

**“Babeş-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca
Faculty of Theatre and Television**

Field: Theatre

**OBSERVER AND OBSERVED IN
THEATRE CASTING.
SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINATIONS OF THE “ONE-TO-
ONE” RELATIONSHIP**

Abstract

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I. Keywords, concepts

Casting, audition, test, actor, director, perception, attention, observation, typologies, creativity, imagination, emotion, the flow state, errors of attribution, first impression.

II. Object and main directions of research

The research materialized in this doctoral thesis, called *Observer and Observed in Theatre Casting. Socio-psychological Determinations of the "One-to-one" Relationship*, relies on the necessity to emphasize the vital role played by casting for a theatre project. Starting from the idea that the selection of the actors who are to actually shape and portray characters is an act of creation, the study sought to identify the factors that have an impact on this series of decisions. We tried to untangle, even if only partially, some apparent enigmas and paradoxes linked with the casting situation, which, many times, generate legends surrounding the event. The absence of decisive scientific studies on the casting process, in the international and Romanian literature, as well as the fact that, in Romania, the audition culture is a relatively recent acquisition were also consistent reasons for the initiation of this piece of research.

The study of the casting process gave me the opportunity to see the complexity of the phenomenon and to find that the structuring of a cast may provide research material for several fields: psychology, anthropology, sociology, etc. While, at first sight, the theme of casting seemed a “niche” theme, limited to the fields of theatre and filmmaking, once I went deeper into the topic, the perspectives multiplied, including the history of the casting industry, the methods of actor training for casting, the entailed psychological and sociological mechanisms, and so on

and so forth. I chose, however, to limit the scope of my research to the aspects that are my main concern, from the viewpoint of the stage director: the relationship between the two protagonists of the situation called casting, namely the Observer and the Observed, in other words, the actor and the director, one-on-one. I considered in particular a specific category of auditions, wherein the director evaluates on their own the actor, in a sort of tête-à-tête, excluding other parties' intrusion (producers, theatre managers, etc.).

I was able to examine the complex relationship of the two by using, apart from the theatrical instruments, theories, notions and paradigms offered by other fields. Thus, the sphere of the considered concepts included theoretical data provided by psychology, neurosciences, sociology, and aesthetics. Furthermore, the study used helpful information obtained from sources that describe the organization and execution of film casting, especially in the United States of America – the place where this authentic industry appeared and developed.

The director and the actor, the “players” of the “one-to-one” situation, were analyzed either in the context of the casting relationship, or separately. While, at the beginning of the study, the Observer meant the director and the Observed was the actor, later I approached the hypothesis that, in fact, the two alternate these roles, once the focus shifts. In the case of the actor subject to the audition, I considered that the following aspects should be analyzed: the role of creativity, of attention, emotion, and empathy, the existence and the functions of manipulation. Another scrutinized aspect is the actor's constant oscillation between *self* and role, according to the director's guidelines or even to the latter's questions regarding the actor's private person. As to the director, the study focused on: the issue of the first impression, the role of automatisms in perception, the unconscious determinations and the sensible reasons underlying the director's decisions and, at the same time, on the description of the errors that may appear in the process of evaluation of the actors. Furthermore, this paper borrows from psychology concepts such as human personality and typologies, and applies them to the directors, based on the hypothesis that this approach may clarify some aspects of their theatrical activity and of their approach of the actors. Concretely, in a separate material, there is a description of the group of the five directors who, at the beginning of the 20th century, joined each other and organized what would later become the “French Cartel” phenomenon.

The study presents a number of actual examples of castings, where protagonists were worldwide known directors and actors. These comparative illustrations allowed an evaluation

of the stage of development of the casting culture in Romanian theatre, both at organizational and at institutional level, as well as from the viewpoint of the directors' and actors' behavior.

Moreover, similarities and differences were examined, as well as reciprocal influences between theatre casting and film casting, finding that, in theatre, unlike in film, the methods of evaluation of the actors are not equally open to change.

A complementary direction of research focused on putting casting in relation to its context, its background, by analyzing the differences and similarities between the auditions of the repertory theatres, that have permanent companies (subsidized by the state) and the institutions in the so-called field of "independent theatre". Looking into these differences and similarities – with the help of direct testimonies from parties involved (applying questionnaires with results described in the thesis) – I found that the actors' attitude toward casting is sometimes vague, and their training to manage this type of situation sometimes fails to satisfy the directors' expectations. Therefore, this paper seeks to clarify a number of aspects and to formulate a series of recommendations that allow actors to "train" for casting. Such information will be, at some point in the future, the material for some learning aid, for some training guidelines, which, in my opinion, would be welcome in the academic curriculum.

In addition to the confirmation or dismissal of the initial theories, the study performed for the writing of the thesis meant the appearance of other hypotheses generated by the answers received from the examined/interviewed actors, stage directors and casting directors. Thus, I found that a universally valid casting method cannot be identified, but also that the "classic" form of the audition, i.e. an actor's evaluation based on a single, time-limited viewing, is, in the opinion of many, a source of errors of evaluation, which may lead to an inefficient cast. Instead, the organization of the casting processes according to the "workshop" formula, spanning over a longer time interval (a practice mainly approached by independent theatres), allows a more thorough familiarization of the actors and directors, thus diminishing the risk of perception and evaluation errors.

At a specific level of understanding, every individual audition is the meeting of two artists whose shared purpose is the theatrical performance/show. It is the time when the first exchange of information occurs, when the first step to mutual understanding is taken. The subordination relationship, wherein the director is the controlling authority, the only one authorized to lead the creative process, to coordinate it or to censor it, not allowing the actor

to place a decisive input, is visible in some projects from the casting phase. Could the actor also mislead the director, by taking over the control, by somehow manipulating the latter? Or instead could we speak of a partnership, of a dialogue of the equals, a relationship in which one must consider the other, their creative offers, their behavior, and the acceptance or refusal of the cooperation is a right of both parties? Questions such as those above should be linked with another premise of this paper, relating to the predominantly creative nature of the casting process, whose development allows one to guess the director's artistic personality, his/her creative intents, his/her method of work, information able to already prefigure the atmosphere of upcoming rehearsals.

III. Structure of the paper

This thesis is organized in five chapters. The paper starts with an introduction that describes the object and the study guidelines, justifying the opportunity of the theme, contextualizing the examined phenomenon, presenting the sources of information and the considered study methods. The introduction is followed by chapters meant to expand the theoretical approach, and then by a case study starting from a filmed casting process in a repertory theatre. The paper ends with the related conclusions.

The first chapter starts with the definition of the research object and continues with a brief history of the same. It also includes the synthetic presentation of some pieces of information about film casting, the casting industry, but also of alternative casting methods in various theatrical systems. The chapter ends with a comparison between the audition and the entrance examination taken for the acting faculty.

The second chapter is meant for the psycho-sociological determinations of those involved in the casting process (director and actor). The information about personality, temperament, character or skills, followed by a classification of human typologies (according to bio-constitution, psycho-biological and psychological traits, characterological, cultural and artistic types) finds its applicability in a profile study applied to five known stage directors (Jacques Copeau, Louis Jouvet, Gaston Baty, Georges Pitoëff, and Charles Dullin) who formed the French Cartel.

The third chapter focuses on the analysis of the *first impression* in theatre casting, but also of the psychological processes involved in the evaluation (perception, attention, observation); the chapter also describes some errors that may occur in the attribution process.

The fourth chapter examines the director-actor relationship, analyzing the two protagonists either in the context of the “one-to-one” situation, or separately (role of creativity, imagination, improvisation or emotion, the flow concept, the role of manipulation, etc.).

Chapter five, the last one, focuses on a case study, the result of a shooting of an audition organized by the Oradea “Regina Maria” Theatre, for the cast of A.P. Chekov’s *Cherry Orchard*, directed by Alexandru Dabija (2015). This chapter “*The Cherry Orchard – case study*” is meant as an applied counterpart to the first four chapters of this thesis. The audition for the Oradea theatre stage play was only one of the many casting processes organized in theatres and it does not necessarily have a representative nature. Auditions, however, are not similar to one another; each of them is a living, unrepeatable and wide-ranging process that involves conflicts, revelations, frustrations, confirmation, and gratification.

The **Final conclusions** are followed by the **Bibliography** and **Annexes** sections (which include the most relevant answers from directors and actors, to the applied questionnaires).