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RADU PENCIULESCU – PEDAGOGY AND CREATION

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## SUMMARY

### CHAPTER 1. THE INTRODUCTION

### CHAPTER 2. THE TRAINING OF THE ACTOR-TEACHING PRACTICES VERSUS WORK OF CREATION

#### 2.1. SHORT INITIATION IN HISTORY

#### 2.2. THE TRAINING OR WHAT ONE NEEDS TO DO CANNOT BE LEARNED

#### 2.3. TRAINING AND PLAYING

#### 2.4. THE WAY TO WALK INTO THE TRUTH

### CHAPTER 3. STANISLAVSKI: „THE CONSTANT NOVELTY OF THE SYSTEM”

#### 3.1. ABOUT “THE SYSTEM” AND MORE

#### 3.2. ABOUT THE ACTOR, THE TEACHING PRACTICES AND THE PLAY

### CHAPTER 4. RADU PENCIULESCU IN ROMÂNIA

#### 4.1. RADU PENCIULESCU AND THE CONTEXT OF BRINGING THEATRE BACK TO THE THEATRE

##### 4.1.1. THE PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNGMAN

##### 4.1.2. ORADEA AND THE BEGINNINGS

##### 4.1.3 BRINGING THEATRE BACK TO THE THEATRE-A NEVERENDING STORY

#### 4.2. THE SMALL THEATRE

##### 4.2.1. HISTORICAL PREMISES

##### 4.2.2. THE MANAGER

##### 4.2.3. THE REPERTOIRE

#### 4.3. RADU PENCIULESCU’S PERFORMANCES AT THE SMALL THEATRE

##### 4.3.1. HOWEVER STRANGE IT MIGHT SEEM

##### 4.3.2. TWO PEOPLE AND A TELEPHONE

4.3.3. POETRY AND THEATRE

4.3.4. RICHARD II. THE FIRST

4.3.5. THE TANGO, „A SELF DISTRUCTION DANCE”

4.3.6. THE HATCHET OR THE TRIUMPH OF SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT

4.4. RADU PENCIULESCU’S PERFORMANCES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ACTOR’S PRE-EMINENCE

4.4.1. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

4.4.2. ON A PARTICULAR DANCE

4.4.3. WOYZECK OR THE ABOLISHMENT OF THE “PERFORMANCE CREATING DIRECTOR”

4.4.4. LEAR: KING LEAR

4.4.5. THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE TEAM OR “THE THIEVES’ BALL”

4.4.6. SOMETHING BAD CAN TURN INTO SOMETHING GOOD

4.5. THE REFORM OF THE THEATRE DIRECTING SCHOOL

CHAPTER 5. RADU PENCIULESCU: THE RETURN

5.1. TEACHING THEATRE: FACTS

5.2. WORKSHOPS IN ROMANIA

5.3. THE PERFORMANCES OF THE RETURN

CHAPTER 6. THE WORKSHOP: THE PERFECT MEANS TO TRAINING THE ACTOR

6.1. WORKSHOP. LACK OF FEAR OF CHANGE

6.2. TOPICS AND PLAYS

6.3. THE SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS. CRITERIA AND PRINCIPLES TO MAKE THE SELECTION

6.4.EXERCISES. GROUP EXERCISES. INDIVIDUAL EXERCISES

6.4.1. THE EXERCISE, THE STAGE TASK AND THE FLYING

6.4.2. THE EXERCISE THAT GOES WITHOUT SAYING

### 6.4.3. ON SEVERAL ACTIONS TOWARDS AN ACTING CLASS

## CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSIONS

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## SUMMARY

Why did Radu Penciulescu leave the world of theatre, in terms of performance, is a question we can never utter correctly enough to get a correct answer.

Why has Radu Penciulescu settled for the limitless territory of preparing the actor instead is a question he has never answered.

Our research is meant to determine whether professor and theatre director Radu Penciulescu has managed to develop a personal technique of training the actor. The starting point to this effect is a number of his own statements published within what we consider to be his programmatic work. We shall attempt to define Radu Penciulescu's singular method of training the actor, one that he refers to as follows:

“Teaching, in theatre, can only be a practice that goes along a *via negativa*, that is to say, a method of learning what one is not supposed to learn (because what one really needs to do cannot be learned) in order to achieve an exceptional state of vigilance, situated at the height of all possible realities.” (Penciulescu, *The involvement of the actor*, 86-87)

During a conference<sup>1</sup> held at the Bucharest „I.L. Caragiale” National Theatre on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2010 the theatre director/teacher firmly states “the age of silence has begun for me”. Even though he opts for silence, Radu Penciulescu, born 1930, still manages to surprise us, every now and then, with his actions. We emphasize the word “actions”, as, although we would have expected him to surprise us with his memoirs by now, Radu Penciulescu, true to his life-long activity, has chosen to bet on “actions”, to the prejudice of theory.

Our paper follows Radu Penciulecu’s nearly seventy years of work and will attempt to single out the definite elements that pertain to his unique method of training, based on his activity in Romania.

Chapter 1(The Introduction) reveals the premises of the paper and lays out the ways the research is going to follow. It is within this chapter that we utter the questions our paper is prepared to find answers to.

Chapter 2 (The training of the actor – teaching practices versus work of creation) constitutes the hard core of the paper. Starting from real practices of Radu Penciulescu, it conveys an image of the theatre director’s/teacher’s approach on the training of the actor, along his entire teaching career. Once we have gone through the necessary initiation in history, we shall analyze the main constituent parts of the training: the playing, what one has to do and the way to step up to the truth.

Chapter 3 (Stanislavski: „the continuous novelty of *the system*”) is a part of the paper that became necessary as a result of having identified a set of similar elements in both “Stanislavski’s system” and the training method developed by Radu Penciulescu. The chapter highlights the Stanislavski affiliation of the Romanian teacher’s method, by means of singling out the

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<sup>1</sup> The conference entitled „The long way of the play to the stage” was held at the Bucharest „I.L. Caragiale” National Theatre on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2010.

similarities and contradictions to the Russian theatre director's approach. Moreover, this chapter is meant to prove Radu Penciulescu's intention to acknowledge Stanislavski as the first reforming spirit in theatre.

Chapter 4 (Radu Penciulescu in Romania), the most extensive of all, allows our research to focus on the analysis of the work with the actors, thus attempting to identify the singular method of training Radu Penciulescu developed. The chapter consists of five sub-chapters which, by means of ample presentations, reveal the form of Radu Penciulescu's work with the actor. Going through his activity as a theatre director and teacher, we shall present his actions in several contexts: that of bringing theatre back to the theatre and the beginnings of his career, in Oradea; that of founding "the Small Theatre" and his experience as a manager; that of his activity as a director within the theatre he managed; that of the performances he put up in theatres across the country; that of his reforming of the theatre directing school in Bucharest, a role that we believe to be intricately connected to his work as a trainer.

We shall investigate both his directorial achievements and his teaching successes. The introspection into the world of his performances will reveal or not, apart from elements of his method of working with the actors, the way he connects to the history of Romanian and European theatre and the way he relates to the administrative context of the time; the same introspection will allow us to single out a number of specific actions that constitute the pillars of his singular method of training the actor. This chapter following his work in Romania relies upon the study of numerous and consistent documents, thus placing Radu Penciulescu in the larger context of the world of theatre throughout the fifth and sixth decades of the last century and, at the same time, allowing for a true picture of the artistic life of those times.

The present paper will put together Penciulescu's presence in the world of Romanian theatre by taking a close look at his work as a teacher. The 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter (Radu Penciulescu: the return) highlights the efforts he put into the workshops he held, as a theatre director and teacher, upon his return to Romania; this chapter will also attempt to record the relationship between these workshops and the performances he staged after his return. We feel all these performances are a result of the works carried out throughout the workshops and have a definite teaching mission.

We shall record within this chapter a series of exercises that have proven to be essential to the training of actors; these exercises will be highlighted throughout Chapter 6 (The workshop: a perfect means of training the actor). The sub-chapters to this particular part of the paper constitute the steps to be taken in setting out and conducting a training process: the choice of plays, the selection of people to take part in the training, up to the decision on what exercises to be carried out throughout the workshop and the means to implement them.

To conclude, in Chapter 7 we demonstrate our theory by laying out the outline of one of Radu Penciulescu's method of training the actor.

Asked why he is teaching, Giorgio Strehler<sup>2</sup> retorts with a phrase hidden behind a transient need:

„The profession of theatre director is, in itself, the profession of a critic and a teacher. Plenty of directors are, alas!, critics far too sterile, or have far too many ideas; and, as teachers, are led to believe, out of cowardice or due to a sense of

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<sup>2</sup> Giorgio Strehler (August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1921- December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1997) Italian theatre and opera director.



discipline, that they are supposed to do things whose meaning escapes them; and they never do so as a result of a mutual love or a mutual respect.” (Strehler 85-90)

We believe Radu Penciulescu’s reply to the same question – though not asked directly, in the same publication is much closer to the importance of the act of teaching:

„Teaching offers a whole lot more time, it forces one to find instruments that will allow for the solution to be not programmed, but discovered.”

(Penciulescu – A space of freedom, 81-84)

As always, Radu Penciulescu does not bring into discussion reasons less earthly, esoteric, and imponderable so to speak. His motivation is about rediscovering or renewal of instruments the director already has; instruments that might have been altered in time, thus not allowing him to be lucid in his work.

Teaching allows Penciulescu to take his time. He needs time to reaffirm his profession, to refresh his instruments. Radu Penciulescu’s time gives way to instruments that will afford avoiding programmed solutions, both as a director and as a teacher, and plunging into large spaces, infinite at times, of searching for something else.

His second motivation is more personal and belonging to Radu Penciulescu the theatre director: “The freedom of the director begins where everybody involved takes part into the evolution, without losing the capacity to direct.” (Penciulescu 82) The phrase speaks to the level of absolute freedom that Penciulescu, both as a director and as a teacher, is willing to bestow upon the people he works with. This freedom is not just his. Penciulescu frees all the actions of training the actor and, at the same time, those of staging a performance.

The third motivation pertains to the desire to tend to the evolution of the actor, the most important element in a performance: In teaching all of these connections are even freer: evolution is not just a means to an end, it becomes an object of study.” (Penciulescu 82).

The fourth and last motivation on our list is a feeling slightly selfish, as selfish as Radu Penciulescu might be:

„On another hand, there is a biographical motivation as well: at some point in his career, the director needs to meet people that are younger than him. I have learned from my students at least as much as they have learned from me. There are a number of questions you get asked, in the name of innocence, or maybe even treachery, that force you to renew yourself. Any given artist, even though I do not think of the theatre director as being an artist, is prone to sclerosis, because the audience tends to ask of him to express what he has learned yesterday, so to repeat himself. As far as I am concerned, I have always tried to clear away this will of the audience to project a fixed image on you.” (Penciulescu 82-83)

Throughout this paper we shall comment on a number of elements belonging to Radu Penciulescu’s teaching method, elements we find are of great importance to sustain our theory. The first of these elements: the theatre director/teacher states he has learned from his students as much as they have learned from him. Not ignoring Radu Penciulescu’s legendary generosity, we need to mention that throughout all the years the director/teacher has never attempted to place himself above his students; moreover, he always valued his students’ personality as more important than the small needs of the master. Both his ways as a teacher in Romania and the method he applied during his work in Sweden speak volumes to this effect. The second of the above-mentioned elements: the director/teacher enjoyed the position of someone who, trying to

answer the students' innocent or treacherous questions, was forced to enlarge himself and renew his day to day directing and teaching practices. The third element: the director/teacher, in permanent and wilful contact with the freedom not engaged artistically, but turned towards the becoming of his students, has declined, for good, one might say, to be the prisoner of his own image, that imposed by the audience; he also placed the energy of the teaching process as a shield against the devouring sclerosis of thought and action. The fourth element: the biographical motivation, or, better yet, the biological one; the sort of motivation that every director needs in his activity.

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