REINSTALLING CULTURE AS COMMON GOOD AND PUBLIC SERVICE

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REINSTALLING CULTURE AS COMMON GOOD AND PUBLIC SERVICE
REINSTAURER LA CULTURE EN TANT QUE BIEN COMMUN ET SERVICE PUBLIC

Issue Editors:

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Foreword of the Issue Editors:
Reinstalling Culture as Common Good
and Public Service

MIKI BRANIȘTE[1] and BOGDÁN ZENKŐ[2]

In more and more countries globally, the common good and public services in social areas such as education and research, health and culture are being targeted by major reforms that seek to impose a different operating system for them, namely that of efficiency in areas that do not have the same metrics as economic sectors. The latest European cultural policy documents, influenced by the paradigm of creativity, emphasize the economic potential of the cultural sector, which appears under the name of cultural industries and is always present in public discourse alongside the creative industries. Culture is seen as a source of creativity, which in turn is a necessary ingredient of innovation, and innovation is seen as a vector of the competitive advantage needed by the European Union in the context of competition in the global creative economy.

The paradigm of creativity operates a series of changes with direct effects on the cultural field in general, but perhaps the most important of them is the change in the mission of art and culture: going from a function of common good and public service dedicated to its citizens, to one in which the stake of its existence is mostly circumscribed by the economic value it has or can have. The capacity of cultural and creative industries to generate

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jobs and contribute to GDP becomes the main value, to the detriment of symbolic and social values. The arts and cultural sector is under economic pressure which may lead to profound changes that may affect its very ethos. Although the economic argument is the one that most appeals to policy-makers when it comes to funding culture, based on the principle of investment that can generate future income (profit), it does not apply to all areas of the cultural sectors that have a public mission: such as independent cultural organisations, public institutions like theatres, museums, libraries, etc.

Building the argument for supporting the artistic and cultural fields in the logic of investments with direct results and moving away from the logic of subsidizing their public mission, deprives them from the value of their ability to anticipate and participate in understanding the transformations of today's society. Digital acceleration, climate and health crisis have complex global social effects that require first and foremost understanding in order to come up with appropriate responses. Art and culture, through their critical capacity, have contributed to the creation of values and alternative models of social production, always accompanying the process of knowledge and understanding of the world.

Since time can no longer be turned back and the separation of culture from the creative industries in public policy making does not seem a viable long-term solution, how can we re-initialize the public service dimension of culture in a society undergoing such profound transformation? How can we rethink the public mission of culture in a context where the trend in European/Western countries is towards the reduction and privatization of the sector through various austerity measures? These questions lead us back towards others such as why do we fund culture and who does/should it serve?

The articles published in this issue can constitute a broad argument for the re-renewal of cultural policies in their own language and spirit, connected to social changes as effects of the current multiple crises, putting an emphasis on culture as a common good and public service.

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Introduction.
Réinstaurer la culture en tant que bien commun et service public : vers une prise de conscience

ŞTEFANA POP-CURŞEU[1]

Il est temps de rouvrir le débat sur la question vitale du partage des valeurs culturelles qui nous unissent *au-delà* et, paradoxalement, *grâce aux* différences et spécificités collectives ou individuelles. Car, en effet, nous assistons depuis quelque temps à un changement de paradigme en ce qui concerne l'approche et la compréhension de la culture, qui tend à être vue à travers la lorgnette de l'efficacité économique et non pas à être embrassée d'un regard panoramique qui dévoilerait les biens communs d'une société qui se reconnaît au sein de ses valeurs humaines, spirituelles et civiques, tout en se réinventant continuellement pour mieux se retrouver.

L'histoire des arts, au sein de cette vaste histoire de l'humanité, nous a montré maintes fois que la culture a atteint ses plus hauts sommets artistiques aux moments où les communautés, fussent-elles rurales ou urbaines, se sont laissé conduire par des forces vitales et symboliques partagées par l'ensemble de la société, mais où le libre apport individuel occupait une place essentielle dans la construction et le soutien organique de ces valeurs partagées. Qu'il s'agisse du siècle d'or de la tragédie et de la comédie antique, du travail minutieux du masque et du costume au Japon ou en Chine, de la gestualité à mille facettes dans le théâtre-danse indien, des statuettes de l'Afrique Noire et de l'Océanie, des costumes folkloriques roumains, de la peinture de la Chapelle Sixtine ou des bas et hauts-reliefs des cathédrales, des architectures de Gaudi ou des sculptures de Niki de St. Phalle, la création artistique a toujours été l'expression d'un carrefour significatif des valeurs civiques des êtres humains,

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en étroit rapport avec leurs semblables, et des valeurs spirituelles des ces mêmes êtres humains en permanent rapport avec le transcendant et l'au-delà, sous toutes ses formes imaginables. Et cela, au sein d'une communauté unie par des liens identitaires, indifféremment de la forme politique ou administrative qui en patronnait le fonctionnement. Que ce soit au sein d'une cité, d'une tribu, d'un village, d'un bourg, d'un cartier, d'une nation où d'une agglomération urbaine, à tout moment de l'histoire, la culture s'est reposée sur l'idée de partage des valeurs relatives au présent, vécu en rapport positif ou négatif avec les membres de la communauté en question, et des valeurs historiques et atemporelles, rétrospectives où projectives, relatives au monde qui entoure et définit l'existence de l'individu au sein de sa communauté.

Pourtant, il est tout aussi vrai qu'avec les grands changements apportés dans la société européenne par les débuts de l'industrialisation, les repères communautaires de la culture ont été ébranlés. Et cela parce que la cohérence de type traditionnel, basée sur une structure hiérarchique très stricte et des lois indiscutables transmises de génération en génération ne se soutenait plus dans un environnement social de plus en plus hétérogène, urbain, où le dépaysement devenait le premier pas de la réinvention de soi et de cette nouvelle société même, sous un soleil différent. C'est alors qu'apparaît le complément moderne du binôme classique : *haute culture* et *culture populaire*, plus précisément la *culture de masse*, qui définit, plus que tout, la deuxième moitié du XXème siècle et le passage vers le XXIème. En même temps, si l'on pense à la naissance des nations modernes au XIXème siècle et aux efforts d'identification et de classification entrepris par les gens de culture afin de tracer les contours identitaires de leur propre nation par rapport aux autres et au sein de la grande société Européenne, puis allant plus loin, universelle, il devient évident que le passage d'une culture communautaire à une culture nationale ne s'est pas fait sans secousses. Il ne s'agit pas de développer le sujet ; puisque les historiens, sociologues et ethnologues s'en sont bien chargés, mais l'exemple de la Roumanie qui se trouve au centre de ce numéro est, il nous semble, parlant. Les secousses furent d'autant plus fortes que la formation de l'esprit national et l'industrialisation se superposaient pendant la deuxième moitié du XIXème et la première du XXème siècle. Comment gérer les sentiments d'appartenance ou de non-appartenance à un groupe social en train de se former ? Comment assister la naissance d'une nouvelle forme de

culture quand les deux premières étaient à peine à l'état de prise de conscience ? La première solution trouvée par des esprits éveillés, intellectuels et hommes politiques en même temps comme Vasile Alecsandri, Nicolae Bălcescu, Mihail Kogălniceanu, a été dans l'éducation et l'institution de repères culturels (construction de théâtres, bibliothèques, écoles, universités). Il s'agit des premières politiques culturelles qui ont commencé à prendre des racines surtout dans les années 1859-1910, avec les grandes réformes des leaders libéraux qui se proposaient d'illuminer les paysans, analphabètes et majoritaires à ce moment de l'histoire.

Dans son article *How Do Cultural Houses and Cultural Hearths Matter? Towards a New Imagination of these Institutions (Comment faire compter les Maisons de la Culture et les Foyers culturels? Vers une nouvelle imagination de ces institutions)*, Irina Botea Bucan, bien que centrée sur la question de l'abandon presque total des maisons de la culture construites pendant la période communiste (1947-1989), reprend aussi l'histoire du début de ces constructions avant ladite période, dès 1897, et de la véritable politique culturelle du Groupe ASTRA (l'Association Transylvaine pour la Littérature et la Culture Roumaine[2]). Ici, il est impossible de ne pas citer la très belle définition de la culture donnée par un des grands sociologues de l'entre-deux guerres, Dimitrie Gusti, qui a conduit ce qu'il appelait « la mission culturelle » dans les villages roumains :

> « Culture » est un mot qui a de nombreuses significations. La poésie, la musique, la religion, la science, les codes, compilent la culture d'une époque et son mode de vie. Mais seul le lien vivant et vécu entre ces biens culturels, créés par les talents et les génies de son temps, et les personnes et les groupes sociaux, donne naissance à la culture acquise, appelée culture personnelle. La culture personnelle de chacun de nous n'est pas héritée ou rigide, mais un effort continu en perpétuel mouvement et devenir... La culture est la faculté gagnée de donner à l'être humain la possibilité de se trouver soi-même à l'intérieur de la réalité dans laquelle il vit et dans laquelle il est fixé par la nature et par la foi, et de construire une vie spirituelle qui lui est propre, à travers la connexion vive avec les biens culturels (artefacts), avec la culture du peuple.[3]

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[2] Valer Moga, *Astra și Societatea: 1918-1930* [Astra et la Société], (Cluj-Napoca: Presses Universitaires de Cluj; 2003).

[3] Dimitrie Gusti, "Idei calauzitoare pentru munca culturala la sate" [Idées constructives pour le travail culturel dans les villages], *Căminul Cultural*, Novembre 1934: 3.

En effet, bien que caractérisée comme « subjective » par l'auteure, cette définition reste incroyablement contemporaine. Elle souligne *le lien vivant et vécu* entre les biens culturels, l'apport de l'*individu*, de l'artiste, sur le même plan que l'apport des collectivités et *des groupes sociaux*, tout en contribuant finalement au bien-être public, un *Dasein* en harmonie avec soi-même et avec le monde environnant. Une faculté *gagnée*, considérée aujourd'hui par la constitution roumaine un « droit » inaliénable[4].

La question qui se pose et dont traitent la plupart des articles du présent volume est de savoir comment résoudre le problème de l'accès à la culture, comment intervenir dans les politiques culturelles nationales, régionales et locales, afin de continuer les bonnes directions qui ont existé au cours de l'histoire et qui, de nos jours, semblent ignorées, oubliées ou mal-interprétées. Comment combler le vide de formes et de contenu qui menace de s'agrandir, faute de subventions suffisantes et d'intérêt de la part de l'Etat ? Et en même temps, comment gérer l'héritage paradoxal de la période communiste pendant laquelle la culture avait l'avantage d'être un bien commun et un service public ouvert à tous, surtout aux plus démunis, mais qui était en fait dûment surveillé et censuré, afin de respecter l'idéologie totalitaire du parti et ne permettre aucune initiative contraire ?

Ainsi, Örs Székely, dans *The Challenge of the Commons in the Post-Socialist Cluj*, traite du besoin de récupérer l'idée des biens communs, dans le contexte de la capitalisation forcenée de la culture après l'échec de l'expérience socialiste étatique dans les pays de l'Est, et accuse la logique des marchés appliquée à la culture qui a conduit à une érosion du concept de biens communs et, par extension, de l'universalité.

Irina Botea Bucan milite pour donner une nouvelle chance aux Maisons de la Culture et Foyers culturels (*cămine culturale*) si nombreux dans les communes, villages et villes roumaines, édifices souvent abandonnés, mais qui se prêteraient à un format institutionnel ouvert et flexible qui pourrait accueillir des actions culturelles publiques pour le bien-être et l'intégration sociale des citoyens, qui devraient être vus moins comme consommateurs et plus comme producteurs culturels.

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[4] Article 33 de la Constitution de la Roumanie. Voir
   http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site2015.page?den=act2_1&par1=2#t2c2s0sba33

Valer Simion Cosma et Theodor Constantiniu présentent les résultats d'une recherche attentive centrée sur la consommation culturelle d'un genre de musique hybride (*muzică populară*), spécifique à la culture de masse dans les régions rurales et industrielles qui s'est développée pendant l'époque communiste et continue de connaître, de manière paradoxale, un grand succès parmi les jeunes. Les explications établissent un lien entre la détérioration de l'infrastructure culturelle dans les zones rurales, la migration transnationale et le développement exponentiel d'une industrie consacrée aux productions récentes de ce genre musical populaire.

Maria Drăghici propose un article inspiré d'une recherche sur le terrain, déroulée à partir de 2006 dans la communauté Rahova-Uranus, menacée d'expulsion pour faire face à des investissements immobiliers. Un groupe d'artistes, composé de Maria Drăghici (artiste visuelle), Gabi Albu (architecte) et de quelques metteurs en scène de théâtre (Miruna Dinu, Irina Gâdiuță, Bogdan Georgescu, Vera Ion, Ioana Păun, David Schwartz) s'est impliqué dans la vie de cette communauté à travers une anthropologie participative, utilisant notamment la méthode de la table ronde. Le but était de générer une prise de conscience des droits de cette communauté et aussi, dans la mesure du possible, d'influencer les politiques publiques en matière de logement. L'utilisation de diverses formes d'art actif, d'art socialement impliqué a également joué dans le même sens.

Mirella Nedelcu-Patureau réalise un panorama de la situation théâtrale en France où le théâtre est perçu comme un service public essentiel, au moins à partir de la révolution de 1789. Au cours du temps, cette idée s'est renforcée et a connu aussi des concrétisations législatives qui sont analysées dans l'article. Le focus de la présentation est sur le théâtre contemporain français, sur les rapports entre les troupes permanentes et les nombreux intermittents du spectacle, sur les modes de financement, ainsi que sur la manière dont la pandémie a impacté le monde du spectacle. Une étude de cas appuie toutes les argumentations et les conclusions de l'auteure, à savoir le festival d'Avignon, avec ses deux branches principales, le IN et le OFF.

L'article de Iulia Popovici essaie de proposer une perspective sur la manière dont les arts du spectacle ont réfléchi les événements qui se sont produits en Roumanie dans les premières décennies après la chute du

communisme. Bizarrement, cette reprise et réflexion n'a pas eu lieu tout de suite et l'on a dû attendre les années 2017-2019 (avant la pandémie de Covid-19) pour voir le théâtre (notamment ce qu'on appelle le secteur indépendant) s'intéresser aux aspects sociaux, économiques et culturels de la transition du communisme à un système démocratique, qui ne n'est pas déroulée sans heurts et sans accidents de parcours. Iulia Popovici brosse un tableau assez général de la tradition des institutions de culture roumaines, qui est utile pour la compréhension nuancée de la problématique traitée.

La recherche de Zenkő Bogdán porte sur le cadre législatif qui régit le fonctionnement du monde du théâtre en Roumanie. Il s'agit de deux ordonnances gouvernementales : OG 21/2007 and OUG 189/2008. Son approche est discursive et sociologique : elle analyse à la fois la constitution du discours concernant les pratiques théâtrales comme pratiques d'intérêt public et les enjeux sociaux et institutionnels de ce discours. Un des points forts de l'article de l'auteure est de faire des renvois aux pratiques législatives et institutionnelles européennes, afin de mettre en évidence les aspects que la législation roumaine pourrait mieux préciser, nuancer ou changer.

Filip Odangiu centre son étude sur un problème de culture théâtrale liée à l'enseignement vocationnel qui fait ressortir les points faibles de l'actuel système Bologne qui encourage non pas le processus d'enseignement et le développement personnel des étudiants, mais la course après les résultats et les débouchés professionnels immédiats. L'exemple de l'étude du masque, essentiel à de nombreux niveaux, mais qui se retrouve souvent abandonné par les écoles de théâtre roumaines (en dehors de celle de Cluj) pour des raisons d'efficacité sur le marché des emplois, devient le centre du débat : faut-il réduire l'éducation universitaire à une fonction de production économique ou bien faut-il lutter pour maintenir la valeur de la recherche intellectuelle et encourager les établissements d'enseignement supérieur à jouer un rôle important dans la promotion du bien public en facilitant le raisonnement, le débat, la promotion de la démocratie et de l'esprit critique ?

Deux dialogues avec des artistes et agents culturels contemporains complètent ce panorama peu optimiste pour ce qui est de la voie empruntée actuellement par les politiques culturelles roumaines et européennes, trop

centrées sur le profit économique, en oubliant le profit humain, civique et spirituel de l'individu au sein de la société. Comment survivre en tant qu'artiste et agir de manière constructive sur cette société s'il y a si peu de place pour l'initiative culturelle, pour l'expression collective ou la culture participative ? Comment croire encore à ce vaste et riche espace de la culture qui n'est que théoriquement un bien commun puisque, en pratique, l'accès à la culture reste très réduit par rapport aux besoin réels de la société contemporaine ? Autant de questions auxquelles Livia Pancu et Raluca Iacob, Răzvan Anton et Mihai Iepure-Górski esquissent de possibles réponses.

Mais toutes ces interrogations restent ouvertes, car il est temps de s'arrêter un instant et de se souvenir à qui appartient la culture et qui sont ses destinataires aussi bien que ses créateurs… il serait temps de réinstaurer la culture en tant que bien commun et service public et laisser le profit économique immédiat aux autres « industries ». N'est-il pas plus profitable de contribuer à l'épanouissement d'une société humaine équilibrée, en harmonie avec elle-même et avec le monde environnant et la nature ? Sans commettre les mêmes erreurs que dans le passé, sans revenir au cauchemar des modèles proletcultistes d'une Europe de l'Est communiste, serait-on capables de réinventer l'espace culturel commun, à même de respecter l'initiative personnelle, l'individualité créative, artistique, au même niveau que le travail en équipe et la libre création collective ? Au-delà des choix et perspectives assumés par les auteurs ici présents, il est certain que la culture est une affaire de politique mais dans le sens d'affaire relevant de la *polis*, de la cité, de la communauté tout entière, et surtout pas, de mon point de vue, une question de droite ou de gauche, de propagande ou d'idéologisation.

Je rêve d'une culture ouverte qui accepte, d'une *open culture*, non pas d'une culture qui annule les différences, d'une *cancel culture* ; je rêve d'une culture qui comprenne et cultive les diversités individuelles et collectives, en les confrontant dans un permanent dialogue. C'est ce qui donne la richesse des peuples et encourage la libre pensée dans un esprit de vraie tolérance et compréhension de l'unicité de chaque être humain.

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STUDIES AND ARTICLES

The Challenge of the Commons in the Post-socialist Cluj

ÖRS SZÉKELY[1]

Abstract: Since the neo-liberal turn of the 1970s and the consequent failure of the state socialist experiment, the functioning of the Eastern European states has increasingly been governed by the rationale of markets. This logic has led to an erosion of the concept of the commons and, by extension, universality. The notion of then alternative but now mainstream culture creates and serves particular class interests under the banner of 'independence' and 'freedom', which aims not to transcend the *status quo* but to preserve it and the property relations on which it is based. My thesis is written as a first step to reclaim the idea of the commons, pointing to the capitalist genesis of the forms in our contemporary culture.

Keywords: commons, art, Cluj, post-socialism, Eastern Europe, class relations, neoliberalism, privatisation of art

The history of Cluj/Kolozsvár after the '89 revolution is the success story of Romanian capitalism. The notorious pyramid scheme of the 1990s, the concentration of capital that resulted from Caritas, gave birth to the technotopia of the "five-star city". Since Cluj did not have, and still does not have, a vast system of artistic institutions (concert halls, museums, etc.), except perhaps for theatres, the cultural needs of the city's new tech-industry middle class had to be met to a large extent by institutions that had neither permanent funding nor a permanent location. During the boom of the 2010s, this was not evident because, on the one hand, the emergence of independent

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art spaces, and the freedom and dynamism of project-based art were a breath of fresh air in the city, shaking up its comfortable art institutions; on the other hand, these art movements also facilitated the gentrification of Cluj, so the city government had every reason to support them.

But ten years later, in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis, this picture is very different. Several institutions with a similar profile have moved or been forced to re-profile their activities due to rising rents (*ZUG Zone*, *Fabrica de Pensule*). The housing of young creatives and intellectuals looking for jobs in the city is increasingly under threat, and the continuing uncertainty of project-based funding is a much greater concern. The current economic downturn shows that without a stable infrastructural base, culture is merely a means of recapitalising the city, and once this is done, the precarious cultural workers and creators can go and 'revitalise' another municipality. However, this was not up to the will of individual creators: for instance, *Fabrica de Pensule* initiated a project to reimagine a nearby green area, the Parcul Feroviarilor/ Vasutas park, involving the local population, aiming to create a space where the townspeople could meet. The plan ultimately failed because the local government did not provide the means for the long-term use of the park (while it did for real estate investors), and also because the form and the channels used by *Fabrica de Pensule* were only aimed at the urban middle class, university students and yuppies.

Behind the plethora of these unfortunate developments lurks an even wider spreading scepticism, and even disillusion regarding the ideas of the 'public'. This is, however, not just a feature of Cluj: in the countries of post-socialist Eastern Europe, welfare systems and the state in general are subject to popular ridicule for a reason. The most contemporary problem, the treatment of the coronavirus pandemic, reveals all existing flaws in state systems like the proverbial drawing of the veterinary horse. At first glance, one might get the impression that the ruling governments do not understand what the (modern welfare) state is for and why it exists. After all, the legitimacy of nation states is – or should be – based on protecting their citizens from vulnerability to market processes, i.e., representing the interests of workers against those of capitalists.

However, neoliberal capitalism, the prevailing economic doctrine since the 1970s, has assigned the exact opposite role to the state. The so-called 'night watchman state' or 'minimal state' is not a team player but a referee, as it guards the rules of the game against the interests of workers, to ensure the free flow of capital. This neoliberal ideology provides the main topos in the beliefs of the post-socialist transition generations: the state is a bad master, taxes are a robbery, and public institutions are a hotbed of laziness, corruption, and incompetence. The question is: where does this great distrust of the state and the public sector stem from, given that the market transition is the main cause of the disintegration of the fabric of post-socialist societies in Eastern Europe?

In search of explanations, let us examine the idea that equates the concepts of 'state' and 'public.' The state socialist experiment was based on the idea that the state is in fact *res publica*, and that the goods within the territory of the state should be the property of its citizens. In reality, however, centralised state control was in many cases another form of private property to which certain communities were denied access. This was exacerbated by the fact that the state, which was supposed to represent and defend the common cause and the common goods of all citizens, tended to maintain the cohesion of the majority against vulnerable groups of citizens over time.

The next stage in this fatal blurring of 'state' and 'public' came with the neoliberal turn, during which the countries of the Eastern European state-socialist bloc became increasingly embedded into the capitalist world economic system. The example of Hungary is emblematic in this respect: here, a group of intellectuals, mainly economists, looked to the autonomy of market processes as the solution to the fading state socialism and its discredited party apparatus. In the resulting debate, technocratic professionalism emerged as an alternative to tainted politics, and this binary opposition was reflected in the realm of culture as well.

The analysis of culture in terms of the common good is informed by a particular historical development: the emergence of socialist ideas. While the "communist invariant" had already existed in history, manifesting through slave uprisings, peasant revolts, in short, the efforts to liberate man from his unworthy and subjugated condition, the communist hypothesis materialised and became visible in modernity, starting with the French Revolution. The

various iterations of the movement (state socialism in the East, strong communist and social democratic parties in the West, and the Nordic model of the welfare state) made it a fundamental assumption – at least on a theoretical level – that education must become a prerogative of society as a whole, because it lifts man out of his intellectual minority. The universal human emancipation thus sought was seen as a political act, and its material conditions were ultimately to be secured through the transformation of property relations (the transformation of private property into public property).

However, Alain Badiou, writing on the communist hypothesis, made a distinction that will prove important for us later, when he differentiated between the emancipatory tradition of socialism/ communism and the class politics that later led to the emergence of liberal democracies.[2] The intellectual elites who took an active part in the regime changes in Eastern Europe lost confidence in this former communist tradition when they substituted morality for politics as their reference point. In Romania at least, this boiled over at the moment of the revolution of '89, which was defined by the historical conjunction of the revolution against a state socialist regime that was increasingly functioning as state capitalism, and the restoration of liberal democracy, i.e., capitalism.

The tools and ambitions of those who replaced the Ceauşescu regime sought to remedy state socialism with the very medicine that had produced the symptoms of its crisis in the first place: capitalism. The slogans propagated by the dissident intelligentsia who later took part in the regime change[3] – the universal values of freedom and humanism – were detached

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[2] "From the beginning, the communist hypothesis in no way coincided with the 'democratic' hypothesis that would lead to present-day parliamentarism. It subsumes a different history and different events. What seems important and creative when illuminated by the communist hypothesis is different in kind from what bourgeois-democratic historiography selects. That is indeed why Marx, giving materialist foundations to the first effective great sequence of the modern politics of emancipation, both took over the word 'communism' and distanced himself from any kind of democratic 'politicism' by maintaining, after the lesson of the Paris Commune, that the bourgeois state, no matter how democratic, must be destroyed." – Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, transl. David Fernbach (London – New York: Verso, 2008), 100-101.

[3] Ana Bazac, "Az antisztálinista disszidensek és a 'vox intelligent(s)iae'" [Anti-stalinist dissidents and the 'vox intelligent(s)iae'], *Eszmélet*, no. 60 (2003): 68-80.

from their emancipatory political context: freedom was articulated as the anarchy of market activity, and the right to private property. The positive concept of freedom (freedom *to*) of the communist hypothesis was replaced by the negative concept of freedom (freedom *from*) of classical liberalism.[4] Furthermore, the interpretation of universal human rights as exclusively political rights rendered the concept of social rights (the right to housing, education, free and quality health care) meaningless. In Romania, the crisis of the market economy in 2008 and during the coronavirus pandemic revealed all this with sobering clarity. It also showed how the cultural conceptions of the regime-changing intelligentsia, which turned its back on the concepts of public good and public property, led to a dead end.

It was an illusion to hope for the recovery or resurgence of culture's role in shaping society on a foundation that was either inherently sceptical of any idea of the 'public,' or only interested in maintaining pseudo-communities of different identities immune to political contestation or dissent. The ideas of universalism and emancipatory culture that permeate the new context have been transformed into their own antithesis. A typical narrative was, for example, the opposition between private culture, privatised and scaled down by the intellectual establishment, but still presented as a public affair, and mass culture, industrially produced and cheaply accessible but 'democratic' (a well-known example is the middle-class contempt for *manele*). Mass culture, imbued with the ideology of neoliberalism, has given itself to be interpreted from above as the tendency of barbarians to be barbarians, its popularity being underpinned by the laws of supply and demand (cf. the self-colonising view), not accommodating for real alternatives and access to culture.

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[4] "For the 'freedom' of the men who are alive now is the freedom of the individual isolated by the fact of property which both reifies and is itself reified. It is a freedom vis-á vis the other (no less isolated) individuals. A freedom of the egoist, of the man who cuts himself off from others, a freedom for which solidarity and community exist at best only as ineffectual 'regulative ideas'." (…) [I]n contemporary bourgeois society individual freedom can only be corrupt and corrupting because it is a case of unilateral privilege based on the unfreedom of others, this desire must entail the renunciation of individual freedom." – Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, transl. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1972), 315.

This false dichotomy obscured how the turn to mass culture was partly caused by the fact that high culture claimed universality only at face level, while increasingly becoming the exclusive vehicle for the historical experience and worldview of the middle class. All other social classes remained invisible to it, except when the authors borrowed and used the voices of subaltern groups (cf. 'voice-giving'), while the latter's voice became increasingly structurally impossible to be heard. High culture has increasingly become a rear-guard struggle of intellectual elites[5] clinging to their declining class power against the movement that has been reinterpreting culture itself along the logic of private property and the market, a development which the elites have been more than willing to help set in motion. This also brings into play another opposition, in which professional art is increasingly seen as fulfilling the particular aims of the art institutional system, as opposed to the public service, which is becoming an entertainment industry. The 'commons' in this sense is at best a necessary compromise, an aesthetically inferior deviation from high art.[6]

The particularisation of the commons was accompanied by another development, the depoliticisation of politics. After '89, asking questions about economic production within the framework of politics was considered taboo. Thus, politics, which should have been mobilised for the now privatised common good, has become – and could only be – a substitute and a simulacrum. The privatisation of high culture has thus contributed to the further discrediting

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[5] The retreat and regression of high culture into the art of particularist, middle-class sensibilities can be traced in the literature of Eastern European countries dealing with the traumas of state socialism, whose authors and reception focus symptomatically on the experience of the terror in the eighties, drawing inspiration from it for the continued justification of their anti-communism.

[6] In the second half of the 2000s, some members of the audience started a petition against the management of the Hungarian State Theatre of Cluj/Kolozsvár, criticising the theatre's programming policy and use of space. The debate that ensued diverted attention from the responsibility of an increasingly closed (in the spatial sense as well) artistic/intellectual elite by falsely contrasting the bourgeois and exclusive studio performances favoured by the theatre with the conservative, entertaining large-scale performances demanded by the dissatisfied. This elite has in fact discouraged a section of its audience away from the theatre by making performances both linguistically and structurally inaccessible to them, basing their prestige and aura on professional awards.

of notions of universality, the public, etc. The Hungarian counterculture of the 1970s and 1980s has been conceived in the spirit of this depoliticisation. The legitimacy of the configuration of Hungarian culture that emerged at this time (and remained dominant until the Orbán regime took the stage) came from its opposition to the official discourse of the party-state. Suffice to refer here to Péter Esterházy's *bon mot*, according to which the writer should think not in terms of the people and the nation, but in terms of subject and proposition.[7]

The form and nomenclature of this configuration, which has emerged in different ways and at different paces in different Eastern European countries, is telling: independent workshops and residential theatres, alternative bands, civic initiatives, etc., whose contemporary reincarnations and imitations are also independent and alternative. While initially the more fortunate members of the public could turn here from occupied and appropriated public spaces and institutions, the default, canon-forming spaces and institutions of the arts were increasingly structured by this provisional solution after the market transition. This has had incalculable consequences in terms of access to art: the artistic field has been relegated to the private and semi-public spheres, becoming mainly a field for the reproduction and initiation of intellectuals; it has favoured a *l'art pour l'art* logic, perpetuated the mystical authoritarianism of the master-disciple idea and distanced itself from society whilst performing a spectacular (in a Debordian sense) display of 'social sensitivity.'

After '89, public institutions, having internalised the market approach and its functioning, became its best disciples. As a result, the state has increasingly become the embodiment of the private interests that have taken it captive, in the eyes of the classes that have suffered every crisis since the change of regime. The hybrid nature of state institutions (both depositories of a market logic and bearers of the remnants of a community approach) and the systematic extraction of resources have made them more chaotic than their

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[7] Péter Esterházy, "*A szavak csodálatos életéből*" [From the Marvellous Life of Words], Digitális Irodalmi Akadémia, February 2, 2022, https://reader.dia.hu/document/Esterhazy_Peter-A_szavak_ csodalatos_eletebol-395 – The notions of 'people' and 'nation' refer to two traditions in Hungarian political history: while 'nation' is essentially linked to a bourgeois, nationalist vocabulary, 'the people' is inscribed in a plebeian-socialist matrix.

market counterparts, and this has made purely market-based models more attractive to creators in the artistic field. In what follows I will illustrate the impact of such a model on a local scale.

One of the most impactful performances of the Cluj-based independent theatre venue, Reactor, was *Miracolul de la Cluj*,[8] which tells the story of how Cluj became a real "treasure city" through the Caritas pyramid scheme, the primitive accumulation of capital. Part of the uproar was due to the municipality's refusal to allow an exhibition of the production's material in the city centre,[9] while the performance itself used a language of documentary theatre that, like investigative journalism, was accessible to only a few. In this case, the stripped-down language of documentary theatre acts a distancing from the sentimentality of cabarets, telenovelas, and the world of folk-pop music (i.e., the genre of the lower classes). A fact-centred view of the world anchors the understanding of things in individual intellectual effort, naturalising the social and historical nature of perception.[10]

If we accept that our perception of the world is not only optically filtering the information that reaches us, we will be suspicious of the depoliticised universalism that rears its head in another, also Reactor-based performance, *În sfârşit sfârşitul*.[11] The play addresses a very real social crisis, the climate apocalypse and the resulting climate anxiety, the planet-wide scale of which leaves no doubt that it is a matter of public concern. Or is it?

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[8] David Schwartz director, *Miracolul de la Cluj* by Petro Ionescu, Reactor – a place for creative experiment, Cluj, premiered on September 28, 2017.

[9] Lucia Mărneanu, Petro Ionescu, "re.miracolul", *Scena.ro – Revista de artele spectacolului*, May 14, 2021, https://revistascena.ro/arte/re-miracolul-2/.

[10] "The world which is given to the individual and which he must accept and take into account is, in its present and continuing form, a product of the activity of society as a whole (…). Even the way they see and hear is inseparable from the social life- process as it has evolved over the millennia. The facts which our senses present to us are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ. Both are not simply natural; they are shaped by human activity" – Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, transl. Matthew J. O'Connell and others (New York: Continuum, 2002), 200.

[11] Diana Dragoş director, *În sfârşit sfârşitul* by Brînduşa Ban, Reactor – a place for creative experiment, Cluj, premiered on September 29, 2020.

The performance takes us through the dilemmas of young urban twenty- or thirty-somethings, finding the root of their troubles in the human psyche, in general selfishness, thus trapping the characters in themselves. The *didaxis* is finally represented on stage by no less a figure than Gaia, who, as an embodiment of the neoliberal appropriation of natural religions and syncretic mythological elements (cf. James Cameron's *Avatar*), paralyses those capable of reflection, hammering into them a devastating sense of guilt. This guilt, felt by both the characters and the spectators, knows only the categories of universal selfishness and individual responsibility, which makes it impossible for people to connect with each other, to allow for dissent and mistakes, to act together politically. The trope of guilt thus serves both to make the intellectuals and the middle class acknowledge their responsibility and to shift it from the political to the moral sphere, immediately transforming it into a universal human responsibility.

In order to regain the credibility of the commons, we must first dismantle the illusions that ensure the non-ideological, universal and neutral character of contemporary art forms and means of expression, i.e., we must re-politicise art forms. The immanent analysis of the content of art must be supplemented by an interpretation of art forms as social constructs, because the content-generating capacity of a given form does not merely function as a system that channels the artistic tradition or individual creative abilities, but also reveals a social subconscious.

In this struggle we can seek inspiration from resurging theories, like that of the 'commons', and from the practical approaches of the municipalist tradition. While the former helps us with a historical contextualisation of the ever-reconfiguring matrix made up by class, race and gender (for a wider anthropological analysis see e.g. the work of Donald M. Nonini, while David Harvey mobilizes the tools of geography and urban planning in the struggle for emancipation), the latter addresses the issue from the perspective of working practical models (see the Kurdish municipalist approach or Barcelona en Comú).[12] In Cluj, both are necessary, as capitalist development is inherently

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[12] David Harvey, *Rebel Cities. From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London – New York: Verso, 2012).

based on sets of exclusion (racial segregation of urban spaces in a very affluent city, highly ethnicised townscape erasing the presence of non-dominant communities, class-based access to newly built, mostly private infrastructure, and a car centred approach to urban transportation and development which prohibits and/or regulates access of non-productive citizens).

In this context we urgently need to expand our understanding of art, questioning the paradigm of the author as a singular producer and a lonely romantic genius. As a collective creation, art is akin to both pedagogy and play, capable of mediating different conflicts as well. In this respect, the conjunction of Greek theatre with the ancient polis is as good a model for our imagination as the Proletcult movement in the revolutionary era of the Soviet Union. Instead making individual creators dependent of state- or market-funded scholarships and grants, we need collectives of creators who, as organic intellectuals (in Gramscian terms) are by definition the organisers of communities. Pruning emancipatory theories of urban space out of social sciences and grafting them into the realm of arts would ultimately unleash the very social imagination that is currently shackled by the inconceivability of existing alternatives. The advocated symbiosis of artist and community is the only solution to the cynical parnassianism of the bourgeois intelligentsia and the desperate rightward shift of local intellectuals, abandoned by the state in the long period of post-socialist transition. Only this can revitalise the claim to universalism they claim to represent.

Since the nation-state, the last historical form of political community, has sided with capital, the space and time necessary to re-politicise art must be re-established. The way to establish time is through an exploration of the progressive traditions of the past, revealing the communist invariant they contain. To use Walter Benjamin's expression, we need to shelter our dead from fascism, which, with its absolute presentism, builds every alternative into the fabric of the existing system.[13] The creation of space can be assisted

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[13] "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it 'the way it really was '(Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its

by municipalist models[14] that, unlike nation states, no longer connect imagined communities through ideological state apparatuses, but in which art makes available and accessible to community members all the means through which *poiesis*, the human capacity to create and transform the world, can manifest itself.

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receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it." – Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" in Selected Writings. Volume 4. 1938-1940, transl. Edmund Jephcott and Others (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 389-401.

[14] Murray Bookchin, "*Libertarian Municipalism: An Overview*", The Anarchist Library, February 3, 2022, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-libertarian-municipalism-an-overview.

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How Do Cultural Houses and Cultural Hearths Matter? Towards a New Imagination of These Institutions

IRINA BOTEA BUCAN[1]

Abstract: Whether resembling vacated shells or remaining fully functional, either commercially repurposed or relatively busy with paid or unpaid 'leisure activities', cultural houses and cultural hearths are still present throughout Romania, usually in the centre of towns and communes. Designed to centralise cultural and informal educational activities within a socio-geographic area, they enabled regional authorities to both survey the leisure time of the population along with providing a foundation for the production of the 'new' multidimensional socialist subject within a collective context. But immediately after 1990 they were seen as either a nuisance or a historic reminder that needed to be turned into an absence, a void: the epic but invisible institution.

The article makes a case for why they deserve another chance in a punctual and specific re-evaluation that ultimately desires to insert a number of critical points for a possible re-imagination of these models of organization in which both stable and transitory communities collectively produce what we may call culture. It provides an extended timeline/lineage that opposes one-dimensional readings of the institutions as objects of communist propaganda. It argues that the ways in which they were planned during 1955-1989 counteracts contemporary monetarist visions towards the role of such cultural institutions. Ultimately, cultural houses were part of a national plan that considered culture as central to the 'common good' rather than a laissez-faire approach that places

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economic efficiency above all else. Paradoxically, more contemporary versions of cultural houses and hearths are often far more restrictive than their early predecessors and this situation can and should change.

Keywords: cultural houses, architecture, social imagination, monetization of culture, entanglement

An Extended Timeline and Examples of Differentiated Practices

Two main historical and entangled lineages can be traced: workers' circles and clubs, outcomes of early socialist ideas dating from the second half of the 1800s and a later, pro-active, liberal-sociological programme of modernising the rural areas that was funded and supported by the Romanian Royal Foundation (1934-45), and led by the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti. By the end of the 1800s, the General Association of All the Workers in Romania had initiated a number of *workers' clubs* [*clubul muncitorilor*] and houses of the people [*casa poporului*] in the main industrial cities of Bucharest, Iași, Ploiești, Galați, and Craiova. Places for social gatherings and for the exchange of ideas, they had the clear purpose of empowering the workers and peasants to represent themselves through the distribution of socialist ideas.[2]

Social and political forms of organisation and action were clearly entangled with cultural events in the workers' circles and clubs. While early documents reveal[3] their focus on social and political urgencies, there was

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[2] The 1890 manifesto of the Bucharest Workers Club stipulated that the club was a "society" whose aim is to "solidify brotherhood and solidarity in general amongst all the workers in the country" and to "improve the material, moral and political state of being of the workers, and to organise them around their own party." The manifesto also stated that a newspaper would be produced and distributed to all of the contributors, plus a library would be constituted together with a bakery. When the "society" (cultural institution) acquired more stability, a doctor would then be employed for its members. Additionally, other production workshops would be developed, such as a butchery and a clothes shop. See Ion Popescu-Puturi and Deac, Augustin. *Documents of the Workers Movement in Romania* (Bucharest: Editura Politica, 1977-78), 631.

[3] Ion Popescu-Puturi and Deac, Augustin. *Documents of the Workers Movement in Romania*, (Bucharest: Editura Politica, 1977-78).

also an interest in introducing various cultural activities, such as: literary circles, various forms of theatre, conferences, and film projections.[4]

Even before the formation and consolidation of the Socialist Democrat Workers Party in Romania (1893), the workers' clubs were organising cultural-propagandistic manifestations. A clear example of such activities was mentioned by Ioan Massof in his article *Theatre in the Workers' Clubs*: "In Bucharest, in 1880, poetry was recited alongside discussions on 'What is the Workers Party and what does it want to achieve?' ". Actors from the National Theatre were invited to recite poetry as an introduction to staging plays that were written by a club member. For example, the famous actors Constantin Nottara and Ion Brezeanu came to recite poems on the 1st January 1891[5]. In 1894, at the same workers' club in Bucharest, piano concerts were taking place as background music for a *tableau vivant* initiated by the workers representing "Liberty's Marriage with the Worker". A popular ball was also organised that incorporated poetry readings and two further examples of *tableaux vivants*: "Universal Vote" and "The Triumph of Social Democracy".

The multiple roles and facilitation of social encounters is also to be found in the history of their rural counterpart, the cultural hearths, whose history can similarly be traced back to the late 1800s. This article does not insist on revealing this early history as it can be found in the writings of Raluca Mușat.[6] She sketches the lineage of cultural hearths (*cămin cultural*) by including early educational reforms and the first cultural hearth initiatives that appeared at the turn of the 20th Century (1897-1910) under the supervision of Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu and Spiru Haret, liberal social reformers and nationalist leaders, whose central philosophical goals were to enlighten the peasantry. These initial programmes were later continued by various

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[4] In his article "Theatre in the Workers Club," Ioan Massof mentions that "[I]n Craiova, at the Workers Club on the 20th December 1894, after a musical literary soiree, a production with the miraculous camera followed, a kind of primitive cinema", *Theatre magazine*, no. 4 (April 1971): 19.

[5] *Theatre magazine*, no. 4 (April 1971): 19.

[6] Raluca Mușat. "Cultural Politics in the Heart of the Village: The Institutionalisation of the Camin Cultural in Interwar Romania," *New Europe College Ştefan Odobleja Program Yearbook 2012-2013* (2013): 149-180. http://212.146.115.237/data/pdfs/publications/odobleja/2012-2013/RALUCA_MUSAT.pdf.

philanthropic associations, such as ASTRA (Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and Culture), and ultimately culminated in the extensive sociological programme of Dimitrie Gusti.

In order to better understand the reality of the villages in Romania, Dimitrie Gusti organised applied sociological, interdisciplinary (holistic) and transformative surveys through 'descending upon' villages with a large team of students and academic specialists. The new cultural hearths were then tailored according to the needs and desires of the local peasants, filtered and assembled by members of his team, and documented in comprehensive sociological studies entitled Sociological Monographs [Monografii Sociologice].

Special editions of literary books and a magazine called *Căminul Cultural* [Cultural Hearth] were published and distributed within the new hearths. A library, a stage, a museum and a radio were some of their core elements. The magazine *Căminul Cultural* contained specialised texts surveying the newly created institutions and various 'guide-articles' that would hopefully educate the peasants on various material culture issues, for instance: personal hygiene, crop cultivation, harvesting, and the preservation of traditional culture. Within a special edition of the magazine, a guide on how to make a village museum and preserve the so-called 'authentic folklore culture' was signed by Grigore Antipa, famous Romanian zoologist and museologist who was the first to introduce the use of dioramas into a museum setting and who administered the Romanian Natural History Museum for 51 years.

Significantly, the four distinctive categories of culture employed within the cultural hearths, and that appear in the initial documentation of these institutions were: *labour culture*, *health culture*, *culture of the mind* and *culture of the soul*.

In order to cover as much ground as possible Dimitrie Gusti invited various specialists (doctors, lawyers, writers, sociologists) who would contribute and complete a village inventory according to the four identified categories of culture. However, his subjective and personal idea of culture had a major impact on the structuring of these incipient socio-cultural institutions. In the initial edition of *Căminul Cultural* (November 1934), published after Carol II's speech, Gusti's first article "Guiding Ideas for the Cultural Work in the Villages" outlined the cultural 'mission' of the sociological programme and also detailed what he meant by culture:

"Culture" is a word with many meanings. Poetry, music, religion, science, codes, compile the culture of an epoch, and its lifestyle. But only the vivid and lived connection between these cultural goods, created by the talents and geniuses of its time, and people and social groups, give birth to the acquired culture, called personal culture. The personal culture of each of us it is not inherited or stiff, but a continuous endeavour in perpetual movement and becoming… Culture is the faculty earned to give to the human the possibility of finding himself inside the reality in which he is living and is fixated by nature and faith and to build a spiritual life of his own, through the vivid connection with the cultural goods (artifacts), peoples' culture.[7]

Gusti laid out a methodology based upon five main guiding ideas: the right to culture for the 14 million rural inhabitants of Romania (out of a total population of 18 million); the need to educate social leaders in the villages; the need to understand regional culture; personally acquired culture as a continuous endeavour; the four different categories of culture form 'the total village culture.'

The total village culture should equally embrace: Health (village and peasant hygiene, physical culture), Work (economical regional work, women in the household, life in a cooperative), Soul (moral-religious and artistic life), Mind (spreading books through the libraries, gatherings, museum, theatre, radio, and so on).[8]

His liberal ideology was arguably only one part of these initiatives, as his closest collaborator Henri Stahl, a self-declared Marxist who was highly influenced by Dobrogeanu Gherea, practiced a legal-participative[9] sociology; constantly embedding his research findings within a historical context and often actively participating in peasants' revolts[10] against local landowners.

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[7] Dimitrie Gusti, "Guiding Ideas for the Cultural Work in the Villages", *Căminul Cultural*, November 1934: 3.

[8] Dimitrie Gusti, "Guiding Ideas for the Cultural Work in the Villages*,"* 3.

[9] I call it 'participative' because of the methodology he applied during his field research.

[10] Henri H. Stahl, *Amintiri și gânduri* (*Memories and Thoughts)*, (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1981), 10.

Stahl described Gusti's sociological programme as a 'real turning point' and considered the cultural programme as having a reformist character (reflective of Spiru Haret's cultural programme) that viewed culture as an agent capable of resolving social class conflict; the radical newness of it being built upon the thesis that "any social reform is based on previous scientific knowledge of the realities that must be reformed,"[11] and therefore it was a (new) type of reformism that combined both knowledge and action.

Crucially, the historically observable and documented lineage shows that these cultural institutions not only preceded, but also continued on after the Romanian Communist Party governing period (1945-1989); counteracting 'post-socialist' narratives[12] that identify the so-called communist period as a socio-political 'historical interruption' and representing a cultural colonization imported from the USSR. Therefore, cultural houses and hearths cannot be simply branded as purely being a dictatorial and colonial imposition. Thus, such propaganda-focused narratives are evidently brought into question, and a strict connection with this period alone obscures their extended history and influence.

A counter-narrative to this perspective could well argue that not only did Romania have its own tradition of Marxist discourse and actions prior to 1945, but also that the history and functioning of cultural houses and cultural hearths contains a substantial wealth of individual and collective experience rooted in community-based agency and self-defining cultural volition. The intersection of such multiple agencies becomes even clearer when individual accounts are taken into consideration.

Numbers Count: Planning a Cultural House or Cultural Hearth after 1945

Following the post-WW2 political changes, there commenced a period of rapid expansion and growth in both the numbers and categories of cultural houses and hearths throughout Romania.

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[11] Henri H. Stahl, *Amintiri și gânduri* (*Memories and Thoughts*), 8.

[12] Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România. Raport final* [*Final Report of the Presidential Committee for Analysing the Romanian Communist Dictatorship*], Bucharest, 2006.

This numerical enlargement also registered a diversification in their sizes, formats and institutional allegiances. Such variants included: union cultural houses (casa de cultură a sindicatelor), youth houses (casa tineretului), student cultural houses (casa de cultură a studenților), cultural hearths (căminul cultural) and palaces of culture (palatul culturii).

An obsession with numbers and their multiplication can be observed throughout the Romanian Communist Party leadership period and literally seen as a major factor in the scientific methods of planning and their results. The article *Beyond Numbers* by Dan Deșliu, published in the *România Liberă* newspaper in 1963, gives an insight into the numerical growth of the cultural hearths (cămine culturale) after 1945(fig. 1)[13]. For instance, in 1948 there were 4,931 cultural hearths, whereas in 1962 10,137 such places existed.

Number counting also played a distinctive role both in the classification, and more importantly, in the actual planning and architectural designs of the new cultural institutions. For instance, each cultural house, hearth or club[14] encompassed two main areas that were delimitated by two distinctive functions: the performance or the 'spectacle' hall (*sala de spectacole*) and the club rooms (*clubul propriu-zis*). The performance hall, which occupied the main and most important space in almost all of the cultural houses, is fundamentally a theatre space/stage with large seating areas and flexible spaces designed to accommodate a range of displays, exhibitions or presentations. In comparison, the club rooms, or alternatively a club area, were generally much smaller spaces and their varying dimensions were essentially designed to accommodate participatory sessions, formal lessons, rehearsals and workshops. Specific activities included: visual arts, photography groups, cinema clubs, amateur radio, music sessions, popular dance, ballet, technical activities, theatre and literary circles.

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[13] *România Liberă* [*Free Romania*] 3rd January, 1963.

[14] Cultural houses were also named "clubs" in 1956, marking a connection with the Soviet model of workers' clubs, see Georgeta Ghițulescu and Gherghel, Radu, *Manualul Arhitectului Proiectant* [*Manual of Designing Architect]*, (Bucharest: Editura Tehnică,1956): 106-121.

Fig. 1. Translation of the text under the published image in *România Liberă*: "The favourite meeting place of the collectivised peasants, after work is the village cultural house, the afternoons of questions and answers, spoken diaries, the competitions 'Who Knows Wins', the mass agrarian zoo-technical education, the books, the artistic shows are all appreciated by the citizens. This is why many communes in our countries have built new buildings for the cultural houses, their number being increased considerably."

According to the number of seats located in the main performance hall, these cultural institutions were divided into three categories: union clubs (200-800 seats), city clubs (300-600 seats), and village clubs (100-400 seats). Hence, the actual size of a cultural house was expressed through the number of seats placed *in-situ*. A fixed ratio specific for each category, was used to calculate the relationship between the capacity of the performance hall vis-a-vis the capacity of the club or house. In planning a specific cultural institution, the size of the active (working) population was carefully identified and calculated, including the actual nature of the work they were engaged in. The outcome

of the 'capacity planning formula' often resulted in many such clubs being placed in close proximity to the local factories, or the main workplaces, but away from any potential sources of pollution and inside the residential housing zones.

According to the official instruction manual for architectural designers, the planning of a cultural hearth or house would not be based upon a system of financial efficiency, but rather centred around the number of people that could be accommodated. The architectural manual gave detailed suggestions relating to the core components of a cultural house: what rooms you need to incorporate in response to the overall size of the cultural house, appropriate spaces for specific activities, electrical installations and the required voltage/circuits for each structural partition, how to calculate the visible area around the stage or projection screen, how to plan for good acoustics in each room through considering the sizes, proportions, materials and furniture used within the identified space.

Tabela 1

Cluburi sindicale

Sala de spectacol	Numărul locurilor				
	200	300	400	600	800
Club propriu-zis	120	200	300	600	800
Raport	1:0,6	1:0,6	1:0,75	1:1	1:1

Tabela 2

Cluburi orășenești, raionale sau regionale

Sala de spectacol	Numărul locurilor			
	300	400	500	600
Club propriu-zis	200	270	300	350
Raport	1:0,66	1:0,65	1:0,6	1:0,59

Tabela 3

Cluburi sătești (cămine culturale)

Sala de spectacol	Numărul locurilor			
	100	200	300	400
Club propriu-zis	28	90	110	140
Raport	1:0,28	1:0,45	1:0,37	1:0,35

Fig. 2. Page from the quoted *Manual of an Architectural Designer*, with the number of seats according to the type of clubs.

This planning by numbers did not exclude various other factors influencing, temporally as well as topographically, the realization of new cultural houses. It must also be noted that the period of 1945-89 was neither politically or economically homogeneous. Moreover, national political leadership changes within the international context, such as the death of the communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej in 1965 and Nicolae Ceaușescu's restructuring of Romania in 1968 and the July thesis in 1971, directly impacted upon projection of the institutions into their immediate future.

Several distinctive phases can thus be distinguished: the decade of standardization (1945-55), multifunctional spaces that accommodated multiple activities (1955-59), incorporation of local and national motifs (1955 onwards), cultural houses regarded as 'unique objects of architecture' (1960s-70s), youth cultural houses gain prominence (1981-89). Following the July thesis, even larger scale cultural houses were built and the union cultural houses became the 'stars' of the period (1974-81).[15] Each of these distinctive phases contained ongoing discussions on the rapport between monumentality, functionality and intimacy.

Fig. 3. Table Determining the Capacity of the Clubs, according to the number of workers working in two or three shifts, in the quoted *Manual of Architectural Designer*, vol. 2.

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[15] Irina Tulbure, *The Factory of Facts and Other (Unspoken) Stories* (Bucharest: Asociatia Pepluspatru, 2017), 46-73.

How do They Actually Matter?

"Culture is a good that belongs to everybody." (Tia Șerbanescu, journalist)
"Culture is a supreme form of freedom." (Maria Porumbescu, architect)

The extended history and schema of 'planning by numbers' attempts to delay the expedient and simplistic dismissal of cultural houses and hearths as instrumentalized centres of 'brain washing' and the dissemination of 'empty' communist propaganda, (to use all the tropes in one sentence). Nevertheless, they did not sit outside of state control. Wherein, alongside individual and community driven activities, dry, empty political discourse and political education forums did find an institutional place. A level of surveillance and control was present. But the way they embodied a very specific holistic understanding of culture is of great importance today, when we are witnessing the turn to a complete monetarization of cultural activities, and the dismissal of the need to subsidize culture.

Cultural houses and hearths ultimately refracted the vision that culture belongs to everybody and that cultural democracy is about the immediate, ubiquitous, access to culture and therein represents the transformation of the population from consumers into producers. The view corresponds to the 1976 Council of Europe statement on culture. A report commissioned by the Oslo Ad Hoc Council of Europe Conference of Ministers with Responsibility for Cultural Affairs stated "Cultural democracy implies placing importance on amateurs and on creating conditions which will allow people to choose to be active participants rather than just passive receivers of culture."[16]

Tia Șerbănescu's journalist investigation, written in 1977[17], following the changing views of culture stipulated by the Council of Europe Conference, punctuates the specific place of cultural houses within the national cultural-educational plan:

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[16] James Bau Graves, *Cultural Democracy, The Arts, Community and the Public Purpose*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 11.

[17] Tia Șerbănescu, "Cultural Houses File," *Tribuna României*, (15 January 1977): 8.

> The activity of the cultural houses must be understood as a constitutive part of an element of the network of cultural-educational institutions, organised at the level of concrete human collectives. […] The institutions were connected with the idea of educating the masses, reflecting the cultural policy of constituting a national system of mass cultural-educational activity.[18]

She even mentions the idea of the democratisation of culture in connection to the cultural houses: "Democratisation of culture presupposes direct and wide access of the masses to culture without formalities or inhibitions."[19] Șerbănescu considered them to be the cultural institution with the most diverse profile of activities, whose purpose was to transform the consumption of culture into creative acts.

Not only supplementing the absence of theatre, opera-houses, cinemas and museums in remote locations, they induced a transformation towards a collective authoring of culture. Literally these were the places where participatory and negotiated learning could take place. Professional actors would collaborate or coordinate amateur theatre performances. Visual artists would initiate reoccurring workshops and laboratories (cercuri). Professional writers would be invited to literary circles. The goal was not the professionalisation of amateur artists but the multidimensional construction of the individual within group interactions. Șerbănescu mentions four clear functions of these institutions: *instructive-educational*, to transmit an informational flux to educate the receivers; *developing creativity*, to develop the participant's creativity, to support it in order for the individual to feel fulfilled; *human-intercommunication* to establish new types of human relations, which start with cultural collaboration in order to consolidate social relations; *recreational-entertainment*, encompassing all forms of social consciousness and the full development of the individual.

Cultural houses, depending on their specificity and size, included cultural and scientific universities, dance bands, artistic brigades and applied laboratories, as well as sports facilities. Culture was performed through accessing forms of 'high culture' (visual arts, films, books, theatre) alongside

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[18] Tia Șerbănescu, "Cultural Houses File," 8.
[19] Tia Șerbănescu, "Cultural Houses File," 8.

the material culture of everyday life (cultivation of crops, hygiene, domestic repairs, amateur-radio). Sports were also included in the idea of culture. A wide range of individual and collective sports were practised: football, swimming, ping-pong, bowling, tennis, volleyball, handball.

Fig. 4. Cultural Houses from Buzău, Alba Iulia and Tulcea. Children's show (Craiova), ballet (Sibiu), visual art class (Roman). *Tribuna Romaniei*, 1977

Casa de cultură a sindicatelor din Vaslui : cinefilii amatori sint surprinşi în plină activitate (sus). Noua casă de cultură a sindicatelor din Tîrgovişte

Fig. 5. Union Cultural House in Vaslui: amateur cineclub.
Tribuna României magazine, 1977

The amateur movement was highly encouraged. Previous to the grand focus on *Cântarea Romaniei* [Singing of Romania], the national amateur festival initiated in 1976, a variety of other significant festivals existed: the National Competition of Amateur Groups, Popular Art Biennial, Dialogues on the Same Stage, Biennial of Amateur Theatre[20] and the Biennial of Cultural Centres (a competition for musical and dance groups)[21]. Regional union

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[20] In 1966, *Scânteia* [The Spark] newspaper mentions the amateur theatre festival organized in Bucharest every 2 years. See Radu Constantinescu, Ion Cuchi, Ion Chiujdea, "The Style of Cultural Activities in Cultural Houses," *Scânteia* (April 7th 1966): 7.

[21] Both mentioned in the Romanian Free Europe files, item No 2130/1965, under the file of Cultural Centres.

cultural houses scheduled in their repertoire a special programme performed by amateur groups that were initiated in the cultural hearths. For example, in 1974, Radio Bucharest mentioned that in the Suceava district there was an "initiation of a permanent programme at the cultural house in Suceava, for the best performance groups from the rural localities in the district". [22] While widening participation was declared as their main goal, and while a focused analysis of what communities were allowed in is not the subject of this text, it must be mentioned that small cities and village cultural houses would accommodate Roma performances, while the big cities would not include such performances[23] in their programmes.

Cultural houses are performative and contradictory places and spaces; small intimate rooms and corridors exist alongside monumental performance halls. Intimacy and familiarity overlap with the 'big scale' of the presentation mode… the spectacle. The open spaces are not only connected to monumentality and voluminous architectural grandeur but they also embody a desire to signify culture as a 'supreme form of freedom'. Interviewed by Ecaterina Oproiu, Maria Porumbescu and Nicolae Porumbescu, the architects of Baia-Mare Cultural House, explain the reasons behind their decisions:

> I have struggled to respect all the functions but at the same time to raise everything to significations, so that we can create indeed the feeling that culture is a supreme form of freedom. We didn't want anything closed or isolated. All the functions needed to be entangled. Spaces must flow one into the other. Look at the doors. I didn't want them to be objects that produce a closing, but possibilities of openings. Look at the windows that we embedded in the walls of the library. We wanted the library not to be isolated, closed like in a shell. We wanted people to feel the presence of books even before entering the library. Look at the staircase surrounded by balconies. Young, old, people, we wanted them all to walk, to look at their city, the green hills and to think… Everything was thought as a perpetual fluidity of space and form, meaning the fluidity of thought, the liberty of thought.[24]

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[22] 23rd May 1974. Radio Bucharest, from OSA Archive. 812 Article in Amateur Artist file.

[23] Elaborated upon in more depth in a film in progress, featuring Julius Rostas by Irina Botea Bucan and Jon Dean.

[24] Oproiu, Ecaterina, *3x8 Plus infinit*, (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1975), 95-117.

Highly programmed spaces, they also included non-activities, allowing for informal encounters and a non-observed 'hidden' leisure time. Architect Mihail Cafee argues for disorder:

> People should come here to meet, to relax (recreate) and in this presence, spontaneous cultural activities could be ignited: exhibitions, concerts, projections, discussions rather than conferences. The cultural house has to be opened all of the time, to have an intimate atmosphere, that can only be achieved by giving up monumentality and luxury. Participation for pleasure not induced or mandatory, argues for some spontaneity and disorder. […] The main appeal would be constituted by the possibility of non-activity, attraction for the loss of time, favoring empty chit-chat and unpretentious contact [..] Less glamour, more clutter, a clever programme disguised in a lack of programme."[25]

Re-entangling Pre-entangled Institutions

Cultural houses and hearths are still institutions of entanglement.[26] Historical, political and economic contexts condition their functioning. Most of them are big, and they need to be subsidized. Cultural policies, material culture, architectural design, personal and collective accounts intra-act;[27] generating entangled re-imaginations of them. They capture and accommodate contradictory experiences. Because of their previous status and collective role, these 'voided' institutions are now, within the present, filled with a multiplicity of personal stories and shared anecdotes. Mental images, sometimes only

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[25] "Ancheta revistei. Zece întrebari cu privire la casele de cultură," [Magazine Survey: 10 Questions Related to Cultural Houses], *Architecture magazine*, no. 2 (1974): 13.

[26] Referencing the way Barad uses entanglement, as Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2007.

[27] Intra-act is taken from Karen Barad: "Intra-action signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies: Distinct entities do not precede but rather emerge though their intra-action (distinct in a relational, not an absolute sense), agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements." See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2007, 33.

existing in the minds of previous participants, have the potential to produce a heterogenous re-articulation of the usage and capacity of such cultural houses when allowed time, space and an appropriate medium through which they can be shared.

Recorded[28] personal accounts reveal a vibrant past-image of these cultural centres: narratives populated with opportunities and fond inspiration, stories of where people were encouraged to draw and paint, learnt how to play the guitar in the village, of cinema caravans brought on "Molotov" trucks and projected onto the outside wall of the cultural hearth that was too small for everybody to enter, unique occasions for Roma theatre performances, radio-amateur groups, cine-clubs, photo-studios, ping-pong championships, workers' forum theatre-like performances, realms of celebratory moments and actions.

Today, they may be gradually coming back into the visible. There seems to be a new and emerging focus upon them. An interest in the aesthetic-specificities as architectural objects is noted;[29] cultural projects funded by the Administration of National Cultural Funds (AFCN)[30] for the reconstruction, rehabilitation or even the construction of new cultural centres.

However, they may need more than just renovation. They may instead need to be 'unfinished', and by that, I mean re-deciphered, re-engaged by active-habitation. Reclaimed through belonging to everybody. What would people want and expect from them today?

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[28] For the past five years, my artistic and academic research on the cultural houses includes listening, provoking conversations and recording evocations of various active participants in cultural houses from Câmpina, Satu Mare, Rădești, Boldești-Scaieni, Slon, Ploieşti, Roman, Bucharest, Iași, Sibiu, Budapest, Dunaújváros, Paks and Singapore. I have also interviewed my mother who was assigned to work in the Tămășeni Cultural Hearth (1959) when she got hired to be the teacher of the village school. Her testimony as well as my own experience in the Cultural House of the Students Preoteasa in Bucharest inspired the whole research.

[29] Irina Tulbure, *The Factory of Facts and other (Unspoken) Stories*. (Bucharest: Asociatia Pepluspatru, 2017), 46-73.

[30] The National Investment Company (CNI) a joint stock company, under the authority of the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, highlighted in its activity report the rehabilitation, reconstruction or construction of 235 cultural hearths and cultural centres for the period of 2019-2021.

In Hungary, artists produced experimental educational programmes and have consistently chosen to exhibit 'progressive' work in the small galleries of cultural houses. In 2015, Jon Dean and I conducted several interviews in Hungary for experimental films that were looking into a comparative history of similar institutions. All of our interviewees called the art exhibited in cultural houses 'progressive', versus the conservative art that was permitted to be exhibited in the official museums and galleries, mostly portraits and landscape paintings. Artists like Imre Bak and Károly Hopp-Halász were trained cultural workers that activated and structured these spaces. Their history is inspiring.

Previously, Romanian architects were already predicting the need for unknown activities. Can we re-imagine these places full of free-activities? Can we imagine replacing the need to go to the very badly designed shopping malls by producing an alternative space of gathering where even the collective re-definition of culture can be considered? Can they be the new hubs and repositories of collective and subjective imagination so necessary for producing any kind of alternative change? Can there be such shifts within the present context?

Fifteen kilometres away from here, where I am writing this text, in front of the cultural house (Casa de Cultură) in Mioveni, people meet and roam. They are already there in front, waiting to be invited in. Book-clubs, micro-cinemas, theatre, experimental education, not compulsive play but a break, a stop, in the 'work-time'. The pandemic has given us both acceleration and deceleration, but ultimately filled us with a sense of 'slowing down', an imprecise and hard to remember delay. We have become a lot more 'local' and we have travelled less. Maybe we need, again, a collective home. Mostly empty even after renovation, they still promise… they still exist.

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IRINA BOTEA BUCAN (b. Ploiesti, Romania) has developed a symbiotic artist-educator-researcher methodological framework that consistently questions dominant socio-political ideas and centralizes human and non-human agency as a vehicle for meaning. Choosing to act in diverse contexts, such as: academic institutions, alternative galleries, museums, art biennials, film festivals and generic community centers; she is currently focusing on the de-centralization of cultural discourses and the possibility of sustaining creative differentiation that arguably exists outside of a dominant hegemonic system of values and critique. Presently she teaches

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"It Was All that I Could Think of."
Migration, Youth, and Folkloric Entertainment
in Rural Romania

VALER SIMION COSMA[1], THEODOR CONSTANTINIU[2]

Abstract: A hybrid that originated in the traditional peasant music, Romanian popular music (*muzică populară*), as it is known from radio broadcasts, TV shows or live performances from all around the country, was developed by mixing the village music of the twentieth century with techniques and principles borrowed from the classical repertoire and other light genres. *Muzica populară* emerged in the interwar years, but was perfected and regulated by the communist regime, becoming one of the favorite genres of the rural and urban working class and, nowadays, it continues to have a great appeal among all age categories. Our aim was to discover the motivations that lead the village youth of Romania to involve themselves in activities dealing with *muzica populară*, in particular, or with folklore and traditions, in general. To accomplish this, we conducted several interviews with young people from Sălaj county, from which a few patterns emerged: the rapid familiarization with the genre due to specific TV channels; the acquired taste due to grandparents raising their grandchildren in the absence of the parents who migrated in the 2000s; the expressed devotion to the local culture and their willingness and duty to preserve and promote it. We can also explain the success of *muzică populară* among young people by structural factors that are at work in the whole society, namely the lack of interest of post-communist authorities in building and/or maintaining a cultural and educational infrastructure in the rural areas. Thus, this paper aims to explore contemporary rural pop culture by considering the

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connection between the deterioration of the cultural infrastructure in rural areas, transnational migration and the exponential development of an industry devoted to the recent *muzică populară*.

Keywords: muzică populară, folklore music, folk traditions, rural youth, cultural infrastructure, transnational migration, niche TV channels.

1. Introduction

Born in the same year (1986), but raised in different social backgrounds, one in the city, the other in a village, as adolescents we shared a similar perspective on *muzică populară*.[3] It appeared to us like a relic from a bygone era (the Communist regime) and a sign of backwardness and peasantness, a part of an inferior culture. We figured out that it was the music of the older generation, the generation of our parents and grandparents, and that it would slowly fade away and eventually disappear completely when these generations were to vanish. During the nineties and the first years of the next decade, there was a whole anti-peasantness and anti-*muzică populară* trend among teenagers and young people. We were very interested in urban culture and international music. Of course, there were also youngsters in the village who still enjoyed *muzică populară*, especially among those who were not able to go to high schools and universities in the nearby towns. They were "the peasants"[4] since after graduating elementary school, they usually

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[3] The literal English translation would be *popular music*, but its meaning in Romanian is noticeably different from the English/American equivalent. A better term would be folkloric music, but this would create further confusions since folklore is used both for the orally transmitted peasant music and for the stage music of the professional ensembles. For this reason, we decided to keep the term *muzică populară* untranslated.

[4] In that context, "peasant" was used (and it is still used) as a pejorative term, meaning uncivilized, backward, in opposition to those emancipated and open to a cosmopolitan culture. In a famous book on the concept of peasant, Michael Kearney discusses this: "for unlike the categorical absoluteness of the primitive, which is the primary conceptual antipode of the modem, the peasant is located on the margin—geographic, historical, and classificatory—between them. [...] Within anthropology and within peasant studies in general, 'the peasant' was constructed from residual images of pre-industrial European and colonial

worked in the family household (agriculture and raising animals) or were employed as construction or forest workers in the village or elsewhere in Romania. But, contrary to our expectations, not only did *muzică populară* not slowly fall out of fashion, it gained wider popularity after, during the 2000s and beyond. Moreover, it has also been adopted by many young people, rural and urban, born after the Revolution of 1989.

Beyond the research that each of us carries out on our own, our interest in folk music/*muzică populară* and the ethno-revival phenomenon of the last two decades has to do with the belief that peasant music, and peasant culture as a whole, must be detached from the nationalist-ethnicist paradigm that has been instrumentalizing and distorting them for more than a century. This paper is a first step, with preliminary results, in what we intend to be a thorough research at the end of which we intend to demonstrate that *muzică populară* is an important piece in the understanding of the contemporary Romanian village.

The aim of this paper is to explain the perpetuation and dissemination of *muzică populară* among the Romanian youth living today in the countryside. More specifically, we wanted to understand what their motivations are, not only for listening to *muzică populară*, but also for involving themselves in various activities related to folklore and tradition, or for pursuing careers as instrumentalists or singers. At the same time, we intend to explore the many ways in which transnational migration stimulated an identity and folkloric revival that led to *muzică populară*'s strong adherence among the rural youth, and contributed to the development of a music and folklore entertainment industry.

With these ideas in mind, we conducted interviews with young adults and teenagers from a few villages situated in the Sălaj county (north-western Romania): Valcăul de Jos, Chieşd, Măerişte, and Marin. We were primarily interested in established or aspiring soloists, but we also worked with folk dancers and cultural animators. Our interviews were complemented by a

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rural society. Informed by romantic sensibilities and modern nationalist imaginations, these images are anachronisms, but nevertheless they remain robust anachronisms even up to the end of the twentieth century." Michael Kearney, *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry. Anthropology in Global Perspective* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 25.

constant ethnography of Facebook pages, groups, and profiles, in order to explore the everyday intersections between popular culture and new media.[5]

The subject of *muzică populară* has not attracted much scholarly attention. Romanian ethnomusicologists rarely mention it, and when they do, they do it only to remind the reader that it was the product of the communist regime's propaganda, a kind of social and cultural engineering, a falsification of the genuine peasant music that has no worth, and the sole mission of which was the indoctrination of the population.[6] Sociologists, anthropologists, or historians were not much interested in the subject either. With a few exceptions[7], they preferred to focus on other musical genres such as manele[8], electronica[9], rock[10]

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[5] David Beer, *Popular Culture and New Media, The Politics of Circulation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 1-2.

[6] Speranța Rădulescu, "Traditional Music and Ethnomusicology: Under Political Pressure: The Romanian Case", *Anthropology Today*, 13 (1997): 8–12; Speranța Rădulescu, *Peisaje muzicale în România secolului XX* [*Musical Landscapes in XXth century Romania*] (București: Editura Muzicală, 2002).

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[8] Victor A. Stoichiță, "Vous trouvez cela drôle? Ironie et jeux relationnels dans une musique de fête en Roumanie", *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie* 26 (2013): 193-208; M. Beissinger, A. Giurchescu, S. Rădulescu (eds.), Manele *in Romania: Cultural Expression and Social Meaning in Balkan Popular Music* (Bowman and Littlefield 2016); Adrian Schiop, *Șmecherie și lume rea. Universul social al manelelor* [*Trickery and bad people. The social universe of manele*] (Chișinău: Cartier, 2017); Ruxandra Trandafiroiu, "Manele, symbolic geography and music cosmopolitanism in Romania", *Popular Music History* 11, no. 1 (2018): 61-79.

[9] Raluca Nagy and Cristina Plecadite, "Consuming Electronic Music in Bucharest: «Low-Profile» Locations and Their Public", *Ethnologia Balkanica* 10 (2006): 317–334; Ruxandra Trandafiroiu, "A Tale of Two (or #EverMore) Festivals: Electronic Music in a Transylvanian Town," in *Eastern European Popular Music in a Transnational Context*, ed. Ewa Mazierska and Zsolt Győri (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 213-237.

[10] Doru Pop, "Pop-Rock and Propaganda During the Ceaușescu Regime in Communist Romania", in *Popular Music in Eastern Europe. Breaking the Cold War Paradigm*, ed. Ewa Mazierska (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 51-67; Caius Dobrescu, *The Phoenix that could not rise. Rock culture in Romania, 1960–1989* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2011).

or pop music in general.[11] The absence of dedicated studies is even more surprising since *muzică populară* has a respectable age and a significant fan base, being at least as popular as the aforementioned genres.

2. *Muzica populară*: definition, brief history, and its current status

Muzică populară is a hybrid between Romanian peasant music and Western art music harmonic, contrapuntal, and orchestration techniques. Its actual design comes from the early days of the communist regime, but its origins can be traced to the interwar period. In a way, we can say that *muzică populară* is "the stage version" of the orally transmitted village music. Its shape, as we know it today, was designed in the second half of the twentieth century, and its features are, to various degrees, still identifiable today. One of the most significant changes that it operated was the creation of a new type of ensemble. Unlike the small (and almost exclusively) instrumental groups that were responsible for dance music all over the country, the new music was performed by a much larger collective: the instrumental section was extended and disposed of according to the principles of the symphonic orchestra, with melody and accompaniment compartments, grouped by instrument family (violin, viola, cello, clarinet, trumpet, panpipe, accordion, cymbal, drum, double bass); in many cases, the instrumental ensemble was joined by a dance group; in front of all these, there was a soloist (singer or instrumentalist, male or female). Sometimes, the music consisted of arrangements of genuine folk tunes, but most of the time, the songs were composed by professionals trying to replicate peasant music and also to transform it into a superior artistic expression. Not only was the music elaborated according to a general pattern (lively, up-tempo melodies with an optimistic character), but its lyrics were often used to praise the Party, its leadership, or the remarkable achievements of the Communist regime.

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[11] Claudiu Constantin Oancea, "Popular Music and Official Culture in 1980s Socialist Romania", in *New Europe College Yearbook* (2016-2017): 165-195; Elena Trifan "The Romanian music scene: The social economy of pop music in the post-socialist period", in *Eastern European Music Industries and Policies after the Fall of Communism. From State Control to Free Market*, ed. Patryk Galuszka (Routledge, 2021), 155-171.

Although Romanian ethnomusicologists usually refer to *muzică populară* as a strategy used by the socialist state to distort and replace the traditional music of the villages, the careful design of this genre was justified by Marxist philosophy of history: being a part of a society's superstructure, folk music was supposed to evolve as a result of the changes that took place within the base of a society.[12] Thus, *muzică populară* could be seen as the natural outcome of the transition from a capitalist to a socialist mode of production that happened in Romania from 1947 onwards. As such, it had to embody all the achievements of the new socialist state and to deliver higher satisfaction for the "new man". But, besides the theoretical justifications, *muzică populară* was a far-reaching vehicle for state propaganda, recent research accurately describing it as state representation music.[13] To successfully fulfil this role, it had to be a compelling product, to offer grandiose shows of a repertoire from each of the country's ethnographic regions. This was achieved through a strictly controlled performance, in which a conductor and a choreographer decided all the details. As a result, all the variation and improvisation inherent in a rural band were eliminated. Moreover, the music of the folk orchestra is often polished with classical music related effects, such as frequent and uncommon chord changes, tremolos and uncommon legato for violins, striking dynamic contrasts, literate arrangements with dialogues and countermelodies between different groups of instruments.[14] These improvements applied to the peasant music were meant to demonstrate the superiority of *muzică populară* as the result of a superior form of social organization, and to advance this genre closer to the ideal of Western art music.[15]

Being the state-sanctioned form of folk music, *muzică populară* was widely disseminated through radio and TV programs. Folk music and dance

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[12] Theodor Constantiniu, "Folklore and Dialectical Materialism. A case study of Ethnomusicological Research in Communist Romania", *Studia UBB Musica*, 65, no. 2 (2020): 263.

[13] Rădulescu, *Peisaje muzicale*, 85.

[14] Rădulescu, *Peisaje muzicale*, 84.

[15] Constantiniu, "Folklore and Dialectical Materialism", 264. For a similar discussion of folk orchestras in Eastern Europe see Donna Buchanan, "Metaphors of Power, Metaphors of Truth: The Politics of Music Professionalism in Bulgarian Folk Orchestras", *Ethnomusicology*, 39, no. 3 (1995): 381-416; Jennifer R. Cash, "Reviving Moldova: Social and Political Dimensions of Contemporary Folkloric Performances", *The Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 22, no. 1 (2004): 61-76.

ensembles were a regular presence in the rural and urban houses of culture, in different festivities and celebrations, and in festivals and contests held at a local, regional, or national level. Due to its spectacular design (large groups of performers wearing standardized traditional costumes, synchronized dance moves and instrumental playing, virtuosity and technical skill, celebrity singers) and the prestige that the state endowed it with, this genre was readily embraced by large segments of the population. Most of them were peasants or members of the new urban working class who had strong ties with the village. For the general public, there was no clear boundary between *muzică populară* and the traditional music of the rural communities, but rather a continuity. Soon, *muzică populară* became synonymous with folk music and was considered as a representative of the Romanian musical tradition. The peasants[16] themselves internalized the standards of the folkloric spectacles and began to evaluate their own musical performances in relation to the model put forward by the more prestigious *muzică populară*.

After the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, the fate of this genre was similar to that of the entire pop industry.[17] In the first few years, it continued the same path out of inertia, with the same radio and TV shows, the same soloists, ensembles, promoters, and performance venues. However, the new political and economic climate favoured, beginning with the late 90s, the steady expansion of an industry of *muzică populară*. In the context of a market economy, the state lost its monopoly over the music industry but, in the case of *muzică populară*, it continued to fund music and dance ensembles in each county, to organize concerts, festivals, and contests (via subordinate institutions such as national radio and television, town halls or county councils). But, along with the state's continuing role in supporting this music, the industry was constantly developing due to the growing number of aspiring artists and to the private initiatives in establishing recording studios, record labels, radio stations and TV channels exclusively (or almost exclusively) dedicated to *muzică populară*. The demand for this type of music increased: it was popular at weddings or other family

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[16] By peasants, we refer here to the individuals that live in rural areas, living from agriculture and wage labour in the village, in the nearby cities or abroad, but who present/represent themselves as peasants, although they are living in a post-peasant society. For a more extensive discussion of the evolution of the concept of the peasant, see Kearney, *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry*.

[17] Trifan, "The Romanian music scene", 158.

celebrations, listened to during public festivities, TV, or radio broadcasts. This interest led to the prominence of a multitude of singers ready to perform in all these settings, with a repertoire diverse enough to accommodate various demands (in the absence of the socialist state's strict supervision, the artists can now freely choose the songs and the style they want to perform) and able to gather a small or medium instrumental group to accompany them.

3. The factors that contribute to the popularity of *muzică populară*

Faced with a larger and more diverse offer, the public continued to support the genre and to enjoy it live, on TV, or on the internet. For all these people, *muzică populară* is a musical genre which they still associate with the country's traditional culture and with the symbolic construct of a Romanian national identity, which presents the peasant as the repository of the "spirit of the nation" - and the peasant culture as the national culture *par excellence*.[18] Seen from the perspective of the evolution of *muzică populară* and folkloristic entertainment, the rural world became, after 2000, the subject of a "synthetic traditionalism". The concept of traditional synthetic is used by anthropologist Florin Dumitrescu in relation to the advertising industry and consumer products, defined as "traditional" in order to describe a "mimicked character, reconstituted in factory conditions and widely distributed."[19] This kind of synthetic tradition is what characterizes the folk entertainment industry: televisions, radios, production studios and a whole network of events and contests design their programs and promotion campaigns with a mixture of *neosămănătorism*,[20] traditionalism, and urban pop culture with thick touches of glamor.

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[18] Valer Simion Cosma, "Inventing the Romanian Peasant in Transylvania during the Nineteenth Century." In *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, eds. Ştefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga, Maria Sass (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019).

[19] Florin Dumitrescu, *Tradiții la superofertă. Între socoteala din agenție și cea de la raft* [*Traditions on super offer. Between the agency and the shelf price*] (București: Cartier, 2015), 12.

[20] By this term we mean an approach to the peasant world and its culture in a manner dominated by romanticism, *passeisme*, and idyllicism, reinforcing a fake opposition between rurality and modernity. This concept refers to *sămănătorism*, a political and aesthetic direction from the first decades of the twentieth century in Romania. See Zigu Ornea, *Sămănătorismul* (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Română, 1998).

The last decade witnessed the increasing interest, within the social sciences, for analysis of the neoliberal transformations in the former communist countries.[21] That led to the examination of the reforms implemented in Romania,[22] along with their social and cultural impact. These economic and political transformations have been "embedded in cultural formations and (…) appropriated by the subjects through a wide range of popular practices, narratives and perspectives on how we need to rethink our self and daily life in new socio-economic contexts. The issue of professional and personal success, competitiveness and entrepreneurship, specific to capitalist society, is an essential element of these cultural legitimacies"[23] and a central part of a popular culture based on a "business ontology" that has become hegemonic especially in the last decade.[24] This hegemony is also visible in the *muzică populară* industry

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[21] Vladimir Pasti, *Noul capitalism românesc* [*New Romanian Capitalism*] (Iași: Polirom, 2006); Daniela Gabor, *Central Banking and Financialization. A Romanian Account of How Eastern Europe Became Subprime*, (Springer: 2010); David A. Kideckel, *România postsocialistă. Munca, trupul și cultura clasei muncitoare* [*Post-socialist Romania. Work, the body and class culture*] (Iași: Polirom, 2010); Cornel Ban, *Dependență și dezvoltare. Economia politică a capitalismului românesc* [*Addiction and development. The political economy of Romanian capitalism*] (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2014); Cornel Ban, *Ruling Ideas. How Global Neoliberalism Goes Local* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Florin Poenaru, *Locuri comune. Clasă, anticomunism, stânga* [*Common places. Class, Anti-communism, the Left*] (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2017); Cătălin Augustin Stoica, *România Continuă. Schimbare și adaptare în comunism și postcomunism* [*Romania Continues. Change and adaptation in communism and post-communism*] (București: Humanitas, 2018).

[22] These reforms aimed at Romania's transition to a market economy and have been implemented in the last three decades, with moments of radicalization at the end of the nineties and at the end of the following decade. Once the direction was established, the reforms were gradually normalized and assumed by all the political parties that ruled in different formulas, aiming by multiple means to facilitate large capital investments and deregulate the labor market. The financial crisis of 2008-2009 amplifies the asymmetry between capital and labor, the solution chosen by the rulers of that time being an even stronger deregulation of the labor market, in the sense of labor flexibility. The measures have had a major impact on making workers more precarious and intensifying their feelings of insecurity about their jobs. See Sorin Gog, Anca Simionca, "Introducere [Introduction]", *Noile subiectivități ale capitalismului global. Spiritualitate, dezvoltare personală și transformări neoliberale în Români*a. [*The new subjectivities of global capitalism. Spirituality, personal development and neoliberal transformations in Romania*] Sorin Gog, Anca Simionca, eds. (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2020) 10-11.

[23] Gog, Simionca, "Introducere", 13.

[24] Mark Fisher, *Capitalism Realism. Is There No Alternative?* (Hampshire: Zero Books, 2009) 17.

and among the youth participating in this category of entertainment, both as artists and consumers.

If we want to explain the success of this music in the post socialist years, we have to take into account the evolution of both supply and demand that shaped the industry of *muzică populară* in the context of the economic, political, social and cultural transformations of the last three decades. We chose to examine two of the most important factors of this relationship, namely the establishment of niche television channels (on the side of supply) and the Romanians' massive transnational migration (on the side of demand).

3.1. Niche television and radio stations

After the fall of communism, cable television rapidly expanded throughout the country, fostering the establishment of local private media initiatives. The first TV channel dedicated to folk music, Etno TV, first aired in 2002 and was owned by a controversial politician and businessman. In the next decade, several similar initiatives emerged: Favorit TV (2004), Taraf TV (2005, dedicated exclusively to *manele*), Hora TV (2008, a regional television, running in Transylvania, based in Zalău, Sălaj county). Along with the TV channels, there are also radio stations: Antena Satelor (mostly with *muzică populară* and, since 2006, with national coverage), Radio Someș and Radio Balada, both with regional coverage.

The appearance of these niche TV stations marked a shift in the way the public of *muzică populară* was conceived: while in the communist years the broadcasts of the national television (TVR) were addressed to the whole nation (as the shows themselves intended to portray the nation), in post-communism, cable TV allowed the targeting a segment of the population without the need to appeal to the entire nation.[25] In the new context, niche television had to tailor its programs to respond to the requirements of its target audience, without being too concerned with questions of musical style and "authenticity". Thus, TV stations dedicated to *muzică populară* evolved in the middle ground between the strictly regulated folklore of the communist period and the glamour and

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[25] Urdea, "Folklore Music on Romanian TV", 41-42.

consumerism of the free market.[26] Although targeted to a specific public, niche television channels still equate the shows of *muzică populară* with the premodern village, with its traditions and culture, and with the *nation* at large. In general, the artists and the public continue to assume the same claims of "authenticity" made in the previous regime, claims that contribute to the legitimation of this genre as representative for a Romanian identity. As a distinct musical genre, *muzică populară* is shaped by television, because "through television, we see a particular articulation of the genre, from the last decades of communism to the period of niche television channels."[27]

Presented with a generous TV offer, Romanians do not hold back from making the most of it. According to European statistics, they are among the top TV consumers (in number of hours spent watching TV) on the continent. Since 2007, the Romanians watching television daily counted for approximatively 90% of the total population, with a notable decrease only in 2018 to 79%. When asked to name their favourite cultural broadcast on TV, most of the respondents mentioned the *muzică populară* and etno music shows, or programmes dedicated to rural subjects and problems.[28] Although radio listening decreased since 2007 (from 2007 to 2019 there are 27% less households with a radio), the preferences of the listeners are also directed towards *muzică populară* and etno.[29] The Romanians' appetite for folkloric entertainment is undeniable and the niche TV stations established after 2000 have capitalized on it, and also contributed to its satisfaction and propagation. However, as the statistics demonstrate, the patterns of musical consumption were continually diversifying in the 2006-2016 decade: if in 2006 *muzică populară*, ethno, Romanian light music[30] and *manele* dominated the top of the most listened to genres, with high

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[26] Urdea, "Folklore Music on Romanian TV", 43.

[27] Urdea, "Folklore Music on Romanian TV", 49.

[28] Ioana Ceobanu, Anda Becuț Marinescu, "Consumul de conținut media la TV și Radio. Preferințe și așteptări [Consumption of media content on TV and Radio. Preferences and expectations], Carmen Croitoru and Anda Becuț Marinescu (coord.) *Barometrul de consum cultural 2019. Experiența și practicile culturale de timp liber*, [*Cultural Consumption Barometer 2019. Cultural leisure experience and practices*]. (București: Universul Academic, 2020), 98-99.

[29] Ceobanu and Becuț Marinescu, "Consumul de conținut media", 105.

[30] The expression "light music" is used here to describe the type of pop music that was common in Romania before 1989. This genre was aired on radio and television and produced the first generations of celebrity pop stars.

percentages and at great distance above the other genres, such as Romanian and Western pop, classical or blues gradually make their way into the rankings, sometimes with percentages close to those at the top.[31]

3.2. Transnational Migration

At first glance, the association between migration, the countryside and *muzică populară* leads us to think that the lyricists and composers involved in the music production of the last two decades have allocated a generous space to migration and the way the migrants deal with working abroad, with their longing for home and the various hardships they face. Whether we refer to *manele*, or to ethno music, or to the wider category of *muzică populară*, migration is present as a topic in many songs, even in some very well-known ones, developing a rich repertoire over time. In addition, the consolidation over the last two decades of some Romanian communities in different areas of Spain, Italy, Germany, and other countries has determined the constant organization of tours with famous and popular Romanian artists.

But beyond these somehow obvious aspects, migration has marked the production and consumption of *muzică populară* in other ways, being one of the processes that have shaped and are still shaping the local rural worlds and Romanian society in multiple ways and on multiple layers. With the lifting of visas for Romanian citizens, in the context of negotiations for Romania's accession to the European Union, external migration increases exponentially. Leaving to work abroad became the main or the only solution for those who found themselves jobless in the context of deindustrialization and shock therapy that pervaded the second half of the nineties.[32] In 2005, the level of remittances increased more than 35 times compared to the previous period

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[31] Anda Becuț, Elena Trifan, "Practici și preferințe contemporane de consum în muzică și dans" [Contemporary consumption practices and preferences in music and dance], Carmen Croitoru, Anda Becuț (coord.), *Barometrul de consum cultural 2016. O radiografiere a practicilor de consum cultural* [*Cultural Consumption Barometer 2016. An X-ray of cultural consumption practices*] (București: Pro Universitaria, 2017), 253.

[32] István Horváth, "The Culture of Migration of Rural Romanian Youth," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34:5 (2008), 775-777; Cornel Ban, *Dependență și dezvoltare*, 163-165; David A. Kideckel, *România Postsocialistă*, 67-77.

(1999-2004), when external migration was significantly lower.[33] According to Dumitru Sandu, in the first two decades, more than a third of Romania's households, about 2.5 million, had at least one member abroad and about one-fifth of households had at least one member who worked abroad.[34] For the rural youth of the last two decades, who grew up in a society deeply dominated by the culture of migration, an episode of migration has become the ritual of entering adulthood,[35] replacing the military stage or the employment in the local labour market.

When migration became a mass phenomenon, rural administrations began to organize festivities during the summer as a way of gathering the community and preserving the local identity. During these holidays, along with dance and pop music, *muzică populară* and almost everything related to folklore and traditions played an essential role, being an impetus for the organization or re-establishment of local folk-dance ensembles. This category of events has contributed to the development of networks and has come to play an important role in the evolution of the folk entertainment industry, becoming, along with radio and TV channels, ramps for launching young talents and a way to see the famous stars of *muzică populară* live. In other words, transnational migration has contributed to the development of a new market for music consumption through communities abroad (from CDs to tours) and has funded domestic consumption and industry, both through community events organized in villages and towns, as well as through the

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[33] Dumitru Sandu, *Lumile sociale ale migrației* [*Social worlds of migration*] (Iași: Polirom, 2010) 15; Dumitru Sandu, "Migrația temporară în străinătate." [Temporary migration abroad] *Demografia României* [*Romania's demography*], Vasile Ghețău ed. (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2018) 248.

[34] See Dumitru Sandu, *Lumile sociale* (2010) 84, 87, 92, 100, 101; Dumitru Sandu "Migrația temporară" (2018) 248-249; Ciprian Iftimoaei, Ionuț Cristian Baciu "Analiza statistică a migrației externe după aderarea României la Uniunea Europeană," [Statistical analysis of external migration after Romania's accession to the European Union] *Romanian Statistical Review -* Supplement No. 12 (Bucharest, 2018) 174; *Anuarul Statistic al României/Romanian Statistical Yearbook*, Tudorel Andrei ed. (Bucharest: Institutul Național de Statistică, 2018).

[35] István Horváth, "The Culture of Migration" 773-774, 782; Alexandra Voivozeanu, "I wanted to see how to make money there too": Mobility strategies of Romanian seasonal workers in the agricultural sector abroad," *Social Change Review* Vol. 18, (Winter 2020) 13-38.

investments made by parents in supporting musical careers for their children and the spending of considerable sums through parties related to events such as weddings, baptisms or coming of age parties.

Numerous sociological and anthropological research on the effects of transnational migration on rural communities have highlighted as main consequences the depopulation of villages, the aging population and the development in the last two decades of a generation of children raised in transnational families,[36] with one or both parents working abroad for longer or shorter periods of time. Interviews conducted in the last three years in villages from Sălaj and Bistrița-Năsăud counties highlighted the frequent cases of children raised by grandparents. For them, *muzică populară* was a constant presence on television or radio in the grandparents' homes during their childhood and adolescence. For many youngsters it was a way to become familiar with this musical genre and its constantly evolving repertoire. As we could observe from the interviews, the strong connection created between young people and grandparents in such contexts gave a nostalgic touch and a deeply emotional value to this musical genre.

Last but not least, the depopulation and aging of the rural population, as a major effect of migration, has contributed in a substantial way to the degradation of the cultural and educational infrastructure in many localities. In many villages, the merger of schools during the right-wing government led by Emil Boc (2009-2012) due to the decrease in the number of students was complemented by the disappearance of activities in cultural centers, where they had not already been ruined. The last two decades have strengthened the status of the rural world as a reservoir of natural and human resources for the local and global economy[37] and partially as a space for urban escapism and daydreaming for the urban middle class.

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[36] Janka Vogel, "Transnational Romanian Families." In *Bitter Things, Narratives and Memories of Transnational Families*, Malve Lippmann, Can Sungu, Maike Suhr, eds. (Berlin: Archive Books, 2018); Iulia-Elena Hossu, "Familia Transnațională – reprezentare și practici," *Transilvania* No. 2 (Sibiu, 2019): 71-80.

[37] Norbert Petrovici, "Neoliberal Proletarization along the Rural-Urban Divide in Postsocialist Romania," *Studia UBB Sociologia*, LVIII, 2 (2013): 23-54.

3.3. Technology and social media

As a continuation of the revolution started by the emergence of television and radio stations dedicated to *muzică populară* and traditions, especially in the last decade, the internet has gained a growing role, becoming fundamental to music consumption and the promotion of music productions and videos. Gadgets such as mobile phones and laptops connected to the Internet have become increasingly accessible and their use by all age groups has been boosted by migration, as evidenced by interviews conducted in recent years in Sălaj and Bistrița-Năsăud on how to keep in touch with those at home, especially children and the elderly. However, in addition to the essential role in facilitating communication with those who have left and maintaining contact with the native community through Facebook groups, people from villages, mainly the youngsters, "are engaging with culture via these new media forms as they enchant, distract, entertain, reveal and occupy."[38]

Mobility and hybridity are two main features of globalization, and as John Storey stated, globalized culture is clearly undermining what had been a key aspect in intellectual discussions of folk culture, that is, that being embedded in a particular space – the rural – and separated by both time and space from the development of modern urban and industrial life guaranteed "authenticity." The movement of people and commodities around the globe, bringing the global into the local, clearly challenges the idea that locality can fix the boundaries of a culture. The nomadic nature of global cultures suggests we are witnessing a shift in how we see cultures, a shift from culture as "roots" to culture as "routes."[39] Through new media, the youth from the villages explore and promote its folklore and tradition, both for a local and a global public, becoming part of a global market of traditions and world music. New media, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, allows the young rural artists to promote their activity and to be in contact with followers and other artists, expanding their popularity far beyond the village and country boundaries. Given the collapse of cultural infrastructure in most rural

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[38] David Beer, *Popular Culture and New Media,* 1.
[39] John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture. From Folklore to Globalization* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 117.

communities (libraries, cultural centres, clubs), new media has become the main source of cultural consumption and the main means of promoting one's own artistic activity. An important role is played by those who have gone abroad, often very active on Facebook local groups and very interested in following what is happening "at home" through the category of young trendsetters/influencers who constantly produce content for their pages.

All the people we interviewed in our research are using the internet and various social media platforms to promote their work. P.T. was the administrator of a Facebook page dedicated to her village, Marin, where she uploaded photos of the village and its people. Her work had a great impact among the migrants from Marin working abroad, who began to ask her for photos with their relatives at home. That motivated her to develop her activity into planning and organizing folk events for the entire community. S.H. is involved in multiple projects related to folklore, but he is also active on TikTok where he receives paid requests from other members of the platform to create rhythmic shouts on certain topics. A.P. is a pharmacy student who wishes to launch a YouTube channel containing short comedy films inspired by the life of a "traditional" peasant community. She seemed convinced that this type of folk entertainment will be very successful: "Facebook will explode, believe me!" Thus, social media is not only a platform for promoting customs and traditions. Young people intend to use it at its full capacity, to acquire social and economic capital, to monetize its content.

4. Why people get involved with *muzică populară* and traditions

In our field research, we questioned not only young people interested in a career as a singer of *muzică populară*, but also people who got involved in various activities dealing with folk music and/or traditions: collecting traditional costumes, being an extra in *muzică populară* videos, radio host for *muzică populară* broadcasts, or planner and promoter for re-enactments of various folk traditions. We wanted to learn about what motivated them to engage in all these activities. Their reasons could provide us with a better understanding of the value system that they adopted or that was adopted by the communities they live in.

For R.S. (13) and D.C. (11), two young girls that study music and already sing *muzică populară* in concerts, contests and on TV, the motivation for their passion is fairly simple and straightforward: they showed early signs of musical talent, stimulated by music heard on TV (mostly channels dedicated exclusively to *muzică populară* such as Hora TV). Their parents wasted no time and enrolled the little girls in music lessons in the nearby town of Zalău: "She was a little girl… she was 4 or 5 years old. Our TV was running mostly on Hora TV… and she was dancing, singing. So we said «let's try»" (D.C.'s father). For M.S. (21), music was an interest that she discovered in her childhood, but she settled on *muzică populară* only later, at about 14 years old. That was because "it [*muzică populară*] is the only one that still carries… the idea of the authentic Romanian way of feeling [...] And it's also more complex… so it seems to me… in costume, you need to have a certain conduct."

S.H., a young man in his early twenties from Măieriște, is a collector of traditional artifacts and a cultural animator in his village. He says that his love for folklore started as a little boy, when he discovered that he enjoyed "everything antique." His friend, C. (19), joined a folk dance group when she was 9 years old after she tried to imitate at home the dances seen on TV. Together with S.H., they started a dance ensemble in Măieriște because they wanted to "keep the traditions" (C.) and because they had "a love for the traditions" (S.H.). F.S. (41) from Valcău started to collect traditional costumes because of her "longing for grandparents, a longing for the grandparents' house." Out of this feeling, she amassed a considerable number of costumes, pieces of furniture, household items, and decorations, all gathered in a traditional house that was bought and reassembled in the backyard of her family's house. Her daughter F.S. (12) inherited her interest in folk costumes because she was attracted by the beauty of these pieces of clothing. P.T. (24) was, for a few years during high school and college, the planner and promoter of a series of events that centred around the faithful re-enactment of a traditional wedding and other collective activities such as group work and bees. Her choice for folk culture was motivated by her fascination for traditional costumes and was encouraged by members of her family. On the other hand, far beyond the villages, and among the local and national cultural institutions, the idea that traditions and folklore are the only grids through which the cultural life of the villages manifests itself is widespread.

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5. The lack of cultural infrastructure

We see that the motivations mentioned by our subjects are either anchored by an aesthetic criterion (the beauty of the traditional attire or the beauty of the local customs and traditions) or on a moral duty to ensure that the (beautiful) tradition is kept alive and safeguarded. Although they represent reasonable justifications, we believe that these types of answers are just the surface level of a more complex explanation. If we want to understand the growing interest in folklore and traditions among the rural youth as a wide ranging, national phenomenon, we must search for the structural causes identifiable irrespective of the residence or the aesthetic criteria of those involved in such activities. We claim that one such structural cause is the lack of cultural infrastructure in the Romanian villages. This is a subject that some of our interviewees touched upon, without naming it directly as one of their motivations.

Except for Valcău de Jos, where there is a traditional dance group for schoolchildren and for Marin, where an NGO organized in the last few years a summer camp for children, the rest of the villages in our fieldwork offered no extracurricular cultural activities for the youth. The local authorities may sometimes be receptive to the villagers' cultural initiatives (such as when the mayor from Valcău de Jos accepted F.S.'s proposition to provide the money for a new dance instructor for the children), but usually they don't offer much support for cultural activities. S.H. mentions that, when working with his folkloric ensemble, "the town hall didn't help us with anything" and, in order to succeed in his initiatives, he had to ask for the support of the community.

All the people that we spoke with and that were attending various forms of musical training had to commute significant distances to the nearby towns of Zalău, Șimleu or Jibou in order to benefit from specialized training. R.S. has to commute from Marin to Zalău (28 km) for her folk singing and dancing classes. O.S. and F.S. from Valcău de Jos also go to Zalău (33 km) for violin and piano lessons. Their mother complained that, because of the parents' long working hours, "the situation got very busy and we couldn't handle it anymore". After finishing his workday in the evening, the father

had to drive the girls to Zalău; "when they get home it is already midnight". The mother's hope is for her older daughter, F.S. (18), to get her driver's license so she can take over the task of transportation. C. enrolled in folk dancing classes when she was 9 years old; to attend the rehearsals, she had to travel 40 minutes by train from her village Bocșa to the nearby town of Jibou. D.C., on the other hand, lives in Zalău with her parents, but commutes weekly, for the last three years, to Baia Mare (in Maramureș county, the northern neighbor of Sălaj) for private singing lessons.

Being an aspiring musician in Romania is not necessarily an affordable option, but the costs rise even more if you live in a village. Besides the costs of traveling to some urban centres, there is money to be spent on other expenses as well. The tuition is not free, not even in some public institutions (for R.S.'s classes at the Popular School of Art her parents have to pay a non-negligible sum of money). The private lessons are more expensive, but the parents agree to pay for them if the teacher is noted for his/her proficiency or is an acknowledged performer of *muzică populară*. Adding to the cost of tuition are the expenses required by the technical equipment and/or instruments: microphones, speakers, amplifiers. On top of that, and arguably the most expensive, are the costs of recording a song, filming a music video, promoting it and getting it to be aired on television stations dedicated to *muzică populară*. A common and well-known practice of all these niche TV stations is to charge the performers who wish to promote their video clips on TV. They also charge for the participation of the performers (at least the lesser-known ones) in their daily programs.

The first problem when talking about the cultural infrastructure is that a conclusive statistic on this topic is still a *desideratum*.[40] There is no clear evidence of the cultural resources available in rural Romania, but there is a consensus between experts and officials that this type of infrastructure is

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[40] Carmen Croitoru, Bogdan Pălici, and George Dinu, "Infrastructura publică și impactul social al culturii" [Public infrastructure and the social impact of culture], in Carmen Croitoru, Anda Becuț (coord.), *Barometrul de consum cultural 2016. O radiografiere a practicilor de consum cultural* [*Cultural Consumption Barometer 2016. An X-ray of cultural consumption practices*] (București: Pro Universitaria, 2017), 31.

degrading. A study about the cultural infrastructure elaborated in 2014 for the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration mentions a few evolution tendencies prevailing in this field: the degradation of this infrastructure, especially in villages and small towns; its use for other purposes than it was intended; the absence of investments; diminished spending for its maintenance and development.[41] The number of public libraries decreased between 2007 and 2015 all over the country, including the rural libraries, which were reduced from 2635 to 2052. In Sălaj county there are 61 public libraries for 239534 inhabitants. The number of cinemas also dropped significantly, from 4637 in 1990 to 81 in 2012.[42] The rural institution designed to promote cultural activity, the community centre, is missing from approximately 21% of the Romanian villages.[43] Where they exist, they lack proper equipment, and they were closed or used for other ends.[44]

One of the most important outcomes of this continual deterioration of the rural cultural infrastructure is the constantly increasing gap between urban and rural access to culture. Studies and reports show that the cultural offer in the countryside is quasi-inexistent.[45] Research demonstrates a direct link between participation in cultural events and the available cultural infrastructure: people living in an area with multiple elements of cultural infrastructure are more likely to participate in cultural events than those living in a place with no or very limited such infrastructure.[46] Thus, the scores obtained for activities such as singing, playing an instrument, dancing, writing (prose, poetry, essay), taking photos, painting, drawing, handicraft

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[41] Irina Popescu-Criveanu et al., *Strategia de Dezvoltare Teritorială a României. Studii de fundamentare. Studiul 21. Infrastructuri culturale* [*Territorial Development Strategy of Romania. Studies on the foundations. Study 21. Cultural Infrastructures*] (2014), 59.

[42] Popescu-Criveanu et al., *Strategia de Dezvoltare*, 28, 37.

[43] Croitoru, Pălici, Dinu, "Infrastructura publică", 47.

[44] Popescu-Criveanu et al., *Infrastructuri culturale*, 59.

[45] Iulian Oană, "Accesul la cultură și beneficiile asociate" [Access to culture and associated benefits], Carmen Croitoru and Anda Becuț Marinescu (coord.) *Barometrul de Consum Cultural 2018. Dinamica sectorului cultural în Anul Centenarului Marii Uniri*, [*Barometrul de Consum Cultural 2018. Dinamica sectorului cultural în Anul Centenarului Marii Uniri*] (București: Universul Academic, 2019), 131.

[46] Oană, "Accesul la cultură", 131.

are constantly lower for the rural residents than for the urban residents.[47] The abandonment of the residents of the small towns and villages is considered by some researchers as a violation of the fundamental right of access to culture guaranteed by law.[48]

Despite the scarce resources, the youth are eager to participate in what cultural activities are available, and most of them are related to folk music and dance. When he started his traditional dance ensemble, S.H. didn't need to search too long for members, they came by themselves, without him having to ask. In working to organize her events in Marin, P.T. was helped by about 30 teenagers and approximately 20 adults from the village. She says that the folkloric re-enactments attracted the interest of the youth to such an extent that those living abroad with their parents were planning their summer holidays depending on the date of these events. Those living in the village tried to extend this summer activity all year long by shooting various small-scale re-enactments of different traditions, wearing traditional costumes and creating their own scripts. Both these initiatives proved to be very popular among the villagers: S.H. estimates that his ensemble's first public performance gathered around 400 spectators, the community centre's hall proving to not be large enough for those who wished to see the show; at her first wedding re-enactment, P.T. speaks about more than 300 people that were present in the audience and the number of the spectators was similar for as long as she organized this type of event.

In this context, the choice for all types of folkloric entertainment is the natural outcome of the combination of two factors: the lack of cultural infrastructure and the willingness of the rural population to participate in or to consume cultural events. With no options available, the people have, most of the time, to organize themselves and the only (or one of the few) forms of cultural expression revolves around the folk music and dances that are intensely promoted on TV and online and with which they were associated

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[47] Ioana Ceobanu, Anda Becuț Marinescu, "Relația dintre cultură și educație", in *Barometrul de Consum Cultural 2018*, 180.

[48] Carmen Croitoru, Anda Becuț Marinescu, "Artele spectacolului. Infrastructură și bariere de consum", in *Barometrul de Consum Cultural 2018*, 107.

with for a long period of time. The preference for folk entertainment is, thus, due to an unquestioned automatism that hasn't been challenged by alternative modes of artistic and cultural activity and that cannot be challenged without massive state intervention dedicated to the development of a widespread network of rural cultural infrastructure. When explaining her motivations, P.T. mentioned this narrow imaginary horizon that she experienced living as a teenager in Marin: "I was seventeen when I thought of organizing an event [...] and I didn't know what else… I didn't know something else could exist, that other possibilities are available. It was all that I could think of."

Conclusions

Muzica populară is a version of peasant folk music designed for the citizen of a modern, industrialized society, a citizen maybe with rural origins, but who lives his life in a society completely different from that referenced in this musical genre. In this paper, we tried to explain why young people from Romanian villages are still listening to and enjoying this genre in a time when the landscape of pop music is so large and so readily available. To understand the success of *muzică populară* we need to understand the transition process from a communist society and a planned economy to a liberal democracy and the free market as a process that integrated Romania as a semiperiphery in the world system of division of labour. For the most part of the population, this was equivalent to privatisation, austerity, deregulation and, as a result, transnational migration. The migratory experience has an important role in the perpetuation of *muzică populară* as the music of choice for many of the rural and urban working class: it is the music that expresses their local and national identity and allows them to connect to the culture of their homeland. This demand for *muzică populară* was readily met by TV stations dedicated to this genre established at a time when the first migratory waves were in progress. These niche stations capitalized on the popularity of the genre by claiming to present "authentic" Romanian music, while at the same time upholding loose standards for what a proper musical performance should look like.

In our opinion, one of the most important factors that contributes to the involvement of the youth in activities related to traditions and *muzică populară* is, besides migration and also a result of the transition process mentioned above, the absence (or the de-structuring of the cultural infrastructure in Romanian villages. Our interviews documented eagerness among the rural youth for different forms of artistic expression such as music, dance, acting. But if they want to get involved in such activities, they find no opportunities in the village and they have to go to nearby towns in order to get specialized training. Having no affordable alternatives locally, they organize themselves, choosing the only cultural expressions that they are accustomed with (from watching TV with their grandparents or from the rare occasions of a village festivity): the show of *muzică populară*.

While there is no reason to disregard the cultural initiatives of our subjects, the prevalence of folkloric events and the absence of affordable alternatives can also have undesirable outcomes such as the unwillingness to participate in a multicultural setting or to accept other, non-Romanian, artistic expression. P.T. mentioned that, when she suggested the inclusion of a Ukrainian dance group in the folk re-enactments that she organized, her collaborators were reluctant to accept, objecting that the dances "were not Romanian". The same reluctance was displayed when P. T. tried to include other musical genres apart from *muzică populară* and *manele* fancied by other teenagers from Marin who volunteered to help her. This comes as no surprise, but rather as a confirmation of the role that *muzică populară* played in the symbolic construction of the nation under the communist regime and its continuous use in the perpetuation of nationalism and autochthonism, in stirring the "pride of being a Romanian". But, if ethnocentrism is to become dominant among the rural population or the Romanian society at large, it is not *muzică populară* to blame, but the absence of coherent developmental policies able to reduce the economic and cultural gap between the Romanian cities and villages, and also the absence of the staging of folk music and folklore events outside a nationalist, ethnicist setting.

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Dialogue Table.
A Hybrid Method of ActiveArt and Citizenship

MARIA DRĂGHICI[1]

Abstract: In the absence of a methodology or of an inherited practice, be it directly – from the local artistic environment, or indirectly – through written sources and scholarly literature (*Artificial Hells* by Claire Bishop was released around 2012) – the experience and practice of social art were the result of the encounter of a more or less fragmentary familiarity with art history and lived experience, at the beginning of 2006 within the Rahova-Uranus community art project. The attitude which had not yet become common currency in the local cultural context of those years was one opposed to the art institution(s), which occupied a too markedly elitist and exclusive zone and were insulated from society. It was our desire to identify the various vulnerable social categories which were subjected to a policy of exclusion, rather than to one based on communication, that would bring communities in dialogue. We had to create our own method of working together, the community, the artists and the local authority, in a space of learning from each other skills and experiences which will inform a local practice for a cultural public policy and its servants. The theoretical landmarks originating in the history of art were, alongside direct experience, points of reference and support which could suggest a new practice of embracing cultural competency, professional training and development in public service for the common good focused on this paradox of mediation at the centre of modern political life.

Keywords: communitarian, *ActiveArt*, co-authorship, *Dialogue Table*, action research, radical pedagogy, participatory democracy.

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Context

In this text, I present and analyse the *ActiveArt* method – *Dialogue Table*, describing the organic transition from an imported practice, *The Speaker's Corner*,[2] which we[3] employed at the beginning of our intervention in the Rahova-Uranus community (2006),[4] the way in which this *artivistic* practice evolved into a working-method adapted locally in the dialogue with the administrative authority (2008-2010), and how it was subsequently tested internationally, in 2011.

The method aimed to contribute to the articulation of claims on behalf of a community that was in danger of eviction ever since the plans for the area's further gentrification were officially confirmed by the local authority. The working method around *laBomba*[5] (cultural space of community self-representation) informed the *ActiveArt* concept in its meaning of arts in education and manufacturing, focused on creating active citizenship. The re-valuation of the human resource and potential of the Rahova-Uranus community have created around *laBomba* a *new aesthetic*, through which *Participatory Democracy means of expression* were practiced. The method used was going-between university/professional sets of values and the community creative potential trying to find out new co-intelligent ways of citizenship. Through our means (artists as public workers) we empowered the visibility of participants, co-producing spaces for the interaction with the local administrative structures,

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[2] I am deliberately quoting from Wikipedia, in order to show that this practice – which we adopted, and to which we attributed certain functions in our project – is a widespread one, and is not specific to Active Art: "A *Speakers' Corner* is an area where open-air public speaking, debate and discussion are allowed. The original and most noted is in the northeast corner of Hyde Park in London, UK. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speakers%27_Corner

[3] O2G 2007 (Be *Organized* within community, *Offensive* operations towards injustice, with *Generosity* for marginals) Maria Draghici (visual artist), Gabi Albu (architect) and the theater directors: Miruna Dinu, Irina Gâdiuță, Bogdan Georgescu, Vera Ion, Ioana Păun, David Schwartz.

[4] The volumes: *The Generosity Offensive Initiative 2006-2008* (Bucharest: Vellant, 2009); *Reader Rahova-Uranus LUM DOC.2009* (Bucharest: Vellant, 2010) testify on the beginnings of the *Generosity Offensive Initiative* (O2G) and on the Rahova-Uranus Community Art Project (2006-2013).

[5] http://labombastudios.blogspot.com/

in which marginal groups can construct new meanings and values for (re)inventing the institutions.[6] *ActiveArt* provokes experiences by gathering people in a positive attitude towards their challenges, and forces them afterwards into public action. The practice is both a social one (collective memory and the community identity) and process-oriented towards valuating the community's collective imagination through which both urban space and everyday life are becoming meaningful categories for those who live in the area. The artist should mediate spaces for bringing the power back to the people, shape the public space by encouraging life-learning processes through dialogue and carve out a new subjectivity by creating a meaning once again of our appurtenances to a rooted historical community.

In 2006, we started *The Generosity Offensive*, a movement of artistic practice and social pedagogy which brought together artists from various backgrounds, but also common people, activists, and NGOs. This practice reflected the pressing necessity of a group of artists who could no longer content themselves with artistic representation in the restraining space of the *white/black box* of traditional art institutions to find different ways of putting their vocation to work and who chose at that moment to plunge into the unknown. Finding the appropriate way of formulating our conceptual discourse regarding community intervention took time and was not devoid of failure, disillusionment or wasted efforts.

Community art is, first of all, an attitude, and undoubtedly a choice made by the artist consciously. By encouraging his/her active implication in non-artistic environments, community art repositions the artist's role in the social and even political context, in most cases changing the function of art towards a move from "representing" to "doing something with." Community art creates the situational framework where the artist works together with *the amateur* – a term used in close connection with the common person accepted as *maker of naïve, untutored art*, culturally untrained in the conservatories or

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6 "(...) In spaces of appearance, horizontal relationships enable participants to escape the roles and rules that normalize or even oppress them in other social spaces, to disclose their individuality, and to begin something new — that is, to be 'free' in the Arendtian sense of the term." Xavier Marquez, "Spaces of Appearance and Spaces of Surveillance," *Polity* 44 (2012): 6-31 (7), doi:10.1057/pol.2011.20; published online 19 December 2011.

Art universities, or as we named them, the *experts of daily life*[7] who shape the working-site actively, together with the artist. We named this type of intervention *incisive anthropology* – an investigation space for research and community production where evaluations are based on quality, and not on quantity. The artist, the anthropologist and the researcher become part of the community and through direct action one starts to collect/research/reshape the data, integrating it into his/her work as an active perspective of the local inhabitants on the realities which they are confronting. This way of doing research takes the risk of modifying the observed reality, and moves away from the so-called neutral, "objective" scientific research.

It is a process of direct research in the construction of the investigated site that enables an envisioning of the world through artistic thinking. Art becomes a tool in shaping a new subjectivity. The artist is transformed into a constructor of *site-specific* situations as a result of an organic involvement into the collective work, and changes his/her position from one of authority into that of a participant, from a passive to an active attitude towards the subject and the other way round: "Nothing is completely itself and its full being is realised only in that participation,"[8] in which the members of a potential or real community, the common people, the places, the objects, as well as personal stories become the most valuable source and resource.[9]

Through the performative approach (action), interpersonal communication (observation/empathy), the audience transformed into a creative participant (cultural *open source*), processuality (the disappearance of the final artistic object as the end result of the process), the experimental character (the idea of *feedback* – trial and error, "you don't know"), the giving up on the attainment

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[7] An understanding of the subject by means of the concept of *expert of daily life* is taken from the Rimini Protokoll, a group of authors-directors formed in 2000 whose whole work was written collectively under the name Rimini Protokoll. The group used theatre as a tool in shaping several perspectives on reality.

[8] David Bohm, *On Creativity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998): 106.

[9] Even Foucault, who does not commit himself towards a more constructive enterprise regarding humanism, came to the conclusion "that we need to expand the spaces where self-creation is possible" (Xavier Marquez, "Spaces," 30), in connection with the importance of constructing values and meaning for the reinventing of our institutions.

of perfection as an artistic aim, community art reintroduces the notion of *good* in conjunction to that of *beautify*, as an ethical approach instead of an aesthetic one.

Through the community art projects in Rahova-Uranus in 2006-2013[10]– the volunteer artists together with the people from Rahova-Uranus laid the ground of the *Creative Community* around *laBomba – Community Base*, thus defining a new concept of cultural intervention, namely the *extended concept of school and active citizenship*. The *Creative Community* is a temporary social structure directly engaged in the process of solving some practical problems, process-oriented and collaborative, extended in time in its direct interventions and in the forms of employed expression. *The Creative Community* acted as a catalyst, practically, for "the social sculpture,"[11] at the same time, as a learning community, a social community as well as a manner of (re)constructing identity. Through the *direct actions*,[12] the creative community achieved the organic transition towards an original artistic formula, that of *ActiveArt*,[13] whose concept derives directly from that of community art, while exhibiting certain specific features

The *ActiveArt* concept places added emphasis on the dimension of social transformation within the process of community intervention. As in community art, the artist enters the process with the role of context initiator (the observer), the subject (witness) as the most suitable person to speak about the situation, but also the most motivated in finding new possibilities, and the audience, together with the artist and the subject, enters the situation as a participative worker. They are the ones doing the act of imagination in the cultural space of a *new subjectivity*, wherein the final product of community expression is achieved through the common effort of the artists and community

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[10] "The Sensitive Map" 2006, "Build your Community!" 2007, "Flexible" 2007-08, "Mobile Urban Laboratory"2007-2010, "School in the Street" 2013.

[11] A term used in relation to Joseph Beuys' social plasticity.

[12] Using resource-methods as: the interview method, the *Speaker's Corner* method, *the Dialogue Table,* the *Personal Map*, the Viola Spolin method, the Warner & Consorten, Cornerstone, *Verbatim*, Teatr Dok method.

[13] This was the subject of my research: *Active Art, Action Research and Artistic Pedagogy (Reflections around the personal experience of working in ActiveArt projects)* / The National University of Arts, Department of PhD Studies / Bucharest, 2018.

members in direct negotiation with the local authority.[14] The collection of data is actively used in the economy of the final artistic product of *ActiveArt*, where the term "art" is understood as *fitting*, as David Bohm proposes in *On Creativity*. *ActiveArt* has to do with changing the context, going beyond what is well-known and can give shape to new possible worlds where "normal laws" are suspended, be it only for a moment, as a result of the insertion of "fictions" through which the law itself and the way it operates in such a limited manner is questioned at the level of the urgent pre-documented situation. This suspension in understanding is achieved by bringing together all the participants in the process, according to the concept: *I participate. You participate. He/She participates*, all of them acting in the same present in configuring the transformative event. The event is totally eruptive and cannot be deduced from the situation. It happens as a miracle which, in Spinoza's view, would be an event whose cause cannot be explained;[15] in terms of Alain Badiou's positive paradigm,[16] it is a moment of reconstruction where the normal functioning of the old economic, social and cultural order is rejected or suspended so as to generate the appropriate conjunction for its reorganizing in a new way. The construction of the situation begins before the event, continues during the event and can remain active even after its end, and the *ActiveArt* product is in fact a community creation whose ultimate aim is the active restitution (giving back) of the image to the community from which it was initially taken, observed and documented[17] – a process of understanding

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[14] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and Politics of Spectatorship* (London & New York: Verso, 2012): 11: "There must be an art of action, interfacing with reality, taking steps – however small – to repair the social bond."

[15] Spinoza, "Of Miracles," *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Chapter VI: "a miracle can only be a work of nature, which surpasses, or is believed to surpass, human comprehension." The Gutenberg Project, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, 1997, 12, http://www.dominiopublico.gov.br/download/texto/gu000990.pdf (accessed on 10th of September 2018).

[16] Alain Badiou, *From Logic to Anthropology, or Affirmative Dialectics,* 2012, online by the European Graduate School Video Lectures https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wczfhXVYbxg

[17] "(...) On the verge of being expropriated not by the state (that cunningly retreated from the dispute of which conditions it created) but by a real estate developer with foreign venture capital who bought legal rights of inheritance in 2006 (the moment in which it seemed that there is no limit to profit in the business). The local that hosts 'La Bomba' is in the same situation, the

reality through its objective, organic-experimental crossing: the image can be described, debated, disputed, recreated and re-used by the community members via the artistic products and the related public debates.

The active restitution, the event, the expected accident ("the miracle") are instruments which, used in the re-enactment of pressing issues in ways that are sensitive to a particular context, by stimulating the observation and activating the premises in the performative act, lead, through *feedback,* towards finding the right solution to the predicament an individual or a community face. Through distancing, empathy and chance, the interaction between *accident* and *rule* brings about the *event*, which is not the creation of a *new situation*, the creation of a *new world* – but the creation of a *new possibility* of a new world in the present situation. *The event* is that which simply interrupts the law, the rule, the structure of the situation, and through this suspension creates a new possibility. The collective action is carried out by relying on these three concepts according to the principle of value accumulation through direct confrontation with the issues it faces, and not through promoting the negative paradigm of antagonism and conflict. This type of positively oriented action,[18] which formed the basis for the formulation of the working method of *ActiveArt* – the *Dialogue Table* – embraces at the same time the belief of the historian and activist Howard Zinn: "democracy is achieved when people get organized and manage to do something together."[19]

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next event will be dedicated to the women who are threatened by expropriation: a fashion parade casting them as models." – A. Bălășescu, "Learning from a Flower Market in Romania: Community, social fabric and the promise of economic prosperity." *Development* 53 (2010): 410-415, https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2010.58

[18] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 2: "(…) the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable, co-modifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*."

[19] The historian and the activist Howard Zinn in the interview for *Radical History (Conversation with History)* with Harry Kreisler for U.C. Berkeley, 2001: https://uctv.tv/shows/Radical-History-with-Howard-Zinn-Conversations-with-History-8400 (accessed in March 2017).

The *Dialogue Table* – an *ActiveArt* hybrid method

With the establishment of the *Community Centre for Education and ActiveArt – laBomba Rahova-Uranus*, aesthetics, research and organization came together in imagining a new public space in the middle of the city – a creative space with all the implications of the reality of the place, which required our direct participation in helping people tell their stories in the public arena. It goes without saying that *the accident* itself could not have later caused the emergence of the community centre without the previous preparation of this moment in time through all the actions carried out in the area by artists together with and for the community, through which the "traces" of its coming into being were configured. We then acted as though the utopia existed already – the project had taken a more precise shape than the real space. The *enactment* of the community centre in 2007 made possible the inclusion of *laBomba* on the map of cultural centres,[20] in 2009. Through the community plays, documentaries, organized public debates, the question of housing rights in Rahova-Uranus was being analysed and discussed in public in ways that contributed to lending it a new sense, a new sensitivity, in a dialogue within the social and political sphere. Beyond our wish to remain true to the anti-system discourse, what was primarily at stake in the *community creation* around *laBomba* was establishing communication between the Rahova-Uranus community and the local authority of Precinct 5. When communication occurs, this creates community, both within, as well as outside of it. The "intelligent communication"[21] we came to propose as civic education / *ActiveArt* in the work within Rahova-Uranus community, cemented itself in the concept of *Dialogue Table*.

In order to ease the dialogue between the community and local authority it was necessary to create a structured framework, especially devised in a performative sense, of direct interaction, where this dialogue would be followed by the setting up of a strategy in conceiving and applying clear

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[20] *laBomba* is part of TEH – a Europe-based network of cultural centres initiated by citizens and artists. TEH has been at the forefront of repurposing Europe's industrial buildings for arts, culture and activism since 1983.

[21] Richard Sennet, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures, and Politics of Cooperation* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2012).

intervention actions through which the community would become responsible, together with the local authority, for their implementation. This intelligent form of collective action for a common good cannot be applied without achieving dialogue in the manner described by David Bohm as being the result of a dynamic and evolving process which presupposes order, structure and the harmony of the totality – a different level of consciousness. Ordinary people can appear in public spaces and disclose their identity through action with others in smaller and more private spaces. The *Dialogue Table* should be understood in the context related to *ActiveArt* intervention of re-education through cooperation, a matter of collective self-education of all parties involved.

Stages in organizing the collective action of the *Dialogue Table* intervention:

1. Contemplating via the "armed" eye the traces of things in reality. Documenting observationally the existence of several perspectives. The plurality of truths.

Contemplating via the "armed eye" is an expression used by Boris Groys in "A Universal System for Depicting Everything," referring to Ilya Kabakov's way of looking.[22] The world as we see does not satisfy him. He is inspired by the idea of finding the correct angle of looking at everything that exists. By combining several perspectives, this artist sees, at last, the object of his perception (in the given example, the pan) in the correct position. The fourth dimension would be precisely that inexpressible and irrepresentable thing, but this does not mean that he saw something that other people do not see. He can grasp the trace of things in reality, before they become. Through the memory work, Kabakov's *Total Installation* becomes a space which imposes itself by creating a perceptive discomfort, a spatial model for alerting knowledge, thus altering its comfort zone. The more pronounced the discomfort, the more intense the perceptive impact on the participant.

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[22] "A Universal System for Depicting Everything: a Dialogue between Ilya Kabakov and Boris Groys," published in *Art Margins online*, on 26th of August 2000:
http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/8-archive/429-qa-universal-system-for-depicting-everythingq-a-dialogue-between-ilya-kabakov-and-boris-groys (accessed in April 2018).

The documenting of all the perspectives by preparing the connections among the factions around the socio-political paradox places the actors in the paradigm proposed by the Xenofeminist manifesto: "Refusing to think beyond micro communities, not encouraging the fractioned insurgencies, not taking into account the way the emancipating tactics can be re-escalated in view of their universal implementation means that we are still content with temporary and defensive gestures."

The documentary material gathered in this first stage of documentation is grounded on the concept of plural perspectives of data gathering, which in the second phase of the context consolidation becomes an *assemblage* recognizable in reality as an installation.[23]

2. The identity affirmation of the vulnerable ones. Consolidating the context. Consolidating their image as equal partners in the future dialogue with the authority. Documenting, dramatizing, archiving as instruments of consolidation

The community identity emancipation by placing it in the value group *we are 99%*, as described by Jonas Staal in *Assemblism,*[24] makes possible the emergence of the artistic product of *ActiveArt*, which initiates a process of personal recognition of the participants in the public space: "as artists we are no longer *in power*, but through our means we can *empower.* The practice of assemblage opens the possibility of the emergence of a new community coming out of the new social class of the 'precariat' – a new *us*, through whom we can formulate new campaigns, new symbols, a new poetics necessary for a radical collective imagination – a new emancipatory governing of reality."

These *assemblages* become tools used in the subsequent development of the *Dialogue*, by sustaining a concentrated look on the problem that can no longer be solved in the present, but which requires a new approach, a suspension of attention on the paradox itself, rather than an attempt to get rid of the problem or to solve the conflict.

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[23] "True, people might enter such spaces already shaped by the relationships of power operating in other spaces. But much research by psychologists suggests that human action is highly situation dependent." John M. Doris, 2002, qtd. by Xavier Marquez, "Spaces," 20.

[24] Jonas Staal, "Assemblism," *e-flux* Journal #80: http://www.e-flux.com/journal/80/100465/assemblism/

Fig. 1. *Dialogue Table Komettorget Odlingslotter*,
@ Roda Stein & CITY MUSEUM, Gothenburg 2011-12

The method was used, tested and validated in 2011 in Gothenburg, in a different social-political environment, more suited for democratic cultural dialogue.

For the *Dialogue* to occur we need means of slowing down the thinking process so as to be able to observe this process, with all its consequences as David Bohm describes it in *On Dialog*:

> When we come together to talk, or otherwise to act in common, can each one of us be aware of the subtle fear and pleasure sensations that "block" our ability to listen freely? Without this awareness, the injunction to listen to the whole of what is said will have little meaning. But if each one of us can give full attention to what is actually "blocking" communication while also attending properly to the content of what is communicated, then we may be able to create something new between us, something of very great significance for bringing to an end the at present insoluble problems of the individual and of society.[25]

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[25] David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003): 4.

The *Dialogue* should make available a space where this attention becomes active.[26] The suspension of thought through paradox – *the suspension in the paradox* – implies full attention, the capacity to listen and to see, all these actions being essential in exploring, in the intelligent communication further proposed through the *Dialogue Table*.

Fig. 2. *Dialogue Table Economatul Locativ*
@ Modern Club, Rahova-Uranus, Bucharest 2013

3. The spectacle of the insertion of the situation in reality. Spectacular. *Performative*. The *Dialogue Table*

The *Dialogue Table* (as an installation-assemblage) is built on two levels: the spectacular/performative one, and the one which consists in the re-creation

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[26] After the positive result in the Swedish public realm, the method was reloaded in Bucharest and made possible the dialogue between Rahova-Uranus Community and the local administration which was the main goal of Rahova-Uranus project from the beginning. More details for the *Dialogue Table* in Sweden: https://komettorgetodlingslotter.wordpress.com/author/komettorget/ and for the Romanian context: http://labombastudios.blogspot.com/

of meaning. *Spectacular* is to be read in the sense of vision, a fictional structure, as in "the world as spectacle". *Performative* – participative – means something that happens in front of us, through direct participation. Thus, the spatial construction of the *Dialogue* depends to a large extent on the participants. The trajectory that leads to dialogue crosses unavoidably three levels of attention consolidation: the change of the formalized framework, the spectacular / performative perspective, and re-(co)creation of meaning.

By changing the formalized framework and adopting the spectacular perspective, the trivial, formal meaning of the analysis of the *de facto* situation is disrupted, and so is the comfort of the trajectory of the initial thought. This leads to the acceleration in the number of possibilities, negotiated by the participants, which favours the emergence of a new present, but in an uncontrolled form.

> Creativity is connected to art, science, religion, but also to every aspect of life. I think that, fundamentally, all activity is art. Science is a particular kind of art, which emphasizes certain things. Then we have the visual artists, the musical artists, and various kinds of other artists, who are specialized in different ways. But, fundamentally, art is present everywhere. The very word "art" in Latin means "to fit". The whole notion of cosmos means "order' in Greek. It is an artistic concept really.[27]

Everything is like in an "improvisational ensemble acting," where anything from anywhere can be juxtaposed in order to stage new meaningful associations, to create a new subjectivity in which the first image is the premise, but it is hard to foretell what develops from it and in what direction the participants will lead it; but whatever the case, they move it beyond the initial impossibility of comprehending in which they are stuck.

In order to be in the new affirmative dialectics proposed by Alain Badiou, you must think and act outside the state, and become self-generative. Within the state the only position allowed is the one of defence, resistance or fight – that is, of being in opposition, and this is what leads towards acting in a negative logic. *Self-organizing* is the new creation in the social organism such

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[27] David Bohm, *On Creativity*.

as it develops through the approach of *The Generosity Offensive,* the affirmative way (the positive creation, construction from within in a communitarian way), in contrast to *via negativa* (the way of a conflict and bloody revolution).

Conclusion

I do not believe that the answer to any social problem is that of destabilizing the instituted social structures. Instead of criticizing the systems, we had better try to construct a new one that will render the previous ones' undesirable. We should support the ones that work. As artists cannot convert into politicians or missionaries transforming the lives of others, our task remains that of becoming "constructors" or co-producers of social systems. *ActiveArt* as public culture is one in which the artists are at the service of a larger segment of the population. These new social constructs will not be implemented on a large scale, but at least they can help the artist generate model-ideas which will incorporate knowledge, and which will be used as means of expression, involving us all in the process of self-knowledge.

ActiveArt usually employs the strategy of working with the context and not against it –knowledge through agglutination, a sort of visual thinking or a way of thinking through visual means. Sarat Maharaj[28] describes it as a *liquid form of knowledge*, which manifests itself through cut-outs and discontinuities for a new social design. The *Dialogue Table* as a method is a type of knowledge which sculpts in the fluidity of information, of the experience and thinking, in *bits* combinations, it appears in contradiction, generates associative manoeuvres and juxtapositions, so as to configure an algorithmic sequence. As a consequence of the interaction between trials and errors, in contact with each individuality of the collective, the coordinating direction is defined at each particular moment, through specific choices: "the desired product (a possible future) consists in the very choice we made 'on the fly'."[29]

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[28] Sarat Marahaj, "Know-how and No-How: stopgap notes on 'method' in visual art as knowledge production," *Art & Research, A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, 2, no. 2 (Spring 2009): http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/maharaj.html

[29] Mihai Nadin, "Reporting on anticipatory systems: a subject surviving opportunism and intolerance," *International Journal of General Systems* (2017): 1-30.

Resorting exclusively to practice, the professionalization of method restricts its range of action, since you no longer allow hazard or chaos to come into the process and thus you restrain your activity. The artist permanently needs to stay "unfinished," that is, to be a student in order to keep his/her ability as a catalyst, so suggestively described by Boris Groys in "Education by Infection."[30] Self-infection is produced through experimenting, listening, observing, through a "not knowing" attitude, which should ultimately represent the usual method of working in art. We should be capable of inventing our own methodology every time, as it is needed as an answer to a specific situation. The *effect* produced through involvement becomes a methodological tool, where the artist tries to change the world in order to be able to understand it in the sense of his creation. The passage towards a militant kind of research is accomplished not when the artist is in the process of "changing the world" by constructing an involved subjectivity, but only when the effect of these practical changes *on site* is produced together with the ones it directly concerns (the community itself). The maximum *point* of involvement: someone lives, breathes and researches a given subject and in this process, one becomes the object of his/her own research, together with those with whom he/she began the "submerging". A way of being in the world "with" or "through the others". Humanity and compassion are notions that you do not grasp in solitude; they are achieved only by those who manage to devote their lives to the public sphere, and in doing this are ready to enter a dialogue around this action.[31] This would be possible only in a society where people are not ignorant.

[30] Boris Groys describes how the student has to be taught through a "no rules" artistic education for real life in "Education by infection," apud Steven Madoff, *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009): 27-32: "Ultimately, teaching art means teaching life."

[31] "I think everyone is creative. There are a lot of people who feel separated from their creative nature. I think that's one of the ways culture and society separates us from our compassion for ourselves and our ability to connect with others. Whether it's through a performance or just through a conversation like this one, it's always about connecting. I'm predominantly interested now in performance as a dialogue. Let's just have a moment where we all talk about the thing that happened. Like you said, the creative experiment. I love the idea of that." *Document*, issue no. 12 / Conversations, Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asia Kate Dillon, http://www.documentjournal.com/2018/05/black-lives-matters-patrisse-khan-cullors-and-actor-asia-kate-dillon-on-the-art-of-creative-survival (accessed in May 2018).

We have the responsibility of acting and re-acting to the reality in which we live. Bringing people into dialogue, to think and act in their immediate proximity, is a form of activism due to the fact that it forages into the public realm. *To dig where you stand* is not only a social act, but rather an artistic work. In praxis-oriented artistic research, the researcher is genuinely determined to make an impact on society – whether in the political, social, cultural or any other sector – and does not want to differentiate his/her own abilities from the practicality of the world. One needs to participate, act and live each encountered experience and to encourage co-participation, to guide and mentor students and others to become involved in a transformative praxis. We all influence and contribute to social change as artists, sociologists, architects, public servants... or as mere citizens and this leads toward of a re-educated administration in which the role of the public servant is changed from that of a manager towards that of cooperative participant.

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La culture pour tous, théâtre public, théâtre privé, les règles françaises du jeu

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Abstract: The theater has always been a privileged partner of the political Power, to be protected and/or monitored, depending on each type of society. In France, the idea of having the arts and culture supported by the State had already germinated at the dawn of the French Revolution, but it was necessary to wait until the end of the 19th century to witness a real awareness and a new distribution of "roles" between institutionalization and democratization. After a quick historical review, following in the footsteps of André Malraux, Jean Vilar or Jack Lang, until today, we can identify the principles of a cultural policy, shared between the State and the local authorities. An important particularity of this system is that this policy integrates, to different degrees, the public and private sectors. More concretely, we define what the French theatrical system is made of both public and private, and in the latter, which is more fragile and relatively uncontrollable, we recall the situation of the so-called "intermittents du spectacle" and their permanent struggle to consolidate or wrest their rights. A representative case is thus the confrontation between the two branches of the Festival d'Avignon, the IN and the OFF, at the turn of the health crisis, from which the theater has managed to emerge alive.

Keywords: public theater, popular theater, private theater, subsidized theater, intermittents du spectacle, cultural policy, Festival d'Avignon IN, Festival d'Avignon OFF

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En prenant la direction du Théâtre National de Chaillot en 1981 et agitant le drapeau d'un « théâtre élitaire pour tous », Antoine Vitez s'inscrivait vaillamment sur les traces de Jean Vilar et de son vœu pour un théâtre populaire, mais il se situait surtout dans la filiation d'André Malraux et de son action : « rendre accessible les œuvres capitales de l'humanité au plus grand nombre possible ». Cette politique a été la véritable ligne de crête de la politique culturelle française des dernières décennies.

En France, la *politique culturelle* est une responsabilité partagée entre l'État et les collectivités territoriales, et, particularité importante, elle englobe, au niveau du théâtre, à des degrés différents, le secteur public et celui privé, théâtres et scènes nationales, festivals et petites compagnies indépendantes. Cependant, l'intervention de l'Etat français en matière théâtrale ne date pas d'aujourd'hui. Les prémisses sont préfigurées depuis la fondation de la Comédie Française à la fin du XVIIᵉ siècle. Car le théâtre est perçu d'abord comme un partenaire nécessaire et surtout un témoin de la grandeur de l'Etat. D'ailleurs, tous les régimes politiques sont convaincus de son utilité. On peut citer ainsi un magistrat d'Arras qui écrit en 1783 que « dans l'ordre des édifices d'utilité publique, les salles de spectacles tiennent aujourd'hui le premier rang après les églises ».[2] Pour aller plus loin, la salle de théâtre est le lieu où on se fabrique l'opinion publique, comme le souligne Jean-Claude Yon.[3]

Un autre élément essentiel qui en résulte est justement celui du contrôle de la parole au théâtre. Car la censure existait bel et bien et s'exerçait selon le bon vouloir du Prince : ainsi, pour ménager les susceptibilités de l'Eglise, Louis XIV interdit en 1664 *Tartuffe,* le lendemain de sa représentation, texte qui reviendra, remanié, en 1669 et qui est aujourd'hui le texte de Molière le plus joué sur les scènes françaises, avec 3193 représentations. Toute suite après la Révolution, en 1791, l'Assemblée constituante abolit la censure et proclame : « Tout Citoyen peut créer un théâtre et y jouer n'importe quel genre. » Libérée pour le moment des brides de la Couronne, la Comédie

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[2] Robert Carvals et Cédric Glineur (dir), *L'Etat en scènes : théâtres, opéras, salles de spectacle du XVIᵉ au XIXᵉ siècle. Aspects historiques, politiques et juridiques* (Amiens : CEPRISCA, 2018), 59.

[3] Jean-Claude Yon, « Théâtromanie, dramatocratie, société du spectacle. Une analyse alternative de l'histoire des spectacles », *Dix-huitième siècle*, n° 49 (2017) : 351-363.

Française est scindée en deux, le Théâtre de la Nation et celui de la République, et devra dorénavant négocier avec les pouvoirs publics de l'époque. Très vite, Napoléon Ier reprend la main par plusieurs décrets et le théâtre reste toujours dans les visées du Pouvoir. Significatif est le fait que le décret qui régit le nouveau statut de la Comédie Française, dont l'Administrateur général sera toujours nommé par le chef de l'Etat, et valable encore de nos jours, a été signé le 15 octobre 1812 par Napoléon à Moscou, pendant le siège et la retraite catastrophique de la Grande Armée.

Après la Révolution de 1830, on assiste à l'ouverture de plusieurs lieux privés, dont les célèbres scènes du « boulevard du crime », dans un rythme de plus en plus soutenu, et on peut dire ainsi que le Second Empire inaugure l'ère du théâtre commercial. Avec le décret de 6 janvier 1864, inspiré par la loi de 1791 – certainement la décision politique la plus importante de tout le XIXe siècle en matière théâtrale –, l'Empire instaure « la liberté des théâtres », mettant fin à tout contrôle administratif, hormis la censure, car si le théâtre reste un domaine à protéger il n'en est pas moins à surveiller. Cette conception restera présente tout au long du siècle. Malgré tout, Jean-Claude Yon voit une certaine continuité[4] qui relie ces émancipations à la création plus tard d'un Théâtre National Populaire, en 1920. Il cite ainsi un rapport écrit par Edouard Charton pour le Conseil d'Etat en 1850, qui résume très bien ce désir de relier intérêt public et culture : « Le théâtre est à la fois un art et une industrie. Comme art, il se rapporte plus particulièrement à l'intérêt public, comme industrie à l'intérêt privé … Comment ne pas reconnaître que des divertissements qui peuvent être la source de tant de bien ou de tant de mal ne sauraient être indifférents au législateur ? Aussi a-t-on unanimement admis, sous tous les formes politiques qui se sont succédées en France, sous tous les régimes administratifs, que les théâtres doivent être un objet de sollicitude particulière pour les autorités ; qu'il faut leur être bienveillants parce qu'ils sont des éléments de gloire de notre pays, dont ils servent à répandre dans le monde l'urbanité, l'esprit et le langage, qu'il faut espérer en eux et les encourager, mais aussi qu'il faut dans une certaine mesure les

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[4] Voir Jean-Claude Yon, « Les pouvoirs publics et le théâtre en France au XIXe siècle. Un bref panorama », *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, n° 292, janvier-mars (2022) : 47-54.

craindre et les surveiller ».[5] En France, la censure, qui concernait également le théâtre public et le privé, n'a été abolie qu'en 1906. Ce qui représente un décalage par rapport à l'écrit, où la censure a été définitivement supprimée en 1881, fait qui démontre encore une fois la puissance de la parole théâtrale, qui peut faire peur à l'Etat.

Avec Jacques Copeau et les travaux des quatre du Cartel (Louis Jouvet, Charles Dullin, Gaston Baty, Georges Pitoëff), en écho à des recherches européennes, l'idée d'un théâtre d'art s'impose, par opposition à un théâtre commercial. L'arrivée du Front populaire en 1936, avec Jean Zay, ministre de la Culture qui essaie d'aider les nouveaux créateurs et associe ces metteurs en scène aux créations de la Comédie Française, renforce cette tendance. Il demande même à Charles Dullin un rapport sur les modalités d'une décentralisation théâtrale. Deux perspectives se croisent : celle d'un théâtre populaire et celle d'un théâtre d'art. Mais la réponse de l'Etat se fera attendre jusqu'à la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale.

Quelques atouts historiques face à la crise

L'idée de faire soutenir les arts et la culture par l'Etat, nous l'avons vu, avait déjà germé à l'aube de la Révolution française, mais les guerres et les empires successifs ont vite pris le pas sur ce qu'on appelait à l'époque de l'Ancien Régime, « les menus plaisirs ». Il a fallu attendre la fin du XIXe siècle pour assister à un processus d'émancipation du domaine artistique en opposition au monde économique, en offrant, selon une expression de Pierre Bourdieu, « une économie inversée ».[6] C'est à ce moment qu'un idéal de démocratisation de la culture, qui allait de pair avec un discours contestataire de l'ordre établi naît, porté par des mouvements artistiques comme le Théâtre du Peuple de Bussang, créée en 1895 par Maurice Pottecher, ensuite le Théâtre

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[5] Edouard Charton, *Rapport sur le projet concernant les théâtres* (Conseil d'Etat : Imprimerie nationale, 1850), 4-5.

[6] Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 1998 [1992]), 141.

National Populaire fondé en 1920 par Firmin Gémier, concept repris plus tard, en 1951, par Jean Vilar. L'Etat se contentait jusque-là à légiférer et contrôler la préservation du patrimoine, c'est-à-dire l'art du passé, et laissait le soutien à la création artistique aux initiatives privées, ou au mécénat. C'est dans cette perspective que la création en 1959 du Ministère de la Culture par Charles de Gaulle pour corriger un certain désintérêt de l'Etat à l'égard de la culture, peut être regardée comme un « grand retournement ».[7]

Derrière, se dessine la figure symbolique d'André Malraux, écrivain et résistant pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale, qui peut véritablement imposer une « politique de démocratisation culturelle » dans un esprit de « mission civilisatrice ». Dans ce sens, Malraux tenait à préciser qu'il « appartient à l'Université de faire connaître Racine, mais il appartient seulement à ceux qui jouent ses pièces de le faire aimer. Notre travail, c'est de faire aimer les génies de l'humanité et notamment ceux de la France, ce n'est pas de les faire connaître. La connaissance est à l'université ; l'amour, peut-être, est à nous ».[8] C'est toujours Malraux qui créée les Maisons de la Culture à partir de 1961, en poursuivant la politique de décentralisation théâtrale lancée déjà par Jeanne Laurent entre 1946 et 1962, pour couvrir l'ensemble du territoire national. Ainsi, avant même de la création du Ministère de la Culture, en 1959, et de la création des Maisons de la Culture, la France avait incité un vaste mouvement de décentralisation théâtrale, dont l'idée phare – rendre la création accessible au plus grand nombre – allait devenir l'une des missions cardinales de la politique culturelle de l'Etat. Sur le terrain, ce mouvement s'est traduit par la création d'un réseau très serré de scènes et d'équipements labellisés et qui structurent aujourd'hui encore la vie théâtrale française. La politique culturelle du Ministère est ainsi définie comme un désir de démocratisation de la culture, même si André Malraux n'a jamais employé ce terme. Une volonté égalitaire qui se concrétise par deux politiques : la protection sociale pour les artistes (voir plus tard le « régime des intermittents du spectacle », en France) et l'accès pour

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[7] Voir pour l'ensemble de ce chapitre, l'étude de Quentin Fondu et Margaux Vermerie, « Les politiques culturelles : évolution et enjeux actuels », *Informations sociales*, nº 190, 4 (2015) : 57-63.

[8] Cité par V. Dubois, « La vision économique de la culture. Eléments pour une généalogie », *BBF*, nº 42 (2012) : 32.

tous à la culture. Malheureusement, les crédits alloués à l'époque, autrefois comme aujourd'hui, sont loin d'être suffisants. Parallèlement, surgit une critique, d'ordre sociologique et politique, portée par Bourdieu et son livre paru en 1966, *L'Amour de l'art*, pointant les conditions sociales d'une pratique élitiste. Le mouvement de mai 68 aggrave le désaccord et dénonce l'échec de la démocratisation culturelle et propose la notion de « non-public », définie comme « une immensité humaine composée de tous ceux qui n'ont aucun accès ni aucune chance d'accéder prochainement au phénomène culturel » (*Déclaration de Villeurbanne*, 25 mai 1968). Mai 68 forge ainsi l'idée d'une animation culturelle identifiée plus tard par Emmanuelle Loyer de « gauchisme culturel ».[9]

Cette conception d'action culturelle, complétement opposée à celle de Malraux, refuse toute institutionnalisation de la culture et érige chaque individu en créateur, comme une instance de politisation plutôt que culturelle. On va retrouver cette idée, ou opposition dans les années1980, dans la formule « tout culturel ».

L'arrivée au pouvoir, en mai 1981, d'un gouvernement socialiste et celle de Jack Lang au Ministère de la Culture transforme en profondeur le rôle de l'Etat en matière culturelle. On passe de la démocratisation de la culture à la démocratie culturelle : une « révolution du regard » sous le ministère Lang. Lié au projet socialiste, l'enjeu culturel est prioritaire pour Mitterrand qui, outre les grands travaux qu'il entreprend (Grand Louvre, Opéra Bastille, nouveau siège de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, la Cité de la Musique), double le budget alloué à la culture. Ces nouvelles mesures sont accompagnées d'une nouvelle philosophie pour le ministère. Qualifiée par certains de « vitalisme culturel »[10] en raison de son approche d'un art centré sur l'innovation et le pluralisme culturel, il s'oppose à la conception universaliste et édifiante défendue vingt ans plutôt par André Malraux. Le domaine culturel s'ouvre davantage aux pratiques amateurs, aux genres dits « mineurs » et aux industries culturelles. « Le ministère chargé de la Culture a pour mission : de permettre à tous les Français de cultiver leur capacité

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[9] E. Loyer, « 1968, l'An I du tout culturel ? », *Vingtième siècle*, n° 98 (2008) : 102.

[10] P. Urfalino, *L'Invention de la politique culturelle* (Paris : Hachette, 1996), 351.

d'inventer et de créer, d'exprimer librement leurs talents et de recevoir la formation artistique de leur choix ; de préserver le patrimoine culturel national, régional ou des divers groupes sociaux pour le profit commun de la collectivité toute entière ; de favoriser la création des œuvres de l'art et de l'esprit et de leur donner la plus vaste audience ; de contribuer au rayonnement de la culture et de l'art français dans le libre dialogue des cultures du monde ». (Décret du 10 mai 1982 relatif à l'organisation du Ministère de la Culture).[11]

Les années Lang se caractérisent également par un « tournant gestionnaire » des politiques culturelles, de plus en plus soumises à l'évaluation. À la Conférence mondiale de l'UNESCO sur les politiques culturelles en juillet 1982, qui a eu lieu à Mexico, Jack Lang lance le célèbre slogan « économie et culture, même combat », symbole des « nouvelles croyances économiques », reprises par son ministère. La culture est conçue ainsi comme un secteur qui renfermerait un « gisement d'emplois » et qui serait un allié essentiel face à la crise. Cependant, selon sociologue Philippe Urfalino, « l'embellie des politiques culturelles »[12], qui devrait avoir des effets sur l'élargissement social de la culture n'a pas eu beaucoup des conséquences, au contraire, elle a pu engendrer la peur face à une marchandisation de la culture. Ce sera contre ce « *relativisme culturel* » et la crainte d'une culture « *marchandisée* » et « *ethnologisée* » qu'une certaine critique, plutôt de droite, se positionnera dès la fin des années 1980. Des intellectuels, comme Alain Finkielkraut dans *La Défaite de la pensée* (1987) ou Marc Fumaroli dans *L'État culturel : Une religion moderne* (1991), rendent « l'État culturel » responsable de ce glissement de l'échelle des valeurs et remettent en cause la légitimité même de ses politiques culturelles. En prenant en compte de nouveaux domaines jusqu'alors ignorés par les institutions, le ministère aurait contribué à la dissolution de la culture « légitime » dans le « tout culturel ».

Revendiquant la diversité culturelle, le protectionnisme artistique et l'ouverture au libéralisme économique, Jack Lang a mis en place une politique culturelle ambitieuse. Bien qu'il soit peu enclin au transfert de ses

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[11] https://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/bbf-1982-06-0353-002
[12] P. Urfalino, *L'Invention de la politique culturelle*, 335.

compétences culturelles, le ministère s'investira cependant pleinement dans la déconcentration accompagnant ainsi l'essor culturel des collectivités locales. Pendant les dernières décennies la part des organismes territoriaux a gagné en importance par rapport à l'Etat en même temps que l'intrusion des lois du marché a obscurci de plus en plus les enjeux de la démocratisation culturelle. Cependant, durant ces cinquante dernières années les élites, les associations et les élus locaux n'ont pas attendu la création du Ministère de la Culture pour intervenir dans le domaine artistique et culturel.[13] Par leur soutien aux associations d'éducation populaire, les municipalités s'impliquent à partir de l'entre-deux-guerres au nom d'un idéal de démocratisation culturelle. Entre 1960 et 1980, on observe ainsi une véritable « *municipalisation de la culture* ».[14] La large victoire des élus socialistes aux élections municipales de 1977 conforte la place des politiques culturelles sur la scène politique locale, qui cessent d'être l'apanage des seules mairies communistes (la célèbre « ceinture rouge » des banlieues parisiennes, Bagnolet, Aubervilliers, Gennevilliers, Bobigny, dont certains deviendront plus tard « roses » ou socialistes) lesquelles conservaient jusqu'alors une forme de monopole de la culture locale. Ces évolutions sont accompagnées par les politiques étatiques de déconcentration, symbolisée par la création des Directions régionales des affaires culturelles (DRAC) en 1967, et de décentralisation, poursuivies par les différents transferts de compétences depuis 1982. Aujourd'hui, régions, départements, intercommunalités et communes nourrissent près de 80% de l'effort public de la culture (hors Paris). Pourtant, malgré toutes les déclarations des gouvernements successifs, les budgets culturels des villes et des départements subissent de nos jours de plein fouet la baisse globale des dotations de l'État aux collectivités. Le discours néolibéral et l'aggravation de la situation économique semblent sonner le glas des ambitions politiques culturelles et de la fameuse « *exception culturelle française* », proclamée successivement par André Malraux et Jack Lang.

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[13] P. Poirrier, « Les politiques culturelles municipales les années soixante à nos jours : Essais de périodisation », *BBF*, n° 5 (1996) : 8-15.

[14] P. Urfalino, *L'Invention de la politique culturelle*, 309.

De quoi est fait le système théâtral français

Robert Abirached (1930-2021), ancien Directeur du Théâtre et des Spectacles dans le Ministère de la Culture (1981-1988) présentait récemment, très succinctement, les « sphères du public et l'orbite du privé », soit la structure détaillée de ce système, sans frontières.[15] Pour détailler, il s'agit d'un système complexe, dont une des caractéristiques et principal atout est la coexistence du secteur d'état, fortement subventionné, et en directe subordination, avec un cahier de charges précis, avec celui des « indépendants », ou des privés, mais qui bénéficient à divers niveaux d'une aide d'état ou territoriale. (Nous ne traitons pas ici le problème du mécénat ou du sponsoring, qui peuvent intervenir dans les deux domaines, public ou privé.)

À l'exception des acteurs de la Comédie Française, « les aristocrates » ou les privilégiés de la profession, il n'y a pas de troupe fixe en France, pas de comédiens salariés à ce titre. Ils travaillent tous sur un projet, ou un spectacle. Aujourd'hui, la France compte 5 théâtres nationaux (La Comédie Française, l'Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe, La Colline, le Théâtre National de Chaillot et le Théâtre National de Strasbourg), 38 Centres Dramatiques Nationaux, 13 Centres Nationaux des Arts de la Rue et de l'Espace Public et 13 Pôles Nationaux du Cirque, lieux incontournables de la création en France. Un important réseau pluridisciplinaire, dévolu d'abord à la diffusion (76 structures labellisées scène nationale, plus de 130 scènes conventionnées d'intérêt national) complète l'activité des lieux de production, pour offrir un ensemble unique de structures qui fait rayonner le spectacle vivant sur l'ensemble du territoire. Financées par l'Etat et les collectivités territoriales, ces structures assurent des missions d'intérêt général de création, de production et de diffusion auprès tous les publics, même les plus éloignés de l'offre culturelle.[16] Le Ministère de la Culture soutient chaque année plus de 600 équipes indépendantes, par le biais de conventionnements ou d'aides au projet. Dans la situation récente, de crise

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[15] Robert Abirached, « Théâtre, service public. Genèse d'une notion fluctuante", suivi de « Les sphères du public et l'orbite du privé », *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 292, janvier- mars (2022) : 8-13, 14-16.

[16] Source complémentaire : https://www.gouvernement.fr/le-ministere-de-la-culture

sanitaire et implicitement financière, depuis deux ans, l'appui de l'Etat, sans cesse sollicité, a été déterminant.

La première vague pandémique, les premières menaces et quelques solutions

Le 16 mars 2020 tout s'arrête en France – les salles de spectacle, les musées, les écoles, la vie sociale en général. Comme partout dans le monde, d'ailleurs. Avec quelques exceptions, pour nous permettre de survivre dans un climat de peur, voisin de la psychose. On avait oublié que le monde du spectacle n'est pas qu'un espace dédié au temps libre et aux distractions, mais qu'il apporte des revenus sept fois plus importants que l'industrie de l'automobile, par exemple, d'ailleurs elle aussi en crise. Le gouvernement français décide donc d'annuler en cascade les spectacles et les festivals d'été, sans aucune date officielle de reprise. Le secteur culturel est gravement touché (également le secteur HORECA). Un « Pétition citoyenne » est lancée à la moitié du mois d'avril, coordonnée par le collectif « Année noire et Culture en danger », qui réclame le renouvellement des droits au chômage et une « année blanche », ou une exemption d'impôt pour l'année précédente, pétition qui enregistre près de 200.000 signatures. Cette mobilisation impressionnante est soutenue par une tribune publiée dans *Le Monde* du 30 avril 2020 et qui a un écho retentissant. La profession s'est fédérée pour appuyer ces revendications, parmi lesquels 300 artistes célèbres, moins fragiles que les plus de 100.000 intermittents, des « stars » comme Catherine Deneuve, Jean Dujardin, Jeanne Balibar, Isabelle Adjani. Le 6 mai suivant, le Président Emmanuel Macron répond positivement à ce désir et appelle les artistes à réinventer un nouveau modèle culturel. Le Ministre de la Culture de l'époque, Frank Riester (remplacé par la suite par Roseline Bachelot, qui n'hésitera pas plus tard, de venir discuter avec les artistes qui occupent en signe de protestation le Théâtre de l'Odéon) revient avec des précisions importantes: les droits des artistes et techniciens intermittents seront « sanctuarisés », devenant une zone protégée et seront prolongés d'une année jusqu'à la fin de l'année 2021 ; cette première mesure va mobiliser plusieurs centaines de millions d'euros. Certes, les

théâtres sont restés fermés d'octobre 2020 jusqu'à mai 2021, avec des mesures sanitaires toujours en vigueur, et les jauges des salles, modulables en fonction de la situation sanitaire. Pour résumer, le gouvernement a mobilisé ensuite plus de 5 milliards d'euros depuis le mois de mars 2020, dont 2,9 milliards d'euros mobilisés à la fin mai. Ces mesures doivent être comprises également dans le cadre du régime des intermittents du spectacle, qu'on a essayé de mettre à l'abri au moins le premier été, et par des mesures successives jusqu'au printemps 2022.

Le régime français des intermittents du spectacle, unique en Europe

Un intermittent du spectacle (IDS) est un artiste ou un technicien professionnel qui travaille dans une entreprise de spectacle, théâtre, cinéma, audiovisuel et qui bénéficie, conformément à des critères concernant les heures travaillées et ensuite des cotisations supplémentaires, des allocations de chômage. L'intermittent du spectacle est un statut précaire, issu d'une longue évolution et confrontation sociales et professionnelles. Une catégorie en augmentation permanente : en 1984 il y avait 90.060 bénéficiaires, en 2016 on est arrivé à 117.000, et davantage aujourd'hui. Ce régime fut créé en 1936 par le gouvernement du Front Populaire pour les techniciens et les cadres du cinéma avec des employeurs multiples et périodes de travail intermittentes. En 1965, il est étendu à l'industrie du disque et de l'audiovisuel. Depuis janvier 1968 le régime s'applique à toutes les entreprises de spectacle. Plusieurs modifications ont suivi, pour corriger le déficit de l'assurance chômage. À l'été 2003, il y a une très importante grève des intermittents qui a conduit à l'annulation des grands festivals de l'été : Montpellier, Aix-en-Provence, Avignon et Les Francofolies de La Rochelle. Au fil des années, d'autres règles, renégociations se sont succédé.

Le critère actuel toujours en état d'être renégocié, pour bénéficier d'une aide de chômage demande qu'on déclare 507 heures ou 43 cachets (un cachet équivaut 12 heures) sur une période de 12 mois d'activité, pour pouvoir ouvrir des droits valables une année. Compte tenu des conséquences de la

crise sanitaire sur l'activité des intermittents du spectacle, le Président de la République avait annoncé dès le 6 mai 2020 la prolongation de leur durée d'indemnisation jusqu'à la fin du mois d'août 2021, ensuite cette mesure a été prolongée jusqu'au 31 décembre 2021. Une date anniversaire « plancher », fixée au 30 avril 2022, est prévue pour permettre aux intermittents du spectacle dont la dernière date de fin de contrat serait très éloignée de la date du 31 décembre 2021, de disposer de davantage de temps pour reconstituer des droits. Un décret publié dernièrement complète ce dispositif pour aménager la sortie de l'année blanche et accompagner les jeunes intermittents.[17]

À Avignon, théâtre public et théâtre privé face à face, histoire et conflits en temps de crise

Sous cet angle, celui des luttes des intermittents du spectacle, l'histoire du Festival OFF d'Avignon, né en marge du Festival IN, peut nous aider à éclaircir ce côté spécifique de la vie théâtrale française, avec ses imbrications, qui s'opposent et se nourrissent réciproquement.[18] De quoi parle-t-on quand on oppose les deux formes de cette grande rencontre estivale avignonnaise ? Le festival OFF d'Avignon, investit aujourd'hui plus d'une centaine de lieux, avec un statut juridique d'Association de la loi 1901. Auto-proclamé « le plus grand théâtre du monde », selon une de ses affiches, le festival OFF d'Avignon est un des grands rendez-vous théâtraux de l'été. Festival alternatif des compagnies indépendantes, il a lieu en juillet et coïncide, à quelques jours près, avec le Festival d'Avignon, dit « le IN » duquel le sépare cependant beaucoup de données, qui tiennent du financement, de la couverture médiatique, des buts et, souvent, des ambitions.

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[17] Décret n°2021-1034 du 4 août 2021, modifiant le décret n° 2020-928 du 29 juillet 2020, portant les mesures d'urgence en matière de revenus de remplacement des artistes et techniciens intermittents du spectacle... Il crée enfin une allocation provisoire au bénéfice des jeunes intermittents âgés de moins de 30 ans.

[18] Voir aussi François Ribac, « Spectacles publics versus spectacles privés ? L'exemple (instructif) du Festival d'Avignon », *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, n°292, janvier- mars (2022) : 114-120.

Si le Festival d'Avignon, le IN, fut créé par Jean Vilar en 1947, le OFF naquit plus tard, lorsque André Benedetto ouvre en 1966 le Théâtre des Carmes avec son propre texte *Statues 66*. Le geste est vécu par Jean Vilar comme une provocation, et en guise de réponse il investit en 1967 le Cloître des Carmes, voisin du théâtre de Benedetto. C'est la première pierre de ce que deviendra la forteresse du Festival OFF et le début d'une longue confrontation. En 1967 Benedetto surenchérit et propose *Napalm*, première pièce jouée en France sur la guerre du Vietnam. Vite, d'autres jeunes compagnies commencent à s'installer tout autour, *intra muros*. Le Festival OFF d'Avignon est né ! L'été suivant, l'après mai 1968, fut très chaud, marqué par l'interdiction de la pièce de Gérard Gelas, *La Paillasse aux seins nus*, au Théâtre du Chêne Noir, en marge du Festival officiel. Dans le IN, la température montait aussi, le Living Theatre, invité officiel et Gérard Gelas, en marge, se liguent contre le directeur du Festival, Jean Vilar. Les comédiens du Chêne noir perturbent en juillet 1968 la représentation de Maurice Béjart, dans la cour d'honneur du Palais Papal.

Le moment mai 68 sera ainsi le deuxième temps fondateur du Festival OFF et va marquer son opposition autant que son lien étroit avec l'autre festival, qui prendra le nom officiel de IN, pour le distinguer du OFF, à l'instar du théâtre Off-Broadway en opposition avec le Broadway Theatre de New York. Le nom de l'Off a été trouvé par une journaliste de *France soir*, Jacqueline Cartier, qui a été vite adopté.

L'après 68 ne fut cependant pas plus calme : en 2003 éclate la première grande confrontation avec les intermittents du spectacle concernant leur assurance chômage remise en question par le gouvernement. Le directeur du festival officiel, Bernard Faivre d'Arcier, décide d'annuler le festival, laissant ainsi le Festival OFF, pour la première fois dans sa courte histoire, « seul en scène ». Le problème qui se pose alors aux artistes est vraiment un cas de conscience. Ils sont de tout cœur avec la grève, mais la plupart ne peuvent pas se le permettre, étant donné tous les frais déjà engagés et, ainsi, la plupart des représentations du OFF ont continué. Cet été-là fut spécial, sinon sinistre, pour la première fois depuis plus de 40 ans, le Festival OFF a eu lieu dans une ville presque déserte, loin des bruits de la fête. Cependant, le fait a

démontré, s'il était encore nécessaire, que les deux Festivals devaient aller de pair, les deux visages de la Fête du Théâtre dans la Cité des Papes étaient complémentaires.

L'année suivante, 2004, arrive une autre crise, au sein du OFF même. Une nouvelle association dissidente, ALFA, est créée, accusant la direction d'Alain Léonard d'immobilisme et qui réunit une trentaine des lieux du OFF. La crise est résolue en 2006 après le départ d'Alain Léonard et la création d'une nouvelle association « Avignon Festival et Compagnies », AF&C, association collégiale et paritaire, constituée de compagnies et de théâtres indépendants, présidée par André Benedetto, jusqu'à sa mort, en 2009, quand la suite est assurée par Greg Germain. AF&C crée en 2008 un des événements marquants de la vie théâtrale de la Cité avignonnaise, La Grande Parade du OFF. La veille de l'ouverture du Festival OFF, tous les acteurs des troupes présentes dans le festival défilent en costumes ou masqués, dans une atmosphère joyeuse, pleine de couleur. La parade parcourt la principale rue de la ville, rue de la République, qui part d'en face de la Gare centrale en traversant la Place de l'Horloge et s'achève devant le Palais des Papes. D'ailleurs, les acteurs vont continuer d'arpenter les rues, en cortège bruyant ou seulement isolés, *intra-muros* et au-delà, pour distribuer des tracts ou présenter leurs spectacles aux passants ou aux gens attablés dans les cafés ou en train de se promener dans la ville. Tout dans une atmosphère joyeuse, envahissante parfois, mais toujours bon enfant.

En 2010 est créé le Village du OFF, un espace dédié aux manifestations, rencontres du public avec les professionnels et les artistes, conférences de presse. Le dernier soir, en clôture du Festival OFF (en général une semaine après le IN) a lieu un bal de clôture ouvert à tous les adhérents de la carte du OFF. En 2016, pour la première fois depuis la création de ce festival, petit frère du Festival Officiel, un directeur du IN, Olivier Py, qui avait d'ailleurs commencé sa carrière dans le OFF, assiste à la conférence de presse d'ouverture du Festival OFF.

Le Festival OFF ne cesse pas de s'agrandir, en nombre de spectacles et de spectateurs. Une montée progressive en puissance, en passant d'une quarantaine de spectacles dans les premières années, à presqu'un millier au

début des années 2000. Le Festival présente en 2016, 1416 spectacles, en 2017, 1480 spectacles, en 128 lieux dont 119 théâtres ; doublement du jeune public entre 12 et 25 ans (selon l'achat des cartes). En 2018, 1538 spectacles en 133 lieux. En 2019, 1592 spectacles. Fin des réjouissances sans soucis : le Festival OFF 2020, programmé du 3 au 26 juillet, ne pourra pas se dérouler dans sa forme originelle, à la suite de l'annulation du Festival IN pour cause de COVID 19. Mais le Festival OFF est la réunion librement consentie d'artistes qui décide chacun pour son théâtre, non soumis à une volonté centrale, ainsi plusieurs représentations auront lieu. Parmi les théâtres qui ont joué quand même, dans ces « conditions de guerre sanitaire », on peut compter le Théâtre des Doms, La Condition des Soies, La Tache d'Encre, l'Artéphile (ancien Bourgneuf), Théâtre Golovine, Le Verbe Fou, Le Verbe Incarné, Le Pixel, La Cour des Platanes. Les cinq scènes permanentes d'Avignon, le Théâtre du Balcon, des Carmes, du Chêne Noir, du Chien qui fume et le Théâtre des Halles, organisent du 16 au 23 juillet 2020 dans le cloître du Palais des Papes des lectures sur des textes de Pierre Notte, Serge Valletti, Philippe Caubère et Matei Visniec et reviendront dans « la semaine d'art » du 23 au 31 octobre, juste avant une nouvelle clôture de quelques mois des salles de spectacles (le 30 octobre…) et l'instauration du couvre-feu.

L'été 2021 les deux festivals d'Avignon ont finalement retrouvé le public et le plaisir de jouer devant des gens réels, malgré le pass sanitare qui a impacté la fréquentation pas encore chiffrable. Malgré les contraintes sanitaires, qui ont été « éprouvantes » pour l'organisation et avec le pass sanitaire vécu comme « un coup de massue », déclare Sébastien Benedetto, le président actuel du OFF, le protocole sanitare a été respecté et la fête a repris ![19]

En fin de compte, qu'est-ce qui différencie ces deux festivals, ou ces deux formes de pratiquer le théâtre, du côté du théâtre public, du côté du théâtre dit privé ou indépendant ?[20] Tout d'abord, il y a une différence concernant la

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[19] « Le Off, de la Friche à la permaculture ?», Entretien avec Sébastien Benedetto, directeur du Théâtre des Carmes André Benedetto et président d'Avignon, festival et compagnies. Propos recueillis par Emmanuel Wallon, *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, « Service public/intérêts privés », n°292 (2022) : 157-164.

[20] Documentation puisée dans https://festival-avignon.com/storage/document/19/34119_5f19432c83f8e.pdf

manière de programmation, et surtout, du financement, celle du IN est du ressort officiel du Directeur du Festival (directement financé par le Ministère de la Culture, les collectivités Territoriales et la Ville d'Avignon), qui invite des troupes et des spectacles, payés par le Festival. Par contre, dans le OFF, les nombreuses troupes qui se partagent les vastes territoires des salles, des lieux divers de la ville et même des alentours, payent et louent des créneaux horaires dans des théâtres. Lieux de jeu qui vont d'un petit théâtre traditionnel, voire les cinq salles permanentes citées, à un garage ou à un restaurant, cour d'école, chapiteau, cinéma, un jardin, une chapelle, un appartement. En total plus d'une centaine de lieux possibles, ou susceptibles de devenir espace de jeu, dont 90% sont fermés le reste de l'année. Si le côté promotionnel dans le IN est assuré par une équipe et une organisation bien rodées, côté OFF chaque troupe doit payer pour s'inscrire dans le programme et faire connaître par tous les moyens leur spectacle, notamment des affiches, qui tapissent pratiquement tous les murs de la ville, et par la distribution de flyers ou de tracts, dans la rue, ce qui a donné lieu à un terme spécifique au festival, « tracter », ou distribuer à tour des bras ces bouts de papier, dont en général on se débarrasse à la première occasion.

Les Compagnies investissent directement (une partie sont des troupes subventionnées par des territoires ou des mairies) dans l'espoir de vendre le spectacle pour des programmateurs et directeurs de théâtre. Bref, le paysage du OFF est un véritable marché théâtral et, parfois, quand la qualité n'est pas au rendez-vous, un supermarché *low cost*. Dans ce paysage varié il y a quand même des théâtres reconnus pour leur qualité, les 5 salles permanentes citées, regroupées depuis 2004 sous l'intitulé de « Les scènes d'Avignon » ou des salles semi-permanentes qui peuvent assurer une continuité par rapport à un public hors festival. La plupart accueillent tout, sans critères spéciaux, où le pire n'est jamais loin, ou par contre, jouant sur la provocation : voir l'affiche « N'y allez pas: c'est nul à chier ! » Il s'agit d'*Hirondelle et saucisson*, un texte écrit et joué par un acteur connu de stand-up, François Rollin, mise en scène par Jean-Michel Ribes (le directeur du Théâtre parisien du Rond-Point).

Le Festival OFF d'Avignon serait-il à un tournant de son histoire ? Alors que la 55e édition de ce vaste rassemblement théâtral s'est achevée samedi 31 juillet, les responsables de l'association Avignon Festival & Compagnies (AF & C) – qui coordonne ce rendez-vous du spectacle vivant – veulent croire

qu'il y aura un avant et un après-2021. Tous les indicateurs fournis jeudi 29 juillet par l'association Avignon Festival & Compagnie (AF & C) sont à la baisse. Malgré cela, les organisateurs se félicitent d'un festival *« plus apaisé »*. Avec 1070 spectacles (contre 1600 en 2019) proposés dans 116 lieux (contre 140 en 2019) et une réduction du nombre de créneaux horaires qui a permis aux compagnies d'avoir un temps d'installation et de démontage plus confortable, *« artistes et spectateurs semblent avoir mieux vécu le festival qu'en 2019 »*, assure Nikson Pitaqaj, directeur délégué d'AF & C.

Conclusion

Que faut-il retenir de cette traversée rapide de la situation théâtrale en France, avant et postpandémie, vue à travers ses rapports avec la politique culturelle gouvernementale ? Dans le domaine du théâtre indépendant français, mais très lié, sinon complémentaire au système public, ce qui s'impose, c'est la vitalité d'un rapport toujours en mouvement, entre revendications, vigilances et une relative situation protégée du théâtre, par le biais du régime des intermittents du spectacle. Malgré tout, une situation encore fragile, mais qui peut s'appuyer sur des traditions culturelles indéniables, une construction des lois et des règlements solides et qui ont protégé une partie de l'édifice théâtral. Un échange vital, très vif et sans repos, si l'on pense à la réactivité des artistes, aux réactions, aux occupations des théâtres. Dans cette optique, on arrache ou on consolide des droits, on revendique et on obtient quelques milliards supplémentaires de subventions. Certes, le principe « quoi qu'il en coûte », c'est-à-dire un système complexe d'aides, proclamé par le Président Emmanuel Macron, amélioré au fur à mesure, a permis de sauver pour l'instant la situation du spectacle vivant.

Cependant, la culture reste dans le rouge : dans l'univers du spectacle, le monde d'avant n'est pas pour demain, ni même pour aujourd'hui. C'est ce qui résulte, parmi les lignes, dans une récente étude du Ministère de la Culture, dévoilée le 27 octobre 2021, concernant l'impact de la crise sanitaire

sur les pratiques culturelles des Français.[21] Ce qui est clair pour l'instant, le public des salles de spectacles, des musées revient timidement, à petits pas. Situation comparable à celle d'il y a six ans, après l'attentat meurtrier du Bataclan, salle des concerts à Paris, et qui a fait chuter la fréquentation des salles de spectacle, pour revenir ensuite progressivement à la normale, juste avant la pandémie. Il est possible qu'en attendant le public revienne, à condition que les vagues successives de la pandémie ne le gardent encore à la maison. N'empêche, c'est clair : le monde culturel postpandémie risque de ne pas être le même avec celui que nous avons connu. Le monde du spectacle va traverser sans aucun doute cette période, mais cette traversée va le changer. Des transformations radicales sont déjà depuis un certain temps en cours. Tout d'abord, il y a l'intrusion du numérique comme moyen privilégié de fréquenter le monde des arts, surtout chez la jeune génération : le télétravail, les aléas climatiques, la crise économique en vue, la migration en dehors des grandes villes d'une certaine couche de la population, aisée, grande consommatrice de spectacles. Tout autant de défis à relever, comme une forme de résilience ou d'épreuve à traverser, pour mieux se retrouver.[22]

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[21] https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Espace-documentation/Rapports/Les-pratiques-culturelles-des-Francais-apres-la-crise-sanitaire-Bilan-a-la-fin-de-l-ete-2021

[22] Voir l'article d'Olivier Milot, « La culture dans le rouge », *Télérama*, n° 3747, 03/11/2021.

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The Public Consciousness of the Transition

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Abstract: The decade following the Romanian Revolution, generally known as "the transition," saw radical changes in the economic and social fabric of the country, with one apparent exception: the public theatre system. At the same time, the monopoly the winners of post-communism developed on the discourse about the transition and the traditional practices of cultural production delayed any artistic representation of that period for at least another decade. The article tackles the issue of this delayed public reflection on the long-term effects of the transition, how the theatre managed to preserve its own oblivion to these effects, and how the independent theatre of a new generation of artists engaged, after the financial crisis of 2008-2011, in a public reckoning of the ongoing legacy of the transition.

Keywords: post-communist transition, political theatre, independent theatre.

What do we mean by "public culture"? Is it only about culture as the collective term indicating the totality of arts and other (collectively recognized) manifestations of human creativity and intellectual achievement, and public as opposed to private?

Does the primary reference for 'public' refer to 'belonging to the state' (in terms of production or financing)? Or, on the contrary, the meaning of the phrase we are talking about is a broad one, anchored in sociology rather than in arts and heritage, in which culture represents the whole set of beliefs, values, attitudes and practices of a society, and the adjective 'public' refers to

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their mediated negotiation, through the free participation of as many societal factors as possible (mainly in the press, and in recent decades, to an increasing extent, in *social media*)?[2] The ambiguity of the acceptance is due, we might say, not so much to the non-existence of an "intellectual art and production" anchored in a public policy and a "state" financing system in the United States (where the subject of "public culture" has been theorized on the most in a sociological, broader sense), but to the constant weakening, in recent decades, of the public component of culture in Europe, where it had become state policy in the first post-war decades. A constant weakening attributed to the social and political paradigm shifts, the struggle lost by Keynesianism in the face of libertarian economic theories and the privilege of the financial-objective perspective, to the detriment of that of "public good/service" one, when it comes to culture and the arts. And in terms of theater, as Dragan Klaic, a leading expert in cultural policy, explains at leisure in his book, *Resetting the Stage. Public Theatre Between the Market and Democracy* (2012), a rationale for the decline in support for subsidized production has been the success of commercial theatre since the 1980s, supported entirely by its own revenues.

In fact, and Klaic is far from being the only one who notes this, *the crisis* (of system, of mission, etc.) has been the constant state of existence of the theater since the 1960s – more precisely, with the dislocation of the homogeneity of the audience;[3] in other words, once the pact of common values that united the communities of spectators and artists was broken by theatrical movements concerned with what separates us more than what we share.

The very reason for the institutionalization of culture and its public funding has, historically (since the 19th century), to do with the creation of a homogenous society in terms of collective values – first of all, the feeling of belonging to a single nation (which is especially true for states that arose with the disappearance of multiethnic empires) and of an immutable social order.

We will approach, in this article, the independent theatre scene in Romania from both angles of the meaning of "public culture:" on the one hand, the fact that the performances produced on this stage often claim a

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[2] Robert Hariman, "Public Culture," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* (Oxford, 2016).

[3] See Guglielmo Schininà, "Here We Are: Social Theatre and Some Open Questions about Its Developments," *The Drama Review*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Autumn 2004): 17-31.

public service mission, in a landscape where, atypically for Europe, state institutions tend to become commercial producers, and on the other hand, that, in many cases (the examples we will deal with concern the representation of the economic transition in Romania), this scene functions as a space for debating some societal values and ideas, in circulation at a certain moment.

What we believe is worth discussing is, in fact, to what extent independent theatre – and, in the alternative, theatre in general – can contribute in a relevant way to the questioning of these dominant ideas, and whether theatre *can* be approached from such a perspective, an *effective* contribution to public culture.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

For a theoretical universe strongly infused, globally, by North American thought, "social efficiency" is a concept with interesting variations depending on the context in which it is used.

In the Anglo-Saxon space, its origin is closely related to a confrontation of ideas, dating back to the early 20th century, on the mission of education, between the philosopher John Dewey and David Snedden, Commissioner of Education of Massachusetts. In this dispute specific to the boom stage of industrialization, Snedden argued for the need to separate vocational education (vocational schools), to prepare workers ready to enter production, from liberal ones, intended exclusively for "consumers" of industrial goods, while Dewey asserted that such narrow formation was tantamount to social predestination. Although, morally, John Dewey won this debate, in the long run and in terms of public policy, the shadow of Snedden emerges behind a crowd of contemporary politicians, including in the non-Anglo-Saxon world. David Snedden's arguments also infuse opinions on the practical usefulness of artistic education.[4]

At the same time, in societal organisations that offer an extensive set of social services, such as all continental-European ones, "social efficiency" concerns, almost exclusively, the extent to which the administration manages

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[4] More about this confrontation, from the perspective of artistic education, in M. A. Stankiewicz, "Social Efficiency, Beauty, and the World's Work," In *Developing Visual Arts Education in the United States. The Arts Higher Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

to deliver these social services to predetermined standards and costs, managing to contribute to an improvement in the targeted social situation (from schooling to, say, healthcare needs).

Beyond the fine words, about art that encourages thinking and creativity, there are obviously no tools to measure the actual "efficiency" of artistic discourses. Moreover, the introduction of – or even the simple search for – an instrument to measure the concrete "effects" of, in our case, theatre represents a deeply libertarian approach, which reduces any human activity to its quantification of pecuniary or of generating direct economic added-value.

Therefore, in the present perspective, the efficiency we are talking about strictly concerns two aspects: the way in which the production activity itself responds to the direction assumed discursively (about whose circumscribing we will talk in the article) and the capacity/strategies through which the theatrical discourse contributes to the public negotiation of the values and attitudes that constitute the themes of this discourse.

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Between 2017 and 2019, on the independent stage in Romania, the premieres of a remarkable number of performances with a common theme took place: (re)evaluation of the social experience of the first post-revolutionary decade, from the perspective of those directly (negatively) affected by systemic changes. Two of them – *'90s* and *The Miracle of Cluj* – have the same director (David Schwartz, b. 1985), another three – The *Miracle...* and *M.I.S.A. părut* (the title is difficult to translate; text by Alexa Băcanu, b. 1985, directed by Dragoş Alexandru Muşoiu, b. 1989), in 2017, and *Ballads of Memory* (collective creation), in 2019 – have the same producer, Reactor of Creation and Experiment, Cluj. The last (temporally) in the series, *Factories and Plants*, produced in Zalău (a city without a local theatre) by the Centre for the Study of Modernity and the Rural World, has as authors two graduates from Cluj, active on the independent stage here, Alexandra Felseghi (author of the text, b. 1987) and Adina Lazăr (director, b. 1987). Given that soon afterwards, at the beginning of March 2020, Romania was directly hit by the Covid 19 pandemic, which has majorly affected the production modes in the theatre, one can only speculate on the extent to which this thematic line could have evolved under the conditions of continuity of production.

It is obvious that the '90s are not a white spot in contemporary Romanian dramaturgy and spectacle, but the difference in approach between talking about the 1990s and talking about the post-communist transition is fundamental. It is, in fact, the difference between looking at the first 15 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain from the perspective of political-social consensus (economic transformations as non-negotiable) and looking at them *against* this consensus; in other words, between looking at the installation of Romanian capitalism as the moral struggle with the remnants of communism, and seeing it as an internal distribution of the state-owned property.

Written in 2008 and following the evolution of a Romanian-Hungarian family from 1989 to the end of the first decade of the 2000s, *Playlist* by C.C. Buricea-Mlinarcic (professor, at the Faculty of Theatre, for many of the artists of the independent stage in Cluj) is among the first texts (staged multiple times since 2008 until now) that address the intergenerational family tensions born from the experience of the transition – but a transition largely regarded as a failure of the purifying anticommunism, in which a place of honour is offered to the former *securist* turned businessman, on Romania's way to the market economy (the former employee of the communist political police as the winner of the post-communist transition is a ubiquitous figure in the spectacular Romanian mainstream).

A year before the "landing" of the stage representation of the transition, playwright Peca Ștefan and director Ana Mărgineanu were doing at the Teatrul Tineretului / Youth Theatre in Piatra Neamț *The Missing Year. 1996*, the second show in a series started at the Teatrul Mic / The Small Theatre in Bucharest with *The Missing Year. 1989*, based on the documentation of daily life, especially of theatre employees, in moments with great historical charge (the year of the Revolution, that of winning the elections, for the first time, by the historical right-wing parties and, finally, the year of Romania's accession to the European Union). Despite the fact that *The Missing Year. 1996* was produced in a small town, deeply affected by the transition period, as was the entire North-Eastern region of Romania (where "in 1999 the regional economic downturn is 50% higher than the one registered at national level"[5]), the

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[5] North-East Regional Development Association, „Analiza tendințelor economice ale Regiunii Nord-Est", 2014, https://www.adrnordest.ro/user/file/innovation%20ris%20implementation/ a)%20Assay%20socio-economic.pdf.

perspective of the authors of the show is one that wilfully ignores the broader political-economic context, and in no way aims to criticize it. The show focused (as, moreover, it happened in the productions about the year of the Revolution) on a relatively optimistic vision of, in today's terms, individual resilience. In this key is treated, for example, a central scene, of deprivation of liberty of a woman for the purpose of trafficking her – given that the trafficking of human flesh, extremely present in Neamț in the last 30 years, is a phenomenon influenced by the post-1989 increasing poverty and diminishing social mobility. Although, unlike, among other things, the already mentioned *Playlist*, *The Missing Year. 1996* does not approach the period in question in terms of the failure of a moral purification and democratization, it certainly does not discuss it from a systemic-historical perspective.[6]

In fact, one of the least publicly discussed aspects of contemporary Romania concerns, paradoxically, exactly this era, otherwise highly analysed from the perspective of institutional changes and political confrontations: the social effects of the economic transition, of the "lost decade" 1990-2000, seen from the position of those who had to bear them (largely, most of the contingent of employees in the Romanian economy, especially in industry, subject to an accelerated privatization process).

Studies that analyse theatre in former communist countries after the fall of the Iron Curtain, including those dealing with the alternative scene, dwell at all times on how this theatre has gone through the era of social and economic transition (covering, for most of these states, the years 1990-2000) and never on how it reflected or reflects the era in question. In other words, it is not only the discussion about the representation of an important societal moment for these countries that is lacking, but also that of the possibility of theatre's reflection on its own recent development.[7]

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[6] Among other theatre productions dealing with the 1990s there are Gianina Cărbunariu's *20/20* (2009) and David Schwartz and Mihaela Michailov's *Heated Heads* (2010), but both are dealing with specific public events (an interethnic conflict and the Mineriads/the organized assault of the Romanian capital by thousands of coal miners), without actually connecting them with the transition as a larger phenomenon.

[7] Most recently: Warner, Vessela S. and Diana Manole, eds., *Staging Postcommunism Alternative Theatre in the Eastern and Central Europe after 1989* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2020).

A similar phenomenon is happening in terms of cinema – a reference volume (and the only one) about the "film of the transition" like the one coordinated by critics Andrei Gorzo and Gabriela Filippi deals exclusively with the artistic production of the period, and not the subsequent one, dedicated thematically to this transition. The editors of the volume thus summarize the corpus of productions of the first post-revolutionary decade:

> The hysterical miserableism, the debilitated-libidinous evasiveness, the retrospective and rudimentary anti-communism, being stuck in aesthetic formulas more or less exhausted, in any case practiced at a minor-epigonic level (...) are often invoked to characterize, almost entirely (...), the production of the time.[8]

Gorzo and Filippi's evaluation is, to some extent, inadequate if it were to be applied to the theatre performances of the same years – only partially, because the primary anticommunism and the aesthetic formulas blocked in the last stage of real development of the Romanian scene, the one from the 1970s, are to be found in the great mass of productions from the multitude of theatres of the country, productions lost to the memory of viewers. In the terms of theatre critic Marian Popescu: "The show is, also in this period, a preservative of theatrical aesthetics anterior to 1989."[9]

One of the ingredients of the preservation in question is "the calling from abroad of some Romanian theatre creators," which, being programmatic, "explains both the intention to bring back into the country some values that, for various reasons, emigrated or remained abroad, but also a therapeutic didactics regarding the contact with the West."[10] At the very time of the publication of his study, the early 2000s, Marian Popescu found "a strange mix between the will to produce something new and theatrical modalities that are claimed from an aesthetic of the '60s scene."[11]

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[8] Andrei Gorzo and Gabriela Filippi, *Filmul tranziției. Contribuții la interpretarea filmului românesc „nouăzecist"* [The film of the Transition. Contributions to the Interpretation of the Romanian Film of the 1990s] (Cluj-Napoca: Tact Publishing House, 2017), 5.

[9] Marian Popescu, *Scenele teatrului românesc 1945-2004. De la cenzură la libertate* [The Stages of the Romanian Theatre 1945-2004. From Censorship to Freedom] (București: Unitext Publishing House, 2004), 212. The period referenced is the 1990s.

[10] Popescu, *Scenele teatrului românesc*, 177.

[11] Popescu, *Scenele teatrului românesc*, 221.

In fact, the atmosphere of recovery of the youth (and theatre) lost by the generation of directors (Romania being scenically dominated by the figure of the director) at the peak of the creative power in the 1990s is openly declared at that very moment by Alexandru Tocilescu, in the first post-revolutionary issue of *Teatrul azi* [Theatre today] magazine (the descendant of the monthly *Theatre*):

> First of all, the need for information of the public, who knows almost nothing about the universal theatre of the last twenty-five years, must be met. (...) Our audience does not fully know the theatrical phenomenon of the end of the twentieth century. From Örkény to Beckett and from Ionesco to Pinter everything is to be played in front of the audience, who, according to me, are waiting for that.

From the perspective of the context in which this issue of the publication appeared – the unrest of the months immediately following the fall of the dictatorship, the demonstrations in the University Square, etc. – the idea that the audience aspired to see the absurdist plays of Harold Pinter, seems, now, at least astonishing.[12]

Much more lucid (and a few years after the enthusiasm of December 1989), Alexandru Dabija, at that time manager of the Odeon Theatre in Bucharest, commented, on the one hand, on the experimental dimension in the 90s vision, and on the other hand, on the return of the great names of the exile as if time had not passed over the whole world:

> The most dangerous thing is that the idea of workshop, of experiment, of new work was, of course, taken over by my generation – seen somewhat extended – because it did not take hold in its time. (...) In this frame must enter very clean people (...) or people who practically have nothing to lose, who have but a lot to say, to communicate, whom I would listen to with much love and much use. It would have been, for example, much more interesting a workshop with Liviu Ciulei than a mediocre show with *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* From all points of view. As an artistic act and as a theatrical effect.[13]

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[12] Reproduced in *Toca se povesteşte* [Toca is Narrating Himself], edited by Florica Ichim, 78.

[13] Miruna Runcan and C.C. Buricea-Mlinarcic, *Cinci divane ad hoc* [Five ad hoc Talks] (Bucharest: Unitext Publishing House, 1994), 106-107. Ciulei had directed *The Dream...* in 1991 at the Bulandra Theatre, where he returned as honorary director.

Thus, far from trying to represent or reflect on the immediate events (in fact, the same Marian Popescu repeatedly insists on the general inability of the leading directors to work with Romanian plays, much less contemporary ones), the theatrical scene of the 1990s dealt intensely with what might be called "recoveries:" the remaking, in Bucharest, of Andrei Șerban's *Trojan Women*, initially staged in the United States, the reunification with the canon broken by the departure of its creators. Popescu notes that the promotion of the premiere with *Hamlet*, directed by the father of the Romanian theatrical canon, Liviu Ciulei, himself exiled for several decades, "insisted on the *return* – emphasis by the author – of the director, after nine years, in the theatre whose emblematic figure he is." It was already the year 2000 at the time of this *Hamlet* (the nine years were numbered from the *A Midsummer Night's Dream* withered by Dabija in 1993); a decade later, in the TV show *Back to the Argument*, moderated by Horia Roman Patapievici on TVR Cultural, Liviu Ciulei found that people no longer recognize him on the street, in Bucharest, and no longer stopped him for greetings, as it happened before (the show aired on February 18, 2010).

The canonical attachment of the Romanian theatre to the aesthetics of the art theatre of the years 1960-1970 (the local triumph of "director-centrism"[14]) is visible in two large dossiers, years apart: the first, initiated by the online magazine *Yorick.ro* (which has meanwhile disappeared), in 2011, which speaks not about the theatre of the transition, but about "the performances of the last two decades,"[15] the other, made by *Vatra* magazine in May 2020, of the "balance sheet" of the last 30 years of the local scene.[16] Not only does the overwhelming majority of the performances mentioned by participants, in both surveys, date back to the 1990s, but in some cases, the only titles mentioned are from the first post-communist decade. That,

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[14] The term "director-centrism" belongs to critic Miruna Runcan. See Miruna Runcan, *Theatricalization and network in Romania (1920-1960)* (Bucharest: LiterNet Publishing House, 2014).

[15] „Spectacolele ultimelor două decenii," *Yorick*, https://yorick.ro/category/numere-speciale/spectacolele-ultimelor-doua-decenii/

[16] "The Romanian Theatre. Today", published in two parts, on May 4 and 8, 2020 respectively. https://revistavatra.org/2020/05/04/teatrul-romanesc-azi-partea-i/, https://revistavatra.org/2020/05/05/teatrul-romanesc-azi-partea-a-ii-a/

despite the fact that those who respond belong to different generations and in some cases have certainly not seen these productions in a theatre hall. The substantial ephemerality of theatre as an art form, as well as the lack or reduced availability (including for technical reasons) of video recordings for the productions of the 1990s, make it impossible to reassess in time, artistically or contextually-socially, the performances in question, which contributes to their status as idealized models for successive generations, unable to relate directly to these pillars of the canon.

The generational aspect is important: the thematic and aesthetic diversification noted after 2000-2005 (the last year being the date of the appearance, in Romania, of the National Cultural Fund, whose first annual, then biannual, financing of projects led to the development of artistic production and education through culture outside the state institutional framework), both by Marian Popescu (in the cited study), and by the participants in the surveys in *Yorick.ro* and *Vatra*, is closely related to the theatre debut of artists who were, at the time of the Revolution, at the age of primary school, for whom the direct experience of communism is non-existent, and that of the transition was lived mediately, through their parents.

The emergence of independent theatre in Romania is therefore a phenomenon of generational change, but it is also one of transforming the means of production (and access to these means).[17] This transformation actually has its origin in the structural changes of the 1990s itself. The liberalization of university education – the elimination of control over the enrolment figures, the multiplication of the number of universities, public or private – and, subsequently, the adoption of a Bologna system with a three-year bachelor's degree (previously, the graduation in Theatre directing was obtained in five years) led, over time, to a significant increase in the number of theatre

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[17] For the genealogy and conditions of appearance of this scene, see Iulia Popovici, *Elefantul din cameră. Ghid despre teatrul independent din România* [The Elephant in the room. Guide about the independent theatre in Romania] (Cluj-Napoca: Colectiva/Idea Design Publishing House & Print, 2016). For market economy adaptations of the mode of production and distribution in public theatre starting with the transition period, see Iulia Popovici, „Cum s-a privatizat teatrul în România" [How Theatre Was Privatized in Romania], in Emanuel Copilaş (ed.), *Marele jaf postcomunist* (Iaşi: Adenium Publishing House, 2017), 298-307.

graduates (especially actors). The quasi-complete decentralization of the public performing arts institutions has led to the dependence of many of them on the subsidy received from some local authorities with limited financial capacities, which has led to the reduction of production and collaborations with artists and other institutions.[18] The death of the industry and the changes in the national economic model (towards what ultimately became the "land of cheap labour"[19]) have emptied small towns, leaving much of the national network of state theatres with too few spectators, making it impossible for them to find a role in the community (a classic case are the institutions in mining towns, mono-industrial areas devastated by the closure of coal mines).

After the failure of its own attempts to transfer the touring model of the 1980s, attempts fuelled by the mythology built, in time, around the private companies of the interwar period, the Romanian theatre decided, institutionally, to preserve the structures of repertory functioning and labour relations inherited from the previous decades.

The most detailed accounts about the adventures of the theatre artists in the realm of the market economy belong to an actress-manager, in the last 20 years, of a public performing institution, co-founder of the Bucharest Artistic Company:[20] a financial failure, from which the actors were protected by using the resources of public institutions (in the case of the Bucharest Artistic Company, a minibus of the theatre in Galați and a production taken over from the Bucharest Theatre Odeon), because they hadn't resigned "from the state employments." Conjecturally having the advantage of a long-serving minister of Culture (1996-2000), Ion Caramitru (at the same time, president of the Theatrical Union and, subsequently, manager of the largest institution in the country, the National Theatre of Bucharest), who came from the theatre and who was a leader, formally-informally, of the entire guild,

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[18] The most recent attempt to transfer national theatres, the last remaining in central administration, to local authorities took place in 2009. See *Scena.ro* No. 2, April-May 2009.

[19] The term is sufficiently widely used in the public space, including in the press, to have lost its original origin.

[20] Dorina Lazăr. Among the many interviews in which she talks about the subject, see "Dorina Lazăr, Actress: «When I was 5 years old, my mother ran away from home. Dad was unhappy all his life»", interview by Dana Mischie, *Adevărul* [Truth], Jan. 11. 2020, adev.ro/q3y7u4.

the system of state theatres remained, factually, the only one who almost entirely preserved the monopolistic model of pre-1990 production – it preserved it literally, in the sense of keeping a highly protected space for those already inside.

In time, this has created faults of social and economic status not only between artists (and technicians, etc.) employed in public institutions and those working independently, but also between those who entered the system before 2007 and those who entered the profession later, who have not usually benefited from employment contracts for an indefinite period. The "reform" – one of the key words of the transition period (used aspirationally, along with "anticommunism" and "anticorruption", until nowadays) – that the cultural decision-makers would have wanted, in the mid-90s, for the performing institutions remained, in its concrete details, a desideratum without precise contours, but its reception was summed up, 20 years later, so by the former Minister of Culture during the period of the great privatizations:

> While I was at the ministry, wanting to do the reform, I did a survey. I asked 2,000 people, from all fields of culture, in 1997, what do they think about reform. Of the 2,000 people, 80 percent responded that they don't want anything to change, but to have wages five times higher. The remaining 20 percent, the stars, who knew they were stars and that they would be sought after, wanted to go out on fixed-term contracts.[21]

There are no documents indicating that any of the hundreds of thousands of employees of state-owned enterprises made collectively redundant between 1990 and 2006 (the year in which political analysts such as Vladimir Pasti consider the post-communist transition to be over[22]), or the trade unions that represented them, were consulted on their preferred options, or that the general policy of abandoning previous production models was ever influenced by

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[21] Monica Andronescu, „Ion Caramitru: Trebuie o lege care să le permită tinerilor să intre în teatre" [Ion Caramitru: We need a law that allows young people to enter theatres], *Yorick.ro*, 2 June 2015, https://yorick.ro/ion-caramitru-trebuie-o-lege-care-sa-le-permita-tinerilor-sa-intre-in-teatre/

[22] Vladimir Pasti, *Noul capitalism românesc* [The new Romanian capitalism] (Iași: Polirom, 2006).

the requests of those who were to be directly affected.[23] Except for the multiple statements made, from 2000 until his death in 2021, by former Minister Caramitru, there are no documents about the concrete start of a process of reform in the field of culture, although there are informal testimonies that the consultation of those employed in the system really existed. The bottom line would be that, in the desire for a momentary protection of the system, it was left to adapt alone to generalized societal changes, conserving generationally as much of the old modes of production as possible.

The generational change that led to the emergence of an independent scene with a high sociopolitical sensibility had at its core artists generally born in the decade 1975-1985 (who were, therefore, between 20 and 30 years old at the time of the establishment of the National Cultural Fund and of Romania's subsequent accession to the European Union).[24] On the one hand, it's about a cohort that caught the 1990s when they entered adolescence and felt its effects mediated through the experiences of their parents. On the other hand, the aftermath of the previous period and the tectonic movements of the social hierarchies, in the dynamics of the transfer to the market economy, has nevertheless preserved, for this generation, an extended access to general education, regardless of the place and environment of origin, and decent possibilities to support university education in centres with tradition (for theatrical education, that means, for the late 1990s and early 2000s, state universities in Bucharest, Cluj, Iași, Târgu-Mureș).

The diversity of the social environments from which the actors and directors of the generation that completed their studies in the early 2000s come from – many, from small towns, from families of doctors, accountants/economists who became successful entrepreneurs, workers going through years

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[23] For a comprehensive summary of the relationship between systemic reforms of transition from the planned economy to the market economy and measures to mitigate the social impact, see Victoria Stoiciu, "Political consensus, social movements and criticisms of capitalism in post-communist Romania," in Sorin Gog, Miki Branişte, Claudiu Turcuş (eds.), *Critica socială și artistică a capitalismului românesc* (Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press, 2021), 49-76.

[24] For an introduction to the history of post-1989 political theatre in Romania, see also David Schwartz, "Genealogy of Political Theatre in Post-Socialism. From the Anti-'System' Nihilism to the Anti-Capitalist Left," *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Sociologia*, Vol. 64, Issue 2 (December 2019): 13-41.

of unemployment, teaching staff with secondary education, public servants, miners, etc. – is visible in the independent productions created by them: a good deal of their projects, including those about the transition era, directly exploit personal and group experiences. Especially for Directing studies (theatre or film) – but also for Acting, when it comes to the big cities and young people coming from outside them – the social spectrum is less wide. It has reduced alongside the access to tertiary education, in general, of young people from rural areas, with parents without higher education and with low incomes. For example, one of the few studies on this subject show,[25] based on a questionnaire-based sociological survey among high school students and first-year university students at state universities, in 2010, a middle-class dominance in higher education. At least as regards the entry to college of young people from rural areas and small towns, the data is also confirmed by further research, although none takes into account information on the average income of the family of origin, for example, or the social composition in the case of vocational education.[26]

Based, for the most part, on personal observations and discussions, for the purpose of an applied, ongoing research with professors from theatre universities in Romania (there is no statistical data on the evolution of social composition in such universities), it may be inferred that, at the moment, vocational theatre studies, in large cities, with increased maintenance costs and with prospects on the labour market perceived as limited, are accessible almost exclusively to young people from those cities and/or families with increased material possibilities. Even though these observations regarding Romania are empirical, the phenomenon is global: among other reports, the financial inaccessibility of the theatre studies for young people coming from the working class is one of the themes of the dossier on vocational schools published by the British magazine *The Stage* in the autumn of 2021.[27]

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[25] Remus Pricopie et al., "Access and equity in the higher education in Romania. Dialogue with pupils and students" (Bucharest: SNSPA/Editura Comunicare.ro, 2011).

[26] Cezar-Mihai Hâj et al., "Access to higher education – a quantitative perspective. Analysis of the transition of the school generation 2017/2018 in the first academic year 2018/2019".

[27] UK generalist publications such as *The Guardian* or *The Independent* noticed this phenomenon as early as 2013. See https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/schools/are-drama-schools-just-for-the-middle-classes-8869810.html

The diversity of backgrounds is what largely ensures a diversity of personal experiences that are extremely important in general for the stage representation of the entire social spectrum, and for the connection with an audience, itself diverse. But in the specific case of the independent scene in Romania, this variety of experiences is even more important, because it substantiates a distinctive feature of this scene – its political sensibility and social involvement.

For a consistent part of the post-2000 independent theatre in Romania, the social and often political commitment is impossible to deny – it's not only about the performances themselves, but also about the entire paratheatrical discursive engagement, from the way of communicating the production to the discourse of the artists (in interviews, author articles and edited publications).[28]

The most remarkable such commitment, in terms of an assumed position, probably remains that of director David Schwarz:

> For me, a basic purpose of theatre remains propaganda. And it's the well-made propaganda that doesn't seem like propaganda: [that is] a clearly politically assumed approach in one direction, but that convinces those who are neutral, it does not annoy them. At stake are the people who are not firmly convinced by either one idea or the other. I don't think theatre is going to bring the revolution to Earth, but I think I have to contribute in that direction.[29]

But a similar reference to the role of theatre as a sounding box for contemporary society is underlined, on behalf of the Replika Educational Theater Center, by Radu Apostol:

> It is a cultural space where very important artists have created, within a year, performances that could not have happened on the "great stage of the country," socially and politically engaged performances, which reflect vulnerable realities

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[28] For the moment, the Replika Educational Theatre Center is the most prolific in terms of editing volumes reflecting its own activity and theorizing of their own practice.

[29] Ionuț Dulămiță, "A basic goal of the theatre is propaganda," Scena9.ro, 2017, https://www.scena9.ro/article/un-scop-de-baza-al-teatrului-ramane-propaganda

around us. Artists and citizens respond to community problems. This would be our motto inspired by Shakespeare, the mouse race staged by Hamlet: *An artistic mouse-trap for community issues*.[30]

Similar ideas are expressed by director Catinca Drăgănescu:

> What (more) is the role of theatre in such a world? I think that's what the whole discussion so far boils down to. And my answer would be that the role of theatre is to generate collective experiences and create bridges of communication between different social categories. Its most representative function today is as a social binder, cultural mediator and space for debate. Art can no longer exist in itself. It must be and is fundamental by its essence a pioneer of social change offering experiences that are generating empathy.[31]

This sensitivity is, of course, also the result of their context of forming and developing a critical conscience – in particular, the development of left-wing intellectual groups, the austerity as response to the 2008 financial crisis, the protests against the privatisation of the emergency medical system in 2012, and those concerning the exploitations in Roșia Montană in 2013.

The contribution of this generation of artists to the public culture of reception of recent history is not isolated or singular, but part of an entire debate, interrupted primarily by the pandemic. Obviously, the concern for it manifests itself differently on different levels.

For example, unlike that of the Revolution or the Securitate/the political police (pre- and post-Revolution), the theme of the 1990s from a social perspective had no traction in the post-2000 Romanian cinema. At a first glance, one can find only *About People and Snails* (2012, directed by Tudor

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[30] Oana Stoica, „«Funcționăm ca într-un chibuț» – interviu cu Radu Apostol" ["«We function as in a Kibbutz" – Interview with Radu Apostol], *Dilema Veche* no. 652 (August 2016), 18-24. https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/arte-performative/articol/functionam-ca-intr-un-chibut-interviu-cu-radu-apostol

[31] Andrei Crăciun, "Catinca Drăgănescu, director: «Whether we like it or not, we are a society still retrograde, patriarchal, machist, hypocritical and quite intolerant»," April 2021, https://www.caleido.ro/catinca-draganescu-regizoare-fie-ca-ne-place-sau-nu-suntem-o-societate-%C8%8Bnca-retrograda-patriarhala-machista-ipocrita-si-destul-de-intoleranta/

Giurgiu) and *I Am an Old Communist Biddy* (2013, directed by Stere Gulea), the latter being a film adaptation of Dan Lungu's novel with the same title (Lungu being a sociologist by training, with a very attentive ear to the currents of the peripheries). In fact, *About People and Snails* is the only fiction film whose subject is the privatization of industrial enterprises in post-communist Romania, and the way of approaching it is that of comedy. In other words, the film looks with a touching understanding at the naïve mobilization of some workers, in the face of the closure-privatization of the plant where they worked, to save their jobs. The infantilization of the "losers" of the transition is, moreover, a common temptation for the post-2005 representations of Romania's transition to capitalism – infantilized, although viewed with empathy, is also Dan Lungu's "old communist biddy," herself a representative of the working class; and in relation to this politics of representation, the distinction brought by the independent shows of 2017-2019 is openly visible.

The first performance that directly addresses the theme of the socio-economic transition of the 1990s, the *'90s,* a production of the MACAZ Theatre Bar Coop, does so by focusing on the experience of these losers, in a confessional structure – the text is written by the actors as an archive of family histories at the intersection of two political regimes, from the perspective of the child (played by another actor than the real protagonist). There are five short pieces, the set changes (recognizable furniture elements of the apartments of the time that are rearranged) are covered by musical pieces, performed *live,* audibly identifiable with Atomic TV, a symbol of the 1990s entertainment industry.

The frame of the show is given by the story of the mother who enthusiastically participates in the demonstrations of the Revolution only to reach in the end, not many years later, the limit of survival and hope. Between these covers there is the story of a makeshift trial organized by students against a university professor guilty of too little anti-communist enthusiasm (it's the first time in the theatre that the immediately post-revolutionary purifying euphoria is not treated with deference and approval); that of the family of doctors who lose their house claimed by the former owners; the fall into the passion of gambling and entrepreneurial initiative of a waiter; and

the contradictory discussion, at the table, between the intellectuals "from the centre" and a family of miners, about the benefits of capitalism. All the heroes of this production – never presented as victims, much less of their own inadequacy to the new times – enter the '90s convinced of the good that will follow and end the decade by paying with their life, health or family life (economic migration, in the conditions before Romania's accession to the European Union, is part of history).

The same year, David Schwartz worked, together with the team of the independent theatre Reactor of Creation and Experiment in Cluj (alongside dramaturg Petro Ionescu), on a performance dedicated to a phenomenon specific to the 1990s: the Caritas pyramid scheme – a social hysteria of the years 1992-1993, permanently bankrupted in 1994. *The Miracle of Cluj* deconstructs, on the one hand, the mirage of easy gain in which money multiplies by itself, and on the other hand, the system of interdependence between the founder of Caritas, Ioan Stoica, and the elites – first local, then national, from politics, justice, press, the church: so that, in the end, the collapse of the pyramid scheme is equivalent to that of another saving myth, embodied by Stoica himself.

In both performances, Schwartz not only provides space for representation to those who have lost in the transition, but increasingly articulates what over time has become the hallmark of his directorial practice: contrary to the local theatrical traditions reproduced over the past half-century, he resorts to Brechtian techniques and principles (starting with distancing) that shape theatre as a live demonstration of superindividual narrative political mechanisms.

Another messianic figure of the '90s is at the centre of the *M.I.S.A. părut* production (text by Alexa Băcanu, directed by Dragoș Alexandru Muşoiu) – Gregorian Bivolaru, the leader of a movement of "integration into the absolute" (yoga/transcendental meditation) of great success in those years, especially among teenage girls. Bivolaru was later pursued and convicted for sexual crimes.

The performance not only captures the general lack of references of the young people of the period, in a desperate need for a horizon of order and hope, but also the permeability of a movement, theoretically of oriental inspiration, to folklore and local popular spiritualism, by-products of a religiously fuelled conservatism for which the 90s were a fertile ground, with consequences until now.

Unlike *'90s* (which staged direct family experiences) or *The Miracle of Cluj* (which captures the experience of a community the actors themselves are part of), *M.I.S.A. părut* does not seem to have a personal generating source, but, despite the high degree of fictionalization, it is a documentary production, based on the data of a case discussed at the European Court of Human Rights. Based on interviews with former employees of the Zalău Armătura, *Factories and Plants* (2019), instead, has as a starting point the fact that the father of the director Adina Lazăr worked at the Armătura Factory, one of the largest in the Zalău area, whose industrial collapse and, finally, closure is documented in the performance (again, a proof of the extent to which, for some artists of this generation, the experiences of their family environment are important). "What motivated me was the fact that my father was very upset that the factory was being torn down," says Adina Lazăr, in a material about the production, also published in 2019.[32] Although a consistent part of the performance documents life before 1989, *Factories and Plants* draws a terrifying picture of the decline in living standards, layoffs (collective redundancies) and, finally, the disappearance of a factory with 7,000 employees in 1990.

In tandem with the *'90s*, but also with other productions, usually independent, from the series of revisiting the transition *(Ballads of Memory*, which has as protagonist an "expert of one's own life," in the terms of Rimini Protokoll, recounting her own experience and that of her group of friends in the years of the transition to capitalism), tangential to this series *(Under the Ground. The Jiu Valley After 1989*, 2012, another project with the involvement of David Schwartz) or dealing with the dramatic theme of labour migration, *Factories and Plants* actively pursues the self-representation of the traditional working class, and the "rehabilitation" of its public image, against a dominant discourse that denies its dignity.

It is difficult to identify the general formative path that made the critical reflection on the period of the Romanian post-communist transition, from a political critical perspective, not only economic. It reached its point of maturity in 2017, the year in which the anthology dedicated to the film of the transition appeared, together with a series of other books that directly challenge the

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[32] Diana Meseşan, "The story of the largest factory in Zalau. «Hello, is that us?»" *Scena9.ro*, 18 October 2019, https://www.scena9.ro/article/fabrici-uzine-teatru-documentar-zalau

political – and cultural – consensus of the transition (democracy against privatization, who does not adapt or who complains is a communist) and the hegemonic discourse of anticommunism as neoliberalism: *Ideologies of Literature in Romanian Postcommunism* by Mihai Iovănel (Publishing House of the Museum of Romanian Literature), *Counterculture. Elements of Critical Philosophy* by Ovidiu Țichindeleanu (Idea Publishing House; edited at the end of 2016, it entered bookstores in 2017), *The Antisocial Apostolate. Theology and Neoliberalism in Postcommunist Romania* by Alexandru Racu (Tact Publishing House), *The Great Postcommunist Robbery: The Spectacle of the Goods and the Revenge of Capitalism*, volume coordinated by Emanuel Copilaş (Adenium Publishing House); and, the most publicly debated of all, *Common Places. Class, Anticommunism, Left* by Florin Poenaru (Tact Publishing House). (An important factor in this may have been the appearance of Cornel Ban's volume, *Dependence and Development: the Political Economy of Romanian Capitalism* – Tact, Cluj, 2014, distributed in 2015 –, a book of economic history that puts the transition in the terms of the intellectual left that had not addressed such a topic before.) What is certain, however, is that the moment of 2017 represented a generational affirmation of one's own perspective on a marked collective experience, discursively monopolized, to its own benefit, by the winners of the previous generation.

The spectacular set of theatre productions about the transition in the years 2017-2019 not only coexists with that of the historical-political contestation of the consensus on the socio-economic transformation of Romania, of revisiting the cinematic legacy of the 1990s or of the applied analysis of the ideologies that shape a literature built on the illusion of its own political autonomy, but enter a direct public dialogue with these systemic reassessments, which they conjugate by their own means.

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Changing the State's Discourse about Public Theatre Institutions by Redefining the Language of Law

BOGDÁN ZENKŐ[1]

Abstract: In this study we take a closer look at how the state refers to performing arts venues and their roles and attributions in Romanian society, through its official channel of expression – the law. The two chosen laws, OG 21/2007 and OUG 189/2008, define the purpose, structure and organisation of public performing arts institutions, the criteria for becoming their manager and the duties that must be performed in this position. Our research first reflects on the terminology of these laws, comparing it with the general vocabulary of the texts. Then, for each of the two sets of regulations, we illustrate their shortcomings from the point of view of theatre management, grouping them in six and four topics. We believe that it is necessary to sensitise the professional and civil community to what the word of law actually means, since we consider it important to take back our public spaces through language as well and start democratising public institutions also through discourse.

Keywords: public sphere, legislation, performing arts, management, post-communist institutions, state funding.

Introduction: The present-day legislation of theatre institutions[2]

In the following pages we present a semantic analysis with critical annotations of the ordinances in effect in 2022, which regulate the organisation

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[2] In this article the term "institution" always refers to public theatre.

and functioning of public theatre institutions. These are *Ordinance no. 21 of 31 January 2007*,[3] *concerning institutions and companies of performing arts or concerts*, as well as the conduct of artistic impresario activities, and *Emergency Ordinance no. 189 of 25 November 2008*,[4] *concerning the management of public cultural institutions*. They aim at a concrete definition of how to establish, organise, operate, and manage these public institutions of culture and define the way of employment, position, duties, and rights of the theatre manager.[5] It must be noted that these are not the only legal statutes that define the way these institutions currently operate,[6] but we have chosen to focus on them for two reasons. Firstly, because they are the most representative for the state's vision of the theatre, primarily as a public cultural institution under its supervision, and subsequently as an artistic institution. And secondly, because we believe that if we understand the basis on which this system is built, we can discover the process that has led to its current structural difficulties.

OG.21/2007 defines in eight Chapters and thirty-six Articles the relationship system between the theatre institution and the state and refers to the role of this institution in contemporary Romanian society. OUG.189/2008 is the normative act – much discussed publicly – that defines the relationship between the central (or local) public administration and the management of cultural institutions. OUG 189/2008 shows us, in five Chapters and fifty-seven Articles, how the competition for the management of these institutions is

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[3] Full text of the ordinance: http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/79172, hereinafter referred to as OG.21/2007 in the article.

[4] Full text of the ordinance: http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/99863, named OUG.189/2008 in the article.

[5] This article uses the term manager instead of director of a theatre, in order to avoid the confusion between the artistic theatre director and general director of an institution. It is also important to state that these two terms should be separated by the law as well, since they point towards two different positions within leadership – differentiation elaborated later in this article.

[6] For example, the list of normative acts regulating the organization and functioning of the Hungarian State Theatre of Cluj Napoca: O.G. nr. 21/2007, H.G. nr. 763/2010, O.U.G. nr. 189/2008, H.G. nr. 90/2010, O.G. nr. 9/1996, Legea- Cadru nr. 153/2017, Legea nr. 8/1996, Legea nr. 287/2009, Legea nr. 329/2009, Legea nr. 263/2010, Legea nr. 227/2015, Legea nr. 95/2006, Legea nr. 64/2008, Legea nr. 53/2003, Legea nr. 49/2010, Legea nr. 319/2006, Legea nr. 98/2016, H.G. nr. 1860/2006, H.G. 714/2018, O.G. 600/2018.

organised, which is the primary way of hiring the new manager, it details the relationship between the authorities and the given manager and enlists the manager's tasks and the assessment of their work. Both ordinances, even after nine amendments in total since their publication, still leave much to be desired, a fact underlined also by the professional public discourse surrounding them.

The present semantic analysis of these laws attempts to identify – through the given definitions, lexical choices, and the logic of the text – how the state views the institution of public theatre. What kind of role does the state attribute to it? What kind of leadership and thus what kind of manager does it want? What kind of management is needed to meet the state's requirements? Where are the public and the employees positioned by law, and where are the authorities – the primary financiers of the institution?

The very manner of approval of these laws tells us a lot: both are ordinances, a simple one (21/2007) and an emergency one (189/2008), which means that they were issued by the Government – an executive power made up of appointed ministers – and not by the Parliament, the law-making authority in Romania, with members elected by democratic vote by the citizens. This calls into question the separation of powers within the state and may suggest an aggressive political intervention in the field, which is not necessarily democratic.

We believe that such an assessment is important because it shows us the foundation on which the structure of theatre institutions in Romania is built – and it hints to the general state of all institutions within public culture. Through such an analysis we want to argue how exactly the state and the law leave room for abuses of power in their system. At the same time, we also want to explore how these laws limit the position of the theatre manager: what kind of operation is possible and necessary in such circumstances? We believe that the myths of the "mean old men clinging to their chairs,"[7] which

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[7] "A ghost haunts the theatrical world in Romania, two in fact: the idea, the belief even, that theatre managers are dinosaurs of an age beyond the possibility of social existence, plus the equally strong belief that this is the only, the big problem – old men clinging to their chairs." Iulia Popovici, "Ad Usum Delphini. Revoluția Managementului Cultural (I-III)", *Adevarul.ro*, June 2020. https://adevarul.ro/cultura/arte/ad-usum-delphini-revolutia-managementului-cultural-iii-1_5ede0d745163ec42719f82f7/index.html (last access: 16:00, 03.02.2022).

have even appeared in professional circles, must be nuanced by raising awareness of the administrative and legislative environment in which these people operate as managers or general and artistic directors. We believe that through such analyses it becomes clear that the way these institutions currently operate – and the aesthetical state which many public theatre productions are in consequently – is not such by nature, only because "this is how we have become accustomed" to institutional culture. Understanding these processes unravels that the theatre managers are not the sole culprits, but that this state has come into being as a result of legal constructions, which we can influence and change in a functional and participatory democracy.

Our analysis is exclusively based on the aforementioned ordinances, and our reflections are supported on the one hand by the public discourse surrounding them, and on the other hand by the example of events in the life of certain state institutions. Our article is an attempt to clarify the legal basis from which a public theatre manager in contemporary Romania must (and can) start their endeavours.

Part I: OG. nr. 21/2007

This normative act, issued by the Romanian Government and signed by Prime Minister Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu,[8] was published in the Official Gazette No. 82 of 2 February 2007 and came into effect three days after the date of publication. On the date of approval, it repealed Law No. 504/2004 on public performing arts and concert institutions. The ordinance regulates both performance and music institutions, although in several cases various articles omit the latter, so we can assume that the document was formulated

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Translated by the author from the original text: "O fantomă bîntuie România teatrală, ba chiar două: ideea, convingerea chiar că managerii de teatre sînt nişte dinozauri cu vîrste trecute de posibilitatea unei existenţe sociale, plus la fel de puternica încredere că asta e singura, marea problemă – bătrînii răi care se agaţă de scaune."

[8] Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu is a Romanian political figure, who was Prime Minister of the country from 29 December 2004 to 22 December 2008.

with a greater focus on state theatres than on philharmonics.[9] One of the consequences of the approval of this ordinance was the establishment of the Registry of Performance or Concert Institutions and Companies,[10] which records them at national level.

First, our analysis shows where the weaknesses are in this regulation, that leave a lot of room for free interpretation, which then can lead to abuses of power and conflicts of interest – both on the side of the theatre manager and the authorities. By carefully observing the language used by the state, we deconstructed its perception of the role and function of the public theatre institution and its manager, and through the logic of the text we identified legal situations in which a theatre manager may find themself and in which they must make executive decisions. The main research questions were: What kind of opportunities does the ordinance create and what obstacles does it raise? What kind of decisions does the theatre manager need to make and what kind of decisions become impossible under this ordinance?

1. The objectives of the regulation – the objectives of public theatre?

The ordinance sets out the following objectives, achievable by the theatrical institutions through the implementation of the given regulation: a) to support public initiative and encourage private initiative, with a view to diversifying and developing the performing arts; b) to affirm national cultural identity and the cultural identities of national minorities through the performing arts; c) to promote nationally and internationally local and universal artistic values in performing arts; d) to increase public access to performances and concerts.[11]

Point a) mentions the encouragement of private initiatives, but in the rest of the document we find only private law entities, consisting of companies and artistic impresarios. The latter occupation actually entails an entrepreneurial

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[9] For example: while the ordinance establishes the number of repertory productions and the number of new productions per year for repertory performance institutions, Article 6 of Chapter II. only states that concert institutions must have different artistic productions and must produce new productions each season, regardless of their number.

[10] Official site of the institution: http://www.registrulartelor.ro/despre.html

[11] OG. 21/2007, Chapter. I. Art. 2.

role, which helps the marketability of theatrical productions and is more financially motivated for both the theatre institution and the responsible impresario. Otherwise, for example, in order for this activity to make a substantial contribution to achieving the objective in point d), the ordinance could rather regulate the number of compulsory national tours of the institution or companies per year in areas which lack such activities.

Point b) underlines the romantic concept[12] of theatre as a body for national consolidation, care for traditions and preservation of language. This point shows us that the state still sees theatre as an institution where the artistic act is text based, traditionalist and museum-like dramatic theatre, where the public services consist in the cultivation of supposedly common values. The rest of the text makes no reference to the obligation of the institutions in point d), thus increasing public access remains a mere slogan.

2. The Glossary of the State

If we study the glossary given by the state in Chapter I, Art. 3, we can see where the misunderstandings and tensions between the (mostly independent) theatrical field and the authorities arise from. First of all, we find here a language that pushes theatre towards commercialisation, proving that the state thinks in terms of quantity, rather than quality. Secondly, the definition given to artistic productions is quite outdated: new forms and aesthetics – such as performance or performative installations – are missing, and no serious consideration is given to how private theatre entities are formed and organised.

Among these definitions we would like to highlight the following:

- project: according to the ordinance, it cannot exceed one season, which completely ignores the summer rehearsals of theatres, resulting in difficulties in managing these activities at the bureaucratic level.

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[12] Friedrich Schiller, "Theater Considered as A Moral Institution," essay read at a public session of the Elector's German Society in Mannheim, 1784. Translated by John Sigerson and John Chambless for The Schiller Institute, https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/transl/schil_theatremoral.html (last access: 18.02.2022).

- community needs and requirements: expression used by both analysed ordinances, without making it clear how these should be measured. According to these ordinances, there is no regulation for the inclusion of the public in the activities, in the artistic or administrative board of the institutions and thus the question arises: through which official channel can the public express its needs, to whom should they address?
- *programul minimal* [minimal programme][13]: is defined by the number of programmes carried out, and a programme means a certain number of projects, which all are part of the management project. But we do not find here the definition of the manager itself, and in Chapter IV, where the management of institutions is regulated, it is mentioned under the term general director – terms that shouldn't be interchangeable.
- the artistic collective: the definition states that its members are employed for a minimum of one season, resulting in individual employment contracts for one year, which is unfavourable for independent companies, which in most cases form an ensemble per project.

3. Tell me without telling me – the independent sector

Private companies are recognised by the ordinance only as a possible form of existence, but their organisation and functioning are not regulated at all within this decree. There are no rules for the possibility of collaboration between them and the authorities, or other public cultural institutions, and no indication can be found of any funding possibilities. In the eyes of the state, the establishment of an independent theatre company is not recognised, because, according to the law, in order to be recognised as a performing arts institution, it must be established by the authority, and this means it is subordinated to local or central authorities, and therefore subsidised.[14]

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[13] A term used for describing the set of activities and goals that need to be completed and achieved within a mandate of a theatre manager.

[14] OG. 21/2007, Chapter. II. Art. 4.

We believe that the legislation should make it possible for independent theatres to be recognised as theatre institutions without them being subordinated to the authorities. This recognition could be based on the nature of the activities they carry out and can be complemented by the recognition that these entities perform a public service. For example, Article 7[15] says that the authorities have the right to set up new institutions, which may operate in other manners. This could also mean the contracting of an independent theatre association on the basis of the public service provided. In return, the organisation in question could be supported by allocating premises owned by the authorities for its operations, or by other types of temporary or long-term aid, such as subsidising rent or some of its maintenance costs, co-financing projects of public interest, etc.[16]

According to the legislation, the two, annually compulsory new productions of the institutions must complete and reconfigure the existing repertoire (made up of at least three artistic productions). In our reading of the law text, this means that the theatre is obliged to have a diverse repertoire, to present varied productions aimed at different audience groups. Another clause[17] says that the institution must ensure that it has the necessary budget to carry out the "minimal programme" – instead of requiring the funder to ensure that it can adequately support the given institution. We believe that here, too, an obligation could be introduced to accept performances and events from outside the institution on an annual basis, with the provision that these must include independent projects and projects from other communities. This would solve the ongoing problem of a lack of venue/performing space for independent companies, while their productions would complement the repertoire of the host public institution. At the same time, it would also provide an opportunity for a community to meet other artists and creators.

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[15] OG. 21/2007, Chapter. II. Art. 7.

[16] An example for this can be found in Hungary, where the Civil Code defines as a public service any activity in which an NGO performs a public or municipal task that serves the common needs of society and individuals. If an association – for example, a performing arts group – can prove this and apply for a public benefit title, it can establish a public service contract with the state or municipality and thus receive sustaining, operating subsidies.

[17] OG. 21/2007, Chapter II., Art. 5/2c.

4. Personnel matters

The language used by the state in relation to the personnel of institutions shows a logic in which the functioning of a theatre is based mostly on the artistic act. This is considered the driving and organising force of the management, although the functioning – and therefore the operational aspects – are provided by an administrative staff. Thus, it is emphasised again that the state sees the theatre institution primarily as a producer of artistic projects. This is not necessarily wrong, of course, but it contributes to the hierarchical thinking between the various positions in theatre institutions. On the other hand, the limitation to artistic production does not take into account the fact that a public institution could (if not actually should) offer other types of cultural, educational, research, dramaturgical, or experimental programmes, thus responding to both its professional and public community's needs.[18]

Although the law differentiates between repertory and project-based performing institutions, it also makes it possible for both to hire artistic personnel from outside the existing staff to produce artistic productions. This leaves room for situations where money, human resources, and talent are wasted: members of the hired (and on a payroll from public money) ensemble end up not being cast in new productions. On the other hand, those contracted annually are not guaranteed financial security, social benefits, seniority or pensions. This has both psycho-affective and professional aspects: as no managerial programme can be developed for only one year without the possibility of continuity, neither can artistic and personal investment of the same quality without the assurance of a future. And thirdly, the amounts set out in these contracts, even if they must be included in the income and expenditure budget, are not public and do not fall under Law nr. 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest. This allows for some differences in the amount of artistic fees on the basis of which an actor may decide to give up their life in the troupe and become a freelancer – also performing at the

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[18] As an example, one can look at the London National Theatres projects to see the various ways through which a theatre may connect with its audiences and support the development of its professional field, besides presenting performing arts productions:
https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/about-the-national-theatre/our-national-work

"parent institution" and/or gaining more acting opportunities. We do not have the grounds to judge this decision, obviously, but it raises the question of whether we need theatre companies at all? Why keep an unused artistic staff just as props in a storage room? And more importantly, at whose expense are we doing this?

Further, in the case of these individual employment contracts, hiring can be done directly by agreement of the parties, without public notice, competition or exam. Institutional transparency suffers as a result, as anyone can be hired or let go, without a legal framework for re-evaluating the decision taken by the management of the institution. The fact that this is made possible by the legislation itself shows that employees are seen more as executors than as organic members of the institutional structure and development.

A final weak point in this chapter is that it is stated that any employee of a performing arts institution may have more than one position, and/or may sign royalty contracts with other institutions as well.[19] This point makes it possible for someone to be a General Manager in a theatre, direct and also act in the production, presented in their own theatre. This not only makes it possible to accumulate large sums of money from an institution's budget, but also brings inefficiencies within the operation: conflicts of interest can arise when the director negotiating their fee with the general manager is one and the same person. Or when the manager, being the same person as the director, is witness to non-compliance with the Rules of Internal Organisation during rehearsals. But it also leaves room for possible tensions and inequalities between the actors who perform together with their managers – one may ask who do you say no to during rehearsals, him/her as actor/director, or him/her as employer?

5. Management of the institution

The general director, chosen on the basis of a management competition, can form their team by setting up an administrative board, which has a decisive role in the organisation and operation of the institution. The Chairman of the Board is the general director himself. Its members have to express their

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[19] OG.21/2007, Chapter III., Art. 12/3.

opinion and possible opposition to a president who is also their employer, which can create an atmosphere of fear and censorship in the free expression of differences of opinion.[20] In US theatre institutions, there is a similar board that is above the manager and whose responsibility is to evaluate and oversee the manager's decisions – in addition to financially insuring the operation of the institution. It functions more as a body that ensures transparency and fairness of operations to protect the values of the institution and its employees, rather than as a limiting and controlling entity. In contrast, under Romanian law, the manager is accountable only to the Chief Authorising Officer (the state), which is not transparent, does not ensure the protection of employees and frequently does not ensure the correct evaluation of a manager. We believe that an independent administrative board should also have a role in the annual evaluation of a manager, and that their evaluation should count as a percentage in the final given grade.

Another body to assist the management is the artistic council, which can have as members employees of the institution, and/or cultural personalities from outside of it.[21] We believe that in order to better involve the public – as this objective is formulated in Chapter I, Art. 2 – and to democratise cultural institutions, this board should also have several members from the local community, who are not necessarily from the theatrical field, but are part of the direct and indirect audiences of the given institution, thus properly representing the diverse composition of the local community.[22] In addition, the artistic council should have clear responsibilities for the institution's running and future work, but current legislation gives it only an advisory role.

6. *Funding of the institution*

Among the principles on which the financing of performing arts institutions is based, we would like to highlight the following[23]:

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[20] OG.21/2007, Chapter IV., Art. 19/1.

[21] OG.21/2007, Chapter IV., Art. 19/2.

[22] Example for proper inclusion: Manchester based Contact theatre, who dedicate their programming to performances about, for and by youth, also include young members of the community in their decision-making processes: https://contactmcr.com/about-us/.

[23] All examples are from OG.21/2007, Chapter V., Art. 20-24.

The theatre's own income can be used as an incentive for the theatre's staff, making it possible, for example, to distribute a monetary prize won at a festival with a theatre production.

The law makes it possible to rent its spaces, which can however cause tensions, as it being a public institution is not indifferent to what happens within its walls, even if this is not directly their activity. And the budget allocated to artistic activity cannot be supplemented in this way, because this income cannot be spent on production. The income obtained through renting must be spent on materials and services. However, if an artistic, technical or administrative activity is outsourced (according to Article 12) and a service is contracted by the institution, it can also be covered by the income obtained from the exploitation of its own goods.

It is stated that institutions may accept money from other entities, but only for programmes other than the "minimal programme". This can create for example the following scenario: if a festival, organised by the institution, is included in the minimal programme, its continuity is ensured, but its budget cannot be increased, and if the annual budget granted decreases, the budget of the festival potentially decreases. On the other hand, if it is part of programmes other than the "minimal programme", its budget can be increased by accepting other funding, yet its continued existence is not guaranteed this way.

Another phenomenon that is a consequence of this law is the existence of foundations and associations under private law, through which, for example, most Hungarian state theatres in Romania can accept money from Hungarian Governmental bodies, or through which the given institution's artists/employees can obtain financial support for activities that are not part of the repertoire but are carried out within the theatre. This prompts questions such as: what kind of shortage do these sums cover, and why do they exist? What kind of lack is there in the current funding structures that calls for the foundation of extra institutional organisations? Shouldn't there be a way through which the programme of public cultural institutions could be supported directly by third parties – other than the state?

Part II: OUG. nr. 189/2008

This ordinance was issued by the Romanian Government, published in the Official Gazette on the 25th of November 2008 and was signed by Prime Minister Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu. On the date of entry into effect, it repealed Government Ordinance No. 26/2005 on the management of public cultural institutions. OUG. 189/2008 regulates the employment, contracting and assessment of managers of public cultural institutions. Thus, it defines the eligibility criteria for candidates and the framework regulation for the organisation and conduct of competitions for the position of general manager.

Being issued in a manner of urgency, in accordance with the law, the ordinance begins by arguing the need for this imperative intervention. This introduction states that the legal ambiguities, uncertainties and insufficient regulation in OG. 26/2005 created the premise for abuses by the authorities towards public cultural institutions. In this article we have taken this point of view and applied it to the current form of OUG. 189/2008, adding to it the other side of the equation as well. We have also examined what kind of disproportionate possibilities – and limitations – are created by the law for these executives.

In contrast to OG. 21/2007 – which is superficial and lacking in many necessary provisions – the present emergency ordinance is much better known in professional circles, due to the wide and conflicting public discourse caused by attempts to change the current form of the act.[24] It has been amended five times since publication, with interventions in almost two-thirds of the original text, with the last amendment dating from 2 January 2015. However, the ordinance seems to still fall short of a satisfactory form in several respects, which is due to the fact that the amendments and/or the opposition around them are more of a personal nature, protecting (or attacking) the current managers of some of these institutions, rather than aiming for transparency and democratisation of these public entities through forward-looking legislation.

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[24] For example: in 2014 a platform was formed, initiated by several professionals who demanded affirmative action from the authorities regarding compliance with OUG. 189/2008. On their website you can also find their reaction with annotations to the proposed 2020 amendments: https://apelpentrucompetenta.wordpress.com/apelul/.

In 2020 an attempt at some major changes, first proposed in 2016 by Vlad Tudor Alexandrescu,[25] Minister of Culture in the then technocrat government, was taken up. His attempt was met with such an overwhelming backlash from theatre managers that the author of the proposal resigned as minister. In the spring of 2020, Senators Lucian Romașcanu[26] (PSD[27]) and Vlad Tudor Alexandrescu (USR[28]) formulated a new proposal[29] which was adopted by the Senate on the 19th May, and on 29th the Government expressed its non-support.[30] At the time of this writing, the proposed legislation has the status of "Referred to the House" for debate and is awaiting remarks.[31]

Iulia Popovici[32] has published on the blog Adevărul.ro a mini-series of three articles in which she presents and analyses in detail the current proposal for amendments to this ordinance. Among others, she calls this new attempt at a proposal a "Trojan horse", which could introduce regulations by which public cultural institutions can be pushed towards a more commercial and economically profitable activity, with the expectation that they will provide more of their own income in addition to the state subsidy. This trend towards cultural institutions can be observed increasingly in Central and Eastern Europe. It seems that in these countries current cultural policies, instead of reviving these public institutional structures inherited from the previous regime, are pushing them towards the market under the aegis of "sustainability".[33]

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[25] Romanian senator between 2016-2020.

[26] Romanian senator from 2020, and Minister of Culture since 25th of November, 2021.

[27] Partidul Social Democrat/Social Democratic Party.

[28] Partidul Uniunea Salvați România/Save Romania Union – political party.

[29] http://www.cdep.ro/proiecte/2020/300/10/6/em399.pdf (last access: 16:00, 03.02.2022).

[30] https://www.senat.ro/Legis/PDF/2020/20L154PV.pdf (last access: 16:00, 03.02.2022).

[31] The status of the document can be followed here: http://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/upl_pck2015.proiect?nr=316&an=2020 (last access: 16:00, 03.02.2022).

[32] Iulia Popovici, "Ad Usum Delphini. Revoluția Managementului Cultural (I-III)", *Adevarul.ro,* 2020 June: https://adevarul.ro/cultura/arte/ad-usum-delphini-revolutia-managementului-cultural-iii-1_5ede0d745163ec42719f82f7/index.html (last access: 16:00, 03.02.2022).

[33] We find the same phenomenon related to educational institutions, if we look for example at the events around the Budapest Academy of Theatre and Film (SzFE) from 2020.

The professional discourse about the regulation of institutions largely focuses on the age of theatre managers and their allowed mandates. However, in the current version of the ordinance there are other clauses that are more damaging in the long run: the continued lack of public involvement in the processes of these institutions and the persistent push for theatres to be "performance factories".[34]

In the following we present how the state outlines the image of an institution that mass-produces, is profitable, aims for continuous (quantitative) growth and is more reactive than reflective and proactive in its society's processes. For us, this model is a capitalist one, which paints the image of a business rather than of a public cultural institution.

1. Terms and expressions

Same as in OG. 21/2007, between the first articles of the law we find a glossary.[35] Here, first of all, we find a legislative formulation that underlines the power relationship between the state and the theatrical institution, reducing the responsibility of the authorities merely to providing funding. Thus, the state could be seen as an intermediary for citizens' money, someone who manages and administers taxpayers' money for their own benefit. Based on this logic we can return to the idea that as audience we should at least have advisory functions in the processes between public institutions and the

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[34] "There is a vocal desire for a broader approach to creative processes, a more rational organization and sequencing, giving space not only to artistic creation and research, but also to the possibility of organic and real reconnection with the audience and its community. In this way, theatre could emerge from the role of "showcase institution", also enshrined in legislation." Theodor-Cristian Popescu, "Schimbări subtile. Gînduri la repornirea sistemului teatral," https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/schimbari-subtile-ginduri-la-repornirea-sistemului-teatral/ (last access 16:00, 03.02.2022).

Translated by the author from the original text: "Există dorința vocală pentru o abordare mai amplă a proceselor creative, o organizare și etapizare mai rațională, care să dea spațiu nu numai creației și cercetării artistice, dar și posibilității de reconectarea organică și reală cu publicul și comunitatea sa. Astfel teatrul ar putea ieși din rolul de "instituție vitrină cu spectacole", consacrată și prin legislație."

[35] OUG.189/2008, Chapter I., Art. 2.

authorities. But even in this legislation we only encounter the continual mention of "community needs" – which must be met – but there are no rules for the constant exploration, analysis and evaluation of these needs, or for the organic involvement of citizens.

We can also identify contradictions between the two reviewed ordinances in their definition of the terms "programme" and "project". While OG. 21/2007 says that the programme is a managerial-artistic structure, OUG. 189/2008 recognises it as a purely managerial exercise. And while the latter text states that a project does not exceed the duration of one fiscal year, in the 2007 ordinance, this term is defined with the duration of one season.

This managerial exercise is carried out, according to the law, through the implementation of a management project. We believe that being the manager of a public institution is not a project that is reborn every 3-5 years, but under optimal conditions, we are talking about a process which has a continuous evolution within its community. When the competition for the position of the manager is based on a project, and the project is defined by the state as a series of completed activities, it shows that the state thinks in indicators that can be achieved within a well-defined timeframe, and between the terms of a quantitative assessment. But art, culture and their impact work differently. The purpose of a project or a programme may not only go beyond a financial year or a season, but its scope may also materialise only after many years of seemingly invisible investment.

2. The ideal candidate

Among other criteria, the ordinance requires the candidate to have the lowest degree in higher education, i.e. they must hold a bachelor's degree in theatre studies.[36] This is outdated not only in practice – there are many examples of managers of international theatre institutions coming from other fields[37] – but also in the structure of Romanian higher education, where the transition to the Bologna system means that students only deepen their studies

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[36] OUG.189/2008, Chapter I., Art. 3/c.

[37] For example, György Szabó, founder and former executive director of Trafó – House of Contemporary Arts in Budapest has a BA degree in economics.

and specialise after the completion of a BA programme. In other words, the ordinance induces the absurd fact that a graduate with a bachelor's degree is better prepared than one with a master's or doctorate in the same field.

Some actors in the public discourse are calling for the addition of legal age regulation among the eligibility criteria, i.e. indirectly introducing the obligation for managers to retire. We believe that age is not the right argument, because as neither an artist, a manager also doesn't have a time limit on their abilities or talents.[38] However, being in a democratic country, we should all have equal opportunities to become theatre managers. Thus, rather limited terms of office and public competitions every five to ten years are needed, in this way organically keeping up with the new generations both in the public and in the profession, and with immediate societal and broader global changes.

According to the content of the emergency ordinance, the theatre manager is someone who organises and manages the activities of the institution while also having an artistic vision. This definition implies two positions of eight daily hours each, not to mention the fact that the same manager is also entitled to be involved in artistic projects. In a more prosperous scenario, the person who creates and develops the vision, artistic direction and goals of a cultural institution, and the content of its programme, would work together – forming a great team – with the person who implements – a.k.a. manages – it all.

First of all, it is impossible for someone to cope with this amount of work and responsibility without missing something and without their physical and mental health suffering. Secondly, it would be appropriate for the legislation to distinguish between the position of a manager and a general director – separate terms which it uses interchangeably. By properly defining these functions, the need would arise for at least two people, who help each other in the proper running of the given institution: a general director and an operational manager. The director directs, plans, and is more of a leader, and the manager executes, implements and ensures that each department and employee have what is needed to operate at full potential.

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[38] Cristina Modreanu, "De ce e necesară reforma în cultură și de ce nu mai poate fi ea evitată" [Why culture reform is needed and why it cannot be avoided], *Scena.ro*, 18.09.2020.

We believe that risks do not arise because someone is a manager, an artist, a sociologist, a lawyer or an economist, because we also have international examples that show that art and culture institutions can be run by people with (or without) such studies. Institutional threats arise from the fact that all decisions are in the hands of one person, both physically and mentally overworked, equipped with a power and thus an overwhelming responsibility that often corrupts people.[39]

Even though they have the right to delegate tasks and responsibilities, the manager – according to the authorities' requirements – seems all-knowing and omnipresent. For someone with the minimum criteria of holding a bachelor's degree in theatre, they have duties that are related to economics, law, human resources, and public administration.[40] In the original sense, the manager should be the one who ensures that these tasks are carried out according to the law and in the best manner, not the one who actually does everything. The operation proposed by the state is called micromanagement and is damaging to any institution.

We come back to the sensible clause that allows theatre managers to also be authors or performers in the projects of the institution they run and to practise their artistic work in other institutions as well.[41] It is clear from this that the law is worded with those in mind who are mostly in these positions today: directors and actors.[42] Although the authorities are defined as authorising officers, by this term reducing their responsibility to a purely financial one, they are nevertheless the ones who give their consent through this clause to the manager's participation as author/actor in other projects. If the state were to think responsibly, this would never be possible because it compromises the smooth running of the managerial act. No matter how small a public cultural institution is, its management is a full-time job, requiring

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[39] A phenomenon also highlighted by Cristina Modreanu, "De ce e necesară reforma în cultură și de ce nu mai poate fi ea evitată".

[40] OUG.189/2008, Chapter III., Art. 27.

[41] OUG.189/2008, Chapter III., Art. 27.

[42] Out of 99 public performing arts venues from Romania, in 40 the general manager is an actor and in 16 a theatre director, and 10 musicians – excerpt from the authors ongoing research regarding the gender parity in the leadership of Romanian public theatre institutions.

permanent presence and undivided attention. This, as well as physically and mentally exhausting a person, can also result in potential conflicts of interest and the accumulation of various incomes within the same institution.

3. *Management competition and employment of the winner*

OG. 21/2007 runs the potential risk of creating needs assumed at national level, when the community, the audience of an institution is local, and each institution has its own socio-cultural particularities.[43] The fact that the Ministry of Culture only gives directives in OUG. 189, and each local authority can develop its own regulations for a managerial competition according to its own needs, makes decentralisation possible, but it still fails to give directives for how to engage the public, mentioned again only as a label. The authorities are obliged to draw up all the regulations relating to this process and also to appoint the members of the committee for the competition (and the appeal and evaluation committees). We believe that because these actions are executed by the same body, the transparency of these processes suffers greatly.

Articles from Chapter II, section 1-2 regulate issues such as: the days given to the preparation of management projects, the mandatory content of the objectives document and the requirements of the management project. Candidates have a minimum of 21 calendar days to draw up their management project, which has the following content, based on the information provided by the authorities in the objectives document: socio-cultural analysis of the environment in which the institution is located and proposals for its development; proposals for improving activities; reorganisation proposals; strategy, programme and implementation plan. In the event of winning the competition, the project submitted becomes the reference for the annual evaluation of the manager: in practice, only the level of achievement of the

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[43] From OG.21/2007, Chapter II., Art. 4 it can be concluded that the needs and requirements that an institution needs to fulfil have to coincide with the cultural policies of the authorities to which they belong to. In the case of cultural institutions which are directly subordinated to the Ministry of Culture, this means, according to the law, that it has to be in line with values and strategies different from those of the host city and thus of its direct community.

indicators proposed by the candidate five years before will be measured. But if we only evaluate these indicators (achieved or not), are we really evaluating the content, the real and organic impact of the activities carried out by the institution? Under the pretext of the objectives document, which contains tasks set by the authorities and whose fulfilment – according to the law – means meeting the needs of the community, we return to the question: are these tasks in line with the needs of the community? Can one really find out if the public is not included in any way in these processes?

It is clear from the emergency ordinance that both the competition and the evaluation committee have extremely great power, because it depends on them whether a manager is hired, has their contract extended or leaves office. It would therefore be very important that the methodology for selecting members and, subsequently, the composition of these committees be transparent and regulated by impartial decisions. There is no limitation in this current regulation as to who can or cannot become a member of such committees. For a little comparison, we could look at the regulations of the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN)[44] where we find more criteria and rules – when even these are not regulated clearly enough – for someone to become a project evaluator than in this ordinance.

None of the articles of the ordinance mentions the obligation to publish the list of committee members. Thus, there is no public pressure on the decision taken, which reduces the transparency of the process, and creates room for political intervention. Although, by law, the interview with the candidates admitted to the competition is public, so anyone can participate, and thus the composition of the commission becomes public information

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[44] Call for independent expert evaluators, 2020:
https://www.afcn.ro/media/invitatie%20evaluatori%20sesiune%20I%202021_1.pdf (16:00, 18.09.2020).
Please note that, according to the law, a person CANNOT BE AN evaluator if they:
- have projects submitted for funding under the relevant section;
- are part of the team of a project submitted for funding under the relevant section / are in a contractual relationship with the applying legal entity / are a partner / are in a contractual relationship with a project partner;
- have the status of a civil servant.

anyway.[45] We believe that if the public were included in the selection process and/or in the evaluation of the theatre managers – at least as invited and well-informed observers – we would ensure that the process becomes more transparent through such a public presence.

Once the winner is selected, their managerial project becomes public.[46] We believe that in order to raise the stakes in the decision (and thus ensure transparency) every project submitted to evaluation should be published.

4. Evaluation of the manager

According to Chapter IV, Article 39, the financial report is submitted earlier than the activity report, which again underlines that numbers, amounts and indicators are important for the state. The analysis of the content follows only after these. However, we believe that in the case of a theatre, we should first look at what is done, why and how it is done, thus at the content, and then look at the number of occasions and editions of a project. The evaluation is done in a quantified formula, so it is again emphasised that the theatre is seen as a manufacturer, where the assumed objectives must be achieved, without assuring the evaluation of the means and ways in which these objectives are being achieved.

Among the grounds for terminating a theatre manager's contract, there are several[47] where the relationship between the institution and the authorities becomes vulnerable. This relationship is already a dependent one, since the authorising officer decides the budget, the form of operation and the administration of the institution, to which this clause adds by leaving room for interpretations whereby we can assume that differences in opinions and values can also result in tensions between the authorities and the theatre manager. From Chapter IV, Article 43.1 we learn that if the annual evaluation reaches a grade of 9, the current manager of the institution is entitled to a new candidacy, and the authorities are not obliged to hold a public competition. Even if this ordinance was intended to protect institutions from potential

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[45] OUG. 189/2008, Chapter II., Section 3, Art. 16/3.

[46] OUG. 189/2008, Chapter II., Section 2, Art.15/2.

[47] OUG. 189/2008, Chapter III., Art. 31.

abuse of power by the authorities, it clearly also gives way to collaboration between managers and the authorities, which is not transparent and has almost no monitoring body.

We also note that there are no members of the public, or employees, in the evaluation committees. Obviously, it can be said that the institution that achieves its objectives has a good team and a satisfactory leadership. It seems clear from these rules that the theatre is not seen by the state as a community of people, but as a factory. The contract cannot be terminated at the request of the company or the audience/the community, nor is there the possibility of asking for an evaluation of the manager by its employees and/or community representatives.

Conclusions

In addition to the critical observations presented above, the most important conclusion for us is that the public is not included at all by the current legislation in the processes of the theatrical institution. Its role cannot be made consultative or proactive through any of the analysed ordinances, although it is defined by law that these institutions have the obligation to serve their audience's interest. The state does not ensure through legislation that this service is being provided. The state only ensures that the money is spent according to the initial plans, that what is proposed corresponds to what is done each year, but it is not interested in the content and the way in which these results are being achieved. By the logic of these ordinances, in fact the *authority* becomes the *public* whose needs must be met, so the public theatre means the *theatre of the authorities* – and not of the actual, local audiences. And the institution of the theatre thus equals the theatre manager in the eyes of the state. In the eyes of the state, these managers are its direct employees and the fulfilment of their duties stops at the execution of a financial exercise.

By analysing these laws, we conclude that the relationship between the state and the theatre institution is a money-based one. This equation is not even wrong until it implies that the public institution exercises its responsibility to exchange these sums into cultural values for the audience, and the state fulfils its commitment to properly support the institution in this endeavour.

Thus, we believe it is necessary and important to make the professional and civil community aware of what the state theatre actually means: a place for the public, supported not by state money, but by citizens' taxes. It is important to be aware of this differentiation and to introduce an alternative expression into the discourse: instead of public money, let us use taxpayers' money.[48] It is important to take back public space through language as well and to start democratising public institutions through discourse.

Another observation that we have made during this analysis is that there is a hyper-visibility to some state theatres which produce an exaggerated image in the collective professional consciousness.[49] Because of these, public discourse easily falls into the mistake of saying that the problems come only from "megalomaniac artists" who become managers and stay for life, because we tend to focus on problems with big plus figures – either in age or in money – but we have such indicators in minus figures as well. There are also state theatres where structural problems manifest differently: through underfunding, ethnic and/or political tensions, high resignation rates, personal conflicts between the local authorities and the institution. In a way, these situations are all, directly or indirectly, the products of the present legislation, and persist because of the continued lack of public involvement – both by themselves and by the institutions.

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[48] The importance of this difference was explained by the late Anna Lengyel, Hungarian playwright and theatre producer, in a talk with Martin E. Segal Theatre on 4 May 2020: https://howlround.com/happenings/segal-talks-andrea-tompa-and-anna-lengyel-hungary.

[49] Such as the National Theatre in Bucharest or the Hungarian State Theatre in Cluj, where there have been the same directors for many years (15 and 31 years, respectively) and the given institutions receive enormous subsidies (in 2019: 45,710,000 lei and 14,378,000 lei, respectively).

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Saving the Mask

FILIP ODANGIU[1]

Abstract: The Article defends the actor's mask training from the reformist trends that consider the mask study to be no longer necessary or topical. The author identifies one of the causes of this attitude in the purpose of higher education in Europe that has changed in the recent years. Students are unfortunately encouraged to have employment-focused *consumer* behaviours, therefore are more concerned with the *results* than with the *process of* learning and personal development. Specifically, the question arises whether academic studies, theatre, in this case, are intended only for the training of future employees or, without excluding, of course, this goal, they are rather ways to model behaviours, to (in)-form the spirit, to educate critical thinking and, last but not least, to endow students with an ethos that will allow them to be, as future theatre artists, spokesmen of free expression, the "mirror of the times"? The study continues with a brief exposition of the principles, themes and benefits of mask training. In the final part, the author presents the results of a mini-survey among graduates of the Cluj theatre school, questioned about the role of mask studies in their professional careers.

Keywords: reforms, theatrical studies, mask, actor, commedia dell'arte, Cluj

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Fig. 1. Neutral mask, clay model, by Filip Odangiu

I.

Radical reforms can lead to the disappearance of practices and values that are valid regardless of time or context. This article is a position statement, a call to reason and an argument for maintaining mask courses in the curriculum of theatre faculties. I discuss this particular case because it could illustrate the risks of changes that might undermine basic principles of arts education.

The coronavirus pandemic is generating unrest and serious questions in many areas, and has also been a catalyst for new trends in recent years. Not only the means of communication, but also the mission of art and education are questioned once again. The arts, the cultural and education institutions face unprecedented economic, social and even political pressures.

One can notice a similarity between the way in which the cultural act begins to be re-thought and the act of education. The criterion of efficiency, insistence on measurable results, quantification, statistics become more important than research, personal development, awareness building. Time is getting busier, standardized by "procedures," there are even authorities

who determine exactly how long it *should take* to build an article, a theatre show, an artist. The study cycles are getting shorter, it seems that the training time of a mathematician or lawyer is equal to the training of a teacher, an athlete or an actor. The courses in classic format are seriously competed by workshops, seminars, webinars, tutorials that condense the information, provide the *result* directly without considering the *process.*

Or, at least in arts education, the order of priorities should be different, as the famous acting trainer, Clive Barker, states: "The keynote to all the work is that it is a process of exploration and discovery, not the direct acquisition of practical skills which the actor does not possess. The acquisition of skills is the by-product of the work. By starting with this premise we concentrate on the processes of action and not on the results we want to achieve."[2]

Training, in the artistic field, as in sports, involves an underlying natural process of growth and development, which takes place in a certain time, determined by many objectives and subjective factors. In the face of the current of opinion that proclaims the need to accelerate and maximize learning, the question naturally arises: has the human body-mind evolved in sync with these imperatives? Has the pattern of growth changed? And towards what are we hurrying?

"A school should devote time and attention to a rigorous process of experimentation, to waste time in order to gain time," warns the character Rosa Sensat, in the play *Amor mundi* by Victoria Szpunberg. Not only time must follow regulatory controls, but also the contents are targeted by radical reformulations. Education and culture must, apparently, sell well. The principles of marketing invade territories until recently protected. Attractive projects invite teachers to become "educational entrepreneurs" the innovative nature of courses depends on "maximizing the learning" of students, which is reminiscent of the questionable practice of forced growth in agriculture. The integration of entrepreneurship in teaching is justified by the need to approach the concrete, everyday life.

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[2] Clive Barker, *Theatre Games. A New Approach to drama training*. (London: Methuen drama, 2019), 5.

Fig. 2. Masked students playing Pulcinella and Theresine, 2021;
photo credit Ioana Albu

Simultaneously with the decrease of subsidies in education, as well as in culture, the emphasis seems to be placed more and more on profitability, on an *input-output* system.[3]

The study "Students" views on the purpose of higher education: a comparative analysis of six European countries" refers to the creation of the European Higher Education Area (2010) – as the moment when the European universities were 'reverse-engineered' around an Anglo-American model.[4] According to it, students have employment-focused *consumer* behaviours, therefore are more concerned with the *results* than with the *process of* learning

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[3] Rachel Brooks et al., "Students' views on the purpose of higher education: a comparative analysis of six European countries," *Higher Education Research & Development*, 40:7 (2021), 1375-1388. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1830039

[4] Rachel Brooks et al., "Students' views…", https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1830039

and personal development. Some researchers, cited in the aforementioned study, link the Bologna reform to the same trend that reduces higher education to an economic production function. The study "Students" views on the purpose of higher education…" shows that the tendency of decision makers to instil a *consumer* mentality/identity in students, has led to a more passive attitude towards learning, to the fact that students place much more emphasis on their rights than on their responsibilities and on getting a diploma, rather than knowledge. The findings of surveys by Rachel Brooks, Achala Gupta, Sazana Jayadeva, and Jessie Abrahams certify that politicians and decision-makers continue to introduce policies to measure the "quality" of higher education according to employment outcomes. However, as the cited article shows, many students have a different perspective. A considerable number of participants in the study argued that universities offer society the chance of a protected environment in which thoughts and ideas can be pursued at the highest level; intellectual research is a value in itself, and higher education institutions should play an important role in promoting the public good by facilitating reasoning, debate, the promotion of democracy and critical thinking.[5]

II.

Recently, the decision-making forums in theatre education put forward the idea of eliminating mask studies from the curriculum of the theatre faculty in Cluj. The rationale for this measure is in line with the general trend invoked above, whereby "the value of higher education has come to be associated with economic reward and labour market participation and measured by a relatively narrow range of indicators."[6] In the present case, the reasons presented refer to the limited number of theatre productions using mask in repertoires and the imperative to adapt art education to the expectations of the labour market. This kind of approach forces us to reaffirm the importance of mask studies in actor training, making it inevitable to refer

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[5] Rachel Brooks et al., "Students' views…", https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1830039
[6] Rachel Brooks et al., "Students' views…" https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1830039

to the role and purpose of arts education at the academic level. Specifically, the question arises whether academic studies, theatre, in this case, are intended only for the training of future employees or, without excluding, of course, this goal, they are rather ways to model behaviours, to (in)-form the spirit, to educate critical thinking and, last but not least, to endow students with an ethos that will allow them to be, as future theatre artists, spokesmen of free expression, the "mirror of the times"?

Fig. 3. Scene from commedia dell'arte performance, 2015; Filip Odangiu archive

I have been teaching acting at the theatre faculty in Cluj for almost 20 years. The discipline "Mask and character studies" has been in the academic program for 30 years, since the establishment of the faculty. The tradition of mask studies was created and cultivated by a whole gallery of exceptional artists and pedagogues who recognized the formative potential of the mask: Miriam Cuibus, Mona Chirilă, Bács Miklós, Diana Cozma, Ionuț Caras, Anca Măniuțiu, Ștefana Pop Curșeu and many others. The theatre faculty in Cluj is one of the few faculties in Romania where this discipline is taught on a regular basis, so the mentioned tradition means, at the same time, an accumulation of knowledge. Over 20 generations of student actors, directors, theatre critics and playwrights, trained in Cluj, were, directly or indirectly, influenced by mask studies.

Today, this tradition is questioned and this requires reaffirmation of the fundamental motivations of mask and the Commedia dell'Arte in the academic curriculum.

III.

For the training of the actor, the knowledge and practice of masked acting are indispensable.[7] Jacques Copeau has been the first to acknowledge this when he first covered the students' faces, at the Theatre du Vieux-Colombier, in 1913. Depriving the actor-apprentice of the possibility to use his/her facial expression on stage determines him/her to discover other instruments of bodily expression; the mask helps the actors gain a deep, physical and psychological understanding of the expressive value of their body position/ posture, gesture, gait, etc. At the same time, the mask develops the actor's dramatic instinct: he gets to "feel", to intuit the plot development, the character, the dramatic situation. His condition changes: from the photographic reproduction of reality to the level of a sculpture, that is, from the copying of nature to its understanding, states Leon Chancerel in "Notes personelles," as quoted by Sears A. Eldredge.[8]

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[7] The mask training must be understood, of course, as a complement, not a contradiction of other methods of acting training.

[8] Eldredge, A. Sears, *Mask Improvisation for Actor, Training & Performance. The compelling* Imag (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 17.

Fig. 4. Shadow exercises, 2017; photo credit Filip Odangiu

Freshly admitted students to acting school seem, more and more often, strangers to their own body and mind. First year subjects bring them closer to themselves, teach them to breathe again, to walk, to talk and to undertake actions driven by intention and emotion. Mask studies, introduced in the second year, help beginners discover and practice concepts and techniques like the opposing vectors, status, mask-countermask, to practically understand the idea of mind-body unity, to integrate the environment in their performance, but something essential takes place: their "artistic morphology" develops, through the appearance and manifestation of the "third eye", a metacognitive ability through which the future actor acquires a new, integrative perception of his Presence and actions in space and time.

The cost of these transformations is not to be neglected, because it concerns the very identity of the mask wearer. The newly admitted to acting are, on average, 19 years old and are in the effervescent phase of self-search. When they don the masks for the first time, they are shocked, because they encounter their unknown part, a part only foreboding, but not manifested until then. As all masters of the mask point out, its action is always twofold: it simultaneously hides and reveals the wearer's personality.

Mask acting involves such a radical paradigm shift in thinking that beginners are unsettled, at first. When I started studying the mask, as a student, the shock was just as great. The attitude of the students towards the lessons of the mask, in general, and the Commedia dell'Arte, in particular, moves from enthusiasm to confusion, recoil and, finally, revelation and freedom of expression. Beyond the deprivation of facial expression or the limitations imposed on the voice, a much more disconcerting requirement for the students is to put intentions, emotions and thoughts into the body, to amplify gestures, to discover that "total osmosis between outside and inside", described by inspired actress and mask teacher, Ana Vasquez Castro.[9] The gestural behaviour of the masked character might seem illustrative and superficial, as the opponents of the mask theatre say, but this opinion betrays the limitation to a first level of understanding. We understand that the work happens at a higher level of creativity where each gesture has a significant role, being part of an elaborate system, called "mask code". Problems occur only when mask studies are taught inadequately, justifying the criticism of the mask.

Some of the preconceived ideas about commedia dell'arte, which I, as a teacher and spectator have met, are: Commedia dell'Arte is nothing but a cheerful, superficial comedy, uncoordinated, random improvisation, the opposite of realism; the characters are mere simplistic, even monomaniacal creatures, expressing themselves through chaotic agitation.

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[9] Ana Vasquez Castro, "The Clown, that unique being," *Revista do Lume*, 4/2012, 10.

Fig. 5. Masked students, scene from rehearsals, 2021; photo credit Ioana Albu

Connoisseurs have a different view, they see in this theatrical genre – called "codified theatre", "fixed form theatre", "theatre of declared convention" etc. – the essence of theatre. Pure improvisation does not exist in Commedia dell'Arte, maintain initiates, such as Feruccio Soleri, with whom I had the privilege of working.[10] Anyone who approaches the Commedia dell'Arte carefully can see the deep realism that underlies both the codes and the relationships between the characters. It is not simply a merry agitation. The codes, the "fixed" grammar elements of the mask acting allow the novice actor to understand and respect the craft part of the chosen profession. According to Eric Morris, technique and confidence are interdependent. Confidence in your own tool comes from the certainty that you master concrete techniques, says Morris.[11]

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[10] "The masks of Commedia dell'Arte" workshop by Ferruccio Soleri, "Ion Sava" Centre, The National Theater, Bucharest, 2006.

[11] Eric Morris and Joan Hotchkis, *No Acting Please,* (Los Angeles: Ermore Enteprises Publishing, 2002), 37.

The great acting teacher Michel Saint-Denis, quoted by Sears Eldredge, stated that working in a mask is essential in training the novice actor, because it allows him to arouse his emotions and cool his mind, understanding, through experimentation, the chemistry of acting. The need to control his physical actions, even in moments of great emotional tension, forces the actor to adopt a detached and lucid attitude.[12]

Fig. 6a, b, c. Mask creations and improvisations done by the students;
photo credit Filip Odangiu

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[12] Sears A. Eldredge, *Mask Improvisation for Actor, Training & Performance. The compelling Image,* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 37.

If, from the orientation of my argument, it can be deduced, hastily, that I reduce mask studies to the Commedia dell'Arte style, I mention that, in working with students, the denotations of the mask are very diverse, from the object made of different materials applied on the face, or one part of the body or on the whole body of the actor, to the psychological concept of mask.

Fig. 7. Masks on body parts exercise; photo credit Filip Odangiu

During mask training, students acquire, through experimentation, notions like: *body mask, vocal mask, object-mask, incarnated mask.* As the study progresses, exercises with masks overlap with physical theatre themes and culminate in maskless exercises, in which the gains obtained in the masking stages are preserved. The well-known British director Declan Donnellan asserts in his book, *The Actor and Target,* that working with a mask can be revealing when actors establish the basis of a role, even in the case of the most realistic contemporary texts. Declan Donnellan also points out that „Working with a mask is great for the stuck actor because the mask can destroy the actor's self-consciousness."[13] The use of the mask, as an antidote for creative blockage, is based on the following premises: the mask allows the wearer to find a second nature, the actor is not self-conscious anymore, free from the pressure; the „target" is somewhere outside the actor, not the actor himself. Declan Donnelan then states that the theatre costume, the makeup or any concrete object worn by the performer can serve as a mask as long as (or if) the actor uses it only when playing. In my opinion, the mask works similarly to the *psychological gesture* proposed by Michael Chekhov – whose working method we frequently use in conjunction with the mask – contributing to the laying of the invisible foundation of the role.

Mask studies often fulfil themselves in the actors' consciousness when they play in the street, in front of an audience that does not necessarily attend theatre institutions. With each generation of students, we go through the mask exercises in the space of reality. There, they find out that ordinary people do not reject the interaction, nor treat the mask as a bizarreness, but generally accept the convention and gladly engage, in most cases, in the interaction.

From this perspective, challenging the mask studies, under the pretext that mask performances are rarely present, today, on the cultural market, is obviously an error, a misunderstanding of the role that the mask can play in building the identity of the future theatre artist.

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[13] Declan Donnellan, *The Actor and the Target. Rules and instruments for theatrical play*, trans. Saviana Stănescu and Ioana Ieronim (Bucharest: Unitext Publishing House, 2006), 92.

Fig. 8. Masked students during an action at the Turda Salt Mine, 2021;
photo credit Marius Romilă

IV.

In the summer of 2021, looking for the best way to support the idea of maintaining mask studies, I consulted several graduates of the Theatre Faculty in Cluj, based on the premise that the opinion of the graduates that already have a solid professional perspective can contribute to choosing the right direction to follow. Thus, I launched a mini questionnaire that included two questions:

1. Do you think that studying mask theatre / Commedia dell'Arte helped you later in your profession as actor / director and in what way?

2. Do you think it is useful to maintain the mask study in the training of future actors?

I received 29 responses from actors and directors, representative of the new generations of theatre professionals trained in Cluj. Their full answers will soon appear in a volume dedicated to Mask Training. However, I still choose to reproduce some of the opinions they expressed, in order to illustrate both the "polychromies" of the approaches and the points of convergence. All the views presented here are taken from the correspondence of the author of this article and are given on the basis of the agreement of those cited.

From the very beginning it can be seen that there are differences of approach between actors and directors: while the former passionately describe the lesson of the mask as having a fundamental contribution to their identity as artists, directors – seemingly untouched by the masks "virus" – although recognize the transformative power of the mask over the actor, are more reserved, adopting a rationalist perspective. Both perspectives may contribute to the reconsideration of mask studies, but neither justifies giving them up.

Fig. 9. Students playing Arlecchino and a Romanian Capitano, 2015; photo credit Alin Barbir

The key words most often evoked by the respondents are: basic, rigor, mathematics, archetype, expressiveness, rhythm, energy, playful. Most of the actors whose formative background includes mask studies make categorical statements that, in essence, coincide. Thus, mask studies are seen as "a school in itself (…) one of the cornerstones of acting" (Diana Licu); "A formative base of complex artistic mechanisms that has served me in my practical approach." (Ioana Cojocărescu); "This theatrical form that is ultimately the basis of the construction of any character, be it comic or dramatic" (Patricia Brad); "This form of theatre puts the actor in a continuous state of alert and because it pushes the actor to realize and explore his limits, both physical and mental" (Alex Condurat).

Gaspare Nasuto, Italian artist, who recommends himself as "Ambassador to the world, Museo di Pulcinella. Actor, traveller, puppeteer, sculptor,"[14] one of the most well-known keepers of the tradition of the Pulcinella puppet, responded to my request in his characteristic temperamental manner, first taking the problem that I raised as a re-enactment of the endless negotiation with the Power, a struggle that comedians have always waged: "you are not alone in this battle. I will be by your side whenever you need my support. I am ready to come to Cluj. The future is now. We will win again. For 500 years and more, we've been under siege. The story repeats itself. Nobody remembers the names of the attackers; the world remembers all the Commedia dell'Arte artists." The Italian actor then states that the techniques of Commedia dell'Arte and ancient theatrical codes are important in the formation of an actor. Mind and body control, discipline and exercise contribute to professional growth and enrich the cultural foundation of each student. Gaspare Nasuto believes that an actor capable of using ancient masks and puppets is an actor who has reached a higher level of mastery. His imaginative ability and mind/body connection are amplified. In conclusion, Nasuto states that it is essential to keep the course of study on masks, concluding that "an actor of Commedia dell'Arte represents the gate, the bridge of communication between our times and the past, a past built through technique, faith, practice, study, and discipline."

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[14] "Gaspare Nasuto: Biography,"
https://gasparenasuto.wixsite.com/ladomusdipulcinella/biografia.

Ofelia Popii, the well-known actress of the National Theatre "Radu Stanca" Sibiu, theatre teacher at the Department of Theatre Arts at the University "Lucian Blaga" in Sibiu, says that the study of the mask is "extremely useful" and that she addresses this subject in the second year of study. Regarding the contribution of mask studies to her own professional success, Ofelia Popii states: "Studying Commedia dell'Arte and working with a mask is important for the development of body expression, it helps to explore voice and diction, develop imagination and creative ability. At the psychological level, it marks very well the awareness of what a character means, something you aim for and become, the understanding of the mask idea on a larger level. In my acting career, it helped me both in the composition roles and in those in the realist-psychological area; this study helped me to create all my characters."

Oana Mardare, actress, founder of a well-known independent theatre in Cluj (Reactor of creation and experiment), proposes new perspectives. Having a master's degree in acting at ESTUDIS at Teatro Berty Tovias, Barcelona, allows Oana Mardare to say that "the mask is a lifeline for the actor, it helps her to keep lucid." It is worth noting here the paradox typical of the mask, which is generally perceived as a gateway to the trance of otherness, not to a clearer perspective. Regarding the academic curriculum, Oana Mardare confesses that she does not see the usefulness of completing mask studies by producing shows, the reasons being "time, energy and resources lost by building things that have little to do with the actor's laboratory. "Oana Mardare suggests to continue with the mask studies, but to also have an approach to contemporary reality. The actress considers that, in a symbolic and essentialized way, each character is a form of mask. She thinks it's important to be aware of that, because the convention gives the actor a safe distance from the interpreted material.

From a completely different position, the director Radu Nica states that the study of the mask did not help him in his career. However, the director acknowledges that his area of artistic interest is rather in the direction of a realistic aesthetic, which involves a style of play as natural as possible. Radu Nica appreciates that the study of the mask would lead the actors towards "a thicker/expressionist/exterior (…) acting style", in collision with what he

considers to be an adequate acting style for the 21st century: authentic, internalized, but not without stage expressiveness, a post-Brechtian acting, in which one can see the inner universe of the actor who plays a character, but also his personal attitude (be it sometimes critical) towards the role he plays. Radu Nica acknowledges, on the other hand, that the study of the mask is useful for future actors who, thanks to the aesthetics of Commedia dell'Arte, have the opportunity to unlock emotionally, to acquire the means of bodily expression, to learn the mechanisms of comedy, a body of knowledge from which the director can also fully benefit. Radu Nica concludes that, in an age where honesty, rather than virtuosity and artistic illusion, is at the forefront, the study of the mask is useful, provided that this study is strictly limited to only one semester.

The opinions given above resonate with those expressed by other representative directors. For example, Leta Popescu reproaches mask studies for taking too long and for the lack of grip on contemporaneity. Norbert Boda, actor and director, also believes that the study of Commedia dell' Arte, which spans more than a semester, may be to the detriment of the actor.

Director Leta Popescu also brings into question the fact that sometimes mask studies can distort the way actors play, and she finds that to be the reason why some directors, with an aesthetic close to that of the film, avoid working with actors with a mask background. However, Leta Popescu does not forget to mention a series of healthy, useful, indispensable principles, assimilated by herself, through the study of the mask. Thus, as for the directors, Leta Popescu evokes the precious lessons received from her teacher, Mona Chirilă, a well-known director, specialized in mask theatre: the opening to the poetic area – through the character Pierrot –, in her case, the principle of freedom, of serious play, understanding and applying the techniques of theatrical convention, rigorous pattern, training the muscle of seeking solutions. As for the actors, Leta Popescu adds the relationship with the audience to the previously mentioned lessons. In this regard, she recalls the procedure "colpo di maschera al publico" (or the "double take"), which means to give a fair expression to a reaction, a principle which very few actors with no previous mask experience can incorporate. Recognizing the value of the mask study, however, Leta Popescu recommends shortening the study duration and orienting the work topics towards more contemporary issues.

Andrei Măjeri, director, goes even further, proposing the reconsideration of the curriculum succession, respectively the placement of the mask studies earlier. In his opinion, a more appropriate order of acting lessons would be: nonverbal theatre, then mask studies, in the first year, Elizabethan theatre and then realistic theatre in the second year and, finally, contemporary drama and preparation of the graduation performance in the third year. Andrei Măjeri places mask studies in the area of typology and formalist theatre and considers it imperative to counterbalance this lesson with approaches that, while addressing major themes, show interest in students, are connected to their age and contemporary issues.

Fig. 10. Scene from commedia dell'arte performance, 2013; Filip Odangiu archive

Undoubtedly, it is encouraging and inspiring that directors express views contrary to the current of opinion manifested among the actors. But if we look closely, their criticisms do not address and do not raise the issue of eliminating mask studies, the usefulness of which they unanimously recognize,

but rather express the need to reconsider the approach. I do believe it is very useful to take into account the feedback of the directors who have a constant contact with the professional field. It is also to meditate on the evolution of acting, on the idea of topicality versus permanence.

My pedagogical approach, in mask improvisation, has multiple goals, the most practical one being to help the student incorporate a stage behaviour in the theatre *without* masks.

I am perfectly aware that we rarely meet the physical mask on stage. I am not aiming for students to acquire a mannerist style of playing, not even a certain style. The ultimate pedagogical purpose is to help the students gain something that is pre-style, pre-expressive, in Eugenio Barba's terms, a transformation, it is laying a foundation of thinking in act. This final purpose can only be achieved in time. It is true, in the early phase, after the mask studies, the students' acting style may seem shrill and this can sometimes contaminate the following roles, but gradually the interpretation is tempered and the right tone is reached. It's all about the way the mask is taught. I'm not a mask mystic, my landmarks are Jaques Lecoq, Dario Fo, Feruccio Soleri, Declan Donnellan, Sears Eldredge, Gaspare Nasuto and others. Well-done mask theatre is deeply realistic. The spectators are still very impressed when a masked character suddenly turns to them from the stage. Maintaining the mask during training can structure the actor's long-term stage ethos. Only if it is taught incorrectly, the masked acting remains shrill. Following my former students, I can say that the "work of the mask" is sometimes accomplished even some time after graduation, in roles in which they play without a mask.

Beyond the discussion about aesthetic choices and observations on the teaching process, a number of respondents to my questionnaire presented concrete examples of how the study of the principles of mask play supported them in the profession, helping them in various contexts. I have retained a few eloquent examples. One actor claims that the study of the Commedia dell'Arte brought him closer to social theatre (Alex Condurat). Director Delia Gavlițchi and actor David Constantinescu talk about the non-verbal theatre they practice, mentioning the clear difference between the actors who studied mask theatre and those who did not.

Fig. 11. Masked and unmasked group of characters during an exercise from Sears
A. Eldredge; photo credit Filip Odangiu

Actress Fatma Mohamed, present in most of the feature films of the
English director Peter Strickland, mentions the contribution of the Commedia
dell'Arte archetype characters in shaping her film acting. Actor Cosmin
Bighei refers to his career in stand-up and improv theatre.

Paul Sebastian Popa, along with many others, mentions the usefulness of mask studies in the activity of director/trainer of non-formal education workshops, but especially in puppet and animation theatre. Actor Cătălin Filip talks about the creation of the Commedia dell'Arte canvas as an exercise in structuring ideas, beneficial for the playwright's work. Actor Cătălin Florea highlights the development of scenography skills, comparing the construction of the costume and mask with building a house with his own hands. Most actors talk about the power of the mask to provide solutions to overcome creative blocks. Others confess the contribution of the mask to their identity as actors.

Fig. 12. Commedia dell'arte and Romanian traditional masks, performance by Filip Odangiu; photo credit Alin Barbir

Bogdan Bob Rădulescu – actor who works both in the state and in the private system, considers that the actor becomes a character only when he dons a mask, otherwise the mask is the face of the *actor's character* (real Self). Bob Rădulescu believes that each actor contains, in essence, a character from the gallery of those in the Commedia dell'Arte, and that the discovery of this virtual inner character is the effect of studying the mask. In conclusion, Bogdan Rădulescu states emphatically: "the mask can exist without theatre, but theatre without a mask, no!"

<div align="center">V.</div>

The limited space of an article does not allow the development of an extensive argument in favour of maintaining mask studies in the academic curriculum. It is more than obvious that doing the exercises of Jaques Lecoq, Dario Fo, Eugenio Barba, Keith Johnstone, Sears Eldredge and others one can best understand the value of the mask in training a future theatre artist. I tried to briefly present the themes of working with a mask and their benefits. But the direct experience with the mask cannot be replaced by any theoretical presentation. The enthusiasm of those who have gone through this experience can be felt in the tone of their statements of support. The fact that almost 40% of the theatre students in Cluj choose, as topics of their bachelor's dissertation, subjects from the mask theatre is an obvious indicator of the importance they give to this stage of their training.

But beyond statistics, after all, an actor is just someone who wants to play someone else, or how can he pretend to do that if he doesn't firstly learn who he is? The mask on the face of the novice actor is the perfect alibi and tool that allows him to find his true nature and function at a higher level of creativity.

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FILIP ODANGIU specializes in acting and acting pedagogy. He received his PhD in the pedagogy and training of the actor, specifically, in the metacognitive strategies involved in the actor's training. He completed his PhD in Theater at Babeş-Bolyai University. His artistic practice covers acting, directing for theatre and film, non-verbal theatre, improvisation, commedia dell'arte and mask theatre, physical theatre, animation theatre, Viewpoints and storytelling. His publications include two books of reference in the theater practice (Metacognitive Strategies in Actor's Training, Casa Cărții de Știință Publishing House, Cluj, 2013 and Praxis. The Strategical Exercise, Casa Cărții de Știință Publishing House, Cluj, 2013) and more than 20 articles in professional journals. He participated in the realization of numerous shows at the Cluj National Theater. In 2020, he set up, together with Diana Aldea and former students, current collaborators, The MAIDAN Creation Centre Cluj Napoca.

MISCELLANEA:
INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES

Reclaiming Public Culture *as*
a Common Terrain of Action in the Public Interest

A Dialogue with Raluca Iacob

LIVIA PANCU[1]

Raluca Iacob *is a cultural manager, a cultural policy analyst and an independent researcher, president of MetruCub – resources for culture Association. Among others, she coordinated the formulation of the cultural strategy of the city of Timișoara for*

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2014-2024 (together with Vera Marin and commissioned by the Municipality of Timișoara) and, as councillor to the minister of culture in 2016, the design of the national strategy for culture and heritage. Other relevant collaborations with: the Center for Consultancy for European Cultural Programmes, the Romanian Academic Society, the Romanian Federation of Community Foundations and the European Network of Cultural Centres. Currently she is interested in practices and policies of culture in education, in alternative models of cultural governance and in cultural networks.

Livia Pancu: I want to start by first saying a big thank you for accepting to give us this interview. Just to briefly mention that today we have to discuss a quite wide subject of which even I, who have been present in the realm of contemporary culture as a professional, do not have a very clear image yet. Thus, I would kindly ask you to first give us a sort of personal and professional trajectory of your own. Better said, a trajectory of your own work, that of a cultural worker, because I assume that this specific work built a very clear conceptual space for you, in which one could navigate.

Raluca Iacob: Thank you for the invitation. Indeed, I also believe that my professional path is a good lens to grasp the meaning of *public culture* as value-statement, and as experience-based, so not only a purely theoretical constructed concept.

I started to work in culture when I was 24 years old as a consultant for the Romanian Cultural Contact Point, now the Creative Europe Desk. My job was meant to facilitate, negotiate and transition ideas, opinions and data among the perspectives of the European Union, the one of the cultural actors, and other funders, local administration, or the Ministry of Culture. The result was to offer advice and information about how to obtain European funding for cultural cooperation projects. Because it was fundamental for my overview and for my professional path, I am going to insist a bit on this first job.

Livia Pancu: Please do, but before that I just wanted to pin point that all this was happening in Bucharest. Which year?

Raluca Iacob: This was happening in Bucharest in 2007; it was a public institution that was called The Center for Consultancy for European Culture

Programmes, placed under the Ministry of Culture. Me and my colleagues often travelled around the country for workshops and presentations, so I got to know a diversity of places and organizations. There I learned first-hand how the European Union engages with culture as a domain and with the cultural actors, and I understood how the European institutional space of ideas was structured, a space in which diversity, cooperation and respect for human rights were valuated. This is how I grew an appreciation for and a practical understanding of partnerships and the value of intercultural dialogue and competences, an encompassing view of the public value of culture and an inclusive definition of who its main players are. I had the chance to reflect on key topics of cultural policy, but also to meet international specialists in the field, who later influenced my work, such as Dragan Klaic, who coordinated my MA thesis at Central European University on the subject of advocacy for culture in transition countries, with a focus on the Romanian situation after 1989. In my view, this first job I had for almost three years was fundamental for everything I have done afterwards, because it made me understand how different viewpoints converge or disband, how power structures can interact and how important it is to create a safe and consistent space for exchange and mutual respectful contribution of all.

Because I was on the lookout to spot the most pressing needs of the Romanian cultural actors that I could provide a solution to, I was inclined to do more than my job-description implied; for example, to get informed and to think about other types of services that the cultural actors would require. Therefore, I quit and I started a free service of informing cultural actors about funding opportunities. Further on, I went to study cultural policies at Central European University, meanwhile co-founding with other cultural actors the *Coalition of the Independent Cultural Sector*. And from 2011 onwards, I started to do what I am continuing to do nowadays: work simultaneously on several projects or assignments, as an independent researcher, as a consultant, as a manager, as a project evaluator, as a trainer with NGOs, public institutions, public administrations, local, national and European. In 2012 I co-founded an NGO called *MetruCub – Resurse pentru Cultură* [CubicMeter – Resources for Culture] with Bianca Floarea and Ioana Tamaș.

Livia Pancu: Just another quick question: have you also worked in public administration as part of the cultural domain, as an employee?

Raluca Iacob: Yes. I was a counsellor of the Minister of Culture, Ms. Corina Șuteu, from May 2016 to January 2017, in charge of redrafting the *National Strategy for Culture and National Heritage* as well as coordinating the Platform for Living Culture, among other things. And the first job I had, the one I already mentioned, was within a public institution that was part of the administration, in direct contact with the Ministry.

Livia Pancu: If we were to look at what you have described so far as to a kind of a grid, where you have two coordinates: one is the temporal line that starts with 2007, the year when Romania joined the EU, up to now, and the other one follows the independent scene, public administrations – both in the EU and nationally – can you describe to us whether there is a progress or not in the way publicness is understood? Also, you mentioned earlier that part of your most important values are diversity and cooperation, but you also addressed vulnerability. How do you think this concept changed from 2007 to the present day in those three different registers mentioned above?

Raluca Iacob: I think in 2007, compared to the present moment, there was more eagerness among the Romanian public administration, especially the Ministry of Culture, to reflect and discuss openly those democratic values and principles of participative governance, the public value of culture, the role of partnerships and cooperation, the role of NGOs for an inclusive concept of public culture, and really try to integrate them in new legislation, policies, programmes, discourses of the institutions and the officials. Also, at that time, the European Union's actions and discourse on culture were much more directed towards access to culture, intercultural dialogue, diversity of cultural expressions, and so on. There was this encompassing political view that was much more socially-oriented, much more looking at people and communities, at the complexity of the cultural ecosystem in a connective way, at the relation between the arts or heritage, on the one hand, and the way people are making sense of them, their values, their cultural rights, on the other.

Still, already by 2007 one could notice, from the European Union level to the national and local one, a trend of measuring the economic impact of culture, the value of culture in terms of the money it generates in the economy, and a shift in the political discourse leaning in this direction. That was the time when the referential KEA study was done.[2] This strong trend has been counterbalanced again in the past few years with a much needed orientation of discourse towards the relation between culture and sustainable development, audience engagement and cultural participation, well-being, and partnerships as a model of international cultural relationships. It is again a turn towards the value of a democratic cultural practice in society, but the world is not the same as in the 2000s, and the focus on cultural and creative industries and the routine of valuing culture in terms of its economic capacities left its strong mark.

The influence of a financial outcome-based reasoning to support culture presents many challenges (and few opportunities) for public culture, especially in difficult economic and social situations, such as the ones generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, for example. In these scenarios, where there is a need for targeted and strong state support for key types of cultural actors working in the public interest, the focus on the financial value of their work as an argument for their worth is wrong, in my opinion, and it is a result of the line of thinking that frames the economic impact of culture as a measure of its societal value.

The Romanian public administration's discourse used to be quite mimetic to the main European trends, but its practice has and continues to have a quite strong conservative core. The legislative reforms from the late 90s and early 2000s were inspired by examples from other European countries, where our cultural policy shapers worked or studied, and because there was at some point consistent funding for reform and capacity building within the administration, as we were in the process to be accepted as EU members and needed to consolidate our capacity to act based on democratic principles and a new view of how cultural management should behave. But that was back

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[2] KEA European Affairs, *The Economy of Culture in Europe*. Study prepared for the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education and Culture), October 2006.

then, and the most recent important national cultural norm is from 2008. Since, we were only left with the mimeticism of discourse, and a very conservative and inertial policy practice took the lead, which meant neglect and inactivity mostly.

Thus, the talk about the economic contribution or value of the cultural and creative industries was adopted very rapidly – albeit with no practical or policy follow-up – while the paradigm of access to culture and participation was to a great extent left behind. This happened even though Romania did not really resolve the issues of the lack of availability of cultural infrastructure and did not address the need to provide a supportive frame of work and funding of cultural NGOs and a status of the creator, nor did it persevere to build an inclusive concept for the public value of culture but was complacent and stayed with the model of understanding public culture meaning only the work of public cultural institutions.

Livia Pancu: Can we say that this concept of public culture was better addressed in the – let us say – older paradigm than in the new one, where you have industry and entrepreneurial mindset, so on and so forth? Should we first start defining the concept of public culture?

Raluca Iacob: One must say from the beginning that academia more often refers to the *public value of cultur*e or *culture in the public interest*, than to *public culture*. Still, at least in our Romanian case, and maybe in all spaces that share our political, cultural and institutional dynamics, I would argue it makes most sense to refer to it as such. I will come back to this later on.

Public culture as a term is mentioned by my late professor of cultural policies, a key European expert, who has influenced not only the development of a European space of thinking about policies of culture, but also managed to propose valuable patterns of critical thinking that bridged the Western and Eastern experiences of cultural management and governance. I am referring to Dr. Dragan Klaic. He speaks about *public culture* as an opposite of commercial culture, when referring to the fact that "a large part of culture has intrinsic value without being able to make money; and this is why it has to be subsidized.

It is about a public interest that demands public investment, and not only for the sake of national representation but as a distinctive segment of the expressive culture and as a critical culture in itself."[3]

In valuing the role of culture to society, which is in fact the perspective of public policies with a cultural dimension, this quote refers to the debate between those speaking about the intrinsic value of culture, versus supporters of its instrumental worth. But, here I feel the need to make a comment. Because we are talking about words and their power, the "intrinsic value of culture" is, to me, a tricky formulation, because it connotes this image of looking within, of a type of culture which is self-referential and in a way closed within itself for nourishment and justification, in isolation from the rest of society. In contrast, the way Dragan Klaic refers to *public culture* in the short quote above is more aptly expressed, it connects culture to society, via the idea of the *public interes*t of *public culture.*

Even if in culture this discourse is only marginally prevalent nowadays – and in Romania it never was, I dare say – it is quite well established in the academia and the work of policy analysts, as a discussion about public goods, governance and the role of management in public institutions and the administration, the role of public funding and the ecosystem around public services in general. A good introduction of all these themes and the idea of *the public value of culture* is the literature review prepared by John Holden and Jordi Baltà in January 2012 (European Expert Network on Culture Paper)[4].

Now, to come back to the term *public culture.* Last year, in a conversation about Romanian cultural strategies, the director of the Romanian National Institute for Research and Training, Dr. Carmen Croitoru, said the following: "Wrongly and in an absolutely artificial way, the public culture is fighting the private culture, as if they were sharing the same terrain, which is a big mistake, because we do not share the same terrain. We, the public culture, are constrained to follow some rules, and yes, private culture does not have

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[3] Dragan Klaic, "Culture shapes the contemporary city," *Eurozine*, 22 June, 2010, https://www.eurozine.com/culture-shapes-the-contemporary-city/

[4] Baltà, Jordi, Holden, John. *The Public Value of Culture: a literature review*, European Expert Network on Culture Paper, January 2012.

the funds, but has a freedom that we will never have. On the other hand, we have a common goal, and we should be united."[5]

I do not agree with the first part of the quote, though I stand behind the idea that we have a common goal. In fact, I would argue that it is precisely because public and private actors – in some conditions – have a common goal, that it means that they do share the same terrain. Not legally, and not in terms of legal constraints deriving from their legal form, but in terms of goals and objectives, which are *in the public interest.*

In my view, it is the *public interest,* and not the legal form, which shapes the terrain on which all the different actors that belong to the cultural ecosystem exist and interact. And for this reason, I suggest that a common denominator for this terrain should be found. I prefer to follow Klaic's lead and refer to it as *public culture*, meaning a type of culture which by ambition is directed towards the public interest, and is diverse and inclusive in the legal form of its potential actors (public, private non-profit, freelance, independent, even commercial, depending on the situation). This term shakes the identification to which Ms Croitoru refers to, by which public culture fully overlaps with the work of public cultural institutions. I think we need to overturn the use of the term towards the idea that public culture is culture in the public interest, irrespective of the legal form of its actors. I don't think that without such a strong shout-out there are any chances of change of perspective.

Livia Pancu: But aren't these limits systemic? Aren't these structural delimitations?

Raluca Iacob: It is structural only if we assume that the legal constraints of a certain type of legal form of an actor completely define the type of value they bring to society. But what I have lately noticed – not only me, but I can also call for John Holden's ideas on cultures as ecosystems[6] – is that the roles and

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[5] Carmen Croitoru. Public intervention as speaker in the online conference (in Romanian), *Strategia culturală și new media art în România*, December 9, 2021, https://www.far.community/talks/talk.php?id=6131cf6d35393048db00012d.

[6] John Holden, *The Ecology of Culture. A Report commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Cultural Value Project*, January 2015.

functions of the existing actors are dynamic, interactive and complex. His view is that the ecology of culture refers to "the complex interdependencies that shape the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings." It speaks about the relations among cultural actors and with the audience as making together the space of culture, and that these relations determine the particular (sometimes, changing or multiple) roles the actors take over time and in different situations.

That is why I think that the old way of understanding structure as being derived from the legal form does not tell you as much nowadays as it used to do. This is because one cannot just assume that the type of operational dynamic, the impact and the role can be determined fully from the legal form of an actor. The emergence of social businesses, the intersectoral actions, and the entrepreneurial turn (or push) in the work of cultural workers, public institutions and NGOs alike, are distorting the boundaries among types of cultural actors by legal form. One example. So many museums have associations of the friends of the museums. And in the work of the museum or public theatres, in terms of assessing the public value of their work, oftentimes even the managers report the shared impact they have in conjunction with the association of the friends of the museum, or via the partnerships they engage with other NGOs. How do you address this type of complexity if you do not have a proper conceptual terrain? That's why I think we need to start a discussion about culture with a public interest, with a public value, which I suggest we call public culture, precisely because it provokes a change of understanding from its current use, where it only refers to the work of public cultural institutions.

The concept of *public culture* opens up the potential to shape collaborations around *common centers of interest* based on public interest related values among diverse players. The moment when you find common ground between that of your own work and that of another, regardless of the legal form, it seems to me to be a great win. From that point on, aspects like: legal form, artistic forms, dimensions of funding, the issue of where the funding is coming from, should be discussed, but within this sphere of what we would call public culture, as a culture which works in a direct relation to the public interest, and thus has a public value. I think that the fragmentation between independent culture, the one produced by public institutions, freelance and

industry has its limits in the way we understand what the impact or the effect of cultural practices and institutions in society is, and that the lenses of the public value of culture can open up fruitful pathways of critical and practical thinking and policy shaping. A huge potential from the perspective of shared, potential impact.

Livia Pancu: It is a forced conclusion, but I want to make sure that this is what you say. Is it that the entire spectrum of actors within the culture field should work more on a conceptual level and understand what society needs at this point, and collaborate on this, rather than within an entrepreneurial mindset whose first aim is to have profit, as opposed to an independent? Can this aim of the entrepreneurial mindset at some point, not at any point, turn something that is addressed to society into something else that is more useful for profit making and not for a non-profit targeted receiver? For example, I wonder how a social work directed NGO would find its meaning, if society would solve its inequality problems.

Raluca Iacob: I am not saying that cultural actors working in the realm of public culture should necessarily look and only address those issues which are coming from society. I think that the will and the freedom of the artist are really important. What I am saying is that the creation of a public value derived from cultural practices and the public interest guiding policies that engage or address cultural actors mean that those who enter this terrain should align their practices with these goals, and the policy makers should care for this. But public culture as a terrain meets the terrain of commercial culture and the same actor can be active in both. By legal form, by its typical constraints, each actor would find its own recipe to deal with the different pressures that are applied, for example to be entrepreneurial and mix and match commercial and public value actions.

For sure, this is not a safe interplay, and more likely in practice it looks like a continuous struggle and negotiation or even compromise. It needs rules and it needs an overview, it needs competences and reflection. It needs discussions and choices. The risk is to see a complete privatization of a cultural public institution, because of this hybridization and coming together of public and private actors on the same terrain. For this reason, I think that

some essential cultural goods, services or institutions should be kept safe, be protected in a way, in order to preserve their quality of publicness, and potential partners or allies be carefully selected to act jointly in the public cultural arena.

Livia Pancu: What are the mechanisms by which to make each actor aware of the potential of this concept (public culture)?

Raluca Iacob: I think the first step we should all take is to think about the meaning of our work. Why? And what for? And based on what principles? Once we are clear about these, I believe that we will be able to communicate and to join people who have the same interests and values, and see how and if it is the realm of public culture or not. This process requires clarity and courage, first at the individual level, and then at the organizational level. It is about authenticity, which is not the same as truthfulness. Authenticity means that the explicit meaning of work that is being done is not a fabrication for the eyes and ears of an outside persona, like the grant giver, our peers or even the public, but it is a felt and lived truth of those who express it.

LIVIA PANCU (*1980) is a curator based in Iași. She is the co-director of tranzit.ro, coordinating the Iași branch of the network. She has been involved in the field of contemporary art in Iași since 2003, acting in it from various positions. She graduated from the Royal College of Art in London (2007-2010), where she studied in the Curating Contemporary Art program under the supervision of Mark Nash. Currently she is part of the international project Conditions of Peace, realized with colleagues "that have identified the lack of a vision of peace and the constant reproduction of social relations that result in war as the main factors threatening Europe today." She lives and works in Iași.

The Collective Gaze –
Notes from the Land of the Independents

A mash-up conversation* between
Răzvan Anton and Mihai Iepure-Górski

Răzvan Anton is a visual artist, born in 1980, in Cluj (Romania). He studied at the *University of Art and Design* Cluj (BA Printmaking) and *Camberwell College of Arts* London (MA Drawing). He is teaching at the *University of Art and Design* Cluj and is part of the *Paintbrush Factory* artist collective. He has been involved in the digital archiving of the *Minerva Press Image Archive* from Cluj. And he was an artist in residence at the *House by the Synagogue* Mediaș in the project *Absence as Heritage* within *TRACES (Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts)* between 2016-2018. In November 2018 he was a *tranzit/erste* artist in residence at the *MuseumsQuartier* Vienna. Since 2019 he is a board-member and has been co-curating the visual arts program of the *Paintbrush Factory* (Fabrica de Pensule Cluj) alongside Mihai Iepure-Górski. [1]

Mihai Iepure-Górski is a visual artist, born in Alba-Iulia, Romania. He is an Arts Academy graduate that currently resides in Cluj-Napoca and works in a variety of mediums trying hard to not fall for their charms. Some recent shows include solos at *Sandwich Gallery* in Bucharest and *Baril Gallery* in Cluj-Napoca, group shows participations like the 1st edition of *Art Encounters*, Timisoara, *Survival Kit 4 Festival*, Riga and *European Travellers - Art* from Cluj today, *Műcsarnok*, Budapest. He has been a tranzit/erste artist in residence in 2018, has participated in the 2nd edition of the Mobile Biennale and was

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* A dialogue willingly assumed in a fluid format to underscore the shared thoughts rather than their individual ownership.

[1] Contact: antonrazvan80@yahoo.com.

(long ago) among the recipients of the Open Calls of *Salonul de Proiecte*, Bucharest. As of recent (2019), he took matters into his own hands and started writing projects and curating as part of the *Paintbrush Factory* collective from Cluj (Fabrica de Pensule) alongside Răzvan Anton. [2]

Photo credits Kispál Attila.

    All is well, all is outside of time. And you tend to forget, you forget that you have to start over every year. That's why it's irrelevant, whatever I'd say now, I really have no reason to complain, do I?

    It's a matter of fiction, everything that's going on here doesn't really exist. It's not sustainable, it's not real and it actually might do more harm than good… that such space even exists or that it ever existed. It leaves the impression that things are possible… that such things are real, that we are able to achieve them… no, we aren't. There is nothing that makes it possible for us to be able to achieve such things since there aren't any conditions for us to even be. It's a matter of… some coincidence… Some people, like in a game of pick and choose, took us and put us here and let us deal with it… and we had no choice but to do our best and make something out of it.

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[2] Contact: mihai_iepure@yahoo.com.

Let's give it a shot, right? Still it's not, it really isn't real, this space was never real and once we step out and lock that gate, it will all disappear as if it never existed.[3]

In 2019, both of us took charge of the curatorial strategy for visual arts in *Fabrica de Pensule*.[4] We started off with a project we considered necessary in order to move on and that was to have a look at other cultural independent projects from across the country. After that trip we ended up with eight testimonies that we presented in an exhibition format during the 10year anniversary of *Fabrica de Pensule*.

2019 was the year when *Fabrica* moved out of its space and we were confronted with a project associated with a building that was no longer our roof. The rising rental prices and the schism of our community posed a mortal danger to our organization and the future of our projects. By that time, many of the organizations of *Fabrica* had already left. The scandal of the community split had pushed away many of its members while others were reluctant to join. Only a few years before, many artists and cultural organizations were eager to have their names associated with what had become the brand of *Fabrica de Pensule*. But in 2019, that brand became another sign of a failed community project and, subsequently, it was something to be avoided, especially by the organizations who believed that their commercial interests would be affected.

Wondering if maybe what pushed us here is exactly that state of affairs – the shock of the *Fabrica* rupture – touched by the feeling of loss, despair, faced with the disappearance of something that seemed important, representative, you feel motivated-demotivated. You start to ask yourself if

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[3] Raluca Voinea (tranzit.ro / Bucharest), "The Collective Gaze: Samples of Something that Concerns Us All," interview by Răzvan Anton and Mihai Iepure-Górski, Fabrica de Pensule, 2019, video, 14:28.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXx5kmTpwSg&list=PLc5Qchyvnr0hmOkFJ0oX5AM Ym7f96Q7I4&index=1.

[4] Independent contemporary art space, *Fabrica de Pensule* is the first large post-industrial space converted into a cultural space in Romania (2009), internationally recognized for the visual arts and performing arts programs. In 2019, the community lost its space due to a new conversion carried out by the owners, this time becoming the headquarters for IT companies. For more http://fabricadepensule.ro/.

maybe that even was what you thought it was. And we do that, on the one hand trying to decipher and understand that which we are losing, whether it belonged to us and we to it, whether it was some form of a community or simply a set of people and things with converging interests and shared spaces. We want to find out if what happened to us is isolated or symptomatic for the whole land. And then we look around, we see projects that have survived and have managed to build for themselves or within their respective community an identity, program, coherent, cohesive, critical (why not?). Maybe this too is a pretext for us to answer questions we have about ourselves, for ourselves. What happened here, what people, typologies, programs collided and caused this rupture that seems to define our culture and ourselves (so well)?

We believed, and I guess we still do, that Romania's cultural independent organizations were the ones driving most of the public cultural agenda of the country. And we also believed as we do now that public institutions are simply not assuming their public role, for different reasons, including the severe underfinancing of the sector and the lack of transparent mechanisms in attracting competent managers and cultural specialists.

Of course, the expectations, because they are connected to local cultural history, the expectations are not grand, but they give the measure of who we are and, as they exist and have existed, they give something to tie our present actions to. For me, at least, studying all the practices starting from the '50s until now – and, in fact, the hard thing is not the case study research, because we do that, but this is not the hard issue –, the burden is to set up a theoretical framework that explains a certain type of cultural behaviour in a local space. This is the hard thing, and in the end this can also be an explanation for why Romanian art history has this minus. There isn't a history of art of the Romanian context.[5]

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[5] Alina Șerban (Institute of the Present / Bucharest), "The Collective Gaze: Samples of Something that Concerns Us All," interview by Răzvan Anton and Mihai Iepure-Górski, Fabrica de Pensule, 2019, video, 15:59.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtOdtlw_7tA&list=PLc5Qchyvnr0hmOkFJ0oX5AMY m7f96Q7I4&index=5

We are not claiming to have found out exactly what is going on, still, we believe that by taking note of these (quite few) projects and people from various places around the country, projects and people we consider to be referential, representative, important, we get a pretty good picture.

What took us out of the calm of our studios (!), and by that I mean an 8h/day job for me that takes me to places I would never go to willingly, that pushes me into serving, well, the corporatists, and you, stuck in an uncomfortable teaching chair at the art university, who, in itself is a subject for another long conversation, which shall not take place here (now), so what got us out there?

Yes, my work at school (I have been working at the University of Art and Design Cluj since 2010) is another motivation behind this journey. It is striking to see how little attention is given to these initiatives in our art schools. It's almost like living in a parallel universe. And so, most of the discourse is taken by remnants of some old pedagogical programmes and an unfazed fascination for the art market.

Why did this idea ever pop into our heads that we need (want) to find out WHAT is happening with this artistic environment of ours that seems to be right back where it started after some period of time in a cyclical course that seems never ending? The '90s, 2000s, 2010s, 2020s are all the same. Things seem to be going right back there, with every change of (political) season we seem to have to start over, nothing solid takes shape, nothing goes beyond the borders of precarity. Oh, maybe those new capitalists that have managed to take the helm of the present with their selfishly built Private (with a capital P) constructs. As they remain Nameless, maybe they will end up Pointless. Then again, the Present belongs to those who have achieved it and appropriated it. That's clear. Clearer and clearer. It's not justified, or fair, but what to do?

If we look at what is happening now in the local scene and if we go back 20 years ago, in the '90s, we would notice that the needs and problems are somewhat the same. This is why, for me at least, it was extremely important, or what motivates me in what I do is to get to some answers that have their basis in a type of reaction adapted to the local context that the artist was witnessing at the moment. That is, if the present context would have pondered on what happened, say, in the '90s-2000s, things would have probably been constituted, coagulated, and structured quite differently.

What motivates me is the backlash against the "we don't, we cannot, we don't have what they have, we want what's elsewhere". I think this type of mentality and of raising the issue only does us harm. To aspire to something built and born from entirely different needs and to adapt them to something that calls for a whole different type of reaction is the wrong approach.[6]

When we started activating as 'curators' for *Fabrica*, we did it thinking that we needed to offer some kind of alternative to the missing programmes from our public institutions. Again, this is not something new. This has been the main motivation for many other independent initiatives in Romania. But I guess we also wanted to have a look at the art field as a place that had become almost entirely engulfed in this market discourse. And we all know that this is a consequence of absent institutions. It's very difficult to find strong and independent curators or critics, who didn't have to compromise their agenda in order to pursue their work or research. And yes, we wanted to talk especially to the ones who didn't compromise their programme or initial motivation.

It is a very difficult time for most of the independent cultural organizations in Romania now and we see this ever-growing gap between research initiatives being pursued by independent organizations versus 'research' in public institutions. Things already looked bad in 2019 and I think, now, they are a lot worse.

This is the worst time to be talking about art… contemporary art, that's what we are about, isn't it? Projects that… try to make sense, to make sense of what's going on around us. Things were never right, but now it's worse than ever… because now it is as clear as ever that no… that we are a minority and so few, everyday fewer… that we have absolutely no influence in the real world, none whatsoever… that someone pays us to pretend that we have something to do here.[7]

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[6] Șerban, interview.
[7] Voinea, interview.

Sometimes you hear or see these (local) people talk about biennials, festivals, projects, artists from different areas of the land (country) and you get the impression that something is being done, that things are moving. As you (unfortunately, and you say to yourself – why did I have to do it?) take a closer look, you start to see how what we have here is nothing but - isolationism in some shape of marketable entities, a method already tried over and over again in the last 30 years. It's not only useless, but it becomes toxic since it counts for depleting the resources that could have been otherwise used in building the (non-existent) critical discourse; one that could produce the institutional/public level changes we need. Maybe a form of survival, still the equivalent of revolutionary (political) discourse consumed in private clubs, by philosophers, without political commitment – and you realise (somehow in this paradoxical calming and assuring way) that you weren't wrong that everything is wrong and that you were right about that. We are still facing this wasteland of a place where nothing seems to grow.

Well, with the soil it's like that, things grow annually or perennially. Annually or biannually, whatever it's called… or perennially and here in Bucharest it seems to me that there are very few perennial things that can grow. Whatever we are planting now lasts a season, as long as we are funded by AFCN (National Cultural Fund Administration) or wherever people can get funding from, and then we need to start all over again. If we managed to keep some seeds from the last harvest, things might be a bit easier this time around, if not, we really need to start over again every single time. From everything we planted, very little will grow bigger, more beautiful, more solid, stronger, more productive.[8]

This place has no contemporary art museums, anywhere, none. And if we talk about that (National Contemporary Art) Museum, it's quite clear to me that such institution cannot really function in a building like the House of Parliament and it definitely cannot function when right next to (THAT) building, you have the center of Romanian Orthodoxy in the shape of a (most) massive cathedral (maybe the actual cultural public project as it is

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[8] Voinea, interview.

publicly financed). Beyond such irreconcilable occurrences, there are those physical walls that surround the house that make it virtually impossible for such a space to function as an open platform for contemporary art and culture, critical discourse and such. This Museum deserves to be (ERASED) out of History… Yes, I said it.

In the (almost) complete absence of a platform for contemporary art, one (and by one I mean these INDEPENDENTS) starts to fill the gaps, stitch the holes, fill the holes in this ever sinking…, an impossible endeavour. Taking upon one's self the role of what should be but are not, nowhere, public institutions, while acting in private manner with an assumed collective goal and purpose. The curious case of the Independents of our Culture. And AFCN (state sponsored) sponsors this balance act just enough… sustaining life so to speak (comatose, but alive).

If you ask us what our purpose is, what we want to achieve, or what we are looking for through our events, the exhibitions held at Magma, the answer is that we want to influence society in our own way. We want to influence the community that lives here, that is, to try to create a more open, more cooperative society, this would be our ideal. I state this, because, on the one hand, the Magma Contemporary Art Space represents a protective "bubble", where all topics can be approached and discussed, and all opinions expressed, almost "without any repercussions". Since Magma can provide a safe space for such activities. At the same time, I think that if the events or exhibitions give the creators and the public the opportunity to approach or bring to light certain energies, or taboo subjects that will then be discussed, dissected and analyzed, then the creation and functioning of the Space, as well as its use as a social valve that sometimes opens and releases the accumulated tension – whether good or bad – is already an important step in the right direction.[9]

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[9] Kispál Attila (MAGMA / Sf.Gheorghe), "The Collective Gaze: Samples of Something that Concerns Us All," interview by Răzvan Anton and Mihai Iepure-Górski, Fabrica de Pensule, 2019, video, 29:08.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1J00q8-Ht4&list=PLc5Qchyvnr0hmOkFJ0oX5AMYm7f96Q7I4&index=4.

There is a civic attitude behind this effort of setting the records straight about recent artistic history and this is something that cannot wait any longer. This is something that will affect the entire cultural environment especially in a context where commercial initiatives or market speculators are directly interested in hijacking the historic narrative.

Since the beginning I had some principles or some things I was looking for with ODD: to work and have international relevance, to have a political position, to have a hybrid practice, and to have an educational or pedagogical dimension. This is what I started from and it seems to me that now, after a while, coming back to these things, I understand them even better than I did at first. I think initially I was much more connected to the art world and I had more trust in what the art world could be, and I think I was making a direct connection between art and the art world. Now I would say I see the two as, on the one hand, a practice, and, on the other, an ecosystem of financial and symbolic speculation, and it's a world I don't want to be connected to and I don't want ODD to support or promote it.[10]

Faced with such public institutional freeze, one has the tendency to look for alternative solutions or try to find ways of dealing with matters elsewhere. Maybe the best alternative though is no alternative. Instead of building (indie) para structures, usually underfinanced and underpowered, something proven to be inefficient in the attempt of bringing real change, focusing on putting and maintaining pressure on the public sector and demanding change might be the actual way to go. While some of these alternative projects and spaces have been extremely important in the recent past and in defining the local artistic climate, they have not managed to bring about change in a structural way and have mostly remained isolated.

I have the impression that even though this is quite an obvious thing to do, a more militant pose hasn't been tried, at least not on a larger scale. And it

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[10] Cristina Bogdan (ODD / Bucharest), "The Collective Gaze: Samples of Something that Concerns Us All," interview by Răzvan Anton and Mihai Iepure-Górski, Fabrica de Pensule, 2019, video, 17:00.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiDPG0VjLTU&list=PLc5Qchyvnr0hmOkFJ0oX5AMYm7f96Q7I4&index=3.

should be. We are in grave need of a strong public sector with (finally) representative institutions, one that would reopen these structures to its beneficiaries, the Local Scene, the Audience, the Community. On the other hand, the local scene seems to have lost its critical eye and muted its critical voice. This lack of real critical voices of the public space results in a significant lack of art scene regulation; those PR-type published texts just feed the abject activity/actions of those who act for the benefit of small/obscure groups, private entities and so on. Change is needed here too.

For some of these cultural entities it was not primarily about contemporary art, but about civic activity and public criticism. There was no aesthetic or artistic programme without a civic stance. And this is something that has remained unchanged in their work.

Regarding the more conceptual motivation I would briefly say that the main ideas would be closer to the arts on the one hand, and more socially engaged on the other one, because Tranzit House *was, from the beginning, a social project that wanted to oppose isolationism by all possible means. And as an artistic project, which was still connected to the political situation, it was meant to offer an alternative model to the conventional, monumental art that was present at the time. And I'm also an anthropologist and I can't ignore looking at things from this perspective as well, which would symbolically translate as occupying territories, like putting statues, all kinds of monuments everywhere, taking over territories politically and symbolically. I'm not sure if it's clear enough but I hope so, that the* Tranzit *project is supposed to be seen as going into oncoming traffic and that's why it's called* Tranzit House *because, this is how I see our mission, we act like traffic police directing the flow, as you come, you do your work, move on and leave room for others. And it's also connected to this idea that the media we prefer the most are the ephemeral ones like film, video installations, performance, performative arts in general, things that take the space, also symbolically, only for a given time and then, they make space for other people and events.*[11]

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[11] Csilla Könczei (Tranzit House / Cluj), "The Collective Gaze: Samples of Something that Concerns Us All," interview by Răzvan Anton and Mihai Iepure-Górski, Fabrica de Pensule, 2019, video, 16:32.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN3aaniPd0g&list=PLc5Qchyvnr0hmOkFJ0oX5AM Ym7f96Q7I4&index=6.

It's clear by now that, by themselves, even the most capable alternative (private) entities, cannot bring the changes we need. Some sort of collective pose needs to grow and some sort of coalition has to develop for pressure to rise and for the public sector to finally give in and push for reform. The right to bring about such changes resides not in an individual or single organisation (that would again mean monopoly). Collective solutions demand collective actions. The ongoing state of resignation or complacency in private forms of success or profit is not just ineffective, but it makes matters worse as it wastes, exhausts local resources.

There's also a strong need to redefine terms like public or private and the differences between the two, as locally a significant number of organisations seems to move freely between the two with no responsibility or justification. What makes an institution an institution, how does it behave and who or what does it even respond to?

Reanalysing what we have, what we are, what would be considered to be local recent (art) history, letting go of some of the so-called values that we are stuck with. It takes courage to do, but it is necessary. It might be painful to finally accept the fact we haven't moved anywhere from the 90s as we are still there, blocked in a state of confusion, waiting for some outside force to come and bring us redemption, show us the way, clear the ground. That won't be happening (clear by now). As difficult as it is, we have to accept it, to be able to finally find some sort of resolution with the past, by ourselves.

All this sounds oddly political, doesn't it? Might sound militant even, but I do believe in some sort of collectively driven redemption. With our Frontline – which consists of some of these individuals and organisations we interviewed a couple of years ago, and maybe a few others – weakened, debilitated, what we need to do, and it's about time, is to fill the ranks and join the collective pose, (finally) demanding real change.

PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS

Whether We Like It or Not – About Michael McKinnie's Theory of Theatre-Market Interactions

Book review: Michael McKinnie, *Theatre in Market Economies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

We have a natural resistance to associate theatre in particular and art in general with anything to do with money or finances. For this reason, Michael McKinnie's book, *Theatre in Market Economies*, is not only hard to pallet, but it seems almost outrageous. The book aims to outline the complex relationships between theatre and finances and how theatre makes use of the best strategies of generating capital, often without even realising it.

As practitioners, especially in Romania, we tend to see theatre as a poor art, as constantly trying to fight the financial system, and it is a subjective truth, rather than an objective one. McKinnie argues that theatre is high-performance financial engine that makes use of the best strategies that our capitalist world has to offer. This theory is broadly outlined in the introduction, and is further illustrated by examples in the following chapters.

Theatre in Market Economies relies on an extensive literature overview, linked to both the cultural and economic domains. In his comments, the author distances himself from Karl Marx's view of Industry as a revelation of humanity's powers achieved through labour, and opts for a more moderate approach, in which theatre is not only a means of producing industrial products, but also a domain in which industrial-type techniques are used, but in which the products are non-replicable. The author relies on theatrical models that function in a mixed way, both on state subvention and on direct revenue from the public. Therefore, theatre is influenced not only by economic factors, but also by political ones, and each functioning solution is, thus, a *spatial fix*, in the sense defined by Bob Jessop. The author's arguments also rely on an extensive critique of the term *creative industries*, as defined in 2018 by the UK's Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport as a sector bridging technological innovation, industry, and consumer culture. The author believes that viewing the art sector as an independent domain is more truthful and would ensure a realistic view on the investments made by the state in cultural goods. Consequently, even though Michael McKinnie's book relies on a broad literature overview, his uniquely moderate approach places him at a notable distance from traditional views on the interaction between culture and economy.

The first chapter, *Industry*, seems the most non-specific, unrelated to certain venues. The author deconstructs the notion that theatre and art are not subject to the normal production process in other industrial areas. We currently see art as producing unique, non-replicable products. Even though it is true that no two performances from the same show are ever truly identical, the aim of theatrical companies is exactly this: create performances that are exactly the same every night. Without this, actors would just stumble upon each other on stage, props would never be positioned where they are

needed and no two lines would fit together. We need only to think of performances that are created and re-created with multiple casts at different venues, such as musicals from Broadway.

In the second chapter, *Productivity*, we learn about the way performance industries have shaped the South Bank region of London. What was a largely undesirable part of the city, is now an enormous cultural hub. We are told the story of the construction of the National Theatre of London and the creation of The Vaults, an alternative performance area in the metro system in the area. The South Bank becomes a home of both tradition theatrical events and highly-experimental ones, both types of shows taking advantage of the unique venues and generating more than revenue. Here culture generates industry, especially for services such as restaurants and boutiques, which greatly benefit from the presence of tourists and other spectators that come here, to a neighbourhood that was not even seen as belonging to Central London.

The third example in Michael McKinnie's book comes from Ireland, and is centred around the Tinderbox production of *Northern Star*, by Stewart Parker, at the First Presbyterian Church in Belfast, in 1998. The show was performed not long after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in Belfast, marking the ceasing of armed conflict in Northern Ireland. It was a tumultuous period in time, when both economic and political tensions were high. *Northern Star*, a play about the Irish revolution, was staged aiming to create cohesion around the new-found peace. Culture was seen a "peace dividend," just like tourism, as a motivation for the cease fire, for making the streets of Belfast safe again and not constantly patrolled by armed British soldiers. *Northern Star* became an event that created social cohesion better than the State and the political community could ever create. Therefore, it was a theatrical success due to its integration in a volatile economic and political environment, using the company's close ties to the community in order to generate a unique, site-specific performance, staged in a relevant space for the conflict and the resolution of the conflict.

The next chapter, *Security*, is centred around the Haskell Free Library and Opera House, which is a theatre venue right on the border between U.S.A. and Canada. Half of the building lies in Derby Line, Vermont, while the other half lies in Stanstead, Quebec. Here we are not being told the story of the

success of a specific show, but the story of how theatre can bridge two countries. Back at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the building was constructed, members from both communities could cross the border with almost no restrictions to work and visit relatives. Nowadays, following the wave of border regulations caused by the 9/11 terror attacks and a long series of border reforms from the 1950's onward, the communities are much more isolated. Despite this, the Haskell Opera House is to this day the only place where you can legally cross the US-Canada border freely, in order to attend events. The Haskell has privileges that no multi-national conglomerate has. This theatre, which has become a tourist attraction, is so important for the local communities that it became an exception in international law and, as such, a place that both defies and defines the flexibility of market economies.

The last chapter of the book, *Confidence*, tells the story of the creation and the aftermath of Danny Boyle's *Isles of Wander* theatrical production for the 2012 London Olympic Games. At an estimated budget of 27 million pounds, with a cast of over 7.500 people, it is probably the most watched live theatrical performance in British history, with 27,3 million viewers in Britain and 900 million worldwide viewers. The book does not discuss the theatrical qualities of the show, even though it outlines its structure. McKinnie describes the impact of the show, despite it clearly being non-linear and non-traditional. It was a performance that took advantage of the large budgets of Olympic events and of the fact that host countries desperately try to show confidence. It seems that *Isles of Wonder* throve during one of the most austere budgeting periods of modern times in the U.K.

There is an aspect that is present throughout McKinnie's book and which we find most relevant. He shows that theatre creates a type of monopoly, exactly because theatrical productions are not identical. If you wish to buy a pair of leather shoes, you can choose between multiple items from different brands, because you can compare these items. If you want to buy tickets to a theatrical production, you have little but your personal taste to help you choose between a Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *The Tempest* and an independent production of the same text, or a performance created by Punchdrunk. Therefore, a company has a monopoly on its production, because the said production is unique. Theatre companies do not really compete with each other.

A second key idea is the fact that theatre (especially with site-specific productions), is rent-seeking. Rent-seeking is a phenomenon that describes certain actors on the market that solely own buildings, sites, or equipment and then rent it out. The phenomenon is seen as a type of plague, because it generates no value, it brings no real benefits to the world. Rent-seeking behaviour was part of the reasons for the 2008 market collapse. Theatre creates rent-seeking behaviour because it enables the audience to temporarily inhabit a place that is usually off-limits. But it turns out that theatrical rent-seeking behaviour actually generates value, because it educates and creates culture and because it revitalizes disused or marginalized urban areas.

In conclusion, *Theatre in Market Economies* is a complex book, which outlines ways in which theatre not only survives in a capitalist world, but also thrives in it. It is most useful for cultural managers and researchers in the field. We strongly believe that it is also a book that all practitioners should read, especially in Romania. It is an eye-opening material, that shows us that theatre is not something vague, based on talent and inspiration, but an art form, that is highly organized, anchored in the reality of its days and based on clear principles. McKinnie's book is a lesson of everything that Romanian theatre is not, and of all it should/could be: a domain in which art is truly linked with the social, cultural and economic interests of the community it serves; a relevant means of entertainment and education for those who pay for its existence.

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Let Us Look at People Without Passing Judgment

Book Review: Independent Theater Hungary, Michael Collins, Franciska Farkas, Dijana Pavlović, Richard R. O'Neill, Mihaela Drăgan – *Roma Heroes: Five European Monodramas,* Publisher: Women for the Future Association/ Independent Theater Hungary, May 29, 2020.
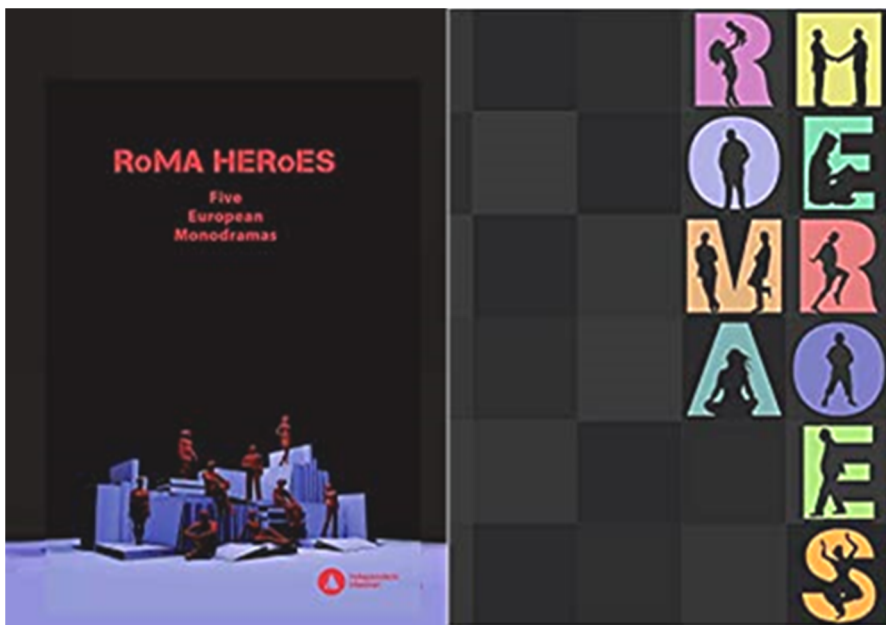
      Although it has been argued that the Roma theatre has existed in Europe for over a century, this phenomenon is still an enigma today due to lack of data. According to other opinions, this tradition dates back to 1930 and is linked to the former USSR, where the Romen Theatre was founded, serving the political ideology of the time. Whatever the origin of this cultural activity, Roma plays were never collected, much less printed in a volume.

Currently, the only international Roma theatre festival in the world is held in Hungary. The readers of the volume hereby reviewed, are fortunate to see the first collection of Roma plays ever published in the world. *Roma Heroes: Five European Monodramas* is an exceptional collection of dramas and a special cultural history volume. The drama collection was compiled with great care and a lot of work. In the collection we can read five different dramas written by five European authors.

Before writing anything about the five monodramas listed in the volume, it is worth carefully studying a very important aspect pertaining to it. This, together with the Introduction and Preface, is so rich in content that an entire review could be written about it alone. In Eastern Europe, and particularly in Transylvania, it is highly unlikely that anyone is unfamiliar with the Roma. Depending on our way of life, our relationships, our interests, we may have been relating to these people in various ways, from total indifference making friends and all the way to starting a family together. The book, and therefore this review, is also about people who may not get enough attention, and if they do, it may not be for the better.

Among others, Rodrigó Balogh himself writes about these things; even after twenty years of work, he cannot sit back, and as this volume proves it, this struggle – in which he is not alone – has not been in vain. His words convey not a plea as much as an expression of his concern with the future of the next generation in his community. He managed to find collaborators of different ethnicities to achieve his goals, and to get support from the authorities, so he feels that this struggle, the struggle of the Roma, is not a hopeless cause.

In the *Introduction*, the writer and journalist Szilvia Sisso Artner states that this is an exceptional collection of plays, a landmark of cultural history. She then goes on to summarize the plots of the plays, and concludes: "It was only the most important reading experience of my adolescence, Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird!" that struck me as powerfully as this volume." So, let's see the authors and their works!

Actress and playwright Mihaela Drăgan, born in 1986, is a multifaceted artist with an education in theatrical performance, living in Bucharest and Berlin. In 2014, in collaboration with other Roma actresses, she founded

Giuvlipen Theatre Company, where she works as an actress and playwright. In 2015, she played in the feature film *Aferim* directed by Radu Jude, and in 2018, she was a resident artist in Hong Kong at Para Site Contemporary Art Centre. She was one of the six finalists for the 2017 International Theatre Award in New York and a 2020 nominee, an award which acknowledges the exceptional work of 20 theatre women around the world. Over the last years she has been working in Berlin as an actress for Maxim Gorki Theatre, Heimathafen Neukölln, and Theater Aufbau Kreuzberg. She is also a trainer at the Theatre of the Oppressed, where she works with Roma women on their specific issues in Romania. In addition, she has worked with refugee girls in Germany as a theatre trainer.

Tell Them About Me by Mihaela Drăgan deals with the topic of early marriages through personal stories of various Roma women in Romania. The play is composed of the stories of four Roma women who talk about the truth of early marriage, what it means to belong to a traditional community, and what happens when you are no longer there. Their stories depict the so-called "exoticism" of the Roma woman, about stereotypes that remind us that acceptance and diversity are still far from reality. *Tell Them About Me* must be read and performed so that these women's message can be passed on. But the question remains: should these women's stories be known for compassion, or so that others, who are not Roma, may understand them better? As in any community, in the Roma world there are tragic stories and there are stories with a happy ending. The Roma, a community based on strong traditions, need hope as much as anyone else.

The following story is told from a male perspective and centers discrimination. Michael Collins, a member of the Irish traveller community, has been an advocate of traveller human rights for over 20 years. He is an actor and a writer. Michael has been developing the idea of establishing a Traveller Theatre Company which would work with Travellers and other socially excluded and ethnic minority groups to allow them to tell their stories and issues in an artistic way.

It's a Cultural Thing. Or Is It? shows the past of Traveller people, in the '60s, '70s, and '80s in Ireland. The Irish Traveller artist talks with his own daughter who wants to drop out of school. To dissuade her, he recalls childhood memories and through these sometimes funny, sometimes difficult stories, he shows his daughter the importance of education. He describes his family's journey to Dublin to join the other Travellers who started the exodus to Dublin as a result of changes in the social welfare system and the end of the traditional way of life. The strength of Michael Collins' story is that it is completely devoid of hatred. As he grows and sees more and more of the world, he suddenly realizes the injustice of the system they live in. He hopes that if people in his community are better educated, they will have a better life.

Franciska Farkas also had to fight hard to achieve her goals. She was born in Gyöngyös, Hungary, on November 5, 1984. She is an actress and drama teacher. She performs in several theater productions. She's one of the few Hungarian Roma actresses who reveal and openly discuss their origin. Upon finishing high school, she studied as a social worker. She worked as a model, a housekeeper in a hotel, a waitress, a bartender and a number of other jobs and, for lack of means and time, could not enrol in an acting school. Later, she attended drama teaching school and graduated successfully in 2017. She was awarded Best Actress in several movies.

Letter to Brad Pitt by Franciska Farkas is a painstakingly honest confession about the actress' own life, with a touch of dark humor. The protagonist is Franciska Farkas herself, who speaks on her own behalf. It reveals to us the darkest hells of being a woman. She talks about the hell of prostitution, drug use, homelessness, dropping out of school, mental hospital, and family breakdown. The play is an uplifting story of survival and becoming a heroine. The story shows a keen picture of what it means to escape victimhood as a Roma woman. It talks about what it means to make decisions and set an example for others in a society characterized by various manifestations of discrimination. The fact that the play ends on a positive note encourages everyone facing a similar predicament to dare to dream big.

The next author, Dijana Pavlović, is a Roma Italian-Serbian theater and screen actor, activist and media personality. She has campaigned for language rights for Roma and Sinti and against forced evictions in Italy, and has also worked with disadvantaged youth in and around Milan. She is one the founders of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture that opened in 2017 in Berlin.

Speak, My Life by Dijana Pavlović shows the long years of Yenish genocide in Switzerland that ended in the '70s, as depicted by the Yenish novelist Mariella Mehr. In her book, Mariella Mehr writes about the inhuman treatment and the biological genocide of the Yenish people in Switzerland. The story faithfully portrays the state of mind of the powerless, oppressed people and the cruelty of those who serve the system. Based on historical facts, the book provides insight into the process of how the Swiss state and the church subjected the members of the nomadic community to forced treatments and sterilization. The writer Mariella Mehr also experienced this horrendous treatment and her works contributed to preserving the historical memory of these events.

Richard O'Neill (1962) is an internationally acclaimed performance storyteller, author and playwright. He was born and brought up in a large traditional, fully nomadic Romani Gypsy family, travelling throughout the North of England and Scotland. His roots are also to be found in the coal mining communities of the North East having family members who worked down the pits. This co-cultural upbringing is reflected in his creative work. Storytelling has been a constant in Richard's life for as long as he can remember. Learning his craft as he sat round camp fires at the feet of some of the best Travelling and North Country storytellers, he developed a passion for stories, something he is keen to share nationally and internationally in a range of settings from schools and universities, to the workplace and at a diverse range of festivals.

The Hardest Word by Richard O'Neill presents the campaign of Jess Smith, the Scottish Traveller writer who demanded the first minister to apologize for the injustice and persecution of the Traveller community. The Hardest Word performed by Jess Smith broke new ground by enabling the change of the law in Scotland.

In summary, the book *Roma Heroes* is a very thought-provoking collection of dramas. It discusses social problems that we are unfortunately facing even in the 21st century. Its reading is recommended both for those interested in theater and those interested in sociology.

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Psychanalyse et sorcellerie – la psychologisation de l'anthropologique

Book Review : Ioan Pop-Curşeu, *Études comparatives sur la sorcellerie. Anthropologie, cinéma, littérature, arts visuels* (Şcoala Ardeleană Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2021)

La dernière nouveauté éditoriale – nouveauté aussi nationale qu'internationale, considérant l'amplitude des voies d'exploration littéraire et culturelle impliquées dans cette démarche – et transdisciplinaire de l'universitaire Ioan Pop-Curșeu, née autour du projet de recherche *Iconographie de la sorcellerie, une approche anthropologique : cinéma, théâtre, arts visuels*, s'engage à analyser dans une perspective psychanalytique freudienne les représentations sociales et artistiques de la sorcellerie et de la magie.

Simultanément, l'étude vise, en couches concentriques et à travers ses chapitres vraiment passionnants : l'analyse dualiste du corps de la sorcière, les transformations psychosociologiques des sorcières ; l'iconographie séduisante et troublante de la déesse-sorcière Circé transposée sur les écrans ; la matérialisation du fantasme de copulation avec le diable surtout dans des films d'horreur ; l'examen de l'année 1857 par rapport aux deux grandes directions dans le rapport de la magie avec la science, puisqu'elles favorisent stratégiquement une époque fertile pour les écrivains du siècle et pour le cinéma fantastique et occultiste inspiré du 19ème siècle ; le meurtre de l'enfant dans les rituels de sorcellerie, un scénario d'horreur pour les gens des XVème-XVIIème siècles, ayant des explications sociologiques et mythologiques ; une comparaison symbolique et apocalyptique entre l'infanticide magique et l'enfant monstrueux qui met en danger la communauté ; les réécritures multiples et les transpositions filmiques de *Hänsel und Gretel*, insistant sur la régularité de surprises et d'allusions intertextuelles, mais surtout sur la nature dévoratrice du désir, spécialement du point de vue psychanalytique ; la psychanalyse de l'image obsédante de la mère-sorcière – mère officielle et mère secrète, des aspects qui relèvent des problèmes de la filiation – dans les films du réalisateur et auteur italien Dario Argento.

En somme, il s'agit de huit textes groupés en deux parties et conçus dans une architecture complémentaire et symétrique, une sorte de dialogue dialectique entre Éros et Thanatos, tout au carrefour insolite et fructueux de la pulsion de vie et de la pulsion de mort, qui constitue un processus dynamique entre deux classes principales, l'instinct de la vie (l'amour et la coopération – le désir de l'autre) et l'instinct de la mort, silencieux, qui tend à effacer ses propres traces (le désir inconscient de mourir, l'expérience

traumatique répétitive, c'est-à-dire soumise à la compulsion de répétition). En ce qui concerne la psychanalyse de Sigmund Freud, les pulsions de la vie recouvrent des pulsions sexuelles et d'autoconservation ; d'autre part, les pulsions de la mort sont vraiment régressives et se manifestent sous la forme d'agression, de violence et de destruction, tendant pratiquement à amener l'être à l'état anorganique. Dans la *Préface*, l'auteur affirme, très enthousiaste : « Les deux parties du livre ne sont pas cloisonnées ; elles se mirent l'une dans l'autre, se correspondent, dialoguent et vont même se communiquer des énergies caractéristiques par endroits. Ainsi peut-on trouver de l'Éros dans le Thanatos, et de la mort dans l'amour... » (p. 9)

C'est exactement sur l'ouverture féconde et l'association indissoluble apportées par ce croisement que Ioan Pop-Curşeu écrit ses textes amples et académiquement documentés, qui reviennent au principe du plaisir, un principe réprimé initialement à la faveur du principe de la réalité. Ensuite : « Je vois la magie et la sorcellerie à la fois sous un angle anthropologique et sous un angle artistique. Au fond, l'essentiel de mon intérêt s'est longtemps focalisé sur le concept de "représentation", tel qu'il a été véhiculé dans les sciences humaines et sociales... » (p. 7). Ici, la représentation reçoit « un sens complexe, où se retrouvent la trace, la mémoire, la concrétisation visuelle, la projection sur un support... » (p. 8), un sens rhizomique, pluriel, nuancé et créateur. Ce que signifie que, sous l'influence de Freud (*Totem et tabou*) et de I.-P. Couliano (*Éros et Magie à la Renaissance. 1484*), le livre de Ioan Pop-Curşeu propose la représentation du fait anthropologique qui s'ouvre lui-même à la psychologisation, laissant ainsi en arrière-plan l'interprétation ethnologique de premier niveau. De plus, Freud aborde la magie dans l'horizon du savoir, de la sagesse (c'est-à-dire qu'il faudrait supposer qu'on sait quelque chose de l'Autre), dans l'horizon de la croyance à la toute-puissance.

Dans ce contexte, la fonction de la magie indique l'institution d'une pratique du principe de plaisir, une pratique d'évasion et de retour et aussi une communication directe avec les traditions anthropologiques. On sait déjà que dans *Totem et tabou*, Freud lance l'idée du dialogue entre les sciences sociales et le savoir de l'inconscient et c'est précisément l'objectif de ces études comparatives construites autour d'une bibliographie exhaustive – de

regarder la pensée freudienne comme « un instrument d'analyse culturelle » (p. 10), vraiment nécessaire, qui fait l'anthropologie de la psychanalyse ou bien qui psychanalyse l'anthropologie : quelle que soit la situation, les deux se regardent en réciprocité et en complémentarité. Pour conclure, le trou de l'inconscient dans le savoir anthropologique reste naturellement le désir et la demande de l'anthropologie vers la psychanalyse.

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