mr. Ubu was extremely inventive, and, this time, he found the connections between the thoughts, intentions and melodies on his own; Andreea Gavrilu's contribution to the choreography of the show benefited everyone. The oriental resonances of the chorus ("Ne lustruiește... Ne lustruiește"¹³) were greatly aided by the dance capable of offering the sound the undulation that is transmissible from movement to song and vice versa.

The research carried out together with Adian Cucu began with a secondary character and by the time of our third collaboration, he had already become used to expressing himself through song with the ease with which he communicated through spoken texts.

2. The case of Ștefan Mura

I resumed the research conducted on the character *Švejk* together with one of the actors from the National Theatre from Târgu-Mureș, Ștefan Mura, whom I invited to perform in a small version of a concert. Having known him from a previous project, I could also imagine him interpreting the tragic dimension of the text without damaging the stage situations. I selected several representative songs from the show *Švejk in Concert* and I presented them in a new form (by changing both the text and the music, depending on the new interpreters and the new context).

12. "To stink... Not to stink... To be, or not to be kaki... To rot... Not to rot..."

13. "Polishing us... Polishing us..."

Several years ago, we had the opportunity of building, together, a certain number of musical versions of certain roles: *Caliban*¹⁴ (in a brutal and energetic song), *Ariel*¹⁵ (delicate and sensitive) etc. from his very first attempt, he expressed himself naturally while using the words and their meanings in the songs. Several discussions made me believe that his connection with the rural world decisively contributed to the relation he developed with music, texts and the stage situations. The somewhat melodic speech of the countryfolk sometimes contains their state of mind and the intentions they wish to transmit. Ștefan Mura, through simple verbal communication with the villagers, practiced the type of connections that I always desire in the creation and interpretation of the songs.

In the rural world, there are places where it is not said that a man cries, but rather that he “sings”. Namely, that he is singing his sorrow or pain through words, while expressing his state of mind together with the cry slipped into a song. The language of the villagers communicates much through few words, due to the fact that they associate the sounds capable of completing the parts that are absent from the text. Sometimes, a shout replaces an accusatory sentence and a “What’s the matter?” can be endearing, curious, aggressive or seductive. This aspect is studied in theatre, but the rural worlds from certain areas naturally connect the words and the aforementioned states of mind with songs. The folk artist expresses a thought through both the melody and the text. His aim is not to create music or literature, but to communicate the truth of a situation that deeply affects him. The authentic rural world musically connects the meanings of the words with the state of mind of the speaker or singer, and actor Ștefan Mura practiced this type of expression for a long time, living under the beneficial influence of certain villagers.

Based on the background information regarding this actor, I approached the role of *Švejk* from a different perspective. I proposed he use the rural speech, so that we could draw nearer to the source of his naturality and, as

14. *Caliban* – a character from William Shakespeare’s play, *The Tempest*.

15. *Ariel* – a character from William Shakespeare’s play, *The Tempest*.

such, we continued the research by building a character (emotionally) connected to the universe of our grandparents¹⁶.

I, Ștefan Mura and Bobo Burlăcianu created the accompaniment of each song, involving the characters as well. We sought actions capable of theatrically and musically sustaining the scenes, even if they were connected to musical instruments. The use of bells in a song in which the character was referring to the wonderful moments spent in the hospice (“La balamuc am trăit cele mai frumoase clipe din viața mea. / La balamuc poți să te crezi Iisus, o chiflă sau o acadea”¹⁷) came as a natural addition to the behaviour of a possibly insane person who sang while clinking. In the same way, the villager, proud to having been given an order from the priest, bangs on a drum, emphasising the importance of certain words with bangs¹⁸. We used props, trying to combine theatre with music as effectively as possible, and this helped to clarify some stage situations. The appearance of a phone receiver was surprising, after a long period in which the character had only used instruments, but it was justified by the context and by the text. In a few concerts, I presented fragments from *Švejk*, and the actor played with humour and emotion. The naturalness with which he expressed himself through song determined me to propose that we continue our research with other roles: *Gulitză*¹⁹, from *Chiritza in Concert* and *Sancho*²⁰, from the concert *Quijote*, projects still unfinished. Our experiments aimed to identify certain connections between the musical communication of a text and the accompaniments that can be used, naturally integrating them into the show. Through his contact with the rural world, Ștefan Mura has the experience of dialoguing in a “sung” speech, which contains intentions and word meanings within the melodies of certain lines.

16. See Ada Milea, *rerepetăm Švejk (cu Pateu')*, www.youtube.com, 20.06.2019, accessed February 03, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRc5s7hYSBk>.

17. Ada Milea, *rerepetăm Švejk (cu Pateu')*: “In the madhouse, I lived the most wonderful moments of my life. / In the madhouse, you can believe yourself to be Jesus, a bun, or a lollipop”.

18. Ada Milea, *rerepetăm Švejk (cu Pateu')*.

19. See Ada Milea, *Gulitză intro*, www.youtube.com, 04.09.2020, accessed February 03, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HudxBAgRXTw>.

20. See Ada Milea, *ziua 1 Q*, www.youtube.com, 01.09.2020, accessed February 03, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm3bW_P6xNo.



Fig. 2: Scene from a concert with fragments from *Švejk*.

National Theatre in Târgu-Mureș.

From left to right Ștefan Mura (*Švejk*) and Bobo Burlăcianu (*Katz*),
photo by Valentina Lazăr.

3. The case of Anca Hanu

During my long collaboration with the National Theatre of Cluj-Napoca, I had the opportunity to work with this excellent actress many times. She manages to express herself through music and text easily, and our artistic communication improved from one project to the next. We have undertaken research work both for the shows of the aforementioned theatre, and during the rehearsals for the independent concerts. While offering her creativity as much freedom as possible, I asked her to be my co-author in the case of certain new songs, or to improve the already existing ones, reinventing them together.

At our first artistic meeting, Anca Hanu improvised a carol, using the name of a colleague nearby. The ease with which she immediately adapted to a situation and the creativity she showed determined me to cast her in an important role and to observe the way in which she uses sounds to express the text. I proposed we try a short accompaniment with an accordion, an instrument easily associated with the sailor environment, and she noticed that she could easily use the bass buttons. In order not to unnecessarily complicate matters with instrumentations that could hinder the actress' performance, we used only the accordion bass and transformed the other hand into a fish tail (to justify its passivity).

While working, we could immediately test two voices (in dialogue or in harmony) and modify the melodic line on the spot, in accordance with one another, improvising. The "on the go" ideas were easily to recover with the help of the recordings, and the useful materials were immediately sent to a (secret) working group for the shows.

Another project of the theatre in Cluj²¹ allowed us to resume the research on the sonority of the accordion. We sought Tyrolean resonances, in order to ensure the sound support of the songs requested by director Alexandru Dabija. Beside the sounds and meanings of the words, which we usually noted, we were also compelled to adapt to the "Bavarian" direction of the show, periodically placing yodels²² in the texts. We created an entire chorus of verses made of the sounds used by the interpreters of this musical genre, using them as if they were words: "odl lidl lidl looo! Iodl lidl lidl looo! Iodl lidl lidl, iodl lidl lidl, iodl lidl lidl looo!" The stanzas in German, although their texts were intentionally banal (on the level of a beginner's textbook: "Ich bin Gretchen!"), together with the sound of the accordions and the chorus, created the atmosphere that the show needed. Anca Hanu played the role of a hen, which is why we introduced clucking among the words and we prolonged certain lines with squeaks. Thus, the research led us both to testing the extent to which the universe of a show

21. Alexandru Dabija director, *Mein Kampf* by George Tabori, music by Anca Hanu and Ada Milea, The National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, premiered on October 14, 2014.

22. Yodelling – a form of singing in the Bavarian folklore, in which the voice very rapidly combines the low-pitch (chest) sounds with the high-pitch (head) sounds.

(in this case, a Tyrolese one) and the requirements of the director (in this case, Alexandru Dabija) can offer us new, useful directions in our musical-theatrical experiments. We tried the yodel sonority, converting the sounds of the Austrian folklore into unintelligible words, while the accordion and the other instruments (percussion, in particular) made for an adequate musical basis.

The work on *Švejk in Concert* began with the stages that proved useful in the past experiences. I prepared a show scheme by selecting the possible characters and the relevant scenes from the book, after which I made the musical sketches for each song. Together with Anca Hanu, we invented and reinvented the texts and melodies, after which we filmed their approximate versions²³. For a better use of the lines in the songs, we imitated actors in different roles²⁴, as well as the instruments that were to be used by other colleagues (trumpet, kazoo, percussion etc.)

The presence of actress Sânziana Tarța determined us to use many harmonious voices, since we could immediately try them out and we could develop them together. She adapted to the way in which we musically built a text and she made several highly useful proposals. Hašek's book represented the support in our endeavour, but we tried to imagine roles that would not perturb the events described by the author, while also allowing the two actresses to contribute to the songs.

Initially, the idea was that they were to be two continuously present ghosts, followed by an idea in which they would be two old ladies that greeted the military train in each station; in the end, we thought it would be better if they were two nurses. Their presence allowed us to suggest that the entire action takes place in a hospice, or that war is seen as an action that can only be justified in a psychiatric hospital. We modified the scene in which *Švejk* had an experience in the madhouse²⁵, eliminating everything related to concrete treatments (enemas, electric shocks etc.). The show

23. See Ada Milea, *Alo 1*, www.youtube.com, 24.11.2017, accessed February 03, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E79k1aDKfbs>.

24. Ada Milea, *Alo 1*.

25. See Ada Milea, *Švejk – repetiții cu frunza generalului*, www.youtube.com, 14.12.2017, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmJAd4p5z6w>.

began with a song about the Russian military threat, but offered the hope that our countries would unite and save everyone. We relied on the fact that certain similarities between the contemporary world and the one in Hašek's book would intrigue the spectators: "Dragi maghiari și bosnieci! / Dragi nemți, cehi și austrieci! / Avem un dușman periculos la răsărit / Împotriva lui, cu toții ne-am unit! / Avem același drapel. / Avem voință de oțel. / Popoarele noastre împreună vor lupta / Într-o zi o să ajungem la Moscova!"²⁶



Fig. 3: Scene from *Svejk in Concert*. From left to right Sânziana Tarța and Anca Hanu, in the roles of nurses. Photo credits Nicu Cherciu.

26. "Dear Hungarians and Bosnians! / Dear Germans, Czechs and Austrians! / We have a dangerous foe to the east / Against him we have united! / We fly the same flag. / Our will is unshakable. / Our peoples shall fight together / To one day reach Moscow!"

For this project²⁷, Anca Hanu used an ukulele, an accordion, a melodica, a synthesiser and a kazoo, some of which creating the accompaniment basis for many of the songs. Together with the other actors, she constructed her role in such a way that the interpretation naturally contained the relation with the instruments, acting and singing at the same time. The accordion thus became an extension of her character, it asked questions or audibly redirected different lines, while the kazoo had very long interventions that imitated the distorted voices from a telephone. In involvement of the larynx in the use of the kazoo allowed the spectators to distinguish the words. The human-instrument dialogues included many moments of improvisation²⁸, and Anca Hanu produced, through the receiver, gentle, hysterical or indifferent voices that dialogued with the other characters.

The theatre research continued with two other projects: *Chiritza in Concert* and *Ubu in Concert*. The collaboration with Anca Hanu was initiated by the discussions on the text and the characters, but it truly began with the sketches of the songs, which we then modified or remade together. She contributed with ideas to their orchestration, imagining the possibilities of integrating the instruments into the show in a natural manner. The actress played the lead role in both of the theatrical productions, and her perspective on the songs proved to have a double involvement: that of a creator and that of a performer.

Our experiences were extended outside the theatre as well, through the concert versions of certain songs; they continued with the essentialisation of certain shows and their completely different instalment. This is the case of the study on *Gulliver*²⁹, after Gellu Naum – the songs were borrowed from a play held by the Gong Theatre in Sibiu³⁰. During the rehearsals, held

27. See Teatrul Național Cluj-Napoca, *Trailer: ŠVEJK IN CONCERT - Teatrul Național Cluj-Napoca*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebSdQvL-LI8), 31.08.2018, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebSdQvL-LI8>.

28. See Ada Milea, *09 Telefoane*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anwEtDDUo30), 25.11.2017, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anwEtDDUo30>.

29. See Ada Milea, *Gulliver (după Gellu Naum) – aproape tot*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHsJTdl5JIw), 22.11.2020, accessed February 03, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHsJTdl5JIw>.

30. Alexandru Dabija director, *Cel mai mare Guliver*, by Gellu Naum, music by Ada Milea, Gong Theatre, Sibiu, premiered on October 02, 2016.

in an apartment³¹ in which we constructed the concert version, we considered that all of the song were sketches upon which we could intervene with no reservations. Together, we studied the way in which a giant could be (audibly) suggested, and the attempt to influence the songs in this sense determined us to use the effect of the image on the song. In a previous study that focused on the same huge character, we added an effect that exaggeratedly deepened the voice, singing very close to the microphone, accompanied by a speech dilation. Thus, the word “Matei” [Matthew] was spoken slowly, in very low-pitch notes. Because this song was performed in front of an audience made of children, the powerful, low-pitched utterance of the word caused a slight collective commotion. The young spectators became frightened upon imagining the giant, although there was no image of him. When we discussed this story, we decided to use a projection, in order to establish the extent to which the sound and the image can contribute to the live musical illusion of the giant.

The exploration of the universe of a contemporary Chiritza, for the show *Chiritza in Concert*, challenged Anca Hanu to seek her character before rehearsals even began. This time, we created a visible profile on a social network page³², where the participants could follow the respective updates. We wished to create the profile of a contemporary celebrity, starting from the author’s information and from the inspiration provided by the current society. We thus built the caricature of a character whom money, deception and fraud propelled to the top, regardless of her level of stupidity and superficiality. Our aim regarded the fleeting figures and their undying habits, even if the audience imagined that they recognised anyone in particular in the characters: “Televiziunili mă vânează mereu/ Reporterii stau ciorchine-n juru’ meu/ Nu pot să fac greșeli di vocabular/ că imediat îs ruptă-n bucăți di vreun ziar”³³.

31. See Ada Milea, *RepeGulli 2*, www.youtube.com, 25.08.2017, accessed February 03, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugNxUufhol4>.

32. *Chiritza Bârzo*, <https://www.facebook.com/Chiritza-B%C3%A2rzo-758296127887995/>.

33. “The televisions hunt me daily / Reporters all around me / One slip of the tongue / And I’m immediately ripped to shreds in the papers”.



Fig. 4: Scene from *Chiritza in Concert*, with the two charlatans. From left to right Cosmin Stănilă, Anca Hanu (*Chiritza*) and Radu Dogaru. Photo by Nicu Cherciu.

The character of *Chiritza* also had an essentialised version, outside the theatre, for the concerts held in unconventional spaces. Our research followed the way in which the songs can be received by the spectators who are unfamiliar with Alecsandri's text. During the apartment rehearsals, together with Bobo Burlăcianu, we reconstructed several musical pieces, presenting the dramatic situation of a husband forced to become perfect³⁴, the quarrel over the marriage of certain girls³⁵, a story about Thai people on a trip to Vienna³⁶, the conquest of *Chiritza* by a toreador who was, in fact,

34. See Ada Milea, *Prefect (din repetiție la MiniChiritza)*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcxx1orAw3A), 22.12.2020, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcxx1orAw3A>.

35. See Ada Milea, *Ni șiertăm (din repetiție la MiniChiritza)*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onNMfjqo-RQ), 22.12.2020, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onNMfjqo-RQ>.

36. See Ada Milea, *Chiritza la Viena (din repetiție la MiniChiritza)*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43mp7JQgoGA), 22.12.2020, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43mp7JQgoGA>.

not a toreador³⁷, the bimbos dreaming of the ideal men³⁸ and their emotions upon meeting them³⁹.

4. Difficulties, obstacles and solutions when working with the actor

The relation between the actor and the song depends both on the interpreter's musical qualities (rhythmic sense, voice etc.), and on their ability to use other qualities. Sometimes, the person aware of their musical talent focuses on the melodic line excessively, without offering the voice an adequate emotional support. Although they perform the sounds accurately, they tend to ignore an essential dimension in theatre: the connection between the text and its meanings.

Actress Dana Dogaru showed a justified distrust in a mysterious character who had to perform a musical moment in a Japanese restaurant in Russia⁴⁰. She told me even proved to me that she could not perform songs. Indeed, she could render neither the high pitches of certain musical notes, nor any rhythms, but music is not limited to such aspects. A melodic line devoid of context involves memorising a string of sounds, but humans can create connections between the sounds and the words or the stage situations. In the case of the aforementioned actress, I avoided the presence of an instrument, since it would have emphasised the difference between a melody considered to be correct and the one that she emitted. For this reason, I suggested that she accompanied herself by an imaginary Japanese orchestra. I offered her a musical sketch, marking the passages that she had to sing instead of the instruments, after which I recorded an approximate version. Together, we tried out several possibilities, imitating string

37. See Ada Milea, *Toreador* (din repetiție la MiniChiritza), www.youtube.com, 22.12.2020, accessed February 04, 2021,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfoekkJaEgI>.

38. See Ada Milea, *Fetili* (repetiție la MiniChiritza), www.youtube.com, 28.06.2020, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0TLJf0-TDg>.

39. See Ada Milea, *Noaptea pi lac* (din repetiție la MiniChiritza), www.youtube.com, 22.12.2020, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF3tkmjagiE>.

40. Felix Alexa director, *În rolul victimei*, by Vladimir and Oleg Presniakov, The Metropolis Theatre, Bucharest, premiered on September 30, 2007.

instruments or small percussions, as similar to the European perception on the Japanese sonorities as possible. The actress sang the lines using sounds that could seem Japanese, after which she imitated an imaginary orchestra. At our next collaboration, we preferred to use an accompaniment made of the noises the shoes made on the floor. Once again, the actress' talent successfully replaced her musical ear and thus the songs of the show⁴¹ were interpreted without any problems.

Another interesting case was the role of *Leonce*, from the *Leonce and Lena*⁴² play, for which I proposed an actor that had rhythm problems⁴³. Although I did have other more comfortable options (from a musical viewpoint), my recommendation was based on the interpreter's past (he was a student of the Faculty of Theology) and his ability to better understand the character's existential turmoil. The cast of a different actor could have been much more useful rhythmically, but it would have taken us away from Büchner's character. In the case of *Leonce*, the effects of the rhythmic issues were diminished by the interventions of the character of *Valerio*, played by an extremely musical actor⁴⁴. He gave him useful signals and saved him vocally, when needed, with ease and elegance. The spectators confused the actor's wandering in the world of sounds with that of the character that was disoriented by the society in which he lived, and his reliance on *Valerio* was received as a sign of admiration for the one with a better knowledge of humanity's madness. As friends and colleagues, they naturally communicated through words, sounds and glances (some, the aforementioned signals). More than *Leonce*'s musical precision, what interested me was that the philosophical games from Büchner's text be clear, which can happen when the actor focuses more on the ideas than on the melodies.

41. Felix Alexa director, *Meșteșugul vieții*, by Hanoah Levin, The Bulandra Theatre, Bucharest, premiered on October 15, 2011.

42. Mihai Măniuțiu director, *Leonce și Lena*, by Georg Büchner, The Queen Marie Theatre, Oradea, premiered on November 23, 2013.

43. E.N. – actor of the Queen Mary Theatre of Oradea.

44. Richard Balint – actor of the Queen Mary Theatre of Oradea.

During the rehearsals with less musical actors, I noted the way in which the stage situations, the text and the experience can help them interpret melodic lines. Even through some of them showed a justified distrust in their own ability to sing, they did true to express themselves musically and, through theatre, to reach “the sound that becomes music”.

5. The instrumentalist actor and his theatrical accompaniments

In an attempt to identify the sounds that are capable of aiding the musical expression of the texts, I found an excellent ally in the actor who can play an instrument and who can use it as he would a character (or as an extension of his character). Florin Călbăjos is able to make a double bass play different roles, by making it “mumble”, “speak” or “scream” in his own “voice”. Through small suggestive gestures, accompanied by sounds, he creates images in addition to the text he sings. He made an accompaniment in which two bangs placed periodically, upon certain words, offered them new meanings. Namely, they could suggest the empty head of a woman, while also playing percussion (“**Banii**, în **ca-pul** unei femei, sunt ca... **os-ul** pentru căței, sunt ca.. **Dar-win** pentru atei, sunt ca... **berea** pentru prietenii mei”⁴⁵).

The character played by the actor had a double bass and was only concerned with money. We undertook a study together, trying to use everything at hand (sounds, gestures, words) in order to get him to refer to money in as many ways as possible. The rhythm dissonances⁴⁶ of his instrument showed how money “squandered”, while a hand gesture that controlled the sounds proved how they “disappeared”⁴⁷. A small foot tambourine rattling represented “all his money”⁴⁸ and the snapping of his

45. “Money, in a woman’s **head**, is like... the **bone** for the dog... it is like... **Darwin** for the atheists, it is like... **beer** for my friends”. See Ada Milea, *Banii în capul unei femei*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paZK_sczFQ4), 09.05.2018, accessed February 06, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paZK_sczFQ4.

46. See Ada Milea, *Banii mă înnebunesc*.

47. See Ada Milea, *Banii mă înnebunesc*.

48. See Ada Milea, *ăștia mi-s toți banii*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFgnYtKLaeo), 09.05.2018, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFgnYtKLaeo>.

fingers suggested his shortcomings⁴⁹, or the large number of plays written in a year⁵⁰ (the gesture also emphasized their quality, but especially the idea of payment).

Another actor, Romulus Chiciuc, used a violin in several projects in which we aimed for the same relation between the instrument, the music, the text and the stage situations. In the concert Quijote, the actor played *The Puppeteer*, whose puppets were the violin's bow and body⁵¹: the bow was the male-puppet (Marcello Bello) who sang low-pitched notes on the lower cords, and the thinner cords were reserved for *Isabelle's* quavers, in a type of instrumental commedia dell'arte. I collaborated with this actor in other concerts as well, in which the violin was used as a dulcimer (by hitting the cords with a pencil⁵²) to illustrate insects flying through a garden⁵³, or to help the actor write threatening letters to Santa Claus, using a pencil with an eraser⁵⁴.

The research on the instruments that efficiently use the text, the characters and the stage situations continued by involving an extremely creative percussionist, Alex Neagu⁵⁵, in the theatrical-musical experiments. Together, we transformed many of the already existing songs, offering them new versions. Thus, several songs about fires, firemen and stories shrouded in mystery, initially created for a performance in Iași⁵⁶, were readdressed, with the involvement of certain percussion instruments. From

49. See Ada Milea, *artiștii nu se îmbogățesc*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLaHcI-6EMI), 09.05.2018, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLaHcI-6EMI>.

50. See Ada Milea, *16 piese într-un an*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acwMP6HCB38), 09.05.2018, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acwMP6HCB38>.

51. See Ada Milea, *păpușar cu vioară*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gF9HYjvf93M), 09.05.2018, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gF9HYjvf93M>.

52. See Ada Milea, *Aoleu*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_zUPfghs0s), 24.01.2014, accessed June 01, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_zUPfghs0s.

53. See Ada Milea, *Ruginesc albinele*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IK_PQIGZo8), 25.01.2014, accessed June 01, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IK_PQIGZo8.

54. See Ada Milea, *Scrisoare de amenințare pentru Moș Crăciun*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKuRZOqDGLA), 21.09.2014, accessed June 01, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKuRZOqDGLA>.

55. Alex Neagu – drummer, percussionist, member of the bands The Bread Pits and Fără Zahăr.

56. Felix Alexa director, *Biedermann și incendiarii*, by Max Frisch, The National Theatre, Iași, premiered on October 24, 2009.

the desire to discover as many connections as possible with the events in the text, we also introduced a lamp which could have different uses: as a light bulb turned on at night by a person haunted by insomnia (the percussionist had lines, while turning the lamp on into his own eyes⁵⁷), as a sun rising in plain sight (the lamp was turned on, immediately followed by the line “Soarele a răsărit”⁵⁸), or as a reflector of the night guards (the lamp was turned on, followed by moments of fear⁵⁹). The musician also used other unique percussion elements: several tuned tubes⁶⁰ (whose smell was investigated when discussing flammable substances⁶¹), a hairdryer (to suggest indifference towards certain situations in the text⁶²), a floor tom⁶³ into which air was blown through a hose and thus changed the sound of the drum⁶⁴ etc. These instruments were used in many other songs. In one such song, the floor tom audibly suggested the belly of an immense fish⁶⁵, while another created the illusion of the sway of a pirate ship⁶⁶. The sounds always aimed to support (together with their images) the ideas in a text, and the musician also vocally took part in the song. He was a character and a percussionist, using the percussions naturally.

57. See Ada Milea, *Cine (repetiție'n sufragerie)*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7OPpnBylfl), 24.11.2020, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7OPpnBylfl>.

58. The sun has risen”. See Ada Milea, *Soarele - repetiție'n sufragerie*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLThmjAmfqQ), 24.11.2020, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLThmjAmfqQ>.

59. See Ada Milea, *Dormitzi*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nx_Xj6LdoMI), 06.06.2019, accessed February 06, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nx_Xj6LdoMI.

60. See Ada Milea, *Biciclete*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksSs98fw5lQ), 06.06.2019, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksSs98fw5lQ>.

61. See Ada Milea, *Benzina*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msDXN55-zY4), 06.06.2019, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msDXN55-zY4>.

62. See Ada Milea, *Zdup zdup zdup - repetiție'n sufragerie*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCW1AM4ytEY), 24.11.2020, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCW1AM4ytEY>.

63. Floor tom – an element of the drum set.

64. See Ada Milea, *Benzina*.

65. See Ada Milea, *Peștepe suprem - repetiție'n sufragerie*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pn4DPWDQC28), 26.11.2020, accessed February 07, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pn4DPWDQC28>.

66. See Ada Milea, *Piratzii*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVJuSVprZSI), 06.06.2019, accessed February 07, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVJuSVprZSI>.

The research on the way in which the actors identify the melodies through the texts and the stage situations continued by seeking the types of audible interventions that would help them in their endeavour. Then, I studied the ability of the instrumentalists to transform their instruments into characters and to use their theatrical qualities in a musical context.

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PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS

The Romanian Multimedia Theatre Dictionary – a Digital Historical Recovery Process

Project review: *The Romanian Multimedia Theatre Dictionary*



Besides an already troubled and uncertain background, the pandemic accelerated the need for digitization and digitalization as such. At the same time, from an optimistic perspective, it rushed this process in several areas. The lack of interest (and professionalism, we might say) for Romanian theatre's archives has led to an unfortunate consequence: they are either very difficult to reach or they are buried inside the basement of a theatre or of a library and completely forgotten. In the last thirty years, no dictionary containing a coherent and systematic recent history of the Romanian theatre emerged.

Therefore, the ARPAS¹ initiative, meant to recover recent cultural memory, is based on the needs of the present. The project curated by the theatre critic Cristina Modreanu, joined by two well-known Romanian universities, through their theatre faculties, namely Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, and the University of Arts of Târgu Mureş, both bringing together more than 20 specialists in the field of theatre and their students, became extremely necessary, while also addressing both the attention of the new generations and the researchers.

The project, which was planned to be exclusively digital, aims, as mentioned on the website, to bring, through the use of new media technologies, the history of the Romanian theatre closer to the new generation. The historical period that the project coordinators and collaborators assumed they would cover was 1950-2020. The project collaborators include theatre critics and researchers such as Miruna Runcan, Oltița Cântec, Anca Hațiegan, Mirella Nedelcu-Patureau, Oana Cristea-Grigorescu and others. By switching to the online environment, they redesigned the archives, ordering them into a user-friendly, free of charge and easy-to-access platform.

The dictionary, a novel approach in the Romanian space, currently comprises fifty files, being divided into two sections, that are alphabetically organized: *artists* and *performances*. Every artist (theatre directors, actors, stage designers) has an artistic biography, a teatrography, a filmography, photos from their performances and of their posters, video or audio conversations, chronicles and links to other relevant materials. For now, the artists' section contains thirty-one files with information about artists such as: Leopoldina Bălănuță, Radu Penciulescu, David Esrig, Cătălina Buzoianu, Margareta Niculescu, György Harag or Alexandru Tocilescu.

The performances' section greets the visitors with nineteen multimedia files, that include iconic performances, such as: *Cum vă place/As You Like It*, directed by Liviu Ciulei (Lucia Sturdza Bulandra Theatre, 1961), *O Trilogie Antică/ An Antique Trilogy*, directed by Andrei Șerban (Ion Luca Caragiale National Theatre, 1990), *Efectul razelor gama asupra anemonelor/ The Effect of*

1. ARPAS is the Romanian Association for Promoting Performing Arts, also the editor of *Scena.ro* quarterly.

Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, directed by Cătălina Buzoianu (Mic Theatre, 1977), *Macbeth*, directed by Aureliu Manea (Ploiești State Theatre, 1976), or *Livada de Vișini/ The Cherry Orchard* directed by György Harag (Târgu Mures National Theatre, Romanian section, 1985). Every file brings to the attention of the platform's visitors information about the performance in a dedicated critical article, the complete distribution, posters, photos from the performance, extracts from the chronicles, complementary links and, in the case of some performances, their program in the form of a notebook. The multitude of elements present in the mentioned files and their interactive character do not only manage to provide information, but also to redesign important events from the Romanian theatre, and to preserve the past in a current, contemporary manner, adapted to the times we live in.

At a time when the performative events take place into specific frameworks, the labour market – especially in the field of art – is becoming more and more globalized. In this context, the *Romanian Multimedia Theatre Dictionary* aims, by establishing the directions and criteria for the selection of the artists, to promote European values and to present those artists who have provided, in a restrictive context – namely the communist period – a link of communication between domestic and global practices: "(...) thus the selection comprises those creators who, during the period that we are analyzing, have made the connection between the Romanian scene and that of the world, despite the conditions of isolation dictated by a totalitarian system"².

The dictionary is a work in progress, the letters of the alphabet are not all present in neither of the two sections. As the initiators themselves state, their wish is to continue extending the project as they access the necessary funds. Despite the uncertainty generated by the lack of constant funding, the project is long-term oriented, and it will grow step by step, but quite slowly, unfortunately. The need for recovery, for reimagining and for the preservation of Romanian theatrical movement's history, as well as of

2. The Romanian Multimedia Theatre Dictionary, <https://www.dmtr.ro/>, accessed on July 13, 2021.

the artistic cultural heritage in general, is an urgent one and has been reported on numerous occasions by researchers, practitioners and people working in the cultural fields.

The fact that the Ministry of Culture does not prioritize, through coherent financing policies, such an approach as the one started by the *Romanian Multimedia Theatre Dictionary* demonstrates, once again, the lack of vision regarding cultural policies and particularly the management of archives by reactivating the cultural heritage.

Fortunately, at the time of writing this review, the Dictionary, awarded at the AFCN Gala (co-sponsor of the project), received a new grant, and thus, it will be completed with fifty additional files coming in November 2021. The emergence of the *Romanian Multimedia Theatre Dictionary* represents a small (as of right now), but important step towards the modernization of the Romanian archives, that gets us closer to the 21st century. Through the power of example, we hope that the approach will be emulated by other artistic fields.

We are convinced that the project will demonstrate its relevance over time (had it not happened yet) and that it will bring into question, in a concrete and articulate way, the need to rethink the archives in a digital format, in a thorough manner. The Dictionary will also create a bridge between young people and history, by using a modern and attractive language.

We can only hope that the project will be carried out, that it will achieve its mission and that it will influence other people to get involved and start similar projects. Even if it sounds utopian now, it would be incredible (and we think it's achievable) to have such digital archives, that also include a history of the Romanian films or, why not, of the visual arts or music. Until then, we are counting on the dedication, patience and perseverance of the project's initiators and, of course, we hope that it will be funded until the end – and accessed by as many people as possible, whether we talk about students, researchers or the general, theatre-loving audiences.

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Infracriticism and Interartistic Dialogue

Book review: Laura Pavel, *Personaje Ale Teoriei, Ființe Ale Ficțiunii. Eseuri / Characters of Theory, Beings of Fiction. Essays.* (Iași: Institutul European, 2021)



The interpretive approach that Laura Pavel¹ engages with in her recent book *Personaje ale teoriei, ființe ale ficțiunii. Eseuri/ Characters of Theory, Beings of Fiction, Essays*² is a novelty in the realm of Romanian critical discourse, due to both the manner of arguing via the “characters” / beings of fiction, and the way of exposing the framework of postcritical theory. The latter supplements the current directions of interpretation in the field of literary studies, or in those of the visual and performing arts.

The subtitle *Essays* enables the author to adopt quasi-playful hypostases and introduce her interdisciplinary theoretical premises, based on which she builds her analyses synthesized in a prologue (argument). Here, even readers unfamiliar with the history of criticism can learn about the approach proposed by postcritical theory: “[...] The new aestheticism corresponds to a ‘post-theoretical’ period, in which theory enters a ‘reflexive’ rather than emancipatory and militant phase, being interested in rediscovering the philosophical origins of art as well as of the theory of literature, and less so in the discursive-ideological apparatus [...]”³ French structuralism, deconstructivism, American poststructuralism, neo-Marxism, postcolonialism presuppose a series of approaches – text-centred approaches, loss of meaning, “death of the author” (Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault⁴), the decline of the great

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1. Laura Pavel is an essayist and literary and theatrical critic, professor at the Faculty of Theatre and Film of Babeș-Bolyai University, where she teaches Theatre History, Theatre Anthropology, Cultural Studies and Performance Theory.
 2. Laura Pavel, *Personaje Ale Teoriei, Ființe Ale Ficțiunii. Eseuri* (Iași: Institutul European, 2021).
 3. The detachment of the current “new aestheticism” from the interpretive grid proposed by the critical theory potentiates the distance established between different ways of perception of the artistic object. At the same time, their coexistence aims at a complementarity, based on their historicity and the organic evolution of the interpretive directions, materialized in the gradual branching of the critical discourses. See, in this regard, Laura Pavel, *Personaje ale teoriei, ființe ale ficțiunii, Eseuri*, Cluj-Napoca, Institutul European, 2021, pp. 11-12. The chapter *Personaje ale teoriei. Latour, Felski, Nussbaum & Co., În loc de Argument* exposes concepts that are expounded upon later, in the analysis of interdisciplinary creations.
 4. As stated by Mihaela Ursa in Mihaela Ursa, *Scriptopia* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia XXI, 2010), 30: “The twentieth century is infused with this nihilistic perception of representation, which leads to the death of metaphysics”. Thus, the unity subsumed to the cosmological principle is subjected to disaggregation. The critical approach converges towards a negative, demystifying hermeneutics, supported by the ontology of suspicion and secrecy, as part of an apparent universal “plot”.

narratives (François Lyotard) - which can be grouped under the name of critical theory. This entails a *political turn*, particularly through Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. But there is, as Laura Pavel points out, the moment of an ethical turn⁵ which culminates in a greening of aesthetic experiences, an ecological turn theorized in the texts of Bruno Latour, who attacks with a “biting” verve the school of suspicion, derived, after Paul Ricoeur, from the three “masters of soupçon” (Marx, Nietzsche and Freud). Among the forerunners of postcritical theory are Stanley Cavell, Wittgenstein, Paul Ricoeur, and Bruno Latour, who anticipate the return of interest in the aesthetic and the interpretation of the intrinsic value of the work in a broad philosophical, existential context.

The tools used as an analysis medium for the fictional self and for the “stylistics of existence” in the bohemian life of the ‘60s and ‘70s, the construction of the *total novel* of the ‘70s, the theories on monodrama with psychodrama elements, the reception of the performativity of Adrian Ghenie, Victor Man and Marius Bercea or the interpretation of Klaus Obermaier’s intermediate creations – these all diversify on vast, interrelated levels. Certain notions specific to post-critical theory synthesize the stake of the recuperative approach through the concepts to which it is connected: the *quasi-object*, for Bruno Latour, designates the artistic object, with double subjectivity, of the creator and the receiver; *ekphrasis*, viewed from an etymological perspective, would translate into *giving voice*, and in this context it means one of the pre-expressive or unexpressed voices of the work of art, manifested in latent form as polyvalent facets of expression; *infraprivation* is a non-invasive critical investigation of the object, which should not be taken possession of, but only recognized, its radiography relying on the empathic approach, without the subject imposing their authority in the analysis of artistic creation. *Compositionism* (Bruno Latour) refers to a process of “post-production”, which does not deconstruct, but restores the works disfigured by the critical interpretive grids in an ecological manner. The

5. In Laura Pavel’s interpretation, the phrase the “Ethical Turn” represents, alongside other syntagms like the “Pictorial Turn”, the “Literary Turn”, the “Performative Turn”, the “Ekphrastic Turn” and even the “Postmodern Turn”, an approach generated by debates of the past few decades, through which the interpretive communities come to coexist and to offer new valences and methodological options, in a dialogical, inter-arts cultural space.

creation-interpretation interference implies the recovery of the work and its restoration through a “curatorial” perspective, as the literary historian Rita Felski states, the reconstructive intention being found in the Latourian *actor-network theory*, and the *object-oriented* phrase refers to the privilege of a critique, which has at its centre the object of reference, which is part of the terminology coined by the philosopher Graham Harman.⁶

The chapter on the anthropologist and critic Bruno Latour is titled provocatively, like in a cape and sword novel: *Latour Enters the Scene*. The opening of the chapter marks the intrigue that determines a new turn of the plot, changing the critical perspective. The latter is no longer distant and systemic, structured and detective, but complicit, empathic, recovering through the dimension of aesthetic reception, which involves a transfer between subject and object, the latter receiving new valences, by objectifying the figures of fiction. The exciting interrogations from the Cluj critical landscape can be found both in the work of Mihaela Ursa, *Scritopia*, and of Alex Goldiș, *Critica în tranșee. De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului*. Laura Pavel’s book also has the “aura” of multiple interrogative valences, beyond interdisciplinary postcritical analyses: What is happening on the stage of criticism today? Where is the local criticism in this context? How do we relate to the posthumanist period from an ethical and aesthetic perspective? Can distinct and polemical directions of criticism coexist in the same era? The answer offered by Laura Pavel’s essays, caught in a vast network, defined by transdisciplinary interconnections - the foundation of a *work in progress* structure - is that through Latourian figurability, through “the action of fiction, the continuous figuration of material” (p. 46), the receivers are seen as subjects, following the establishment of a complicity relationship derived from the process of creation-interpretation.

The concepts of style and theatricality become tools of analysis for metafictional texts, true “theoretical objects”, not only through “Bovarian self-fictionalization”, but also through some strategies of mythologization

6. The terminological framework is completed with the notion of hermeneutics of recollection from Paul Ricoeur’s theory, synonymous with a “revelation of new ways of being”. This anticipates the premise of the new approach to aesthetic anthropology synthesized in Laura Pavel’s volume. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge [Eng.]; New York: Paris: Cambridge University Press; Editions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1981), 191.

and demythologization, through the convergent functioning of the conceptual dichotomy fictionalism-biography. Thus, dandyism becomes a mark of both the biographical and fictional selves, Mateiu Caragiale being “a spectator and critical interpreter of his own life, understood as a daily scenario of a work of art” (p. 65). In a few pages we find the evolution of the concept of theatricality, from Michael Fried - who considers that the work of art should reject theatricality, in order to remain that autonomous fiction of stage reality, perpetuating the illusion that there is no spectator, the receiver being contemplative, passive - to the Canadian researcher Josette Féral, who analyses the split of otherness, both in the character and in the spectator.

The chapter entitled *Literary Bohemia of the '60s and '70s: Ways of Being Between the Autobiographical and the Fictional* pertinently captures the transgression of the biographical-fictional levels, by fictionalizing the self, so much so that the rhythm of authorial life comes to be confused with fiction. Bohemia is defined as a way of self-aestheticization and “self-irresponsibility” and puts into action the transformation of the writer into a character, through a true “stylistics of existence” (Marielle Macé). The analysis of this *modus vivendi* is done through the lens of Latourian interpretation, because what Laura Pavel calls *co-fiction* takes place in a network in which the entire constellation of bohemian characters of the '60s-'70s participates, becoming beings of fiction, by self-officialization. The phrase socialist aestheticism (Mircea Martin) is repurposed beyond the thesis of an autonomy of aesthetics, in the context of the '70s, the appearance of the total novel cultivating a “fantasy of the authors' power” (p. 110), which involves a type of *fiction*, different from fictionalization, a dynamic transfer between biographical and fiction.

In another essay, *The Psychotropic. Defictionalization and self-exposure*, with an undisguised verve, correlated with interdisciplinary cultural information, the author analyses the paradoxes of the psychodrama character and the reception of a monodramatic, autobiographical performance. The interpretive network is composed of: “the effect of presence [...] identity, self-politics, life writing, performance and performativity, liminality, the Other (otherness), the mind/body dichotomy and, last but not least, *psychotropic* unity” (p. 129), this summing up the fictitious and the biographical content, through the concept of theatricality realizing the link with the spectator,

who identifies or distances himself. The short history of corporeality conveys an incursion into the aggrandized ego, through the monologue in which the actor performs, through a duality of the fictionalized self with the biographical self, as well as of the fusion of the public space with the private one. Corporeality has a semiotic connotation and is a sign of a universal essence, theatricality being established when receiving the performer's duality. Laura Pavel has an essayistic penchant, punctuating certain pauses for breath after providing dense information about the theories of performativity, to gloss, for example, about the disappearance of the Dutch performer Bas Jan Ader, in 1975, who, trying to cross the Atlantic, became invisible or committed suicide, staging his own disappearance, as in a performance. But "characters" are not only performative artists and writers who construct certain aestheticizing social positions, but also theorists themselves, such as Stanley Fish, known for his concept of interpretive community. In the light of this notion, Laura Pavel analyses several cultural "turns," and refers, among others, to the meeting between the ideas of the American school with the French theory (French Theory), resulting in the "battle for showcasting."⁷

The transdisciplinarity of the essayistic approaches is distinguished by the transition to the analysis of the visual, self-reflective metapictures of the School from Cluj. Laura Pavel manages to pertinently analyse the imagotextual creations with post-critical methods, seen in the form of cryptograms with permanent reference to literature. The author discovers the meaning of these pictorial creations through an ekphrastic interpretation that claims its notions of "potentiality-not-to" (Giorgio Agamben) and "I would prefer not to" (Herman Melville), imagological substrates being probed. The final essay *Breaches in Fiction: Aesthetic and (Bio) Technological Boundaries* problematizes the posthuman, hybrid, asymptotic condition. Laura Pavel performs the aesthetic analysis of the intermediate shows, directed by Klaus Obermaier. The aesthetic mutations of the 21st century are discussed, through which the combinations between fictional and non-fictional, virtual

7. François Cusset, *French theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Co și transformările vieții intelectuale din Statele Unite*, trans. Andreea Rațiu (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2016), 98-99.

and *live art*, interfere, asking big ethical questions, testing the limits of perception and overlap between human and nonhuman. The virtual thus becomes an autonomous, anthropomorphic and even postanthropomorphic fiction, the hybrid artistic environment engaging in an empathic dialogue with the spectator-receiver, perceived as a whole. In the analysis of hybrid mechanisms, the author's aesthetic gaze probes the infrastructure of the work of art, discovering "the hidden third", which completes and transgresses the mimetic and non-mimetic interpretive valences.

Characters of Theory, Beings of Fiction. Essays can be read as an incursion into a work that has already become, through its own figurability, a *being of fiction*, which asks questions about the evolution of criticism, giving no final answers, problematizing idea-characters, opening perspectives for interpreting literature and visual and performative arts through the *Other*, in a hermeneutic dialogue of empathic and "infracritical" type.

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New Media - A Discourse of Expression, A Mirror of Reality

Book Review: Cristina Rusiecki, *Un click și...1000 de realități - New Media în Teatrul Românesc* / *1 click and... 1000 realities - New Media in Romanian Theatre* (București: Asociația ENTHEOS, 2020)



There are moments and messages which cannot be transmitted only through conventional scenography, where New Media can have an important role in illustrating the internal struggles, in being a mirror of introspection or in showing points of view which cannot be seen only with naked eyes on stage. In times when discussing theatre shows involving technology and new media in Romania has been needed for a while, Cristina Rusiecki publishes *1 click and... 1000 realities - New Media in Romanian Theatre*, a remarkable initiative on explaining the phenomenon and its evolution. Having a strong background in journalism and theatre criticism, Cristina Rusiecki manages to lead us to the path of technology's evolution and awareness of its presence in Romanian theatre. Together with actors, directors, scenographers, she deciphers fluidly for the reader the significance and the role of new media in each performance described in the book.

The opening pages tackle the subject of theatre being the history or journal of a sensitivity that must embody the reality for the spectator. Taking in consideration that the present consists of constantly evolving visual stimuli and media, the author introduces the idea that in order to address the contemporary spectator, New Media could be the means for expressing our current reality.

Divided in seven chapters, each focused on different methods and concepts of using new media from the first live performances up to the online ones in days of pandemic, the selection of the theatre performances offers continuous and pleasant surprises: the critical discourse tries to awake the reader the same feeling one should get while watching each of these performances live. Therefore, this gives a better understanding of why and when new media has been necessary to fulfill the artistic act. On a personal note, while reading this book I went into a journey of feelings that has taken me back and forth from years of adolescence, when I first encountered some of these performances that had a strong impact on me, to the present days, when I have a better understanding of what is happening on the scene.

Even if, while reading, one can feel a subjective point of view from time to time, the passion of storytelling and the personal participation that comes from empathizing with the movement and the concept of the shows represent the key to engaging with every concept, every story told, and makes the reader want to discover more.

Cristina Rusiecki brings into discussion the imaginary worlds of different artists, sometimes returning to them in different contexts. The pages become alive when describing the universes of artists such as Andu Dumitrescu, honest and transparent; Bobi Pricop, always sensitive and immersive; Adrian Damian, calculated still surprising; Ioana Păun and her social dimensioned works, or Carmen Lidia Vidu, whose theatrical interventions were conceived starting from new media, and whose work would belong to the concept of *mediaturgy*, if that would even exist in Romania. To those mentioned, the author is adding pioneers like Theo Marton and Andi Gherghe; and more surprises come along as Rusiecki is researching various perspectives on working with new media in theatre.

Even if sometimes they may seem tough, the artists' explanations truly encompass sincerity and transparency in regards to what new media means in a theatre performance. For actors, confronting it represents a challenge and surely not always comfortable – and that seems perfectly understandable; yet, I bet the process is fascinating: one can see how each one reacts when facing this situation, and how they let go or not.

The shows presented don't use new media just to simply embellish the stage setting, or to switch the audience's attention to something pretty but superficial. They have earned their place within these pages as their creators use new media with a definite purpose, meant to enrich the theatrical experience, to support the actor's performing skills and to push the spectacle's formula up to the point where it becomes necessary on stage.

The author's experience in journalism is obvious as well as her theatrical knowledge. The elegant way Rusiecki introduces artistic ideas and the cleverness she uses when describing the atmosphere and feelings created during the performances almost makes you regret not having the chance to participate directly.

The book encompasses shows that are site specific like *Sado-Maso Blues Bar*¹, where the scenography was created by Andu Dumitrescu, or will take the form of an installation just as *Și liniștea are puls*² does with a surprising medium signed by Romulus Boicu. Among the performances described, we can find ones that will use only light in relation with the space of the stage, but still reveal so many layers of understanding, as Adrian Damian designed in *Iarna*³, while others might simply make the distance between audience and stage disappear as exemplified in *Pisica Verde*⁴, where the scenography belongs to Irina Moscu. In every case, multimedia becomes organic in relation with the content. In addition to this, a strong point of this research is the frankness of the discussions over technology and new media, the meaning of it, the risk of failing and losing the audience when not done properly, or when used abusively.

Noticeably, there is a common wish of using new media as means of expression with the purpose of immersing the spectator in the theatrical moment, switching his state from passive to active. These works are clearly meticulously calculated. The importance of discipline is emphasized, along with the impossibility for an actor to improvise

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1. Gianina Cărbunariu director, *Sado-Maso Blues Bar* by Maria Manolescu, Teatrul Foarte Mic, Bucharest, premiered in 2007.
 2. Horia Suru director, *Și liniștea are puls* by Brad Birch, Teatrul Andrei Mureșanu, Sfântu Gheorghe, premiered on March 6, 2019.
 3. Mihai Măniuțiu director, *Iarna* by Jon Fosse, Teatrul Nottara, Bucharest, premiered on October 13, 2016.
 4. Bobi Pricop director, *Pisica Verde* by Elise Wilk, Teatrul pentru Copii și Tineret Luceafărul, Iași, premiered on October 3, 2015.

anymore without repercussions. Virtual interaction in today's reality modifies the relationships between humans, and it interferes with audience communication as well. Artists will constantly overcome their work just as technology is evolving, in order to remain valid, up to date and significant for the audience.

Rusiecki is persistent in the idea that New Media in theatre must be seen as a different version than what we are used to; for reaching the audience and provoking it, we must not forget that theatre has always managed to keep up by embedding contemporary technical elements.

Thanks to the huge research, the wonderful illustration, the impressive photo archive and the engaging writing *1 click and... 1000 realities - New Media in Romanian Theatre* is an explosion of color, technology and meaning, a safe space where New Media is perfectly understood and described as means of expression.

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(IN)CORRECT

Performance review: (IN)CORECT, Play and directing by Leta Popescu, stage design by Lucia Mărneanu, with Alexandra Caras, Cătălin Filip, Oana Mardare, Alina Mișoc, Emőke Pál, Paul Sebastian Popa, Lucian Teodor Rus, Doru Taloș. A production of Reactor de Creație și Experiment, Cluj-Napoca, România, 2020.

Cluj-Napoca, February 2020. The independent artistic team *Reactor de Creație și Experiment* continue their multiannual programme started in 2019, *Decalaj. Narațiuni intergeneraționale* (*Gap. Intergenerational Narratives*). This time, however, the project coincides with the last performance of the trilogy *Colaj* (*Collage*) by director Leta Popescu. Began at the Hungarian State Theatre Cluj in 2018 with the performance *(In)vizibil* (*In/visible*), a collage of texts on loneliness by Romanian and Hungarian contemporary authors, continued at the Timișoara National Theatre with *(In)credibil* (*In/credible*), a collage of the director's own texts and writings on failure signed by Mihaela Michailov, Peca Ștefan, and Elise Wilk, Leta Popescu's directing project brings the collage closer to the concept of a "broken mirror" in which the spectator can identify as many perspectives as allowed by imagination. *(In)corect* marks the end of this search and the director's debut as playwright.

The performance aims to bridge the generational gap from the viewpoint of the most intimate nucleus of society: the family. Therefore, Leta Popescu's personal touch on the Reactor stage is easily taken over by all those sitting in the auditorium. A true family journal, including echoes of a question that arises as you are first hit by the transition from childhood to maturity, both for yourself and through the others' eyes: what to do when you're part of a family in which you can no longer find yourself? A mere vision desynchronization and it seems like everything was built on quicksand and all the examples you've had so far no longer apply. Most of

the times, we try to find somebody to blame, establish who bears the responsibility for what happens to us. But how can you reach the “ultimate” truth in a family in which everybody has their own, immovable justice and where certain bad memories turn tradition simply because you are afraid you could hurt the people who have raised you? Are you truly the only one affected by your life choices?

All families may seem dysfunctional, almost always. This defines us, even though we are incessantly running from our roots. Often times, you ask how you can change the way in which others perceive you; how can you start a new life somewhere else, where nobody knows your relatives who, for a while, have also stopped recognizing you? And what to do when you have to face all the prejudice unjustifiably placed upon you? What if you cannot run away, for instance, because you are isolated in the Danube Delta with your family and there’s always something to challenge?



Fig. 1: (IN)CORECT, *Reactor de Creație și Experiment*,
photo credits Doru Vataului.

This performance is a successful overview on a theatre laboratory driven by full transparency itself. The above-mentioned principle, i.e. that it is hard to not be who we are, makes up the basis of this text, and the director's creative method. Actors play characters, yet they never leave their performer status behind. On the contrary, they also take on other scenic roles: stagehands, light and sound operators. These continuously changing personifications are definitory for the director's complex plans. At the same time, we can witness both the events unfolding on stage, and what normally happens behind the curtains. So, the performance relies on the organic evolution of the events, and claims no magic tricks, as theatre shows normally imply. The roles are interpreted by each actor, one by one, so spectators witness as each element is revealed as a machine that serves a visual or sound effect created to enhance the ambiance of the show. Therefore, the dramaturgic coherence of the representation is never mediated by elements from outside the scenic space, but is part of the action itself, coinciding with the scenic time. Everything happens here and now.

The performance is made up of a multitude of images which blend together to create an overview. In fact, the broken mirror effect marks the multiple meaning strata: actors as characters and actors as supporting (so-called) technical staff, the ever-changing, ever-moving set according to the needs on stage, the table where we can watch the sound design be created in real time, and not least, the two screens that visually support the multiple perspectives. In a constant complementarity relation, the TV showing live images created by the actors at the worktable, and the projection screen that coincides with the stage back wall, support this language deconstruction, offering several layers to which the audience can relate simultaneously, so as, by using their imagination and personal viewpoint, to create the complete picture of the family described in through Leta Popescu's specific universe.

Like the course of life, all the elements that make up the performance (*In)corect* are in permanent transformation. The parallel between the fictional play and the cold reality that inspired it fits the director's concept. Throughout our existence, we always change roles, are in a constant state of adaptation, deny our roots only to return to them and reidentify with

what we used to be at the very beginning. Like this continuous return to the origins, the scenic means of expression are resumed and always draw new patterns of meaning.

Watching this family confession, at the end of the show, you can only feel legitimacy. The recognition takes place both during the performance, and in its direct relation with the audience. In the end, the broken mirror is stuck together based on personal experiences, as each spectator takes a private look within. We thus travel the road backwards, from the personal to the general. What may be intimate/subjective to the director becomes an incontestably universal story to the eye of the spectator. Because each narrative specific to one human identity alone bears a grain of common living. How we tell our story is up to us. This is the final impression left by *(In)corect*: trying to erase unpleasant pictures from your past, you rearrange everything as per your present Self, without actually changing the essence of the problem.

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Ciulei. A Director's Point of View

Book review: Eugen Gyemant, *Universul regizoral Liviu Ciulei/ Liviu Ciulei's Stage-directing Universe* (București, Editura Liternet, 2020)



Considering the small number of Romanian books written about theater directors, I think Eugen Gyemant's volume about Liviu Ciulei's work as a director but also as a stage designer is one of the most important and surprising books published last year. It has the quality of using a smart structure in which the innovations in the field of directing and stage design of Liviu Ciulei are being followed and analyzed in a way that, as the author

states in the introduction of the book, tries to capture more than a documentary and theoretical approach of his work, and more than a research from the director's point of view. The author, who is also a theater director, is using reviews, essays and other theoretical studies about Ciulei's work, and with all this material he is recreating the journey back to the performances: he analyses the solutions that Ciulei found and the decisions that he took as a director, making him one of iconic theater artists from the XXth Century.

Born in 1923 and considered to be the founder of modern directing in Romanian theater, but also one of the first modern stage-designers, Liviu Ciulei worked for more than 50 years in this field, mainly in Romania, but also in the United States. Probably the hardest thing about writing a book about such a vast personality is figuring out a way to manage and develop all the material related to this subject in such an unprecedented way and finding a new perspective that was never used before. I think the main purpose of this book is to answer the question: how relevant are the performances made by Liviu Ciulei for theater directing today? Reading it, you gain access to a very careful study about the intimate decisions that the director takes while staging a classical play written by Shakespeare, Brecht or Caragiale. As the author states in the opening chapter, this might be a very useful tool for the future theater makers who are considering staging these plays themselves, and might want to find out more about them and the way they were staged in the past.

The book is divided into eight chapters, each one centered mainly around the staging of a play and the way these performances challenged the tradition at that time. Considering the fact that many of the plays (especially those written by Shakespeare) directed by Ciulei were staged more than once, another theme of the book is the comparison of the different approaches the director had on the same text, sometimes even more than 40 years apart.

The first four chapters are using four of Shakespeare's plays that were staged by Ciulei between 1951 and 2000: *As you like it*, staged five times in Bucharest, Göttingen, Minneapolis, New York, *The twelfth night*, staged at Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, *Hamlet*, staged three times in

Washington, New York, Bucharest, and *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, staged four times in Minneapolis, Washington, Bucharest and Tel Aviv. Reading about each one of these productions, you can easily find the two aspects that all of them have in common, no matter the year and the place they were produced. The first chapter is talking about the idea of reinterpreting the relationships between characters and finding common ground that unites these relationships in Ciulei's view. No matter the aesthetic of the performances, the director uses the word *realism* concerning the way in which the role is created by the actor, based on the text analysis and his imagination, who should be stimulated with the right questions from the director. More importantly, the second chapter has to do with the vision about the space, the way the Elizabethan stage was reinterpreted in many of these performances, and the effect this decision made on the audience: also, on the actors and the way these performances were received in contrast with the ones using the Italian type of stage.

Following this idea, the next chapter focuses more on the work of Liviu Ciulei as a stage designer, and uses the term "archi-mechanism"¹ (influenced by Jan Kott's book, *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*) to describe the famous structures that he used to create monumental constructions on stage: the purpose was to multiply the possibilities of staging solutions in making the performances, as described in this chapter, more intense and dynamic. It is interesting to discover how Ciulei, from the position of stage designer, managed to influence the fellow directors who worked with him. Two famous examples in this book are the production of *D'ale carnavalului*, directed by Lucian Pintilie, and *Iulius Cezar* directed by Andrei Șerban. The last three chapters describe the dynamic between Liviu Ciulei and the directorial interpretations of the works by Brecht, Caragiale, or Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

Besides the encounters between Liviu Ciulei and Shakespeare's plays, Gyemant shows that the ones he had with the theater of Brecht and Caragiale are at least as interesting and the results, as analyzed and described in these chapters, could still be used today as a guide on how to

1. Eugen Gyemant, *Universul regizoral Liviu Ciulei* (București, Editura Liternet, 2020), p. 75.

look at these authors from a director's perspective. One of the many advantages of this book is that the author's decision about analyzing just a small part of the work of Liviu Ciulei helps the reader to form a coherent view of his entire career, and to uncurtain facts that one realizes are still very influential to this day.

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Anti-Establishment Documentary Theatre

Performance review: *Capete înfierbântate* 2020 by Mihaela Michailov & David Schwartz, directed by David Schwartz, with: Alexandru Potocean, Oana Rusu, Teodora Retegan, Maria Sgârcitu. (A production of Centrul Educațional de Teatru Replika, October 2020)

Capete înfierbântate 2020 (*Heated Heads* 2020) continues the performing endeavour which started in 2010 with the homonymous performance and which brought the 1990 Mineriad back to our attention. This time, this second premiere of *Stagiunea Digitală de Teatru Politic* 2020 (*2020 Political Theatre Digital Season*) has drawn inspiration from an acute contemporary situation: the crisis of the Romanian medical system caused (or rather revealed) by the fight against SARS-CoV-2. The project team reunited around this burning topic is made up of Mihaela Michailov and David Schwartz – co-authors of the text, the latter having also directed the performance, joined by Alexandru Potocean (the actor-performer of *Capete înfierbântate* 2010/*Heated Heads* 2010), and Oana Rusu, as well as Teodora Retegan and Maria Sgârcitu, the latter two having created the music accompanying the scenic movement, which was choreographed by Mihai Mihalcea. The scenography was designed by Irina Gădiuță, and Cătălin Rulea was the graphic designer. An essential aspect of the text construction and the performance structure is the collaboration with Dora Constantinovici for research, as the authors highlight the role of the interviews with doctors and labour union members, first and foremost.

The performance raises political and social stakes, engaging in a real critique of the system's defects, thwarting its successive cosmetic improvements. Thus, it reveals its incapacities in a critical situation happening now, with the aim to ring a bell and find immediate solutions. Starting from this pain spot – talking about a crisis from within it – *Capete înfierbântate* addresses us all, not limiting itself to a sole perspective on reality, though not assuming a

prescriptive standpoint, despite its social commitment. The performance starts with a performative structure in which the actors take stands and requestion the official or mass-media data (the shutting down of certain institutes or hospitals, so-called actions meant to make the system more efficient, etc.), or excerpts from politicians' speeches. The musical-choreographic level layers over the textual (quoted) level, showing the (civic and civil) attitude of the four actors. Irina Gâdiuță's functional set is built under our eyes by the actors, who rearrange storage cases, as these turn into various set objects in conjunction with the metal frames, a reference to the medical universe (wheeled screens used to separate beds). Two laptops are used openly, as well as microphones for singing and talking once actors take their performer status, all within the framework of the same logic of minimalistic expression. Beyond the music itself, the soundscape is created by using object plays crystallizing the urgency of putting on the medical protective suit during the pandemic (zippers, gloves, pill bottles, scissors).



Fig. 1. Alexandru Potocean, Oana Rusu, Maria Sgârcitu și Teodora Rategan.
Photo by Oana Monica Nae.

A specific fragmental rhythm ensures the transition from this performative context to concrete, realistically-interpreted situations. From the young doctor who has to move because he works in a risk area, to the flat owner, who can no longer put up with the psychological stress or the cramming in her own house; from the businessman who asks to be infected to prove that the virus is harmless, to the Romanian nurse at the retirement home in Italy. Short characteristic scenes create meaning precisely through the multiple perspectives. The message is clear: the privatization may cause the health system (that should be social-oriented) to collapse; however, the speeches and monologues do not favour a sole vision on the truth. As the author suggested, the effects of the sanitary crisis cannot be the same for all of us: vulnerability and poverty become more acute among those who were already affected by these, and we ask whether these appear under various forms among the privileged or, on the contrary, reinforce their position of power.

The play is based on evident contrasts, provoking the (re)thinking of all types of emotions and empathy. The spectators must question and reconceptualize, according to their own system of values, what would normally constitute a form of justice, the ethical gesture, morality. People throw bleach on the doctor's door, so he is forced to leave his home; the landlady who had rented him the flat goes through a crisis ('four zoom calls in three rooms'), and the most significant line is: "Go be a hero at your hospital, not in my house! The battle for survival has begun!" However, the critical distance imposed through the performative character of certain moments, getting in and breaking character does not validate the ethical judgement of all these, as the spectators is the one to decide the culprits for each character's small drama.

The scenic discourse is devised on antithesis – visible in the case of the patients who call 911: an old lady with no one to care for her and in need of food and drugs, the detached, ironic hoaxers in contrast with the spreading and the seriousness of the virus. The same process highlights the contrast between appearance and essence of the private health system (the publicity and cover-up logic vs. the reality of the patient), in the situation showing the morgue nurse's empathy, as she slowly slips on the path of corruption. The public system lacks funds for equipment, the gaps grow

ever wider, leading to the resignation of medical staff, yet the social media-fed public opinion tends to focus on the sexist denigration of women or on the claimed corruption-incompetence rather than on the legitimacy of its opposition. Another revealing aspect comes in the form of the playful moments, based on real facts, discussing the way in which public money goes to waste in useless projects and purchasing procedures: from parks, to overpriced electronics, and Easter decorations in the middle of the pandemic – “we live in a fantasy world, as if there were no pandemic, right here at the city hall, where one can have anything, even if it costs hundreds of thousands of lei”.

Highly varied accents, from playful to comical, pathetic to emotional, or from powerful to rebellious, melt into civil attitudes, intentional fragmentations, songs, blackout, or changes under our eyes. The actor is not only “seen”, but is also the performer who thus directly draws spectators’ attention to the discourse manipulation they have been put through over time. The Brechtian character is assumed as the dominant aesthetic, while the political note of the show is not ideologizing; on the contrary, it refuses to be prescriptive to the benefit of awakening critical thinking.

Scenes such as the one with the Romanian nurse’s painful, acquiescent speech about the countless people who die in the Italian retirement home where she works, or that with the Roma woman living in one of the 170 shacks next to the landfill aim to get to our hearts, but also to finally make us aware of these truths. The political theatre promoted by the team focuses on representativity, especially when it comes to victims and the marginalized. The topic of the Romanian medical system collapsing during the pandemic also includes other socially relevant subthemes that develop very varied characters: the situation of the Romanian education system (“four zoom calls in three rooms”), gender discrimination (in the case of the ICU doctor), the illusion of finding salvation in the private system (“suffering is also not knowing whether you will be able to provide food for your family tomorrow”, “I now have no one”, “I have two children to support through college”), or those who take advantage of the collective suffering by selling overpriced rubbing alcohol, face masks, gloves, protective glasses – “the new currency”.

However, the show does not slip into melodrama, but touches the audience precisely to cause a Brechtian awakening: getting in and breaking character happens under the audience's eyes through minimal lighting and costume changes, spectacular metamorphoses that show how versatile Alexandru Potocean and Oana Rusu are. Moreover, the fresh, original contemporary music, the choreography, the irony and humour dissipate all melodramatic nuances, while amplifying, with notes of assumed cynicism, the seriousness of the themes and situations approached.

In terms of the research behind it, the performances is not aimed to be a mere re-enactment or archive of real situations (symptomatic examples for these techniques are the collage of political speeches, or of the restructuring of the position of businessman Viorel Cataramă). Realities and identities are fictionalized – the story of tycoons or particular social cases are not significant, but the social-scale representativeness of certain categories that have divergent opinions and visions on the same critical situations.

Incapacities and cosmetic changes are shown in parallel to the truth, both fragile and rough, of the system victims. The scene in which Alexandru Potocean shows the audience a young man dependent on dialysis who is forced to transfer from the public to the private health system (in which he is, in fact, cared for by the same medical team as in public hospitals) is created using the same contrast appearance-essence, through a simple musical and scenographic play. The antithesis is built on several levels – between the two discourses – one by the hospital, following the publicity logic, doubled by the narcotizing voice, and the other by Andrei, victim of a cover-up situation, as well as between the words and the actions of the two nurses.

A central element of the performance is the portrait of the doctor outlined on various notes: from a hero's poetic...

Your face in the mirror, Full of dark spots, Your cheeks, two
slices of sweaty meat, Your eyes, two deep holes, Your hands, harsh
wrinkled strips of skin, Your fingers, strips of crushed creases.
You're but traces. Nothing but traces...

To acknowledging his limits in a vulnerable, deficient system:

Our protection – our body! (...) Sacrifice yourselves, for that's why you've chosen the path of medicine! Yesterday we were corrupt, today we're heroes. Second-hand heroes, sacrificed in depleted hospitals! To be able to fight, you should be alive, right?

The image of the realistic, empathic morgue nurse (who disinfects the banknotes given to her as bribery for cleaning the corpses and allows or takes photos of them for their relatives) is representative for the Romanian medical system, which is full of contrasts and in need of urgent saving.

The final scene ensures a circular end to these homonymous performances, by once again bringing to the limelight the political personality most prominent in the 2010 performance, who also inspired the title – Ion Iliescu. The criticism of the medical system is thus meant to find causes. As a pastiche of the final scene of *Richard III* or of the ancient tragedy, which shows the Erinyes, the former Romanian president is haunted by the spirits of the hospitals, the clinics, and the institutes that were gradually closed down by the so-called democratic government, which ruined the social health system.

Juggling between several registers – from tragic to comic, from re-enactment to fictionalization, social representativity or performativeness, by advancing Brechtian means of social and political critique – from distance and fragmentism to songs and multiple perspectives, *Capete înfierbântate 2020* is a fresh performance not only on the pandemic period, but also for the sore points of the Romanian health system.

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