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Field of Cinematography and Media

**Normative working model for creating
a fiction film without a script**

- Summary of the doctoral thesis -

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SUMMARY

1. Introduction

This doctoral research proposes the elaboration of a normative working model for making fiction films without a previously written screenplay, representing a constructivist approach to the cinematographic creation process. This method, called the “improvisational method”, was developed and refined through personal practice and through collaboration with students, offering a viable alternative to the traditional director-screenwriter model.

The central hypothesis of the research argues that it is possible to develop a coherent and reproducible working methodology that allows for the realization of a fiction film in the absence of a predetermined screenplay, through structured improvisation, active collaboration among team members, and the redefinition of the director’s role. In opposition to the traditional paradigm of the director as the sole author and to the dominant practice of the rigid screenplay, the research proposes an alternative model of creation, in which the film’s narrative and dramaturgy are built organically during the working process.

The necessity of this endeavor arises both from the limitations of the classical system of cinematographic production, which conditions access to funding on the existence of a complete screenplay, and from the author’s pedagogical experience, who observed recurring difficulties among directing students in generating narrative ideas and credible dialogues. The proposed improvisational method offers a viable alternative for filmmakers who lack screenwriting skills or access to collaborations with professional screenwriters.

The research methodology is based predominantly on case study, supplemented by experimental methods and qualitative interpretive analysis. The starting point of the investigation is the feature film “Ilegitim” (2016), made without a previously written screenplay, followed by the analysis of other cinematographic and theatrical projects made by the author within this doctorate, as well as the application of the improvisational method in a pedagogical context, in working with students of the Faculty of Theatre and Film in Cluj-Napoca.

The main objective of the research is to demonstrate the viability and relevance of the improvisational method as a normative working model, to identify its essential principles and stages, and to analyze its limits and conditions of applicability. Through this endeavor, the work aims to contribute to the reconfiguration of the director's role in cinema and to offer a methodological instrument useful both for professional practice and for the training of future filmmakers and could also become the foundation of a course derived from this doctoral work.

2. History

2.1. The beginnings of improvisation in art

Improvisation precedes the modern consecration of the concept of author and of the work fixed in a text. In popular forms of medieval entertainment, in the *Commedia dell'arte* and in pre-classical music, improvisation functioned as a central mechanism of creation, based on minimal rules and on the inventiveness of performers. The seventeenth-century definition of improvisation – spontaneous creation and interpretation, without prior preparation – was later marginalized by the valorization of the written word and of the musical score, with the affirmation of romantic genius and the strict separation between composer and performer. The twentieth century rehabilitates improvisation in multiple artistic fields. In music, jazz becomes the paradigmatic example of collective creation in real time, demonstrating that spontaneity can produce coherent and highly complex artistic forms. In the visual and performative arts, surrealism, abstract expressionism, and experimental theatre valorize the accident, the spontaneous gesture, and the unpredictable. These developments create a favorable framework for reconsidering improvisation as a legitimate practice of artistic creation.

2.2. Improvisation in theatre

In theatre, improvisation does not represent an emergency solution, but a deliberate method of work. Improvisational theatre presupposes the existence of rules and constraints that structure the performative act, allowing for the emergence of spontaneity. The distinction between everyday improvisation and theatrical improvisation consists in the conscious assumption of a set of rules that prevent chaos and guide creation. Research dedicated to theatrical improvisation identifies rules of conditioning, purpose, focus, information, and manipulation, which organize the scenic action and the relationship between actors, audience, and context. These rules are relevant to the present endeavor, since they are found, in adapted forms, in the structure of the improvisational method proposed for cinema. Theatre thus offers a model of collective creation in which the absence of a written text does not lead to incoherence, but to authentic and lively performative forms. Indeed, in the specialized literature I found the term “devised theatre”, referring to improvisational and constructivist working modalities following a normative model, but in *practice-based research in film*, although some articles and research with the specialized term “devised film” can be found, there is however no normative model.

2.3. Improvisation in film

Cinematographic improvisation is closely linked to technological developments. The first decades of cinema, marked by heavy equipment and the absence of synchronous sound, considerably limited the freedom of actors and the possibility of improvisation. The appearance of portable cameras and synchronous sound recording technologies allowed the development of more flexible cinematographic practices, close to documentary and to improvisation in theatre.

Although improvisation has always existed as a reaction to unforeseen situations on set, certain cinematographic endeavors have integrated it as a central principle of creation. In these cases, the filming process becomes a space of exploration, and the resulting film preserves the traces of this collective experience. The director no longer pursues the realization of a completely predetermined work, but the exposition of a process unfolding, in which decisions are made in real time.

2.4. Approaches to improvisation in film

In cinema, two main paradigms of work can be identified. The first is that of the *rigid* screenplay, in which filming represents the faithful transposition of a previously written text, and the actors interpret a dramatic “score”. The second paradigm, associated with improvisation, approaches the jazz model: the screenplay is absent or functions only as a starting point, and the characters, dialogues, and situations develop during filming.

Numerous filmmakers have explored this second paradigm, either starting from minimal sketches, or from thematic ideas or dilemma situations. In these cases, screenplay writing is partially transferred to the set, and editing acquires a decisive role in organizing the material. The fundamental difference does not consist in the total absence of structure, but in its flexible and adaptable nature.

2.5. Disadvantages of improvisation

Although improvisation offers authenticity and freshness, it involves significant risks. The lack of a clear structure can lead to narrative incoherence, major difficulties in editing, and the loss of dramaturgic meaning. Improvised filmed material is often abundant, with long takes and problematic continuity, which requires specific skills and an editing time difficult to estimate. These limits highlight the need for a normative framework that structures improvisation and prevents unwanted derailments or incoherence. The method proposed in this research responds precisely to this need, proposing clear principles and stages that allow the valorization of improvisation without compromising the film’s artistic coherence.

2.6. Characteristics of improvisational filmmakers

The classical definitions of the director, formulated in the history of film theory, place this function at the center of the artistic and technical decisions of cinematographic production. The model of the director-author, consolidated both in cinema and in theatre, presupposes a hierarchical authority and a unitary vision, imposed on all stages of filmmaking. This paradigm, often associated with the idea of the “all-powerful” director, is based on the existence of a prior screenplay that

structures the entire production process. The present research proposes a reconsideration of this model, without denying the importance of the director, but by redefining their role. Within the *improvisational method* – as I have named the method I am researching, the director becomes a mediator of the creative process, a facilitator of collaboration among team members, especially among actors. Authority does not disappear, but is redistributed, being exercised through the establishment of the conceptual framework, the rules of the game, and the thematic direction, not through exhaustive control of every dramatic element.

2.7. The concept in film and improvisation

In the absence of a written screenplay, the concept becomes the central element of the creation process. The concept functions as a generative framework that replaces the predetermined narrative structure, allowing the emergence of organically constructed situations, dialogues, and relationships. This approach is compatible with constructivist philosophy, according to which knowledge and meaning are constructed through interaction and experience. The author is no longer defined exclusively through writing a text, but through the capacity to generate a coherent context in which collective creation becomes possible. The author's function dilutes, but does not disappear: it manifests at the conceptual, aesthetic, and ethical level. The director assumes responsibility for the working framework and for the selection of the resulting material, especially in the editing stage, where the final structure of the film is established.

2.8. Director on the inside and on the outside

In working with improvised sequences, two forms of the director's involvement are distinguished, of which "directing from the inside" presupposes their direct presence in the filming, as actor, cameraman, or active participant in the created situation. Practiced by filmmakers such as John Cassavetes or Maurice Pialat, this method reduces the distance between directing, performance, and the filming apparatus, allowing the emergence of forms of authenticity based on risk, unpredictability, and proximity. "Directing from the outside" maintains a deliberate distance from the improvised situation, the director intervening through framing, duration, rhythm, and the general structure of the filming, without entering directly into the actors' play. This position makes possible a better control of form and narrative direction, allowing improvisation to unfold within a rigorous, anticipated, and coherent framework.

Improvisation does not imply the absence of structure, but another form of structuring the narrative. In the proposed method, the story is not imposed from the outside, but discovered progressively, through the interaction between actors, situations, and context. The dialogues and actions are born from the purposes of the characters and from the conflicts generated by them, not from predetermined lines.

This form of narrative construction presupposes the acceptance of the unpredictable and the integration of the accident as a constitutive element of the creative process. The resulting narrative is an open, flexible one, which is finalized over time, through selection and organization. The improvisational method thus transfers a significant part of the dramatic writing from the pre-

production phase to the filming and post-production phases, without compromising the artistic coherence of the final work.

3. Theoretical foundations of the proposed method for making a film without a screenplay

3.1. First steps in discovering the *improvisational method*

The working method was born from a year-long exploration process, begun in 2014, in collaboration with Alina Grigore, within acting workshops. The initial purpose was not to make a film, but to identify a way of working that would allow the organic generation of the story and a type of acting closer to the functioning of real life. The search started from the desire to reduce the artificiality of cinematographic performance and to transpose into film the rules of everyday behavior and discourse. As a result of the experiments, two fundamental principles were identified: the simultaneous existence of a common social purpose and individual secret **purposes**, generating dramaturgic tension, and the **uniqueness of the moment**, translated through the filming of a single “take”. The process culminated with a ten-day experiment of immersion in characters, followed by an extended filmed improvisation, which demonstrated the possibility of generating coherent cinematographic material without a pre-existing screenplay. This experience constituted the starting point for making the film *Ilegitim* (2016).

3.2. The film *Ilegitim*

The filming took place over the course of 12 days, with a pace of two-three scenes per day, using two Blackmagic Pocket cameras, operated by two cinematographers who chose the filming positions according to principles close to documentary practice, with minimal interventions from the director. Attention was focused on the unfolding of the action, with discreet indications addressed to the actors, including through written messages. The reduced technical crew, the minimal sound and makeup solutions, as well as a self-catering type work system supported a flexible and non-intrusive production framework. After a short initial period in which takes were made, filming was limited to the first take, since reshoots introduced artificiality and diminished editing efficiency. The resulting material, extremely vast and dramatically coherent, imposed a long and difficult editing process, marked by the absence of a clearly defined main character. This method generated an increased complexity of editing and influenced the structure of the montage, bringing it closer to the practices of improvisational cinema, where discontinuity and rhythmic freedom allow a form of improvisation also in the post-production stage.

4. Basic conceptual elements of the *improvisational method*, used in the working mode for the film “Ilegitim”

4.1. THE PURPOSE - in real life and in the lives of characters

One of the fundamental principles of the *improvisational method* is the clear definition of purposes, both at the level of real life and at the level of characters. In the absence of a screenplay, the purpose becomes the main engine of action and conflict. Actors do not receive predetermined lines, but precise objectives, which guide the characters' behavior and determine the evolution of dramatic situations. This principle reflects the mechanisms of the functioning of real life, in which actions are motivated by purposes and desires, not by predefined texts.

4.2. UNIQUENESS - in real life and in filmmaking

The *improvisational method* values the uniqueness of each filming moment, of each actor, and of each situation. Unlike traditional film, in which repetition and faithful reproduction of scenes are essential, improvisation accepts irrepeatability as an artistic value. Each take becomes a singular event, impossible to reproduce identically, and this uniqueness confers authenticity and freshness to the filmed material.

4.3. THE ACCIDENT / THE MISTAKE - in real life and during filming

The accident and the mistake are not treated as errors that must be eliminated, but as potential sources of meaning and dramatic energy. In the *improvisational method*, unforeseen situations are integrated or even deliberately generated, in order to stimulate authentic reactions from actors. This principle presupposes a paradigm shift: absolute control is replaced by the willingness to accept and valorize the unpredictable.

4.4. THE CHARACTER / THE ACTOR - in film and in real life

The relationship between actor and character is redefined within the *improvisational method*. The character is not constructed exclusively on the basis of a text, but develops through the interaction between the actor, their own experiences, and the proposed situations. The actor actively contributes to defining the character, bringing into play authentic values, reactions, and ways of speaking. This proximity between real life and fiction increases the degree of credibility of the performance.

4.5. IMPROVISATION - in real life and during filming

Improvisation represents the central mechanism of the method, but not in the sense of total freedom. It functions within a well-defined framework, made up of rules, purposes, and constraints. These limitations are essential for generating spontaneity and for maintaining dramaturgic coherence. Improvisation thus becomes an instrument of controlled exploration, not a form of creative chaos.

4.6. CONSTRUCTIVISM, THE NON-DIRECTOR

The concept of the non-director does not imply the absence of directing, but a transformation of the directorial role. The director renounces direct control over lines and actions, focusing on building the conceptual framework and on facilitating the collective creative process. This positioning is compatible with the constructivist perspective, in which meaning is produced through interaction and shared experience. The director remains the author of the endeavor, but exercises their authority in an indirect manner, through structure and selection, not through dictate.

5. Essential working stages of the *improvisational method*

5.1. Defining the stages of the *improvisational method*

The proposed method is based on a clear set of working stages, intended to structure the creation process and to offer a reproducible normative framework. These stages do not constitute a hidden screenplay, but a methodological course that allows the controlled generation of dramatic material.

5.1.1. Source of inspiration – Personal dilemma situation

The source of inspiration can come from a literary source, a news item, a personal dilemma, a memory, an abstract idea, a synopsis, or even an already existing screenplay.

5.1.2. Research – Documentation

This stage is essential for outlining a solid foundation on which the project will later be built.

5.1.3. Construction of characters – Background

Identifying typologies and developing coherent fictional histories based on the real background of the actors, a mixture between the fictional typological profile of the characters and the real one of the actors.

5.1.4. Defining purposes and conflict - Purposes

The objectives of each character are established, both the common ones and the individual ones.

5.1.5. Diverting actions - Twists

Possible moments of plot twists are anticipated and premeditated.

5.1.6. Rehearsals

Improvisation sessions are conducted to create shared experiences among the characters.

5.1.7. Starting situation and context – Premise

The context and starting point of the scenes to be filmed are determined.

5.1.8. Choosing locations and technical configuration - Filming preparation

The camera positions and the number of cameras used (usually no more than two) are decided, according to the stylistic and technical needs of the project.

5.1.9. Director's participation during filming – Directing

The director intervenes either directly or through other means, to guide the actors and subtly influence the unfolding of the action.

5.1.10. Integrating or generating unforeseen situations – Accidents

Unforeseen situations that arise during filming are taken into consideration, the director having the freedom to decide whether they will be integrated into the film or not.

5.3 Observations and conclusions

These stages represent a working framework applicable in the process of making a film through a collaborative and improvisational approach, eliminating the need for a previously written screenplay.

6. Case studies in which the application of the *improvisational method* that took shape after the practice of the film “Ilegitim” was attempted

6.1 Practical projects carried out within the elaboration of the doctoral thesis

6.1.1. The project “*Claudia (Working Title)*”

This short film represents a relevant case study for the application of the *improvisational method* in a hybrid form, which combines the existence of a screenplay with the actors' improvisation. The project started from a clear thematic situation and a well-defined concept, but left open the construction of dialogues and relationships between characters. The *improvisational method* allowed the permanent adaptation of the dramatic material according to the actors' reactions and to the situations arising during filming. This way of working facilitated obtaining a high degree of authenticity and demonstrated the method's compatibility with a production process intended for the festival circuit.

6.1.1.1. Analysis of the *improvisational method* in the project “Thailandia”

The Thailanda project is in the editing phase and starts from a concept and a way of working, not from a predetermined synopsis. A film crew traveled to Thailand together with a professional actor and a homeless person, pursuing in parallel two directions: the improvised generation of fictional material, coordinated by an assistant director, and the ongoing documentation of the process of making this film “without a director”. The filming alternated between fictional sequences made according to classical procedures and moments from the team’s everyday life, discreetly documented, including with audio. The method tested the mixture between professional and non-professional actors, the dispersion of directorial authority, and the construction of the screenplay in real time, on set. The accidents generated by the cultural context and by the team’s dynamics became an integral part of the creative process. The result is a vast volume of visual and audio material, situated at the boundary between fiction and documentary, which interrogates the very nature of the cinematographic act and the relationship between control, improvisation, and author in the creative process.

6.1.1.2. Analysis of the *improvisational method* in the project “Claudia (Working Title)”

Images filmed in Thailand were integrated into the short film *Claudia (Working Title)*, completed before the Thailanda project, although both were developed starting from the same initial screenplay. During the creative process it became clear that the generated material allowed for the making of two distinct films. *Claudia (Working Title)* was built mainly on the basis of production meetings, before and after the Thailand experience, organized around key points from the written screenplay, the rest of the dialogues being improvised by team members. The film is a fiction made through directing from the inside, in which the director becomes an active character, and the team’s improvisation maintains an authentic character. The central theme is the questioning of the ethics of using a homeless person in a cinematographic project. The working method respects the stages previously experimented in *Ilegitim*. The result is a hybrid film, situated between documentary and fiction, a critical reflection on the cinematographic creation process.

6.1.1.3. Conclusions

Unlike *Ilegitim*, the project started from a screenplay used as a support for improvisation, of which only a few *obligations* (mandatory actions or dialogues to be performed) were kept. The ten stages of the method remain valid, but the explicit formulation of purposes was secondary, since the characters largely coincide with the real identities of the participants. The way of working approaches that of Cassavetes in *Faces* and Éric Rohmer’s method in *Le rayon vert*: minimal narrative structure, dialogues generated on the spot, few takes, and emphasis on spontaneity and the acceptance of imperfections.

6.1.2. The project “Harakiri”

The feature film “Harakiri” (2024), made in co-direction with Vlad Popa, constitutes an extreme example of the application of the *improvisational method* in a *no-budget* production context. The film was made without a written screenplay and adopted a guerrilla-style filming

strategy, which amplified the importance of flexibility and immediate reaction. Improvisation functioned both at the dramaturgic level and at the logistical level, each decision being adapted to the concrete context of the filming. This case study demonstrates that the improvisational method can constitute a viable alternative to traditional production models, especially for independent filmmakers.

6.1.2.1. Application of the improvisational method in my segment of the project “Harakiri”

The project started from a personal dilemma, linked to erotic-platonic experiences and close relationships, which was later integrated in editing as a combination between reality and fiction. Documentation was carried out mostly through the memories of the director and the actress Cătălina Romanet, with minimal and informal interactions with the second actor, Bogdan Tulbure. The characters were constructed minimalistically, preserving as much as possible of the real biography, and the initial purposes of the improvisation were adapted along the way, introducing secret purposes to dynamize the action. The *twists* included the “postponement of the casting” in which the two were to participate and spontaneous suggestions of closeness or playful actions. Rehearsals were absent, the actors relying on mutual acquaintance and on situations inspired by real life. The filming took place in a studio apartment with a terrace, with minimalist equipment, and directing was done through SMS messages and adapting the camera to the actors’ movements without stopping the filming. The improvisation was captured without major incidents, and the small unpredictabilities added narrative naturalness.

6.1.2.2. Conclusions

The limited preparation, the lack of rehearsals, and the absence of clear purposes reduced the quality of the improvisation, highlighting the importance of these factors. Unlike this project, directors such as Harmony Korine allow actors to improvise and bring personal elements, making the characters almost extensions of themselves. Examples include *Gummo* and *Spring Breakers*, where spontaneity and natural interactions were essential.

6.1.2.3. Application of the improvisational method in the segment made by Vlad Popa of the project “Harakiri”

Vlad aimed to maintain the same team and concept, to film low-budget, focusing on the source of inspiration, based on personal dilemmas and real cases. The choice of actors was made by exploring their ideas and concerns, and the research/documentation was focused on authenticity and spontaneous reactions. Directing was carried out both from the outside, through communication via devices, and from the inside, through discreet interventions. The actors were imposed purposes and obligations to generate authentic moments and small accidents were created to keep the dynamic alive and realistic. This method allowed seemingly banal scenes to become relevant in editing.

6.1.2.4. Conclusions

Vlad Popa's working method includes all ten stages, although the purposes are less clear and less fictional, the emphasis being on generating conflict through the radicalization of the actors' values and on communication through messages during filming. The process thus becomes one of discovery, not of deliberate construction. Similarly, Peter Watkins operated with principles, rather than strict rules: rejection of conventional aesthetics, the use of non-professional actors and improvisation, intentional discontinuity, subjectivity as an instrument of truth, filming as pedagogical research, intuitive editing, and the challenging of the audience.

6.2. Application of the *improvisational method* in “The Man Who Could Only Speak What He Read”, by Adrian Sitaru

The theatre performance “The Man Who Could Only Speak What He Read” (2020) extends the applicability of the improvisational method beyond cinema. Although the text used simulated the existence of a screenplay, the performance's structure was based on controlled improvisations and on the direct interaction between actors and context. This experience highlighted the differences and similarities between theatrical and cinematographic improvisation, contributing to the clarification of the method's limits.

7. Application and analysis of the *improvisational method* in students' projects

7.1. Application and analysis of the *improvisational method* in the short film “The Dead with the Dead, the Living with the Living”, by Maria Giurgea

Maria started from a news item about two individuals who robbed a grave, which caused her a personal dilemma related to values and morality. She documented the situation, gathered opinions, and drafted an *outline* with thoughts and observations, without writing fixed lines. At the Baru Mare camp, she chose the actors instinctively and assigned them characters according to their personality and values, building common and secret purposes to generate conflict and authenticity. The rehearsals explored moral dilemmas and allowed for improvisation, including major twists, such as the discovery that the grave belonged to a child. The filming took place in four locations, with long takes and interventions through messages, controlled surprises, and creatively integrated accidents, which allowed the actors to react naturally and build credible relationships between characters. Editing condensed the filmed material, selecting the lines and moments with maximum impact. The entire process lasted approximately six days, was carried out with minimal resources and without a budget, and the result was a functional short film, appreciated at festivals, demonstrating the efficiency of the *improvisational method* applied by Maria.

7.2. Application and analysis of the *improvisational method* in the short film “Centimetric”, by Philip Găicean

Philip started from a character created by the actor Cătălin Florea during a group improvisation, inspired by a note with an obsession related to “revenge sex”. Initially, Philip tried to adapt a story by Lavinia Braniște, but abandoned the idea, building the film in the last three days of the Baru Mare camp. Cătălin transformed the situation into a “guru of energetic sex” type monologue, and Philip used the recording to observe the reactions of other participants and to select the appropriate actors, thus developing the characters and their background. The premise was fictional, inspired by contemporary society and the figure of the guru, and the research focused on authentic reactions and the construction of conflict and abuse between believers and skeptics. The filming was carried out without extensive rehearsals, with locations available in the Baru Mare camp and improvised decor. Philip used two cameras and two sound recordists, often leaving the actors alone, which allowed for autonomy and natural improvisation, similar to “jam-session”. Directing included SMS messages, real-time interventions, and controlled provocations to generate plot twists. Unforeseen accidents, such as an ambulance siren, were creatively integrated as dramaturgic elements, transforming mistakes into opportunities. The characters and scenes were built dynamically, with autonomy in story development, which led to unpredictable and authentic results. The process lasted approximately three days, without a proper budget, and editing took months, going through several versions. The film was presented at festivals and nominated at Gopo 2025 for “Best Short Film”, demonstrating the efficiency of the improvisational method, rapid adaptation to limited resources, and Philip’s directorial talent.

7.3. Application and analysis of the *improvisational method* in the short film “We Light a Candle When the Power Goes Out”, by Iriana Cuconu

Iriana, in her second year, was preoccupied with death, trying various cryptic, abstract, and symbolic scenarios. After her mother’s death, her professors suggested she transform the trauma into a film, offering her the opportunity to work directly with actors. Her first short film, “What Is Love?”, had been a failed experiment, but the personal experience offered authentic material for the next project. Inspired by her mother’s death, Iriana chose to build the film on her own experience, transforming the trauma into a conscious reflection, avoiding gratuitous exposure. The choice of actors – Ioana Pitic and Alina Mișoc – was guided by the natural chemistry and their resemblance to the director’s personal reality. The roles were assigned to them based on secret purposes, inspired by real events, to generate authentic reactions. The rehearsals were extensive, focusing on creating the characters’ background and on their psychological understanding. Improvisations were used to simulate real experiences, including situations preceding the main action and spontaneous interactions, preserving the authenticity of reactions. The improvised material was transcribed and adapted into a hybrid screenplay, preserving the actors’ freedom in lines and movement. The filming preparation included choosing a suitable location and using two cameras to simultaneously capture the actresses. The operators’ freedom and the inclusion of accidental moments brought naturalness and authenticity. The director’s interventions were limited to minor adjustments, maintaining spontaneity and realism. The film was made in approximately three days of filming, with weekly prior rehearsals, minimal equipment, and a reduced budget. The result was a short film that combines the improvisational method with the written screenplay, capturing authentic emotions and personal experiences. The film was selected at festivals in Romania and at Gijon (2023), confirming the method’s success.

7.4. Application and analysis of the *improvisational method* in the short film “Circ”, by Alexandru Sîrbu

Alex recounts that after the abuse scandals at FTF, sessions were organized with a psychologist brought from outside, but many students did not participate, so he and Iriana were asked to attend to represent the faculty. The event had problems more or less relevant, without concrete results, and Alex used this experience as a source of inspiration for the film. At the same time, he was inspired by Alexandru Tocilescu’s book “The Empire of Cats”, to build a framework for improvisation and invented characters based on stories from the book, assigning them to the student-actors. At the rehearsals, the actors received a short backstory and general purposes, without precise indications, and Alex used phone messages to stimulate spontaneity. The first filming plateaued, being predictable, and the change of purposes revitalized the scene. The location was chosen at the faculty; the teachers’ lounge. The filming was carried out with three cameras and a mix of boom and 360 microphones for sound, and the technical accidents and the actors’ improvisations were integrated into the film, adding realism. SMS messages functioned as a directorial instrument. At rehearsals, some scenes required interventions to avoid exaggerations or blockages, and the actors brought unexpected moments, for example an invented relationship between characters. The inspiration from Tocilescu was spontaneous, but linked to personal affinities and interests. The improvisational method allowed the director to combine control with improvisation on the spot, and the second take was essential to adjust boring or predictable moments. The process lasted four days: two of rehearsals, one of *scouting* locations, and one of filming, with a minimal budget. The film was selected at international festivals, demonstrating the method’s efficiency. *Circ* is thus a successful example of rapid, organic, and creative cinematographic improvisation, in which the actors and the director created together a hybrid universe of docu-fiction, satirical and authentic.

7.5. Application and analysis of the *improvisational method* in the short film “Oedipus’ Morning”, by Eszter Tompa

The idea started from experimenting with self-sabotage in relationships and using SMS messages as directorial indications for actors, a method inspired by Christiane Jatahy. Eszter, with 35 years and life and acting experience, chose actors such that their psychological vulnerable points would match the theme, combining a professional actor with an amateur dentist and a first-year acting student, introducing surprises that generated authenticity. The entire process required keeping the unknown for the actors, limiting information, and building characters based on their personal experience, using real contrasts and conflicts as instruments of improvisation. The film’s premise was capturing two friends who wake up together after a night of alcohol, and the rules of the game required them not to be “nice” or correct, but to react spontaneously, preserving silences and interpreting the truth of the situation. The restricted space of the bedroom and the minimalist approach amplified the narrative tension and emotional intimacy, and the contribution of the cinematography professor and the student operators facilitated filming with a single camera, alternating operators due to the long takes. The second take introduced new elements, surprises, and the unexpected entry of a new character, maintaining spontaneity and authenticity, and the

directorial SMS messages regulated the moment of the appearance of plot twists. Eszter used her acting experience to identify and amplify the *relevant contrast* between characters, transforming the personal dilemma – self-sabotage in relationships – into a psychological study visible on screen. The process lasted three days, including rehearsals, scouting, and short filming, with a minimal budget and faculty equipment, demonstrating the efficiency of the improvisational method even with non-professional actors. The film explores the tension between the desire for intimacy and moral or psychological constraints, highlighting the flexibility, instinctive reactions, and contrast between characters, which generated an authentic, remarkable final product, awarded at festivals such as TIFF 2023 and the Student Short Film Nights 2023, confirming the value of the *improvisational method* and of the organic selection of actors.

7.6. Comparative analysis of the *improvisational method* with Mike Leigh’s method in “*Vera Drake*” (2004), by Mike Leigh

The analysis of the applicability of the ten stages of the improvisational method in Mike Leigh’s creative process highlights the validity of this approach in making films without a traditional screenplay. Leigh draws his inspiration from real life and relevant social problems, as can be seen in *Vera Drake*, and documents carefully through interviews and historical studies to understand the social and cultural context. The characters are built organically together with the actors, who practice the roles and interact outside the filming to create authentic dynamics. Each character has clear purposes and defined conflicts, and the actors are not fully informed about key events in order to obtain spontaneous reactions. The diversion of actions and improvisation replace traditional rehearsals, allowing actors to react naturally, and the premise and starting situation are carefully chosen for dramatic coherence. The choice of real locations and authentic decors amplifies realism, and the director subtly influences actions by manipulating the context of scenes, without direct indications. The integration of accidents and spontaneous moments intensifies the authenticity of performances, and this methodological structure can also be adapted in contexts with reduced budget and limited time, as in the case of the improvisational method applied by students. In conclusion, the comparison of the proposed *improvisational method* with Mike Leigh’s working method highlights significant similarities and differences. Both approaches value improvisation and collaboration with actors, but Mike Leigh’s method presupposes a long process of workshops and rehearsals that lead to the fixing of a screenplay before filming. In contrast, the method analyzed in this research keeps improvisation active throughout the filming, transferring a significant part of the dramatic writing during production.

8. Final conclusions

The analysis of the projects demonstrates the validity of the hypothesis that a fiction film can be made without a pre-existing screenplay, using a normative improvisational method. This redefines the director-actor-narrative relationship, emphasizing collaboration, authenticity, and flexibility. The method’s feasibility is confirmed through personal and student projects, generating coherent narrative materials even with limited resources. The method offers a structured framework, guiding improvisation and maintaining directorial control, with advantages such as natural performance, cost reduction, and educational applicability. At the same time, there are challenges

related to editing and adaptation to certain genres. The research highlights the pedagogical potential of the method, proposing a 12-week course for directing students, with objectives of developing creativity, collaboration, and artistic autonomy. The course includes stages of premise, purposes, actor-character, rehearsal, improvisation with twist, integration of accidents, “from the inside” director, filming, and editing. Students experience the cinematographic process directly, exploring innovative forms of storytelling and building coherent short films from improvised materials. This approach promotes a generation of filmmakers capable of creating authentic, flexible, and innovative films, offering viable alternatives to traditional production.

8.1. Educational benefits and impact on filmmakers’ training

The *improvisational method* offers significant benefits both in cinematographic practice and in filmmakers’ training. It stimulates creativity, authenticity, and the assumption of artistic risk, offering an alternative framework for making fiction films.

8.2. Challenges and limits of the *improvisational method*

The research highlights the fact that the improvisational method is not universally applicable. Its efficiency depends on the typology of the project, the availability of actors, and the director’s capacity to manage the unpredictable. Respecting the principles and stages of the method is essential for avoiding narrative incoherence.

8.3. The axis of novelty

This research brings an original contribution due to the absence of a normative specialized literature on “devised film”. Until now, only punctual descriptions existed, without systematic theorization or replicable models. The study proposes a normative framework in 10 steps, transforming dispersed experiences into a coherent, didactic, and applicable method. I consider that the integration of personal experience with theoretical reflection confers practical value and a theoretical foundation to the endeavor. The method has educational potential and can be used for productions with reduced budget or for the training of students without screenwriting preparation. The novelty is thus double: theoretical, through the normalization of the method, and practical, through its validation in films made and awarded.

8.4 Methodological clarifications and final observations

The quality of a film does not depend exclusively on the screenplay; there are masterpieces without elaborate screenplays and failures from excellent books or screenplays. The improvisational method does not guarantee success, but offers directors who do not excel in screenplay writing an efficient instrument for collaboration with actors and for the organic construction of the story, quickly and with a reduced budget. The practical experience accumulated through making several films develops directorial skills and the understanding of the cinematographic process. Improvisation allows authenticity, spontaneity, and artistic flexibility, generating unexpected

moments and narrative depth. This approach encourages the mixing of genres, the exploitation of “accidents”, and the creation of a personal style. It promotes collaboration between the director and the team, bringing the film closer to the unpredictable nature of life and offering an innovative alternative for independent cinema.

8.5 Implications and relevance

The improvisational method demonstrates efficiency in making independent film without financial or screenwriting constraints, emphasizing authenticity and overcoming creative blocks. The success of student projects underlines its pedagogical value and its usefulness as a practical instrument for future directors. The method’s flexibility allows the integration of unexpected situations and “accidents” into the creative process. The research highlights the robustness and versatility of this approach, applicable in diverse genres and contexts. Thus, the *improvisational method* becomes a significant contribution both in practice and in cinematographic pedagogy.

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