

UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ – BOLYAI
FACULTATEA DE TEATRU ȘI TELEVIZIUNE
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ A UNIVERSITĂȚII BABEȘ – BOLYAI
DOMENIUL TEATRU ȘI ARTELE SPECTACOLULUI

DOCTORAL THESIS

-summary-

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CLUJ – NAPOCA
2016

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**A FORAY INTO INDEPENDENT THEATRE –
PERFORMANCE AND THE MULTIPLE CREATOR
-summary-**

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1. KEYWORDS AND CONCEPTS

Performance, Theatre, dance-Theatre, contemporary dance, avant-garde, feminism, signifier, logos, communication, Marxism, capitalism, futurism, psychoanalysis, catharsis, modernism, manifesto, manifesto aesthetics, mirror-neurons, intercultural approaches, precariousness, independent Theatre, audience, reception, the actor-spectator relationship, independent companies, community art, community, personal development, art therapy, creative workshops, ideology, independent spaces, unconventional spaces, independent sector, cultural NGO, creative industries, director, playwright, collective author, devised theatre, participatory art, choreography, emotion, social involvement.

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3. ARGUMENT

The present thesis, titled *A foray into independent Theatre – Performance and the Multiple Creator*, is focused on the independent theatre phenomenon throughout the last fifteen years, with an emphasis on Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Throughout researching, I have tried to meld two important and interconnected branches which pertain to this subject and which cannot be separated at this point in time, namely: (1) the current context and the administrative models of independent companies and (2) the extremely contemporary tendencies of performance and theatrical shows. I have also tried to include both the analyses of new shows presented as case studies after each chapter, and a more ample description of the international context. I opted for this approach

because it is inadmissible to think of Romanian Theatre as a unique phenomenon, severed from a larger movement which is happening on a global stage. Quite the opposite: the current activity in Romania must be considered a branch of the European theatrical and cultural phenomenon.

For fifty years, art originating from Romania was almost absent on the international map, because of the political system. It is now trying to “recover”, to “catch up” to the new trends. Important personalities of international renown are very interested in the Romanian artistic potential, which is thought of as an underexploited field, mysterious and even “exotic” – an area which succeeds in blending the techniques of the Russian school of performance and those of the European paradigm. Currently, there is an extremely favorable context for international creative partnerships, co-productions and participation in specialized international festivals, enabled by Romania joining the European Union.

In the current research, I have theorized the main branches of activity and core beliefs of the Create.Act.Enjoy independent company, which I have founded in the year 2011, along with actors Diana Buluga, Mihail Onaca, Raluca Lupan and film director Cristian Pascariu. Started as an experiment, the company has matured in three years of activity, achieving an important position on the local independent map, both through community activities undertaken and through Theatre and film productions, presented via national tours or by participation at fringe festivals both in Romania and abroad. I have chosen this example in my research, in order to offer as exact an image of the phenomenon as I can, based on my personal and professional experiences as a stage director and PR Manager in an independent Theatre and film company. I have also managed to use an empirical method of research on the proposed phenomenon. All the activities performed through Create.Act.Enjoy are the result of the work and dedication of the artists which comprise the company, along with their coworkers, in the hopes that they will be able to markedly contribute to

the development of independent art in their city and country, through their sustained efforts. In the field of independent Theatre, I believe that administrative work cannot be separated from artistic work. In a young company, as is the case with Creat.Act.Enjoy – actors and directors split their attention between these two spheres of responsibility. As for results, the Create.Act.Enjoy Company is the only one in Romania at the time of writing which has succeeded in raising funds for an independent Theatre show exclusively via a crowdfunding campaign. The campaign was undertaken in October 2013, through the Creștem Idei platform. As a concept, crowdfunding is a very fast and very creative way of obtaining the necessary funds for an independent project. The online platform offers the domain upon which organizers can post information concerning the initiative, which can then be supported financially by visitors' donations.

Another project completed by Creat.Act.Enjoy was the sole winner – in the year 2012, in Transylvania – of an art therapy project, titled *Art for life/ Artă pentru viață*. In 2015, this project became the most expansive such activity in the country. Through art therapy, the company wishes to attract a different type of audience, making it understand the immediate effects that artistic activity can have on daily life. The members of the group were nominated for the *Female Excellency Gala* in two consecutive years, winning the award both times for benefits brought to the local community. This event is organized by the Association of Cluj Business Women and by Vitrina Advertising. The company also maintains an ongoing collaboration with the local authorities, either through art therapy projects, flash-mobs or as a consultant during the process of compiling Cluj-Napoca's file as a candidate for the title of European Capital of Culture 2021.

4. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS

The purpose of the present research was to test the importance and efficacy of an independent company in the current cultural and artistic space, as well as discerning the way the local public relates to artistic experiments in the field of performance. As a result, during the last four years, the city of Cluj-Napoca has developed an attractive framework for starting new cultural NGOs which work in the independent sector, becoming one of the most well-represented centers in the country in this field. The objectives were established after formulating the purpose described above. We have opted both for an empirical research of the subject, and for a theoretical and anthropological approach. Thus, the objectives were: (1) forming a cultural NGO, who would test and search for solutions from within the problem; (2) conducting an audience study on a local level, from the same empirical perspective; (3) researching the creative industry field and gauging the extent to which performing arts fit into this category; (4) creating a theoretical framework for a contemporary phenomenon, by placing it in an international, philosophical and anthropological context.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL-SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT

The current paper combines scientific and empirical methods, using one to exemplify the other. Theatrical art is a concrete form and is largely based on action. For this reason, it is very difficult, and at the same time insufficient, to try and separate two elements (practice and theory)

which constitute the same subject and which develop mutually. *A foray into independent Theatre-Performance and the Multiple Creator* is a research based on the author's practical experience, after having considered activity in the independent field as an ongoing experiment in the Romanian community.

Other methods which have served the present research are as follows: methods associated with theatre history, critical thinking in the theatre, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, audience study, psychology and theatre aesthetics. All of these methodologies are evidenced, both within the issues exposed in the reasearch, and in the final bibliography of the paper.

6. THESIS STRUCTURE

In the *Introduction* of this paper, we have expressed the premises upon which the research is based: we've established the concept of theatre/performance in contemporary society. In this theoretical part, we have also developed an intercultural timeline of the main ideas which have constituted the basis of performance theory and of early 20th Century theatre theory, which have massively influenced the way in which artistic productions are constructed and perceived today. Our motivation was the fact that performance phenomena happening today cannot be understood lacking context and localization in a more complex image. We've developed this idea in *Chapter I*, where we've theorized the main theories/philosophies which have influenced artistic thought in the 20th Century: Modernism, Marxism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Semiotics. We have also tried to present the evolution of the term "catharsis" in terms of meaning, from Aristotle's definition to that given by modern psychologists.

Chapter I is followed by a case study on the show *This is my body. Come into my mind*, by the Create.Act.Enjoy company, describing in detail the working method and the way the show was perceived, taking into account context and audience type from performance to performance.

Chapter II approaches the theme of Romanian independent theatre at the beginning of the 21st Century, focusing on the context in Cluj-Napoca: mentality, types of perception, administrative models, Actor-Audience relationship in an unconventional space. We described the main vectors taken by the local independent art scene, increasingly focused on interactive performance and community activism. For example, creative workshops curated for disadvantaged layers of society, as well as persons wishing to develop their artistic abilities, or the intervention of artists in the peripheral neighborhoods of the city in order to better integrate them within the larger community. Practical examples include the at-length description of Creat.Act.Enjoy, as well as the activity of cultural NGOs “Colectiv A”, “Creation and Experiment REACTOR/ REACTOR de Creație și Experiment”, “Reciproca Association/ Asociația Reciproca”, “Váróterem Projekt”, as well as mentioning their branches of activity, national and international collaborations, artistic creeds, spaces and visibility.

We have chosen to include a case study after *Chapter II*, focused on analyzing two shows/performances which express the image of contemporary society. The two shows in question are *Snap* (by Create.Act.Enjoy) and *X millimeters of Y kilometers*, directed by Gianina Cărbunariu at The Paintbrush Factory, in November 2011. Both explore aspects of the Romanian contemporary reality, trying to explain the current mentality of the individual in conflict with prejudice stemming from two rival political systems. We had an insider perspective of the creation process for both productions, both as a production consultant and as an assistant director.

Chapter III addresses the concept of devised/devising theatre, as a new approach to work by Romanian companies. As a form, it was hinted at ever since the '60s, but it has developed during the 2000s in the UK and in the USA. Currently, theatre companies throughout Romania are slowly starting to use this technique, which denotes a shift in mentality concerning the way an artistic act is conceptualized. We are also the witnesses of a major mutation when it comes to audiences, a shift from an intellectual to a senses-oriented mode of perception, due to the prevalence of technology in daily life.

As case studies, we have analyzed the working method for two shows produced by Create.Act.Enjoy between 2013 and 2014: *Lost in Transition* and *Every Day is a Bridget Day*. The two productions are examples upon which the *devised* technique can be applied: constructing a scenario for a physical, movement-based show (in the case of *Lost in Transition*, which was performed at the *Avram Iancu* International Airport in Cluj-Napoca, in October 2014), and developing a one-woman show with traces of performance and stand-up comedy (in the case of *Every Day is Bridget Day*, which premiered at the Răgaz coffee shop, in November 2013).

7. CONCLUSIONS

As a result of conceiving the *A foray into independent Theatre – Performance and the Multiple Creator*, we have evidenced and theorized three terms which define our century from a cultural perspective: independent culture, experiment and author. The following words detail these three concepts from a research perspective.

Now, probably more than ever before, there is particular emphasis being placed on these three elements, which have become the supporting pillars of European art, representing their dynamic expression. As proof of this, starting from the first decade of the 21st Century, the

European Union develops funding and opportunity programs over seven year intervals, for artists in member countries. The purpose of these sessions is to enrich the European cultural heritage, to encourage and enable mobility for trans-national communication, to build and to define inter-cultural activity. At the time of writing, the European program being undertaken is called *Creative Europe*, with a cultural sub-program funded with 454,8 million Euro for all successful applicants between 2014-2020.¹

As the representatives of the Romanian counseling office for the current program state, very few projects originating from Romania can pass through the “filters” in Bruxelles. There are multiple explanations, but we will only highlight two of them, which appear to be essential and which express the entire mentality of the Romanian cultural sector in a nutshell.

First, the European funding is awarded to projects taking between 2 and 4 years to complete. Very few cultural institutions and NGOs in Romania make business or opportunity plans for such an extended period of time. In this case, there is a difference of vision or of creating general perspectives between the national and international cultural scenes. As a result, representatives of institutions will avoid attributing leader responsibility for themselves on such projects and will most likely choose to become European partners. It is indeed a slightly more comfortable position, but it is insufficient for making Romanian culture more visible outside our borders.

Secondly, the stakes of the proposed projects, the involvement in the general context, the activity lists and the need for real cultural exchange are all far too small. One can assume that this is due to the lack of a more experienced independent art sector in Romania. One of the main purposes of these European funds is supporting young artists and helping them debut on an

¹ For more information on this, follow the site of the Romanian Creative Europe Bureau: <http://www.europa-creativa.eu/>

international level, targeting collaborations with representatives of different societies in order to achieve socio-cultural exchanges. Independent art in Romania has not yet reached sufficient maturity to be considered a safe framework in which to work and subsist. If in the '90s artist groups acting on their own initiative were regarded with suspicion and reservations, today they are starting to be supported via official funding sessions. Unfortunately however, a major problem is the lack of a solid and active cultural management department tailored to this context. Most frequently, artists manage their own works or events, without previous knowledge in sales, promotion, project writing, business planning, budgeting and prioritizing. They learn "on the fly", experiencing these aspects in their own groups, looking for ways to attract their audience and studying the immense bureaucracy required by a national funding program. Without this cumulative experience, a very small number of artistic groups will venture to submit applications for a European funding program. In spite of all this, the credit which national and international institutions are starting to place in the work of young artists is a new and admirable phenomenon, especially taking into account recent history and the context so far.

Regarding the artists' taste for the experimental, it is fueled by the Avant-guard movements of the early 20th Century. In *Chapter I* of this thesis we have sketched a history of the great theories which have influenced the mode of thought of revolutionary artistic creators, focusing on performance and Theatre. We opted for drawing a cultural time-line, which would synthesize the itinerary of the major theatrical theories, taking into account time and space. The explanation is that the amount of written material available on this is colossal, and it is not the object of the current research. It was however essential to sketch out a history in order to correctly identify the context in which independent forms of Theatre were born, and the mutations which occurred

concerning acting and power relationships within these frameworks, as well as the changes which occurred on aesthetic and conceptual levels of the artistic act.

In a national context, Romania has not had the opportunity of a culture of artistic experiment, due to the previous political regime. The *in extremis* polarization of art has led to an absolute control by the political powers, which could impose upon Theatre managers the number of productions to be developed each season, as well as mandatory names which were to appear on posters, never concerned with their quality. Because of this, after the '90s, once totalitarian control was removed, the cultural space found itself in a new posture, never before encountered, in which it had to catch up to essentially 50 years of culture. This need to realign pushed the Romanian artist to adopt new forms, without the benefit of a solid foundation derived from decades of experiments. These new forms which artists were gravitating towards conflicted with the mentality and hierarchies which society accepted, that is to say, with *national tradition*. This is the reason why very few initiatives to renew the cultural sector have survived the years following the downfall of the communist regime. The main culprit is unfavorable context; considering the cases in the universal history of Theatre, the greatest number of groups which practice and develop experiments come from permissive environments. The very idea of Avant-guard presupposes revolting against, denying that which Exists – an attitude which was almost impossible in Romania between 1947 and 1989. In consequence, the only way to achieve cultural rejuvenation was to adopt new forms and “fill” them with meaning over the next two decades. This outside-in approach was not and is not simple, when the main conflict is being fought between new initiative groups, and obsolete and extremely bureaucratic institutional mentalities, or between these young groups and the dwindled interest toward culture of their young audiences, as highlighted by the cited IRES study. One can state that one of the main reasons for this reserved attitude from the

audience is the lack of trust and familiarity with new forms and the fact that the main “victim” of their adoption was the show itself. Another reason is the lack of updated education, while the tradition of “going to the Theatre” still persists both in families and in schools. Yet another reason is the proliferation of entertainment alternatives and distractions: cinemas, concert, festivals and so on. In Romania there is no performant culture of theatrical entertainment styles, such as musicals or cabaret; these events do not happen regularly and there are close to no institutions and artists specialized on these models. In most cases, state Theatres and operettas approach this area of theatrical art as well, and independent companies usually develop niche productions, for small audiences.

This is not necessarily a negative thing; quite the opposite: independent Theatre should and must assume a different approach from state Theatres, without entering into competition with them. Independence is defined by experiments, by choosing their own repertoire and acting space/spaces (all of these being different from what is available to an institution) and, more than ever, independence is defined by redefining and re-evaluating the rapport between Actor and Audience. This rapport will always be subject to two very important elements: (1) the conception of the show/performance, which often necessitates direct communication between all people involved, or even a shift towards a more active role for the public; (2) logistical conditions of positioning the audience in relation to the show. Independent artists most often refuse to stage shows in the Italian box stage setting, just as much as they refuse the idea of the theatrical illusion, allowing their audience access to the working mechanisms and techniques, which they leave “on display”. This builds a true relationship of complicity between the two sides of the stage, placing it within a convention established before hand. This exercise alludes to participative art, which is gaining more and more momentum nowadays. In order for this to achieve functionality in the

Romanian cultural space, there is a stringent need for a genuine campaign to educate audiences, and this can only be achieved over a long period of time. The current Theatre spectator's conception is to witness an artistic act within a secure space, with no implication or influence on what goes on on stage. Unfortunately, this is not a favorable position in which to develop artistic experiments; further more, communication is an act which happens in any situation, voluntarily or not – through messages being broadcast to everyone around. Thus, the exchange between spectators and actors/performers will occur in any circumstances, be they positive or negative.

The third aspect referenced in this thesis, namely the dispute over authorship, we are convinced by critic Iulia Popovici, which attests to the fact that the artists' option to practice a devised method while developing their shows is not only an aesthetic choice and a continuation of the Avant-guard in a deliberate way, but more than that, it is a shift in the structure of roles and relationships between roles within the production team.

We believe that the key moment which led to the birth of the devised technique in Romania is the crisis of the theatrical play, due to the retraction from the national repertoire of authors affiliated to the previous political regime. This has motivated artists, driving them to search for subjects in areas less explored of the current society, pushing them towards a more and more diversified communication with representatives of other artistic and social fields.

Another step which we consider essential in the development of this phenomenon is the internal structure of an independent artistic company. The dissipation of established roles and functions is catalyzed by multiple factors: from the financial aspect, which “dictates” reducing personnel, to the aesthetic aspect, through which show authors believe they can obtain a more complex and more dynamic vision of the proposed theme. Finally, there is the aspect of convincing

and motivating a group to develop a show/performance which isn't perceived as merely part of a list for the current season, but going much further, it is interpreted by its creators as a personal experience, which lends the work far more weight than it had in the past.

Whether the cultural programs of an independent company address community art, collaborative art, participative, social, forum Theatre, art therapy, personal development workshops and so on, they all have the same purpose in today's national context: developing a community and its position in a wider context.

Currently, this area of interest and activity cannot be covered by state institutions which produce culture, without somehow degrading the fundamental concept from which they build. All of these are expressions of independent initiatives, born in the underground, in freedom, within society, following the Avant-guard, stemming from revolt or opposition towards an established order, from a shift or a mutation within social classes, or simply from being disenfranchised.

Independent companies have their own administrative and hierarchical structures from which they derive their energy and stylistic concepts. In this context, these two elements cannot be separated – they will always function as voluntarily interdependent.

These groups, or cultural micro-structures, are considered the future of Theatre, both from a national and an international perspective, due to two very clear reasons: the dynamism they exhibit when it comes to attracting audiences, and their community and social involvement in a creative way, while reestablishing hierarchies within groups. This raises the level of responsibility towards the artistic act for everyone involved.

The current thesis does not position itself against institutional Theatre, but rather supports the idea of creating an art capable of approaching and involving itself much more in the problems and needs of its audience.

Independent Theatre and state Theatre shouldn't compete, but rather find themselves working in a complementary partnership: each represents a viable alternative, offering the audience value.

8. FURTHER RESEARCH

Considering that the current thesis represents the description and theoretical outline of a developing phenomenon, the continuation of the research will initially focus on a practical context. Currently, the subject needs to develop, expand and acquire a palpable form within national cultural policies. This aspect can be foreseen in the following years, as well as the foundation of a national level coalition of the independent sector. Future research will focus on a much more complex and diversified study of audiences, taking into consideration communities formed around independent companies, but also approaching the importance of cultural intrusion in the form of creative workshops in the lives of audience members.

The current research represents a first step in building a theoretical framework for this subject, a starting point for future research in the field.

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