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1

PERSPECTIVE ASUPRA CRITICII DE TEATRU



ZUR THEATERKRITIK



VIEWS ON THEATRE CRITICISM



The End of the Golden Ages? or 2010-2020: the “Border” Decade for British and American Theatre Criticism¹

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Abstract

This text is an exploration of the tendencies transpiring on the territory of theatre criticism in Britain and the US during the tumultuous last decade, in an attempt to create an overview of the criticism’s landscape there. Three main springboards for applying comparative analysis are used. First: the main features that have characterized the criticism’s models in the two countries, since their establishment, i.e. their “world of yesterday”. Second: a host of articles devoted to the dramatic changes in the criticism’s face there, published between 2010 and 2020. Third: a juxtaposition of the situation in the two countries criticism-wise. On focus are the factors that have triggered major changes in the subject-matter, most importantly, the role of the digital shift. The advantages and disadvantages of the digital criticism *per se* and as opposed to the traditional one are surveyed, as well as the search for securing criticism’s sustainability as a main way out of the much discussed impasse it appears to be in. While it remains to be seen if the golden ages of British and American criticism have indeed come to an end, to all appearances the last decade could well be called “a border” one.

Keywords:

theatre criticism; Britain; USA; digital shift; crisis; sustainability.

Rezumat

Acest text este o explorare a tendințelor din domeniul criticii de teatru din Marea Britanie și SUA în decursul ultimului deceniu tumultuos, în încercarea de a crea o imagine de ansamblu a peisajului criticii în cauză. Sunt folosite trei abordări principale pentru efectuarea unei analize comparate. Sunt analizate în primul rând principalele caracteristici care au influențat modelele criticii în cele două țări, de la înființarea lor, adică „lumea de ieri”. În al doilea rând sunt cercetate o serie de articole dedicate schimbărilor dramatice ale

¹ The research for this text has been partially funded by the National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts, Sofia, Bulgaria.

criticii în cauză, publicate între anii 2010 și 2020. În al treilea rând se efectuează o juxtapunere a situației celor două țări din punct de vedere critic. În focus rămân factorii care au declanșat schimbări majore ale fenomenului, cel mai important fiind rolul paradigmei digitale. Sunt analizate avantajele și dezavantajele criticii digitale în sine, alături de cea tradițională, precum și căutarea asigurării sustenabilității criticii ca principală cale de ieșire din impasul mult discutat în care pare a fi acum. Deși rămâne de văzut dacă epocile de aur ale criticii britanice și americane au ajuns într-adevăr la sfârșit, privit din toate unghiurile, deceniul trecut ar putea fi considerat drept „o cotitură”.

Cuvinte cheie:

critică de teatru; Marea Britanie; SUA; paradigmă digitală; criză; sustenabilitate.

The Amazingly Persistent Hats-Off to Theatre Criticism: An Awesome Tradition

Since 1990, when I started my active research on the world models of theatre criticism, I've kept on being impressed by the genuinely deep interest of the theatre community and theatre audiences in the English-language countries not just in the concrete opinion of the critics regarding particular works but in the general state of theatre criticism there. Even more striking to me has been the fact that in a remarkably long historical perspective theatre-makers, critics, and, to a great extent, the intelligentsia at large there have tended to find the state of theatre criticism inexorably intertwined not merely with the state-of-the-theatre but with the state-of-culture and the state-of-society.

Hardly is there any other culture where critics have achieved the glamorous status of a real star, like Kenneth Tynan did in his capacity as the main critic of the weekly *Observer*, in the 1950s and 1960s, in Britain. Each of his reviews was regarded as an event and literally the talk-of-the-town. In a book on etiquette readers were advised to go to the theatre with the only aim to be able to then take part in the discussions based on the latest Tynan review. Families would have arguments over the breakfast table as to who would first get hold of the paper in order to read his piece. This became so well-known a practice that, for decades afterwards, when editors would explain what type of journalist they wanted to hire, they would say “someone for whose articles the readers would fight over coffee”. Tynan was a real role model, an idol, a point of reference. And, to a great extent, for the critics in the English-language world he still is.

At the end of 2019, very indicative of the persisting importance of the critics' role in Britain was the way the theatre community there expressed its genuine respect towards Michael Billington on the occasion of his retirement from *The Guardian*, after nearly 50 years as the paper's chief theatre critic and over 50 years as a critic

on the whole. Notably, apart from the numerous interviews in the media, there was a special tribute event at the National Theatre, with its head, Rufus Norris, quizzing Billington and actors reading parts from plays considered as milestones both in his career and in the development of British theatre – i.e. plays whose pioneer quality and significance Billington had spotted and helped the respective playwrights build their careers.

In the US, on Broadway, there are theatres that bear names of critics. The Brooks Atkinson Theatre is named after the longest-term critic of *The New York Times*. Atkinson served there from 1922 till 1960 and it was exactly upon his retirement when one of the Broadway theatres was especially renamed so as to pay tribute to him. In 1990, Walter Kerr, another of the very highly revered critics of *The New York Times* was honored in the same way. He served at the leading paper in the US for 17 years, after years of being a critic at other publications, and left an indelible trace in American theatre. So now there is the Walter Kerr Theatre on Broadway. (By the way, Kerr also ventured successfully into theatre-making and co-authored, with his wife, several musicals one of which got the Tony Award; he tried his hand in directing too; quite like Kenneth Tynan who produced the both famous and notorious revue *Oh, Calcutta!*; Tynan was also a dramaturg of the National Theatre after he left criticism). Although Frank Rich, another long-time critic of *The New York Times* (from 1980 till 1993), is not at all likely to get a Broadway theatre named after him, since his uncompromising criticism earned him the nickname “Butcher of Broadway”, he will certainly be remembered for his fierce fight for high standards in theatre and for being the critic able to make or break a production with a single review.

The utmost epitome of the importance of criticism in the English-language world – not only within the theatre but on a wider, cultural scale too! – is a book, though! *Establishing Our Borders: English-Canadian Theatre Criticism*, edited by Anton Wagner.² It follows the stages of the formation of Canadian national identity via the developments of none other but theatre criticism in Canada! Here is how its foreword starts: “Canada’s cultural history – from colony to Dominion to independent nation – is mirrored in the pages of its newspapers from 1750’s to the present. Newspapers and magazines have reflected and shaped how we view and express ourselves and how we differentiate ourselves from others – how we establish our personal, collective and political borders. Nowhere is this cultural debate more evident and vocal than in press coverage of foreign and indigenous theatre and drama in Canada.”³

² Wagner, Anton (ed.): *Establishing Our Borders: English-Canadian Theatre Criticism*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1999.

³ *Ibidem*.

The examples can go on and on. And, if I take the liberty to get into these details, it is to underline the contrast between the awesome tradition, on the one hand, and the gloomy views regarding the state of theatre criticism in the UK and US throughout the last decade, and, even more so, the apocalyptic forecasts for its future, expressed in an astounding number of texts on the topic, on the other hand. I will dwell at length on this further on. Now I would like to only quote some of their titles and subtitles reflecting these startling and widely spread-out views.

Doom and Gloom in the Headlines

Consider some of the subtitles first: *Critics are getting laid off. It is getting tougher to find ways to be paid to write. It sounds that theatre criticism is on life support*⁴ (2013) Or: *Reviewers and reporters are endangered species*⁵ (2017).

And now the titles. Some of them, thankfully, are implying that the situation may not be so gloomy. E.g.: *Crisis, What Crisis?*⁶ (2013) Or others which at least have a question mark at the end, acting like an open door for a way-out of a doomed future. E.g.: *British Theatre Criticism: the End of the Road?*⁷ (2014) However, other titles are outright doomsday-like. For instance: *What Is the Future of Theatre Criticism? A Hurling Car-Crash*⁸ (2013) Or: *Is Theatre Criticism Dead?* (2018)⁹ Or: *Death of the Theatre Critic?*¹⁰ (2020).

Or yet another variation of the same ominous tone, only this time even without the glimmer of hope brought by the ending question mark: *The Death of Theatre Criticism*¹¹ (2020). Do note that, with the exception of the latter two, the rest were written way before the pandemic of 2020!

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2013/oct/08/theatre-criticism-in-crisis-critics>, by Lyn Gardner, 08.10. 2013, *The Guardian*, theatre blog – part of the subtitle, [access: 07.12.2020].

⁵ <https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/11/28/a-second-act-for-theatre-criticism/> by David Cote, 28.11.2017, *American Theatre*, [access: 08.12.2020].

⁶ https://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?view=article&id=8662:a-debate-on-theatre-criticism-and-its-crisis-in-the-uk&option=com_content&Itemid=60, by Andrew Haydon, 24.10.2013, [access: 07.12.2020].

⁷ <http://www.critical-stages.org/9/british-theatre-criticism-the-end-of-the-road/>, by Aleks Sierz, Critical Stages, 14.02.2014, issue No:9, [access: 07.12.2020].

⁸ <http://www.jakeorr.co.uk/blog/2013/10/future-theatre-criticism-hurling-car-crash/>, by Jake Orr, 2013 [access: 07.12.2020].

⁹ <https://newmusicaltheatre.com/blogs/green-room/is-theatre-criticism-dead>, by Kait Kerrigan, 13.08.2018, New Musical Theatre, [access: 07.12.2020].

¹⁰ <https://thetheatretimes.com/death-of-the-theatre-critic/>, by Aleks Sierz, 22.07.2020, The Theatre Times [access: 07.12.2020].

¹¹ <https://thecritic.co.uk/the-end-of-an-era-in-british-theatre-criticism/>, by David Herman, 05.08.2020, The Critic [access: 07.12.2020].

Most of these texts were, naturally, having as a spring-board for their observations and conclusions the state-of-theatre-criticism from before the time they focused on. So reading them and rereading other, older ones, including my own books on American and British theatre, I was strongly reminded of the Stefan Zweig's memoir *The World of Yesterday*.¹² The opening sentence of the book is the following: "When I attempted to find a simple formula for the period in which I grew up [...] I hope I can convey its fullness by calling it the Golden Age of Security."¹³ Then, in the same first paragraph, Zweig uses two other important words to encapsulate the essence of his *world of yesterday*: "permanence" and "stability."

In order to get a better notion of the great changes that transpired in British and American theatre criticism during the last decade, it is worth taking a glance at their "yesterday."

The "World of Yesterday" of Theatre Criticism in the UK and the US

The first so to speak "seven years" of both British and American theatre criticism – i.e. their growing up, of course, took centuries – were tumultuous. Yet, afterwards, once the importance of the theatre critic's profession was established, it was, to a large extent, exactly "permanence" and "stability" that became emblematic for it.

British theatre criticism was born in the most dramatic century of British theatre's history: the 17th century. It started with the peak of British theatre and drama, when Shakespeare wrote 17 of his plays, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night*, *Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. About 30 years after the Bard's death, in 1642, with the puritan's seizure of power, the theatres were closed for 18 years. In 1660, Charles II reopened them, yet, at the end of the century, the glory of the British stage of the century's beginning seemed like an irreversible past.

Appropriately dramatic was the formation of British criticism: from 1668 (considered as its birth date, with the publication of *Essay on Dramatic Poesie* by John Dryden) to the 1770s. Not only because the puritans had again become a very important factor in society. More importantly, because, with the Restoration, a green-light was given to the French neo-classicism cannon, which automatically placed nearly all British theatre and drama outside of the territory of the "aesthetically worthy," Shakespeare including!

¹² Zweig, Stefan: *Die Welt von Gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers*, (The World of Yesterday. Memoires of an European), 1942.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 13 [of the Bulgarian edition], "Светът от вчера", Стефан Цвайг, Колибри, 2018.

So from Dryden's essay during the next 100 years, the search for a face of the fledgling British theatre criticism was marked with a struggle against the neo-classicism canon. (It is worth noting that Dryden was convinced that it's better for the British theatre to have a "genius which ignored the Rules than a second-rate talents who observed them", as it is well summarized by Arnold Hinchcliffe.¹⁴)

This resulted in the formation of some very important, so to speak, "genes" of the British theatre criticism's model. In the first place, the critic as a staunch and unyielding champion of British theatre, very skeptical of any "isms" – i.e. of any theories, coming from abroad (were they later on, in the 20th century, structuralism or semiotics) – in brief, the critic being primarily a very pragmatic and practically oriented connoisseur of theatre. Although, ironically, it was the rediscovery of a theory – of Longinus on the Sublime – that finally empowered that kind of critical stance and made it possible for the British theatre to fully reclaim Shakespeare and making truthfulness to life rather than any theory/rules be a main criterion for artistic quality.

With the advent and then very quick boom of mass journalism in the 18th century, critics also became popular "legislators" of the public taste and opinion. At the same time, the advent of the star-actor phenomenon – with all the great actors of the time – resulted in honing of the British critics' special skill to dwell on acting in a very profound and psychologically nuanced manner, and be able to clearly differentiate the energy of acting from the energy of the written play. Also, both critics and the audiences developed a hobby to 'collect' different interpretations of one and the same role of say Lear or Hamlet, etc. So writing about acting on the base of a comparative method and making historical references became an indelible part of British theatre criticism. Finally, criticism became less judgmental and more descriptive. At the end of the 18th century criticism in Britain was already a prosperous profession.

From the beginning of the 19th century on, British theatre criticism rose to another, higher level. The great stylists came to the fore and transformed theatre reviewing into an art form: Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt, and later on, at the end of the century, Bernard Shaw. Their spectacular, lively style, rich in extraordinary memorable metaphors, make their pieces on theatre read like great prose which is of interest to readers today too. And it's exactly his singular writing style that made Kenneth Tynan the star he was in the middle of the 20th century. I can't resist the temptation to share several quotes by them which are a manifestation of their talent as writers.

¹⁴ *Drama Criticism: Developments since Ibsen*, ed. by Arnold P. Hinchcliffe, Macmillan, 1979, p. 14.

Here's how brilliantly Tynan described some of the British acting styles: "There is... a gulf fixed between good and great performances; but a bridge spans it, over which you may stroll if your visa is in order. Mr. Redgrave, ignoring this, always chooses the hard way. He dives into the torrent and tries to swim across, usually sinking within a sight of the shore. Olivier pole-vaults over in a single animal leap. Gielgud, seizing a parasol, crosses by tightrope. Redgrave alone must battle it out with the current."¹⁵ Or how he described *Waiting for Godot*: "*Waiting for Godot* frankly jettisons everything by which we recognize theatre. It arrives at the custom-house, as it were, with no luggage, no passport, and nothing to declare; yet it gets through, as might a pilgrim from Mars. It does this, I believe, by appealing to a definition of drama much more fundamental than any in the books. A play, it asserts and proves, is basically a means of spending two hours in the dark without being bored."¹⁶

Or the best ever description of acting, done by William Hazlitt: "Players are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time; the motley representatives of human nature. They are the only honest hypocrites. Their life is a voluntary dream; a studied madness. The height of their ambition is to be *beside themselves*. Today kings, tomorrow beggars, it is only when they are themselves that they are nothing. Made up of mimic laughter and tears, passing from the extremes of joy and woe at the prompter's call, they wear the livery of other men's fortunes; their very thoughts are not their own. They are, as it were, train-bearers in the pageant of life; and hold a glass up to humanity; frailer than itself. We see ourselves at second-hand in them: they show us all that we are, all that we wish to be, and all that we dread to be. The stage is an epitome, a bettered likeness of the world, with the dull part left out. What brings the resemblance nearer is that, as *they* imitate us, we, in our turn, imitate them. How many fine gentlemen do we owe to the stage? How many romantic lovers are mere Romeos in masquerade! How many soft bosoms have heaved with Juliet's sighs! They teach us when to laugh and when to weep, when to love and when to hate, upon principle and with a good grace! Whenever there's a playhouse, the world will not go on amiss."¹⁷

Another very important trait of British theatre criticism – this time an extraneous one – has been its, so to speak, polyphonic nature which is a result of the availability of many newspapers in Britain, without any one of them being more

¹⁵ *View of the English Stage*, Kenneth Tynan, Paladin, 1976, p. 129.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

¹⁷ William Hazlitt, *On Actors and Acting*, *The Examiner* (15 January 1817) as quoted in *Drama Criticism: Developments since Ibsen*, ed. by Arnold P. Hinchliffe, Macmillan, 1979, pp. 40-41.

important than the others, unlike the situation in the US. This makes the critics in Britain like a choir rather impressive in its size. And until the end of the first decade of the 21st century, despite the generally dwindling space for criticism in the traditional media and some cutting of the jobs, still there were a host of dailies and weeklies, all with huge print-runs, that published theatre criticism of highest professional quality, amounting to the largest volume of criticism published in the world.

In turn, the formation of the American theatre criticism model started, of course, much later (in mid 18th century) and went through a rather opposite type of an initial phase due to the prevailing puritan mores and ideology in the then New World that held theatre in very low esteem, deeming it outright responsible for luring people into sin. So, for quite a while, the borderline between criticism and censorship there was quite vague – as it's very well demonstrated in the names of some of the papers, like *Theatre Censor* and *Dramatic Censor* – and the reviews were, naturally, predominantly moralistic. It was only in the beginning of the 19th century, when some intellectuals, writers and poets, like Walt Whitman and Edgar Allen Poe, started applying also some aesthetic criteria in their occasional writing about theatre.

In the middle of the 19th century, the advent of the French culture vogue softened the social mores, freed theatre from some taboo topics, and contributed to a major change in journalism (including theatre criticism), bringing a special effervescent streak in it. The center of journalism moved from the puritan Boston to the much more cosmopolitan New York and, in the following decades, with the boom of the newspapers, (their number and print-runs rose skyrocketingly in the 1880s) and the creation of the big theatre empires (to meet the demands of the new national pastime – theatre), the interests of the media and the theatre met and became “mutually beneficent.” This led to enlargement of the space devoted to criticism and to creation of a number of specialized theatre periodicals and weeklies. The theatre-critic-on-staff position was born and quickly flourished: by the end of the century there were 25 critics on staff in New York.

150 years after its formal “birth”, American theatre criticism had already behind its back its initial role of a guardian of the public morality and the main features of its model were already established: a strong social sensitivity (coming maybe from the transformed puritan “gene”), a sparkling impressionistic nature of the writing style (as a result of the French culture impact), and a reportage-like fervor (due to its strong journalistic “gene”). Here is a sample that very well illustrates the latter two features. It's from the writings of the most revered American critic of the first half of the 20th century George J. Nathan – the American arch-critic

whose name adorns the most prestigious award for criticism in the country: “Dramatic criticism is an attempt to formulate rules of conduct for the lovable, wayward, charming, wilful vagabond that is the drama. For the drama is an art with a feather in its cap and an ironic smile upon its lips, sauntering impudently over forbidden lawns and through closed lanes into the hearts of those of us children of the world who have never grown up.”¹⁸

In the first decades of the 20th century American theatre criticism acquired yet another important characteristic, albeit of an extraneous nature: the unique power phenomenon of *The New York Times*’ chief critic. Till the very end of the second decade of the 21st century, the main theatre critic of the paper – whoever might have held the post – did wield the greatest power in the country, the power to make or break a play with a single review. This phenomenon was, actually, brought to being by theatre-makers themselves. In 1915, the Schubert brothers of The Shubert Organization, then the most powerful theatre-owner in the US, after a negative review by the main critic of *The New York Times*, didn’t let him get into one of their theatres. The paper filed a suit against them (which it lost) and then simply stopped publishing ads for their shows. Facing a substantial loss of revenue, the Schuberts succumbed to the pressure and reopened their doors for the critic. Two years later, in 1917, the first quote from a review appeared on a marquee in front of a theatre. (Until this very day, it’s considered that a critic “arrives” on Broadway, when his/her name appears on a marquee.)

These two events “enthroned” the critics in the US, or rather in New York, and endowed them with their huge power in principle. Yet, the position of *The New York Times*, as *the* paper in the US and the so called ‘bible’ for New Yorkers when it comes to media, extended this to a super-power when it comes to the first-string critic of theirs.

The situation in Britain has been much different, since the critics there have traditionally been accepted more or less as an on-a-par choir, which is much healthier for the theatre itself.

Notably, also unlike British theatre criticism, the journalistic “gene” of the American criticism could be traced on several levels, aside from the fact that the profession in both countries is practiced as part of journalism. In the US, it is also in the deliberate keeping a distance from the theatre world, i.e. refraining from any close communication with theatre-makers, lest the integrity of critic’

¹⁸ *The Critic and the Drama*, George J. Nathan, Alfred A. Knopf, 1922, as displayed as an e-book on <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/63188/63188-h/63188-h.htm>: The Project Gutenberg eBook of *The Critic and the Drama*, by George Jean Nathan; unit [52].

opinion gets compromised. This strictly observed and cherished distance borders on something I like to call a “clean-hands paradox”¹⁹ and which Arthur Miller ironically called “virginity” of the critics. This is because, from its very beginning, American theatre criticism did not grow as an indelible part of theatre, as its champion, but rather as the very opposite – a part of the restrictive puritan atmosphere and attitude towards theatre. Then, the American theatre criticism’s journalistic nature is also in its underlined interest in the “here and now” of a theatre fact, rather than in situating it in the context of a whole body of work of the playwright, director, actors, etc., something of which many theatre-makers in the US have been fiercely complaining.

Thus, while British critics, with their historical approach and comparative method, are like family doctors of their theater (they have long been familiar with its condition and have it in mind when taking the “diagnosis” of a concrete theatre piece today), American critics are more like medical guest-consultants whose diagnosis is more of a one-off and whose responsibility ends up with the necessity to state their opinion regarding the piece in question.

And another difference, stemming this time from the fact that British theater audience (and reading public), unlike the American one, is an audience of theatre connoisseurs: while British critics can afford the luxury to skip explanations when it comes to theatre-history references, their American colleagues can never afford to avoid them. And yet another difference, coming from the different audiences and national mentality: British critics do not need to fight for their readers’ attention and transform their criticism into a sort of spectacle, as it is in the US. In the US theater criticism is with a heavier make-up, its gestures are broader, its mimics – more expressive, so to speak, the decibels are louder. In Britain criticism is more relaxed and subdued.

A Definite Past Tense? Three Symbolic Departures

Should a past tense be used for all this now, when we talk about the past decade that brought to being the previously mentioned macabre views and predictions for the future of theatre criticism in the UK and US? The answer is both YES and NO.

NO, on the level of the very essence of criticism in the two countries – i.e. in regard with the way it has been written in the main media and, to an extent, on the net, in the writings of bloggers some of whom are former established critics,

¹⁹ Stefanova-Peteva, Kalina, *Who Calls the Shots on the New York Stages?* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers/Routledge, 1994), p. xvii.

like Michael Coveney in the UK.²⁰ The best samples of criticism in the UK and US have not stopped being pieces of very strong, powerful, and sensitive prose, underlined with competence and love for the theatre.

Yet, indeed, there is an alarming YES too, at least to an extent and especially when it comes to extraneous circumstances that have started dictating the life of theatre criticism – circumstances which have, alas, already started to have a palpably negative impact on the quality of criticism too.

Actually, the tectonic changes that have been happening in and “around” theatre criticism in the two countries, during the last decade, are best encapsulated by three departures. First, as already mentioned, the retirement, in November 2019, of **Michael Billington**, the doyen of British critics – a critic since 1965! Second: the retirement, in September 2020, of **Ben Brantley**, after a 27-year-long stint at *The New York Times*, most of it as its main critic (which translated into being the main critic of the country!) – i.e. the second longest stint after that of Brooks Atkinson, who was for 38 years there. Finally, in August 2020, it’s the passing away at 103 years-of-age (!) of **Erik Bentley** – the famed British critic, playwright, writer and translator (of Bertolt Brecht, in the first place), who spent most of his life in the US and wrote pivotal books, like *The Playwright as a Thinker*.

Importantly, do note that these three departures took place within less than a year, at the very end of the 2010-2020 decade! They may indeed be the most significant and telling symbols of the end of the golden-ages of theatre criticism in the US and the UK. It is very unlikely that the next generations of critics are to stay that long at the job, since the mode of the time is already very different, fast-paced, and with a host of factors that do not propitiate such longevity in the profession.

Ben Brantley: “There Will Always Be a Phantom Notebook on My Lap”²¹

When Brantley decided to retire, in September 2020, he said in a statement (quoted by the British *Observer*): “This pandemic pause in the great, energizing party that is the theater seemed to me like a good moment to slip out the door. But when the theater returns, I hope to be there – as a writer, an audience member and, above all, the stark raving fan I have been since I was a child.”²²

²⁰ Michael Coveney before that was a critic on staff of *The Observer* (6 years), *The Financial Times* (18 years), *Daily Mail*, etc.

²¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/theater/ben-brantley-retirement.html> - an interview carried out by Jesse Green, *The New York Times*’ second-string critic during Brantley’s tenure [access: 08.12.2020].

²² <https://observer.com/2020/09/ben-brantley-retirement-new-york-times-theater-critic/> [access: 08.12.2020].

Born in a family of editors, writers and professors, Brantley was recruited to perform as a child at the theatre program of the university where his grandfather worked as a Shakespeare professor. He did study acting later on in the summer theatre program of the same university. Then, having already majored in English, he started his professional life as a fashion critic at the very influential at the time *Women's Wear Daily*. In 1993 he left in order to move to *The New York Times* theatre department, after Frank Rich had left it. Three years later, in 1996, Brantley became the paper's chief critic and, at the end of the first year as such, for his writing he was awarded the George J. Nathan Award.

It was highly anticipated a change and the question was if Brantley would carry on the torch of Rich as *the* critic making-or-breaking the destiny of any show in New York he would cover. He even became the subject of a website — called *Did He Like It?* — that would scrutinize every word of his. Asked if this power appealed to him, Brantley said that “being powerful has never in itself been something” he “aspired to. I was probably more powerful at *Women's Wear Daily*, which had outrageous weight in the fashion industry.”²³

Actually, Brantley turned out to be less sarcastic than Rich and soon did earn the nickname *the Gentle Ben* in the theatre industry. Nevertheless, he did have a substantial influence on the theatre, in the first place, in that he strongly supported new playwriting and new musicals. A great example of this is the musical *Hamilton*, the review of which is a *par excellence* sample of the best of American theatre criticism writing.²⁴ Brantley substantially helped some transfers of Broadway shows to London too.

He spoke about this special interest of his in new writing, in an interview for *The Stage* two months after his retirement. “...if there's a play that seems to – in however small a way – amplify, extend the form, then you have to be prepared for that, which basically just means being open-minded. The most exhilarating thing is always hearing something, listening to a play or watching it and thinking: ‘Wait a minute, this is its own language, and this is a new language.’ I think my tastes have broadened to accommodate stuff that probably didn't even exist when I was first at the newspaper.”²⁵

“There'd be stuff I wouldn't necessarily have gone to on my own, if I were just the theatre-loving civilian that I'd been for so many years before,” Brantley

²³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/theater/ben-brantley-retirement.html>, [access: 08.12.2020].

²⁴ *Young Rebels Changing History and Theater*, Ben Brantley, *The New York Times*, 6, 2015.

²⁵ Brantley, Ben: “My Tastes Have Broadened”, *The Stage*, Nov. 3, 2020, <https://thestage.co.uk/big-interviews/ben-brantley> [access: 08.12.2020].

continued in the same interview. “I found myself surprised, very agreeably surprised, by things I didn’t particularly think I would have wanted to see... Could you imagine Ivo van Hove being a marquee-name director on Broadway when I first came to the *Times*? It was rare you saw that kind of [mixture of] old and iconoclasm. In his case, I think there was some wilful iconoclasm – but when it works, it really works.”²⁶

Brantley shed more light on the same topic in another of the numerous “exit” interviews, this time at his “own” paper *The New York Times*, answering questions of his colleague, the second-string critic Jesse Green: “... it’s important that when you admire a show’s intentions, or its attempts to create something new, that you acknowledge this, no matter how imperfect the execution. Sometimes rawness is a virtue, which was how I felt describing taboo-baiting performance artists ... Broadway, where people are paying truckloads of money for tickets, and a corporate bruiser like Disney is behind the production, the gloves can come off. (See: “The Little Mermaid”, “Tarzan”) Musicals about vampires (“Lestat”, “Dance of the Vampires”, “Dracula”)²⁷ always seemed to be asking to be annihilated too.”²⁸

In terms of Brantley’s style, some of the main features of the American theatre criticism’s model can easily be traced in his reviews. Firstly: in their very clear and impeccably logical line of thought, and in the characteristically spectacular manner of expression, brimming with eye-catching and memorable lines which are perfectly fit to be quoted. (E.g. one of his recommendations before he left the paper: “Watch a show as if you were a reviewer.”²⁹) Secondly: in his refined skill to catch the moment of a theatre experience and manage to make it feel three-dimensional on the two-dimensional page, true to the traditionally impressionistic nature of American theatre criticism. As he so well described the very feeling of this experience: “once the curtain goes up, a switch flips on inside me. I feel nervous, expectant and palpably, exhilaratingly in the moment. In that sense, I imagine, I’m experiencing a milder version of what the performers onstage go through every single night.”³⁰

This leads to another important point in Brantley’s work – in his coming into the profession, in the way he practices it, and in his way of writing alike. A point that is fully in sync with, and a continuation of, the tradition of American theatre

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ These are examples from Brantley’s reviews quoted by Jesse Green.

²⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/theater/ben-brantley-retirement.html>, Why I’ll Never Stop Being a Theatre Critic, [access: 08.12.2020].

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

criticism: criticism is not a scholarly occupation in the US, it is something done out of love and carries a special emotional charge. Indeed, when I interviewed the main critics in New York at the beginning of the 1990s³¹, they all put the ‘love’ factor in the first place of what is needed for one to practice this profession – something which was further confirmed by the research I went on to carry out afterwards for my other books on criticism in the US. American theatre criticism has traditionally been an emotional interpretation of theatre. The analysis is indelibly interwoven in the description which makes the assessment have a special and very powerful emotional nature. So criticism is sort of an art form itself and affects people like an art form. Of course, the best samples of it, that is.

What Brantley shares in regard with his concrete approach has been very much a proof of all this. “I am hyper-aware of all the moving pieces that make up a production and that a part of my mind is assessing how successfully these elements cohere,”³² he said further on in the same farewell piece of his. “While this might suggest a cold and clinical detachment, I find that it’s an approach that makes me feel more vital, more connected, more grateful. Paradoxically, this “objective” assessing perspective enhances the pleasure of my unthinking self – the part that responds viscerally to a work’s beauty or fearful symmetry, and feels elation or pity and terror. When a show is really working, my gut eclipses my mind.”³³

No wonder Brantley is a critic who admits there are ink blots and tear spots in his notebook. He shared this when concretely referring to his very last review of a Broadway production from before the pandemic shutdown (“Conor McPherson’s strange and radiant “Girl From the North Country,” a Depression-era drama woven with the songs of Bob Dylan”).³⁴ And another statement: “When the theater returns, I hope to be attending it as a lover, a supporter, a fully engaged fan boy. Which means I’ll be there as a critic.”³⁵ This is the finishing line of the same farewell text by Brantley, very appropriately entitled *Why I’ll Never Stop Being a Theatre Critic*. It may well be the declaration of love to the theatre – and, at the same time, a definition of theatre criticism, the American way – by the last of the traditional critics of the over-century-old school of American theatre criticism. A school that may well have come to an end with the end of 2020.

³¹ For the book *Who Calls the Shots on the New York Stages?*, Kalina Stefanova-Peteva, [Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers/Routledge, 1994].

³² <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/insider/brantley-critic-farewell.html>, Why I’ll Never Stop Being a Theater Critic? Ben Brantley, [access: 08.12.2020].

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

The Changes and the Reasons for Changes in the American Theatre Criticism's Landscape (As Well As Some Possible Ways Out)

Indeed, what are the concrete parameters of the new situation that has been formed during that last, so to speak, 'border' decade? And what exactly has been bringing about this dramatic change?

In the search for the answers it is worth to first focus in great detail on two texts by David Cote in the *American Theatre Magazine*, written respectively in 2011 and 2017, i.e. nearly spanning the decade on focus. Their titles themselves are very telling: *Critical Juncture*³⁶ (2011) and *A Second Act for Theatre Criticism?* (2017).³⁷

In the first of the texts, Cote sets about to talk with "12 of the nation's most influential theatre critics about their towns and their changing roles, [...] as theatres and audiences face a brave new digital world."³⁸ Although the article is in effect a set of short profiles of the 12 critics and, via them, of some characteristics of the specific situation in the theatre and in criticism in their cities, the short introduction gives also a notion of the general picture in American theatre criticism outside of New York in the beginning of the decade.

There are some rather worrying facts to begin with. One of the very criteria for the choice of the 12 is that "many of the critics are the "last man or woman standing" in their communities; after they retire or take a buyout, it's unclear if some blogger or junior critic will step up to fill the void."³⁹ Then: "it has been at least a generation since a theatre critic enjoyed a position of national prominence. Frank Rich filed his last notice for the *New York Times* in 1993. [Robert] Brustein dissected Tom Stoppard's *The Coast of Utopia* in *The New Republic* four years ago, but has scarcely reviewed since. Theatrical coverage in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *USA Today* is brief, random and often vapid. And national television won't touch the stage with a 12-foot-pole."⁴⁰

In effect, Cote points out two main factors having contributed to this worrying situation. In the first place, it is the changed role and place of theatre. In this

³⁶ *Critical Juncture*, David Cote, *American Theatre Magazine*, November 1, 2011. <https://www.americantheatre.org/2011/11/01/critical-juncture/> [access: 08.12.2020].

³⁷ *A Second Act for Theatre Criticism?* David Cote, *American Theatre Magazine*, November 28, 2017. <https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/11/28/a-second-act-for-theatre-criticism/>

³⁸ *Critical Juncture*, David Cote, *American Theatre Magazine*, November 1, 2011. <https://www.americantheatre.org/2011/11/01/critical-juncture/> [access: 08.12.2020].

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

regard he quotes Jeffrey Erik Jenkins, then director of theatre studies at New York University and editor of the *Best Plays Theater Yearbook* series: “In less than a hundred years, theatre has gone from being the dominant popular mass medium to something on the margins. Even Broadway is at the margins of culture. It may make a billion dollars in ticket sales and attract 12 million people to theatres, and have plenty of big-name stars, but it is not central to culture.” And Cote adds that “while professional not-for-profit theatres around the country may be more intertwined with their communities, they’ve suffered the same cultural marginalization in the past few decades.”⁴¹

The second factor, according to Cote, is the economic situation after the 2008 financial crisis which, with all merges, downsizing, and digitization, has “taken a toll on media owners, who are constantly looking for ways to cut corners.” This has “only exacerbated conditions for the regional theatre critic. ... Reviewers who are left on staff must do everything in their sections: write preview pieces, review those same artists, blog, tweet and keep an eye on trends in their fields. Burnout is almost inevitable, if the pink slip doesn’t come first.”⁴²

However, the tone of the article is far from pessimistic. The presented critics “form a vital phalanx of critical opinion that chronicles and weighs work that national media outlets are content to ignore.”⁴³ Also, he refers again to Jenkins in whose opinion, “This is a time for people to be entrepreneurial about theatre criticism. There is probably a role for nonprofit arts criticism in America, funded on a not-for-profit model. I’ve always thought that *Best Plays* could be a home for something along those lines – creating an institute that allowed for more of a critical conversation from various localities, with regional editors, funneled through a central source.”⁴⁴

Exactly six years later, in 2017, Cote’s second article too balances between the negative and positive sides of the picture. Yet, there both sides are presented in much stronger colors – something well reflected in the very subtitle: “*Reviewers and reporters are an endangered species. Here’s how some of them are surviving – and even thriving.*”⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Ibidem.*

⁴² *Ibidem.*

⁴³ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁵ *A Second Act for Theatre Criticism?* David Cote, *American Theatre Magazine*, November 28, 2017. <https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/11/28/a-second-act-for-theatre-criticism/>. [access: 08.12.2020].

The deterioration of the situation, presented further on, is indeed startling: very few critics, especially outside of New York, are left on staff of papers. And this is in direct correlation with, or is rather a direct consequence of, the economic crisis. “Today the group portrait I painted [back in 2011] is unrecognizable”, writes Cote. “Of those dozen journalists [presented in the first article], half are gone to retirements, buyouts, or termination. Some of the “fallen” six still freelance, but none have the same full-time job with benefits.” It is himself included too, since he too has been let go by *Time Out New York*, after 17 years there! And even more worrying is that this concrete “cut” (in the numbers of the 12 from back in 2011) is part of a big trend: “jobs and space have been vanishing for years.”⁴⁶ Cote quotes Jed Gottlieb who in a report for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, in January 2017, wrote that “critics at newspapers are dying off even faster than print journalism. Theatre critics, film reviewers, A&E editors, and arts writers of every kind have been stripped from dailies and weeklies around the country.”⁴⁷ This, Cote underlines, has already led to a situation where in some cities, or even entire states, there is “*not one full-time theatre critic.*” “Publishers and editors are fully aware that criticism is dying. And no one seems to be mourning”,⁴⁸ he concludes before getting to the slightly brighter side of the picture, or rather of the still remaining part of the American theatre criticism’s landscape.

The “survivors amid the carnage”, as he calls them, are by his “informal estimate, about two dozen full-time theatre critics... employed across the nation, if you include folks who also serve as editors or split their beats with coverage of dance or opera. Whatever the exact figure (and Bill Hirschman, chairman of the American Theatre Critics Association, couldn’t provide one), it’s an exclusive club that stopped inviting new members. And who wouldn’t love to join? A staff theatre critic at *New York* or *The New York Times* makes around \$80,000 to \$150,000 (and up): a cushy paycheck and a big megaphone.”⁴⁹

“On the next rung”, Cote continues, “are journalists who freelance for one or more mainstream media titles but maintain side hustles to pay the bills. Some reviewers contribute to indie arts sites for \$50 or \$100 a piece, or sometimes zero – they’re just grateful for the free seats. Other self-starters go into business for themselves.” He gives an example with the New York-based aggregator *Show-Score* which includes reviews from New York’s *Daily News*, *Newsday*, NY1,

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁹ *Ibidem.*

yet, if one keeps on scrolling further down the list, “the names start sounding unfamiliar. This Week in New York Blog? TheaterScene.net? It’s getting harder to distinguish message-board fan chatter from citizen journo.”⁵⁰

“Is this caste system the future of theatre criticism [in the US]?” – Cote poses a rhetorical question. “On one side a wading pool of compensated pros, on the other a swarming mass of unedited amateurs with domain names and hot takes?”⁵¹ And in a very typical American way he concludes: “There must be alternatives. Luckily, new models have emerged to pick up the slack left by local media and elevate arts writing above snarky, thumbs-up-or-down consumer reporting.”⁵²

Exactly the new models are on focus in the rest of the text. And they are as follows: self-publishing on the net, the so called aggregators (as the above-mentioned *Show-Score* that reprints reviews from other publications and publishes opinions), specialized sites run at times by former critics, podcasts, and “embedded journalism/criticism”, i.e. in-house journalism/criticism written by people on staff in theatres, at arts centers, etc.

Cote presents the two sides of the coin of some of these new models. E.g.: “*Show-Score* maintains an illusion: To look at the site, you’d think our profession were healthier than ever.”⁵³ At the same time, the aggregator “doesn’t just provide a forum for spectators and critics to share their thoughts side by side; it offers discounts, special classes, and social outings for theatre fans. It’s local, it’s niche, it’s geeky, and it’s growing fast. Whether the company (which has \$2 million of investor cash behind it) will blow up or go national is anyone’s guess. But it’s a party you’d be a fool not to pop in on.”⁵⁴

Although Cote doesn’t single out the main concrete problems that come to the fore in the new reality where criticism operates, they are easily detectable. And the main one is sort of a continuation of the second factor for changes from back in 2011, i.e. the finances, or rather their lack. Most of the new endeavors operated individually are either done on a show-string or pro-bono, which puts their very survival under question.

Therefore *subsidized criticism* becomes the key-word as one of the most reliable possible ways-out of the financial impasse in the field of theatre criticism. Indeed, Cote presents several examples proving the efficiency of *subsidized criticism* that operates on three types of financial models: private bequest money, big

⁵⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁵¹ *Ibidem.*

⁵² *Ibidem.*

⁵³ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁴ *Ibidem.*

foundations (“with national charters and multi-year plans”) funding and state funding.

An example of the first type of funding is “the smartly designed and superbly written *4 Columns*”⁵⁵ – a New York-based review-site covering books, theatre, art, film, etc., launched in September 2016 by Margaret Sundell on the money from a “bequest in her late mother’s will earmarked for philanthropic endeavors.”⁵⁶ “In the realm of theatre,” Cote writes, “*4 Columns* runs about two reviews a month, usually written by Helen Shaw or James Hannaham. Invariably these reviews are probing, elegant 1,000-word essays (for which the writers get paid a respectable \$1,000).”⁵⁷

An example of the second type of funding is *The Boston Globe* appointment, in 2016, of a temporary music critic on a post funded by the Rubin Institute for Music Criticism, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation.

And an example of theatre criticism and arts criticism on the whole done on a state funding – as Cote calls it “writing as civic duty”⁵⁸ – is *Artburst Miami* – “a fascinating civic experiment in Florida, a multi-platform arts site, publishing reviews, previews, and special promotional videos, funded by the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and administered through the Arts & Business Council of Miami.”⁵⁹ He quotes Anne Tschida, its editor-in-chief, regarding how the “local officials responded to the drying up of arts coverage by granting about \$60,000 to hire freelance journalists who formerly worked at some of the publications.”⁶⁰ Cote points out that Christine Dolen, formerly of the *Miami Herald*, and now one of *Artburst*’s main theatre critics, is among the critics profiled by him in his 2011 article. He also underlines a special advantage of the site: that once it has edited and published a piece, “*Artburst* turns around and offers it to local papers to run for free. So Miami-Dade County is effectively subsidizing not only unemployed arts writers but the outlets that may have eliminated their positions.”⁶¹

Again in a typically upbeat American way, Cote finishes the text at least on a sort of high, optimistic note: “The fact that hundreds of writers, editors, artists,

⁵⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁶⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁶¹ *Ibidem.*

and philanthropists across the country are testing new models to pay for good writing and get it to eager readers is a reason to hope. Maybe theatre criticism will become a local, artisanal activity, quaint and cherished by some, but otherwise mostly invisible. Maybe large foundations and state governments will keep it alive as a public good. Hirschman believes it's the ATCA's duty to mentor and encourage the next generation of critics, so that they can get the technology/methodology formula right."⁶²

More problematic features of the American theatre criticism's landscape of the last decade – which are, in effect, imminent factors for change – are added in other publications on the subject matter.

The dividing gap between critics and artists, in terms of an increasing lack of proper reflection, is another major one. As Rob Weinert-Kendt, editor-in-chief of *American Theatre* sums it up in his article *Can 3Views⁶³ Change Theatre Criticism?*: "...the field of theatre, in particular, has diversified its personnel far more rapidly than have the publications who cover it. This has left too much critical power, goes a familiar critique, in the hands of mostly white men for too long."⁶⁴ Weinert-Kendt goes as far as calling this a "toxic divide" and finds it detrimental to both sides. The playwright Sarah Ruhl, one of the founders of the site *3Views*, reiterates the same problem: "the diversity of voices onstage aren't reflected in the diversity of the critics at many of the leading papers."⁶⁵

In the same vein, Bill Marx, in the *Arts fuse*, July 15 2020,⁶⁶ draws the readers' attention to an article in *The New York Times* of a month earlier (June 10th 2020), focused on a manifesto by Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) who form "a coalition of theater artists, known by the title of its first statement, 'We See You, White American Theater.'⁶⁷ The manifesto, consisting of 29-page set of demands, starts with the following address line: "Dear White American Theatre." If adopted, Marx quotes the author of the article Michael Paulson, the demands "would amount to a sweeping restructuring of the theater ecosystem in America.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ 3viewstheatre.com, during the closure of the theatres, covered the cancelled shows or shows that were in a process of rehearsals before the pandemic struck.

⁶⁴ *Can 3Views Change Theatre Criticism?*, Rob Weinert-Kendt, *American Theatre*, June 3rd 2019.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ Critical/Theater Commentary: Slapping Sleeping Media Outlets A "Woke", Bill Marx, *Arts Fuse*, July 15 2020.

⁶⁷ *Theatre Artists of Color Enumerate Demands for Change*, Michael Paulson, *The New York Times*, June 10th 2020.

It is about time ... the revolution has arrived.”⁶⁸ Marx underlines that he’d like to focus on those of the demands “specifically... aimed at the practice and organization of stage criticism in the big homogenized media... Taking action on even a modest number of these suggestions will undoubtedly shake up the current puerility of much of American theater criticism.”⁶⁹

Actually, Ben Brantley himself says in one of the already quoted interviews: “I do sympathize, and I certainly wasn’t oblivious to those public calls for dismantling the white critical establishment. As much as I may claim artistic objectivity, we are all inexorably trapped in the shells of our race, class, gender and generation. So if my departure opens the door to new perspectives from more diverse sets of eyes, so much the better.”⁷⁰

It has to be noted, though, that a change in this direction is already taking place. As Weinert-Kendt underlines “it’s worth pointing out that that picture has lately been changing, with more female critics and critics of color finding berths at publications of all sizes.”⁷¹ Indeed, it is very unlikely for white critics to be of predominant number from now on, as it has been the case throughout American theatre criticism’s history.

Finally, there is, of course, the universal change/s brought by the digital shift and by the arrival of the social media. The most obvious being the atomization of the media and subsequently of theatre criticism itself. Cote touches upon this when making the round-up of the variations of *subsidized criticism* as a way-out of the new situation: “Imagine if a combination of NEA funding, foundation cash, and private donations established a program to link [all independent sites], standardize the platform, and create a national home for informed, independent arts writing? You’d have a TheaterJones⁷² in every major market in the country. We’re talking about something like a ProPublica for arts journalism.”⁷³ (ProPublica, Cote

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ Critical/Theater Commentary: Slapping Sleeping Media Outlets A “Woke”, Bill Marx, Arts Fuse, July 15 2020.

⁷⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/theater/ben-brantley-retirement.html> - an interview carried out by Jesse Green, *The New York Times*’ second-string critic during Brantley’s tenure, [access: 08.12.2020].

⁷¹ *Can 3 Views Change Theatre Criticism?*, Rob Weinert-Kendt, *American Theatre*, June 3rd 2019.

⁷² A site in Texas devoted to all the arts.

⁷³ *A Second Act for Theatre Criticism?* David Cote, *American Theatre Magazine*, November 28, 2017. <https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/11/28/a-second-act-for-theatre-criticism/>[access: 08.12.2020].

explains, was started in 2007 by billionaires Herbert and Marion Sandler on about \$10 million per year support for the project, and has been edited by newspaper veterans.)

The reality of theatre criticism on the net, of course, is a far cry from this imaginary united platform and it brims of problems. As Ben Brantley says, “Because everyone can immediately register their opinion online, the old agreement of boundaries about when plays are reviewed and how they’re reviewed, or movies, or anything else, have become moot.”⁷⁴ Talking about imagination, here is how he continues: “I think the notion of criticism may expand, and people will write more culturally comprehensive mixed-discipline pieces. But it’s hard for me to imagine. It will be interesting to see how much people are actually willing to read in the future online, and whether most communication will be single lines, single impressions, condensations.”

Here I will not dwell on the minuses and pluses (I’m deliberately changing the usual order) of the digitalization’s impact on criticism, since they are not characteristic only for the American theatre criticism of the last ten years but are valid for theatre criticism around the globe. Yet, I would like to take a cue from Brantley’s words and focus on the changes in the very quality of American theatre criticism during the last decade. For all the abovementioned changes have to do mainly with extraneous factors: changes in the theatre, in the economics of the press and subsequently, criticism, in the place and role of the critics, in their migration to the virtual world, etc. All of them have, indeed, substantially influenced criticism in principle. Yet:

How About the Changes in Criticism’s Quality Itself?

Back to the beginning of the 1990’s, when I did my initial research on American theatre criticism in New York, the main focus was on criticism’s quality, its aspects and improvement, what hinders and what secures it, how a critic’s skills are honed so as the highest possible quality be achieved, etc. I.e. quality was a key-word. Now, in the last decade, one of the most striking changes, to me, is that quality of writing is much, much less in the spotlight; even I’d go so far as to say: if at all!

When Cote did his survey back in 2011, in his introduction of the selected by him critics, he wrote: “These dozen writers may not be flashy prose stylists or even revolutionary thinkers about their art form. But they have dedicated years to the

⁷⁴ Ben Brantley: “My Tastes Have Broadened”, *The Stage*, Nov. 3, 2020. <https://thestage.co.uk/big-interviews/ben-brantley> [access: 08.12.2020].

field – and certainly not to get rich.”⁷⁵ I admit that these lines made me bristle up and get ready for an argument. However, I didn’t need to, since Cote himself continues with the following: “As any historian will tell you, it wasn’t always like this. Take a stroll through the criticism section of your local used bookstore (assuming you can find such a mythical edifice) and you will find hardbacks by Stanley Kauffmann, Robert Brustein, Richard Gilman or Eric Bentley – those deep yet entertaining thinkers who released collections of reviews and essays back when publishers did such things.”⁷⁶

Indeed, if criticism has persisted as a profession and its samples have stayed for the generations, it’s exactly because it has been written by flashy prose stylists, as proven by the quotes from the beginning of the text, who have at times been “revolutionary thinkers” as well – i.e. brave champions of innovative theatre. It’s exactly this type of critics who make us still focus on this art form, since they have managed to make criticism stand out as a real art form, dwelling in the realm of literature, when at its best. So no wonder Cote uses the word *writers* in the above quote, as many other journalists actually do, when referring to critics – something which could be seen in many of the quotes in this text.

Now, the new situation in the criticism’s realm – its more and more marginalized place, dwindling size and remuneration, and the lesser and lesser importance of its role – has in effect brought about a paradoxical putting-up with the lowering of its literary quality in general. And it is this exactly that is, to me, the most worrying of the changes the last decade has brought about.

The quickening pace of life on the whole has, in turn, brought about a lesser nuanced type of writing. As Ben Brantley mentions ruefully, “Many readers of daily journalism, I learned, often only skim, which means that nuanced arguments can make them impatient. I loathe thumbs-up, thumbs-down criticism, but there is an in-between approach. For the most part, I see no point in training an elephant gun on small targets.”⁷⁷

There is one reason for hope, though, and it comes exactly from one of the extraneous factors for change. In the aforementioned manifesto of the BIPOC community of theatre-makers, the first demand reads: “We demand that theatre

⁷⁵ *Critical Juncture*, David Cote, American Theatre Magazine, November 1, 2011. <https://www.americantheatre.org/2011/11/01/critical-juncture/> [access: 08.12.2020]

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/theater/ben-brantley-retirement.html> - an interview carried out by Jesse Green, *The New York Times*’ second-string critic during Brantley’s tenure, [access: 08.12.2020].

institutions and commercial producers invest in critic training programs and fellowships for BIPOC critics, * With 5% or greater contribution from theatre budgets to allot for this training with BIPOC Critic Training organizations and/or consultants. * With 15% or greater contribution from prominent press outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Time Out NY*, *The Washington Post*, *New York Magazine* and *Chicago Tribune*, among others, to allot for this training with BIPOC Critic Training organizations and/or consultants.”⁷⁸

It has always been pointed out by the majority of American theatre-makers that the lack of special education and the usual learning-in-the-making routine of honing one’s skills as a critic are among the substantial minuses of American theatre criticism. So now, the demand for investment in training programs for BIPOC critics is a very good sign that the fight for a change of the guard does not simply boil down to, or exhaust with, the skin-color; that along with this, a competent and informed criticism is pursued to be created.

On the whole, the forecasts for the future of American theatre criticism are not very rosy. As Brantley says, “I think there will be a period in which daily critics as such, as we’ve traditionally known them, don’t exist.”⁷⁹ Yet the situation in the last ten years has not been an entirely doom-and-gloom. The very fact that Brantley himself worked full steam throughout the whole decade is a proof that high-quality writing has still been to the fore on the territory of American criticism. The work of most of the critics from the previous generations has still been referred to, when it comes to quality, and some of the main critics from the 1990’s have, actually, continued to work during the last 10 years, albeit not at their previous positions. Like Michael Fiengold, the excellent then first-string critic of *The Village Voice*, twice recipient of the George J. Nathan prize and twice finalist for Pulitzer for criticism, who went on actively writing throughout the decade, recently a column for *New York Stage Review*. Or John Simon – the naturalized Serbian-Croatian, at once famous for improving the quality of American criticism with his extraordinary rich language and memorable style, and notorious for his uncompromising critical stance that frequently made trespasses into areas now made unthinkable by the political correctness; he maintained a blog till his very death in 2019. Also, the *American Theatre* magazine, “the only general-circulation magazine devoted to theatre”⁸⁰ in existence since 1984,

⁷⁸ <https://artsfuse.org/207153/critical-theater-commentary-slapping-sleeping-media-outlets-a-woke/>, [access: 09.12.2020].

⁷⁹ Ben Brantley: ‘My Tastes Have Broadened’, *The Stage*, Nov. 3, 2020. <https://thestage.co.uk/big-interviews/ben-brantley> [access: 08.12.2020]

⁸⁰ <https://www.americantheatre.org/about-us/> [access: 09.12.2020].

has been steadily publishing its nine issues a year, including three double ones, throughout the decade. And, of course, the heavy-weight TDR magazine, of Richard Schechner, has been maintaining the high-bar standard in the territory where theory meets criticism and theatre is just a part of the endless realm of performance.

In brief, during the last decade in the US, the essence of theatre criticism at its best has not changed substantially in terms of quality; yet, the very landscape of theatre criticism at large has undergone dramatic changes which have made it in many aspects unrecognizable and have nearly – or at least are about to – put an end to an over-century-old tradition.

One of the signs of hope that the tradition is to be still continued is the fact that Ben Brantley is expected to keep on contributing to *The New York Times*, after the theatre is back in 2021, albeit not anymore as an on-staff critic. Like his colleague, the tireless Michael Billington in the UK, who has not at all stopped working, ever since he retired.

And how has British theatre criticism weathered the past decade?

British Theatre Criticism between 2010 and 2020: Main Parameters of the Background

Theatre criticism wise, in the UK some processes similar to those in the US have been in motion too. Yet, in general, British theatre criticism has been much livelier and much more in line with some of the major characteristics of its “Yesterday” due to two main factors.

The most decisive of them is that theatre in the UK has retained its huge cultural importance. It remains an art form that is sought out both for entertainment and as a means for discussing the values of life, the state of society, of the nation and the world.

This in itself leads to the second factor: the public conversation about theatre has maintained its significance. The major changes in the theatre and some in criticism have continued to trigger large and vociferous discussions in society – in the media (traditional, digital and social) and as a topic of specially organized events. This has certainly been helped by the fact that British theatre critics have remained a large choir of voices of equal importance (i.e. no power phenomenon, as with *The New York Times* has been valid in London and the UK).

Of course, in the UK too, the traditional media has gone through a huge transformation as a result of the economic crisis and the digital shift, with many

papers losing a big chunk of their revenues due to the falling sales. And this has affected primarily the public-interest, specialized journalism. According to the digital academic newspaper *The Conversation*⁸¹, there has, actually, been a decade-long decline of public interest journalism. “Since 2005, 245 UK newspaper outlets have closed, local news conglomerates including Local World and Johnston Press have been sold off or collapsed and local news staff have been cut to the bone,” wrote Martin Moore in 2020.⁸² Also, like in the US, most of the new online sites “are shoestring operations run out of kitchens and bedrooms, with an average annual revenue of less than £25,000 a year.”⁸³ “It’s only a matter of time before critics go the way of foreign correspondents (one of the first victims of newspaper cutbacks)... the falling revenues of the[se] time-honoured employers of theatre critics is the one factor that means it is sure that the days of the traditional critic are numbered”, wrote Aleks Sierz back in 2014 already.⁸⁴

Yet, in the UK, the dwindling of the traditional (mainly regional and local) media and the proliferation of new digital ones for a long time had not led to such a detrimental media atomization in regard to the theatre coverage exactly because of the abovementioned first and second factors. The preserved importance of the theatre’s role in society and the continuing public discussion about the state of the theatre have served as sort of a moral magnet that has not let the critical thinking and writing about theatre fall apart (in line with the ubiquitous fragmentation mode in the world today) to such an extent that it would become nearly pointless and invisible to society.

Finally, an important nuance of the overall picture is that, during the last decade, quite a few of the critics who were main figures in the leading London newspapers back in the 1990s still went on working, were it for the same media or as bloggers, thus maintaining and transferring the tradition to those of the next generations. The main pillar of the tradition being, of course, Michael Billington, who, as already underlined, continued working on-staff at *The Guardian* till the very end of 2019 (having started his career in 1965!) and retired just months before the anyway nearly theatre-empty 2020.

All this should not leave the impression that everything has been rosy throughout the decade, though. According to Aleks Sierz (again in the publication of 2014),

⁸¹ *Finally There Might Be Some Good News about UK Journalism*, Martin Moore, *The Conversation*, December 3rd, 2020.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁴ <http://www.critical-stages.org/9/british-theatre-criticism-the-end-of-the-road/>, *British Theatre Criticism: the End of the Road?*, Aleks Sierz, *Critical Stages*, 2014, Issue 9, [access: 07.12.2020].

in the 1990's already there were signs that the traditionally stable system of steady and long-term employment of critics by the newspapers was coming "under strain."⁸⁵ "The first tension was the decision of some editors to employ celebrities rather than experienced critics to review shows",⁸⁶ he lamented, giving examples with the *Spectator* magazine back then, and later on, already during the 2010-2020 decade, with the *Daily Mail*, *The Times* (after the retirement of Benedict Nightingale), *Sunday Times*, the *Sunday Telegraph*, TV and Radio channels, like BBC, who "often prefer to ask a whole variety of other arts people, from actors and comedians to novelists, poets and artists (in fact anyone apart from a professional critic) to review arts events. The net effect has been the same: celebrity culture has triumphed over specialist knowledge."⁸⁷ (In parenthesis it has to be noted that in the US, vice versa, for a long time already there have been special calls for inviting people from other professions to cover theatre as something that would enrich the critical perspective.)

In the same publication, Sierz refers to the quoted earlier first article (of 2011) by David Cote (about the crisis in American theatre criticism on a regional level) and states, "in September 2013, this tendency finally arrived in the UK", citing the firing of all arts critics of the *Independent on Sunday*, "including the long-serving specialist theatre critic Kate Basset. Instead, they now print preview pieces, as well as summaries of theatre criticism from other newspapers!"⁸⁸

Paradoxically, it's exactly this unprecedented case of a major British newspaper dispensing of its arts critics altogether which proved that the state of British theatre criticism was not at all so dismal. For, in the first place, it triggered a huge and very lively debate in the media, the very size and fervor of which unequivocally demonstrated that criticism did matter. And, second, the debate brought to the fore a lot of nuances in the new situation which could be considered as nothing but optimistic for the then current profile and further development of the profession. Because of all this I'll take the liberty to dwell on the debate at a greater length.

The Debate of 2013: Silver Linings Overshadowing the Cloud Or Long Live the Digital!

It started on a low note. The sacking, in September 2013, of the arts critics' team of the *Independent on Sunday* and especially of Kate Basset, as well as Libby Purvis of *The Times*, was, naturally, one of the focuses of the Critic's Circle

⁸⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁸⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁸⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁸⁸ *Ibidem.*

Centenary Conference held soon after the event. There Michael Coveney, one of the very famous veteran British critics, famously “made the remark that if someone was to consider theatre criticism in the future it should be as a hobby.”⁸⁹

However, many of the articles that came out afterwards gradually took the debate on a much higher and quite upbeat note.

For instance, despite the macabre title of Jack Orr’s intervention – *What Is the Future of Theatre Criticism? A Hurling Car-Crash*.⁹⁰ – with his first line he in effect opted out of pessimism and presented a situation with decidedly equal sides of the coin: “Theatre criticism is booming. Theatre criticism is in a crisis.”⁹¹ The boom, he explained, is in that there is an “explosion of digital theatre criticism, through blogs, and online magazines such as *Exeunt* and *A Younger Theatre*”, while the crisis, happening simultaneously, “comes from the demise of the print media and in particular with paying criticism.”⁹²

“In ten years time”, Orr continued dwelling on the seamy side, “there will be no more theatre critics employed by newspapers, or if there are, then they will be long held posts with little movement for those other critics who are working tirelessly. We have to look towards online theatre criticism to see any real future. Simple really, but where one model crumbles it is being replaced with a model that is even more ruthless than before, where the only sustainability for digital publications and websites is to drive a huge amount of traffic through its servers. Theatre criticism can not do this, despite all our hopes. As an art-form it is too niche, and whilst the likes of WhatsOnStage attracts advertisers it is only because of their bowing to celebrity gossip that taps into a fan base that drives traffic, it isn’t for the art of criticism.”⁹³

In a typically practical British manner, after laconically conceding that even though theatre criticism might “be adapting with the form of response (long-form criticism, embedded criticism etc)”⁹⁴ and even though there were excellent writers in the digital sphere, Orr stated there was currently no sustainable model and the question was: “So what are we going to do about this?”

⁸⁹ As quoted by Jake Orr in his text <http://www.jakeorr.co.uk/blog/2013/10/future-theatre-criticism-hurling-car-crash/>, Jake Orr, 2013 [access: 07.12.2020].

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁹² *Ibidem*.

⁹³ <http://www.jakeorr.co.uk/blog/2013/10/future-theatre-criticism-hurling-car-crash/>, by Jake Orr, 2013 [access: 07.12.2020].

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

“By we”, he made sure to make himself clear, “I’m not referring solely to the writers who engage in criticism, or the Critics Circle, but much broader. What are we, the arts industry, going to do to safe guard the future of criticism?”⁹⁵ Then Orr explained in a fully convincing manner that it’s the theatre itself that should in the first place take care of the future of criticism, since it needs it in principle, both in its current life and for the record of its legacy. And also “the arts organisations have to come to the aid of criticism and more important the Arts Council England has to acknowledge the crisis theatre criticism is heading towards. To sit back and ignore this hurtling car-crash that we are heading for is self-destructive.”⁹⁶

He finished this, in effect, “call-to-arms” for finding a way to secure a public funding for criticism with the following: “Can you honestly imagine a world without the balanced opinion and response of art through criticism? Can you honestly see a future without theatre criticism?... What is the future of theatre criticism? Right now, there isn’t one if we all turn away from this crisis. Can we reinvent the future of theatre criticism? Yes. Yes we can, but not alone.”⁹⁷

On an even more optimistic a note was the article by Lyn Gardner, at the time second-string critic of *The Guardian* (along with Michael Billington) and already ardent “citizen” of the “brave, new world of the digital” who was actively writing also for the paper’s blog⁹⁸. With the very title of her intervention in the debate – *Is Theatre Criticism in Crisis?*⁹⁹ – she implied she did not at all consider the situation to be gloomy at all and confirmed this with the first paragraph: “Is theatre criticism in meltdown, as some commentators are increasingly suggesting? I’m not so sure. The sacking of arts critics at the *Independent on Sunday* is certainly a worrying sign that some British newspapers are following their US cousins in ditching arts and theatre criticism... But many – including the *Guardian* – remain committed to arts writing and theatre criticism, even at a time when huge cultural shifts mean that the economic models on which they were founded are breaking down.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁹⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁹⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁹⁸ In 2018 The Guardian did not extend Lyn Gardner’s contract and since then she has been one of the main critics of *The Stage*, the oldest English-language newspaper devoted to theatre, established in 1880, whose digital edition can be followed at <https://www.thestage.co.uk/>

⁹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2013/oct/08/theatre-criticism-in-crisis-critics>, by Lyn Gardner, 08.10. 2013, The Guardian, theatre blog – part of the subtitle, [access: 07.12.2020].

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem.*

Which doesn't mean Gardner's was a rose-spectacled view. Immediately after this first paragraph she went on to very concretely name the real core of the problem: "the crisis is how to pay for great journalism – and that includes theatre criticism."¹⁰¹ And coming back to this point further on, she reminded the readers: "That's always been the problem for would-be critics, where over the last 30 years or so probably only around a dozen people at any time have been earning a living by writing about theatre. When I was starting out, you needed a day job to support your writing. It's always been the same for those who make theatre too."¹⁰²

Yet, Gardner pointed out many of the good sides of the current state of criticism in the UK. For instance, the fact that, unlike in the early 1990s, now newspapers "wouldn't dream of not reviewing" the premieres of the regional theatres. Also, in the past, if one wanted to write about theatre one needed a platform, and one would be unlikely to get it unless being white, male and Oxbridge-educated. "That is no longer the case", Gardner underlined. "Anyone can set up a blog and write about theatre; anyone can read it and join in the debate. A space for reciprocal conversation is the hallmark of the best blogs."¹⁰³

She pointed out that "the demographic of mainstream critics is often not a good match for the demographic of theatre's audience"¹⁰⁴, so if more and different voices were to create a buzz around theatre this would be very helpful for the theatre itself. "Particularly when many of those writing about theatre are interested in forms and work that seldom gets coverage in the mainstream press", Gardner wrote. "...just as we need many different kinds of theatre, so we need many different kinds of criticism."¹⁰⁵

Most importantly, she underlined that today "more people are writing about theatre, and publishing what they write about, than at any other time in history. The recent Ticketmaster survey, based on a sample of people who booked online, found that one in five theatregoers were writing reviews in some form using social media."¹⁰⁶ Making sure, immediately afterward, to note that "we need to take care here: does a tweet count as a review?"¹⁰⁷

Another point Gardner made sure to stress on was that "Mainstream critics and bloggers are not in competition with each other; they are all part of a widening

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰² *Ibidem.*

¹⁰³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem.*

and lively conversation in which artists frequently write like critics, and critics sometimes curate and think and write about work more like artists. The possibilities for co-creation are exciting.”¹⁰⁸ In this line of thought, the embedded writing, in which critics take part in the development process of a show, also “offers critics and artists different ways to engage with each other”, she underlined.

Towards the end of the article Gardner summed it all up and answered the rhetorical question from the title: “That’s not a crisis; it’s an enormous bonus that can only be of benefit to theatre.”¹⁰⁹

This stance was shared by Andrew Haydon in an article with an even more equivocal title: *Crisis, What Crisis?*¹¹⁰ Actually, he directly cast aside the very reason for panic, since, according to him, the *Independent on Sunday* could not be regarded “as an example of things to come, however: its relevance among British newspapers is limited, its readership small and its website all but un-navigable. It has been in severe financial difficulties for a long time, so these cutbacks do not come as a surprise and there doesn’t seem any question that other papers have the slightest intention of letting their critics go.”¹¹¹

Since his article was written for a German site, he shed light on important nuances of the general situation in British theatre criticism. Like the fact that it has always been conducted in newspapers – something which explains why any changes in print media have a greater impact on criticism than they might in Germany. Also, before the arrival of blogs, he wrote, “British theatre criticism was already facing an entirely different so-called “crisis”: a crisis of taste and of representation. Put simply, most of the “chief” critics were old, white, male, and frequently exhibited deeply conservative tastes. As a result, some of the best work being made or shown in Britain was never being reviewed favourably.”¹¹²

The main assertion Haydon made in this article was not only that there was no crisis but that the so called “crisis” actually “coincides with the largest, fastest growth in theatre criticism since the advent of low-cost listings magazines like *Time Out* (1968-) and *City Limits* (1981-1993).”¹¹³ And this growth was nowhere else but in the digital realm. He called the rise of the blogging culture a “quiet revolution” and explained that it took place between 2007 and 2012, “during

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹¹⁰ https://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?view=article&id=8662:a-debate-on-theatre-criticism-and-its-crisis-in-the-uk&option=com_content&Itemid=60, [access: 07.12.2020].

¹¹¹ *Ibidem.*

¹¹² *Ibidem.*

¹¹³ *Ibidem.*

which time the print media also began to feel the pinch of both the global economic downturn and the continued mass exodus from newspaper-buying.”¹¹⁴

“As early as 2006”, wrote Haydon, “the Guardian had realised that the future of journalism lay in online expansion, and set up a number of more informal, comment-friendly blogs – including one for theatre. And, for a while, it invited the best writers who were already writing theatre blogs to write short pieces discussing diverse current issues in British Theatre – from the first mainstream British attention paid to Hans Thies-Lehmann’s book “Postdramatic Theatre” to light meditations on the price and quality of ice cream in the West End.”¹¹⁵

The advent of blogs in the realm of theatre criticism, Haydon recalled, was initially treated with suspicion by the majority of established critics and triggered a “Bloggers vs Critics” controversy. Yet, according to him, one of the great contributions of the blog criticism and independent theatre-reviewing websites, was exactly that they broke the stranglehold of half-a-dozen “dead, white, males” critics (the term being coined by National Theatre’s director Nicholas Hytner). Haydon also underlined the importance of Lyn Gardner’s role in encouraging bloggers: “frequently giving advice, advancing the cause and careers of bloggers, and was instrumental in getting the best writers work writing for the Guardian, which in turn raised their profiles enough to make their own blogs far more cultural currency.”¹¹⁶

In further appraisal and defense of the digital theatre criticism, Haydon shared the general opinion that the recent trend “for editors to appoint either middlebrow celebrities or simply journalists who shared their (right-wing) political opinions has done infinitely more damage to the label of “professional critic” than any blog ever could.”¹¹⁷

Finally, he too, like Orr and Gardner, admitted that if there was a real problem to be solved it was the sustainability of independent writing on the net. “If we want serious, popular theatre criticism in the UK, like I believe you have in Germany”, he wrote, “. . . we have to establish where and how it is going to be found and how it is going to be funded.”¹¹⁸ Yet, here too, he didn’t sound the alarm: “perhaps there will never be a shortage of talented young people who care passionately about theatre and write brilliantly about it. And perhaps the career path of the

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

young critic in the future won't be to carry on in the same job forever, but might, like Britain's most revered post-war critic, Kenneth Tynan, only involve ten-years writing criticism before moving on to literary management or dramaturgy."¹¹⁹

The echo of the 2013 debate continued to reverberate way into 2014, when, with his already mentioned article *British Theatre Criticism: the End of the Road?*,¹²⁰ published in *Critical Stage* (the digital journal of the International Association of Theatre Critics), Aleks Sierz took the case to the international arena. He started on a very gloomy note, saying that the critics in the UK are "as doomed as the legendary Dodo" because "the balance has tipped decisively against the professional critic"¹²¹ during the past five years. After getting in detail into the reasons for this, though, he made a decisive change of the tone, affirming that nevertheless "it is clear that theatre still thrives on its conversation with audiences, and that the new media has greatly expanded the range of this cultural conversation."¹²²

As Haydon, who listed six of the best theatre blogs at the end of his article, Sierz too went on to present and praise the wealth of website-reviewing, enumerating sites, blogs, and bloggers, as well as underlining their diversity, including of form (citing, for instance, the blogger, Sophie Reynolds, "who specialises in reviews that are written in the form of poems"), and giving examples of shows whose reception has shown the gap between traditional and digital reviewing was "not only down generational lines, but also across the media divide."¹²³

Importantly, Sierz got in detail into the very pluses and minuses of the digital theatre criticism in principle. The advantages, according to him, started with the lack of restraints in regard with the length, as opposed to the reviews in traditional media with their substantially shrunken size, which "has led to a loss of nuance, of description of acting and of scenic elements, and it has radically curbed discussion of content. On the internet, there are fewer such constraints"¹²⁴, he underlined. Secondly, a review on the net, in Sierz opinion, could be linked "with other reviews and other sources of knowledge and information, from biographies of the playwright, director and actors to other reviews of similar plays." In this respect he stressed, though, that the great potential for creating

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁰ <http://www.critical-stages.org/9/british-theatre-criticism-the-end-of-the-road/>, by Aleks Sierz, *Critical Stages*, 14.02.2014, issue No:9, [access: 07.12.2020].

¹²¹ *Ibidem*.

¹²² *Ibidem*.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*.

internal and external links on the internet was so far “rather underdeveloped – and the reason is simple: it requires a lot of intensive and well-informed effort.”¹²⁵ Thirdly, according to Sierz, the limitless outreach of the internet reviews was a huge advantage compared with the local and national outreach the traditional newspapers and magazines. “Those British newspapers which have websites that are free to access – and not hidden behind paywalls – understand this perfectly, but for how long will they be able to maintain this provision of free specialist content?”¹²⁶, Sierz posed a rhetorical question.

The problems of digital theatre criticism he pointed out were quite a few too. First of all: the lack of quality corrective/control due to the fact that most of it’s self-published and there’s no editor “above” the reviewer. Then, since the bloggers do not get press tickets, they tend to review shows even before they were “officially” ready, i.e. before the press night, or, vice versa, long afterwards. Also, the anonymity of some reviewers could create problems. Finally: “This lack of economic stability means that there is a tension inherent in the internet critic’s role: are they truly independent?”¹²⁷ Sierz posed another rhetorical question and mused on the possibilities for solving this problem via crowd-funding, the lottery, or the arts institutions getting together “to fund critics in residence (on the pattern of resident playwrights).”¹²⁸

“Whatever will happen in the coming years”, Sierz concluded, “the one certain point is not that one technology is better than another (print or digital), but that good criticism cannot be left to the open market, which just forces down prices and rewards the cheapest rather than the best. In the future, as in the past, it’s economic independence, however that is created, that will be the *sine qua non* of strong, impartial, informed and fearless criticism.”¹²⁹

Bad and Good News at the End of the Decade in the UK

In 2018, another prominent critic’s contract was ended – that of Lyn Gardner as one of the main critics of *The Guardian*. The great stir this caused in the British theatre world, though, was in itself again a silver lining of the cloud. As Laurence Cook wrote in his blog, under the title *In a world without professional theatre critics...*, “That the theatre industry is up in arms... is revealing. It shows

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*.

just how much we still care for that critical connection between audiences and makers.... When social media allows us to garner as much raw attention as we want, it proves that theatre makers still care about good ol' fashioned authorities and their meaningful, critical responses. So why didn't we protect them?"¹³⁰

After this rhetorical question, Cook embarked on a passionate defense of the importance and need of theatre criticism in the national media, in the first place. The theatre on the whole and especially the "fresh and daring" type of shows, the emerging and ambitious artists, whose famous champion Gardner has always been, "lost the type of attention from the wider public that only national arts coverage can bestow,"¹³¹ Cook wrote. He bemoaned her substitution by the paper with "a rotating group of freelancers"¹³², and the more and more spreading practice of the newspapers to opt for non-specialist for their theatre coverage.

Cook also voiced the common concern about some of the biggest minuses of the general digital realm (i.e. the one outside of the national press and the national press's blogs and digital editions). Namely: the boundless abundance of opinions and the shortage of competent, deep insights, and the resulting lack of a focused, meaningful and fruitful common public conversation. "Well... at a time when the market of opinion has been flooded with supply", he wrote, "when monetised social platforms encourage us to share half-formed thoughts on everything and everyone, we need to protect real critical conversations more than ever. Instead of directing people towards informed opinions, we are waking up to the fact that (in almost every aspect of life) social media is undermining thoughtful discussion and influencing opinion rather than enabling it."¹³³

Importantly, Cook especially underlined the detrimental effect of the already increasing in the UK breaking up of the public conversation "into ever smaller chunks or ever smaller readerships."¹³⁴ "Lyn's *Guardian* blog and her reviews served as a kind of panopticon over the theatre landscape, a tower inhabited by a proven authority on theatre (but not someone who makes it)", he wrote. "That blog was a shared space between makers, interested parties and audiences. Lyn's now total departure from a top national paper portends the full on atomisation of our critical conversation. At a time when we desperately need to find the language

¹³⁰ <https://medium.com/@LaurenceCook/in-a-world-without-professional-theatre-critics-e7e8b8f42e22>, Laurence Cook, In a world without professional theatre critics..., May 14 2018, [access: 08.12.2020].

¹³¹ *Ibidem.*

¹³² *Ibidem.*

¹³³ *Ibidem.*

¹³⁴ *Ibidem.*

and tools to speak to as many different people as possible, we are breaking up critical thought into increasingly specialised, localised and private units.”¹³⁵

Cook made sure he is properly understood that he does think “internet is great. It has allowed marginal voices to flourish (everywhere!) and superserve their marginal audience (anywhere!).”¹³⁶ Yet, he insisted, that “Online-only journalism may have nabbed a few readers from major publications but the real unintended consequence of it is the creation of a class of badly paid or unpaid reviewers and writers whose passion (or hunger) means that national publications no longer feel much pressure or need to cover those niche or marginal events.”¹³⁷

A way-out of this antagonistic situation was, according to Cook, a coexistence of both spheres. “Like *Exeunt* [the digital magazine], it’s a laudable ambition to create alternative critical platforms but they should be complementary to national criticism, not instead of it.”¹³⁸

Cook touched upon another very important problem of the digital realm: “A less easily measured but ultimately more troublesome problem has been the increasing prioritisation of voice and perspective over authority... Everyone’s a critic and everyone is now publicly critical of critics, undermining them for who they are rather than what they write. Why does that matter? Because this attitude shift is being exploited. Not just by marketing departments... but by those who wish to attack theatre and its constituent voices with claims of box-ticking or cultural relativism. We need brilliant independent theatre criticism that can articulate choices and intentions otherwise those who gleefully undermine the case for public funding and brand theatre as an ‘all must have prizes’ artform will win.”¹³⁹

In 2020, in the midst of the theatre’s lockdown, naturally, the grimmest of all articles on the current state and future of criticism in the UK appeared: in the digital magazine *The Critic*, appropriately entitled *The Death of Theatre Criticism*.¹⁴⁰ Taking his cue from the sad news about the passing away of one of the best British critics, the Hungarian-born John Peter (critic of *The Sunday Times* for over 43 years, until 2010), its author David Herman stated straightforwardly: “Looking back it was a golden age of theatre criticism when critics like Michael

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁰ <https://thecritic.co.uk/the-end-of-an-era-in-british-theatre-criticism/> *The Death of Theatre Criticism* by David Herman August 5 2020, *The Critic*, [access: 08.12.2020].

Billington, Benedict Nightingale and Charles Spencer were at their peak. All four [Peter including] retired in the last ten years. We have not seen their like since.”¹⁴¹ And added slightly further: “Reading what passes for reviews in some of our newspapers and weeklies, it looks as if theatre criticism in Britain is heading for a complete breakdown.”¹⁴²

Unlike the other colleagues of his who focused mainly on the digital shift, the antagonism between the traditional and the digital media, the pluses and minuses of the new situation, Herman concentrated on the advantages of the endangered 200-year-old tradition and on the role of criticism for the healthy state of theatre in principle.

“It is hard to think of a leading critic under fifty. There is no new generation in sight. This is unprecedented”, he wrote and listed concretely the age of all great British critics when they began working: most of them quite under or just above 30. “Who are their equivalents today? Where are the new, young voices in theatre criticism?”¹⁴³

Herman underlined that all great British critics were champions of new theatre trends; their work has always had a crucial impact for the development of theatre. “Confronted with the strangely new”, he wrote, “they tried to make sense of it, and when they felt – as with Osborne and Pinter, Beckett and the Berliner Ensemble – that they were encountering something extraordinary, they fought for it with tremendous passion. Reading those first reviews, you feel as if you are sitting in on history.” And if criticism is so much needed today, Herman insisted, it is “because in several crucial respects theatre in Britain is embattled today as never before.” Moreover: “At a moment of crisis, British theatre has never needed the passionate and informed support of great theatre critics more, supported by editors who believe theatre matters”, Herman concluded.

So where is the good news then?

Paradoxically, exactly towards the end of 2020, the most difficult year for both British theatre and criticism, on the legislative front there a very positive turn in the situation transpired. “...on November 27 [2020]”, Martin Moore wrote in *The Conversation*, “the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee endorsed the extension of charitable status to include journalism. This should mean that news publishers – should they meet the criteria – can now benefit from

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴² *Ibidem.*

¹⁴³ *Ibidem.*

tax relief, foundation grants and charitable donations. Small, non-profit local news outfits may finally be able to sustain themselves while performing a critical public service.”¹⁴⁴

“Still to come this year”, Moore continued, “is the long-awaited and much-anticipated Online Harms legislation. This was originally touted by the government as the first attempt in the world to address online harms “in a single and coherent way”. We are yet to see what the legislation contains, but at the very least it ought to increase the liability of technology platforms such that they will want to prioritise more trustworthy sources.”¹⁴⁵

“There is still a long way to go in the quest for new, more sustainable models for news,” Moore concluded. “But these are all green shoots that could support the gradual recovery of public interest news.”¹⁴⁶

All this is incredibly important good news, since it could pave the way for ending the digital-sphere practice of writing either pro-bono or for very insufficient remuneration and thus make theatre criticism there sustainable. Consequently it has the potential to increase the professional longevity of critics there and therefore enhance their scope of reference and enable a more competent comparative approach.

In turn, such empowerment of the digital-sphere critics could be expected to reverberate very beneficially in the traditional media which would inevitably have to strengthen their arts coverage in the traditional, proven to be highly efficient, manner. Briefly, this translates into ensuring an on-a-par existence of criticism in the two spheres. All of which could be expected to inevitably have a very positive impact on theatre itself.

In addition to this good news, there is, of course, another one, actually enduring throughout the decade: the never-stopping service to the theatre of Michael Billington, the British longest-serving critic, all that time.

Michael Billington: The Last Mohican of the Golden Ages or the Bearer of the Torch for the Next Generations?

Maybe the answer is both of them. His over 10000 reviews altogether – some of them gathered in his book *One Night Stands: A Critic’s View of British*

¹⁴⁴ *Finally There Might Be Some Good News about UK Journalism*, Martin Moore, *The Conversation*, December 3rd, 2020.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

*Theatre 1971–1991*¹⁴⁷ – are like a textbook of theatre criticism created on a daily basis. His books – on Harold Pinter, Alan Ayckbourn, Tom Stoppard, Peggy Ashcroft, the British theatre on the whole – are samples of brilliant writing about theatre in larger formats. All his oeuvre and his whole professional life too are a paragon of the highest moral code a critic could follow. Billington is a critic who is fully devoted to the cause of great theatre; a critic who believes that the mission of criticism is to fight for and maintain the high standards in theatre because theatre serves society. Very telling in this respect is the title of his book *State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945*.¹⁴⁸

Billington started working as a critic in 1965 (for *The Times*), and, as already mentioned, after 48 years as critic of *The Guardian* (till the end of 2019), 81-years-of-age (in 2021), he is still actively writing – now his newest book. And, when the theatre returns, he is to continue contributing, albeit as a retiree “to the Guardian’s extensive stage coverage”.¹⁴⁹

“He is, undeniably, a fixture of British theatre”, wrote Matt Trueman in a big piece on Billington in *The Stage* (in 2015), “perhaps not as prominent as the major practitioners whose work he has covered, but his influence is every bit as pronounced. Creatives can alter the path of British theatre in a moment. Critics do so incrementally. . . . Billington has been our eyes and ears where British theatre is concerned for decades. His descriptions of shows have stood in for the shows themselves. His interpretations have represented authorial intentions. His tastes have been the measuring stick against which theatre gets judged. He may not always be right, but he has certainly been read – and that makes him a major influence on the shape of British theatre today.”¹⁵⁰

It’s worth mentioning several of the main points of Billington’s professional credo. The responsibility of the critic, according to him, is “to use that opportunity creatively; to keep nudging the theatre, needling the theatre, harrying the theatre and reminding it of what it’s not doing.”¹⁵¹ And this is because the very springboard for the critic’s work should be an ideal for the theatre – “what it really could be”, as Billington shared with me back in 1996.¹⁵² “The fun of criticism is not talking

¹⁴⁷ *One Night Stands: A Critic's View of British Theatre 1971–1991*. London: Nick Hern Books, 1993. [Collection of reprinted revs.].

¹⁴⁸ *State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945*. London: Faber and Faber, 2007.

¹⁴⁹ Editor’s View: *the Guardian’s Michael Billington is the last critic of his kind*, Alistair Smith, *The Stage*, November 5, 2019.

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/the-big-interview-michael-billington>, Matt Trueman, May 3 2015, [access: 08.12.2020].

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵² Stefanova, Kalina: *Who Keeps the Score on the London Stages?*, Routledge, 2000.

about plays only, but talking about the culture generally – what’s good and what’s bad about it. Because criticism is a social commentary as well,¹⁵³ he said again.

Billington continued elaborating on the same topics during the conversation held at the National Theatre and led by its artistic director Rufus Norris, in February 2020, on the occasion of his retirement. “The most hostile angry bitter letters I’ve had throughout my life”, he said there, “have been from artists whose work I have not reviewed rather than artists whose work I have reviewed. A notice of any kind is better than being ignored. I believe artists as well as audiences need critics.”¹⁵⁴

Something else Billington underlined in an earlier interview (in 2015) “... criticism is not about the verdict. “It’s about trying to write a sort of essay about the work you’ve seen – a literary essay. It’s a very old-fashioned view, but it’s still how I like to think of it. The key word, for me, is ‘context’. It’s always, always about putting things in context. That’s what we’re doing, I think...It’s not about opinions in the end. It’s about how well you write. Everyone’s got an opinion. It’s the vigour with which you express it that counts.”¹⁵⁵

(Using Billington’s words as a cue, here I would like to again draw the attention towards this accent on the very writing style as *the* most important aspect of criticism – a priority underlined many a time by most of the critics and theatre-makers in Britain.)

Billington is fully aware of the huge change in the critics’ profession in the course of the last decade. “My kind of tenure is almost impossible now”, he says. “I was part of a generation... who had quite long careers with one newspaper. Nowadays, people are more restless and the industry is much more unreliable... I’m part of a lucky generation that had a kind of stability, where newspapers, when I started out, seemed likely to continue and if you enjoyed the job and did it to your employer’s satisfaction, you stayed.”¹⁵⁶

Yet, asked about the so much discussed crisis and even, as many claim, imminent death of criticism, Billington is not at all pessimistic: “I have lived through many decades where you have heard about the death of the novel, or the death of the cinema, or the death of theatre, and they have all somehow survived. I don’t think criticism is dying or indeed dead. The tradition goes on. What is happening of

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁴ <https://markludmon.com/2020/02/28/michael-billington-on-the-practice-of-theatre-criticism/>, [access: 08.12.2020].

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/the-big-interview-michael-billington>, May 3 2015, [access: 08.12.2020].

¹⁵⁶ <https://markludmon.com/2020/02/28/michael-billington-on-the-practice-of-theatre-criticism/>, [access: 08.12.2020].

course is diversification with reviews online as well as in print and I suspect in future those two will co-exist and, who knows, there may be a shift in the balance of power and the website could become as important if not more important than the print critics.”¹⁵⁷

One of the texts devoted to the retirement of Billington (by David Herman, in *The Article*), had the unequivocal title: *Michael Billington and the end of an era in theatre*.¹⁵⁸ Alistair Smith of *The Stage* entitled his text in a similar fashion: *The Guardian’s Michael Billington is the last critic of his kind*¹⁵⁹ and argued that “...whoever replaces Billington – and whatever their background – something will be lost: more than 50 years of accumulated knowledge and experience.”¹⁶⁰ “This is always true when a long-standing critic retires”, Smith continued, “but the difference with previous big-name departures (such as Benedict Nightingale, Michael Coveney or Charles Spencer) was that we always still had Billington. Now we won’t. He is the last of his kind: the final figure from an era when there was longevity and stability in a career as a theatre reviewer and you could build up years of expertise while earning a living from it alone.”¹⁶¹

In turn, in her text on the tribute to Billington at the National, Sarah Crompton of Whatonstage, underlined his “vigorous defence of the role of the critic, which he does not see as dying, merely evolving.” Yet, she pointed out an important nuance of the current situation of theatre criticism in the UK: “The truth is, however, that the role of the critic is under threat in the modern age, not so much because everyone thinks they are one, but because at a time when internet metrics apparently measure every part of our lives, it’s easy to ignore the incalculable influence that the conversation between critic, audience and artist has. If everything is weighed by simple numbers, a report of a ground-breaking production in Nottingham is always going to come off worse than the match report of Real Madrid and Manchester City. Yet in the end, the production in Nottingham might have more impact on society.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁸ <https://www.thearticle.com/michael-billington-and-the-end-of-an-era>, David Herman, November 07, 2019, [access: 08.12.2020].

¹⁵⁹ Editor’s View: *the Guardian’s Michael Billington is the last critic of his kind*, Alistair Smith, *The Stage*, November 5, 2019.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶² *Michael Billington’s successors are going to have to fight hard to preserve his legacy in the modern age*, Sarah Crompton, *WhatsOnStage*, February 25 2020, [access: 09.12.2020].

What Crompton stated is, indeed, very true. And the rest of the already dwelt upon negatives of the digital realm as well as those of the metrics-oriented mode, or even dictate, of the time are indeed all there and are not to be underestimated. Yet, I would argue that Billington's enthusiasm and especially his belief that an ideal about theatre and society should be at the core of one's stance as a critic are widely shared, both by his colleagues of his breed, like Michael Coveney and Lyn Gardner, and by a number of spiritual successors of his from among the younger denizens of the digital realm.

Actually, most of the media where British theatre criticism has traditionally been dwelling in now anyway bridge the worlds of the print and the digital, as well as the generational gap. Like the oldest English-language newspaper devoted to theatre *The Stage*, running since 1880, which is now in both paper and digital editions.¹⁶³ Or like *Theatre Record*, established in 1981 by Ian Herbert and reprinting all the national drama critics' reviews of productions in and out of London, as well as listing all the shows all over the country, which now has a rich digital edition with the whole of its four-decade archive of 52 thousand productions.¹⁶⁴

Among the new digital arrivals that have quickly made a name and become fixtures of British theatre criticism of the last decade it's the *Exeunt magazine* that stands out. Founded in late 2010, it has already a New York edition too (since 2017). A very specific feature of its is that it has no limitations both time and size wise, i.e. giving the critics "the freedom to expand beyond the tight deadlines and brutal word counts of more established media outlets."¹⁶⁵ Also, importantly, it has a remarkably diverse set of formats which correspond to the playful nature of theatre: it publishes reviews in the form of sonnets, of storybooks, plays, and drunken dialogues. So it is worth visiting its site especially in order to see these unique formats of theatre coverage.¹⁶⁶

And, finally, something that is the biggest cause for optimism regarding the future of British theatre criticism, after the turbulent 2010-2020 decade: the thing there has been no shortage of is the brilliant writing about theatre in the UK.

All of the aforementioned characteristics come in a condensed form in the very way Jake Orr, the aforementioned blogger, presents himself in his blog: "a producer. A culture-changer, creating a shift in society. My work in theatre is fuelled by the belief that we can change society through culture. *Does society*

¹⁶³ <https://www.thestage.co.uk/>, [access: 09.12.2020].

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.theatrecord.com/> [access: 07.12.2020].

¹⁶⁵ <http://exeuntmagazine.com/about-exeunt/> [access: 07.12.2020].

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

need to be changed, I hear you ask? I believe it does. I want theatre and the arts to be a vital lifeline as that of the NHS, libraries, post offices and doctor surgeries.”¹⁶⁷

Taking my cue from the tone of Orr’s introduction, I would like to finish this text with a rhetorical question: Could criticism that covers theatre created by people who harbor such passion for it, for its vital role in society, and who also write so well, be truly fatally endangered? And my answer is: I believe it certainly can not!

So maybe the end of the golden ages in criticism in the UK is simply a beginning of another, new golden age?!

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Exchange between Theatres in South Korea and Japan after the Millennium and Its Reflection in the Theatre Criticism in Korea

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Abstract

This paper examines aspects of Korea-Japan theatre exchange after the millennium. Due to 35 years of the colonial governance of Japanese Empire over Korea, a cultural exchange between the two countries used to be remarkably limited. However, since the change of South Korean policy to accept Japanese culture in 2002, theatrical exchanges have increased significantly. After the millennium, non-public exchanges were organised to introduce Hideki Noda, Yoji Sakate, or Oriza Hirata and their diverse performances brought contemporary issues of Japan into South Korean stages. Japanese artists of the so-called Zero Generation (born in the 1970's and having experienced the Collapse of the Bubble Era in their adolescent years) could also stage in South Korea. Tadashi Suzuki drew the attention of the South Korean audiences with his world-renowned Suzuki Method and the way he modernizes. Exchanges in theatre criticism have not been an exception either. Being founded in 2002, Korea-Japan Theatre Exchange Council served a crucial role. Its counter partner, Japan-Korea Theatre Exchange Center, appointed theatre critics as their board members and started holding symposium with South Korea every year in turn, contributing to sharing the critical issues with each other.

Keywords:

theatrical exchange between South Korean and Japan; Tadashi Suzuki; Hideki Noda; Yoji Sakate; Oriza Hirata; Korea-Japan Theatre Exchange Council.

Rezumat

Această lucrare examinează aspecte ale schimbului de experiență teatrală între Coreea și Japonia după intrarea în noul mileniu. Din cauza celor 35 de ani de guvernare colonială a Imperiului Japonez asupra Coreei, schimbul cultural între cele două țări a fost extrem de limitat. Cu toate acestea, odată cu schimbarea politicii Coreei de Sud, în sensul de a accepta cultura japoneză în anul 2002, schimburile de experiență din interiorul scenei teatrale au crescut semnificativ. La începutul mileniului au fost organizate schimburi de experiență neoficiale pentru a-i introduce pe Hideki Noda, Yoji Sakate sau Oriza Hirata.

Diferitele lor spectacole au adus problemele contemporane ale Japoniei pe scenele sud-coreene. Artiștii japonezi ai așa-numitei generații Zero (născuți în anii 1970 și care au experimentat prăbușirea „erei de bulă” în anii adolescenței) au putut fi de asemenea reprezentați prin montări în Coreea de Sud. Tadashi Suzuki a atras atenția publicului sud-coreean asupra metodei sale Suzuki, de renume mondial, și prin modul în care aceasta se modernizează. Nici schimburile de critici de teatru nu au făcut excepție. Înființat în 2002, Consiliul Schimbului de Experiență Teatrală Coreea-Japonia a îndeplinit un rol crucial. Contrapartenerul său, Centrul de Schimb de Experiență Teatrală Japonia-Coreea, a numit critici de teatru ca membri ai consiliului lor de administrație și a organizat anual simpozioane împreună cu Coreea de Sud, contribuind la rândul său la schimbul de idei privind probleme critice.

Cuvinte cheie:

schimb de experiență teatrală între Coreea de Sud și Japonia; Tadashi Suzuki; Hideki Noda; Yoji Sakate; Oriza Hirata; Consiliul Schimbului de Experiență Teatrală Coreea-Japonia.

1. Until opening the door towards Japanese culture

Korea is neighbouring Japan in geopolitical terms. However, due to the colonial governance of Japanese Empire in the past, Korea is still maintaining its social, cultural, and political distance from Japan to the extent that their relations are at times unlikely to be restored. It was even banned by law to import films, music, or even theatres from Japan into South Korea, considering the traumatic history of being colonised and political conflicts that had arisen even after the liberation in 1945. Only after the first decision to change the cultural policy to open the door towards Japan in 1998 was it able to cease the limited conversation between the countries and to expand the opportunities of cultural exchange at the end of the five decades: starting from importing award-winning cartoons and films produced in Japan in 1998, South Korea decided to accept Japanese pop culture, albeit gradually and progressively. The cultural exchange between the two countries once faced a crisis when Japanese government published a distorted history course book in July 2001. Nevertheless, co-hosting the World Cup in 2002 and successfully finishing events for the Korea-Japan National Exchange Year, the two countries recognized the necessity to continue the cultural dialogue and accelerated the speed of the exchange.

In this regard, it was no wonder that theatrical exchange between the two and critical discourses about them were also distinctly limited and small in number: the first performance of a Japanese play was *A Tale of Two Cities* by Juro Gara

in March 1973 at a playground of Sogang University, which was performed at the same time in the same place as Korean Poet Jiha Kim's *Jesus in the Golden Crown*. It was guerrilla-like performance, whereas the first legally permissioned case was 7 years later: theatre company Subaru from Japan was invited to perform *The Deep Blue Sea* by Terence Rattigan in 1979 at a Small Hall of Sejong Center in Seoul. It is likely that the Korean government granted permission for the performance because of the personal connections between the then president Park Chunghee and the leader of the company, Tsuneari Fukuda. On 26 October, however, Park was assassinated a night before the show. But the company carried on the show, which turned the performance into the talk of the whole country as a result. Fukuda was serving as a chairman of the Japanese Modern Theatre Association and used to have a conversation with a chairman of the Korean Theatre Association, Jeong-Ok Kim.

In the 1980s, South Korea started to welcome representative directors of Japanese theatres such as Tadashi Suzuki or Ota Shogo. Under its influence, a Noh performance titled *Funabenkei* was invited for the Third World Festival held in Seoul in 1981. Starting from performing a traditional Japanese puppet show Bunraku for celebrating twentieth anniversary of the Normalisation of Diplomatic Relations Between South Korea and Japan in 1985, Japanese modern theatres were also staged; Kohei Tsuka's *The Hot Ocean*, Kobo Abe's *Friends* (directed by Jinsoo Jung of Minjung Theatre), and Koharu Moshizuki's *A Doll* (directed by Yoojin Choi of Shimin Theatre).

It is also noteworthy that two playwrights from each of the country presented two different performances with the same title, *Mommy*, at the Grand Theatre of the Literary Centre from 1 December to 8 1982. These works, in fact, were originally the result of a monodrama competition organised by a Japanese theatre company, Jinjikai, in the previous summer of the same year. Holding this competition as theatre directors from the different sides of the world, Koichi Kimura and Arnold Wesker stated that the purpose of it was to "regard ourselves and our future through 'mother' as a universal theme to every human being"¹ and allowed playwrights from the United Kingdom, Japan, and South Korea to write about their mothers. Tae-Seok Oh from South Korea staged his version with director Min-gi Kim and presented Hisashi Inoue's version as a director with the subtitle 'the makeup.' These two plays were performed again in Towol Theatre of the Seoul Arts Centre in 1997, now directed by the playwright himself and Koichi Kimura. 5 years later, Inoue retitled his work as *The Makeup*, which was performed 648 times from then on for 28 years until the playwright's death in May 2010.

¹ Koichi Kimura; Arnold Wesker: in: *Kyung Hyang Daily News*, 8 March 1982.

In 1986, *The Trojan Women* directed by Tadashi Suzuki was introduced to South Korean stage for the first time as a part of the events for the Asian Games Cultural Festival. Furthermore, Shogo Ota's Denkei Gekijo was invited 2 years later to present *The Station of Water* both in Seoul and Busan. Despite the significant differences in the format or style, the two performances shared basic movements and ideas in common as they both were based on a traditional Japanese theatre, Noh. Since then, Tadashi continued his relationship with South Korean Theatres by steadily staging his works at the BeSeTo Theatre Festival from 1994 on. His theatrical theory and directing method was also introduced in 1993 and raised a theoretical interest in Japanese Theatres so far as his essay titled *Suzuki Theatre Theory* was published in Korean.

In 1989 and 1993, the theatre company Shinjuku Yangsanbak visited South Korea to present *A Thousand Years of Solitude* and *The Legend of the Mermaid*. The leader of the company is a Korean-Japanese director Soo-Jin Kim, who is also an apprentice of Juro Gara. Transforming the riverside areas of Seoul into a background in an environmental-theatre-like way, she deeply shocked the Korean audience with the wild and intense energy created by actors' bodies. Kim and her company revisited Seoul in 1997 to perform *The Guide Dog for the Blind* written by Juro Gara, which was an indoor performance this time but showed the powerful physical energy again.

There were 107 performances of foreign theatre companies in 1997 and 23 of them, being the largest number of all, were Japanese plays. Similarly, in the next year, 13 out of 79 international performances in South Korea were Japanese productions. It was not only Japanese theatres, however, that visited South Korean stages in this period but also a considerable number of Asian theatres were introduced as well. Particularly, marking its sixth anniversary and increasing the cultural exchanges in Asia, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival had a profound effect on arousing general interests in 'the Asian-ness.'² This article explores the meaning and the accomplishments of three Japanese theatremakers whose influence on the contemporary Korean theatres has been recognized: Tadashi Suzuki, Hideki Noda, and Oriza Hirata.

2. Tadashi Suzuki's confidence in embracing tradition in a modern way

It would be broadly agreed that Tadashi Suzuki is one of the first generation of Japanese directors who have consistently interacted with and inspired South Korean theatres. As mentioned above, it was in September 1986 that Suzuki

² See: *The Literature Yearbook*, 1999, p. 1038.

visited Seoul for the first time. He was to perform *The Trojan Women* as part of the '86 Asian Games Cultural Festival at the Grand Theatre of the Literary Centre. The play caused a huge sensation by relocating the original Greek tragedy of Euripides in the middle of Japan after the Second World War.

Suzuki then continued to participate in the BeSeTo Theatre Festival and presented his own version of *King Lear* at Towol Theatre in November 1994 and *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the Grand Theatre of Uijeongbu Arts Center in October 2003. His adaptation of *Electra* (2008) was also part of a co-production project between South Korea and Japan. Although there are still numerous works of him to be introduced, Suzuki has attracted a great interest in his genuine directing method and intercultural theatres. His visit to Korea was always a topic of conversation as he was already a world-renowned director.

In spite of the fame, however, it is not widely recognized that Tadashi Suzuki was one of the directors representing Japanese underground theatre movement called 'Angra.' Elected as a representative of a symbolical left-wing theatre company, the Liberation Stage of Waseda, Suzuki began to perform Minoru Betsuyaku's controversial plays such as *A Room Available*, *Black Spot Sausages* and *the Elephant*. From 1968, he decided to stage dramas collaged with traditional Japanese Kabuki. One of his major works called *Surrounding the Dramatic I* (1969) is a paratactic collage of famous masterpieces such as *The Broom* by Tadatsu Izawa, *Konziki Yasa* by Koyo Ozaki, *Cyrano de Bergerac* and the well-known Kabuki repertoire titled *Kanadehon Chusingura*. Suzuki aimed at showing the very body and sensibility of Japanese people in this work. He also succeeded in introducing an outstanding actress named Kayoko Shiraishi to the world with this work. Continuing theatrical experiments over the traditional performance and Western classics, he created his so-called Suzuki methods throughout the 1970s.

His first staging of *The Trojan Women* in South Korea drew a great attention by starring Kayoko Shiraishi, who was the most famous actress of Suzuki's theatre company SCOT. Set in a war-torn cemetery, a woman in a shabby cloth appears bag and baggage. The atmosphere of the scene was portrayed as follows: "Having played the leading role since the premiere in 1974, Kayoko Shiraishi is truly renowned for her passionate acting. ... «I would like to emphasize that one should no longer be unhappy by bringing out our misfortune on stage,» said the actress. Shiraishi was raised by her father who was a musician of Bunraku performance and grew up under the influence of the traditional Japanese arts, which allowed her to build a unique theatrical world of her own."³

³ *Kyung Hyang Daily News*, 6 September 1986.

The Japanese adaptation had already toured more than 200 cities around Europe and the United States before visiting South Korea. It is said that the adapted tragedy left a tremendous impression at the L. A. Olympic Arts Festival as well, which would have served as the decisive factor in the invitation to the '86 Asian Games Cultural Festival held in Seoul. The director stated that *the Trojan Women* portrayed “a woman who suffer from the tragedy caused by war and the religious sense of impotence”⁴ and provided “an example of using the Suzuki training as the basic grammar for acting.” The performance shocked the South Korean theatre industry thanks to the increasing interest at that time in the way of embracing tradition into contemporary theatres. It was even favorably reviewed from critics as the show “served as a valuable opportunity to show how traditions of Japan and Greece could collide with each other and ultimately create a new performance.”⁵

Meanwhile, in July 1994, directors from South Korea, Japan, and China – Eui-Kyung Kim, Tadashi Suzuki, Xu Xiaojong – decided to found the BeSeTo Theatre Festival and to hold the first festival in Seoul four months later that same year. Suzuki presented his own style once again on this stage with an adaptation of *King Lear*. The new version of Shakespeare caught the audience’s attention by casting male actors only, on which the director elaborated that “the all-male cast performance, following in the tradition of the Shakespearean time, was to express the intergenerational conflicts of the original text in a much more effective way.”⁶ Suzuki’s adaptation was highly praised, on one hand, for “reconsidering the classic in an ingenious way of emphasizing its family issue as a universal theme and thus for providing a successful example of Japanizing the Western culture.”⁷ It was also reviewed that “was it not the Japanese director the performance would have never showed such a modern feeling of tension from the beginning to the end, which gave a reasonable interpretation on the director’s decision to describe the life as a hospital and Lear the patient.”⁸ On the other hand, however, the very style of the performance was criticized for being too overwhelming that its sustained rhythm and tone inheriting the Japanese classic form was rather monotonous.

⁴ Sang-Chul Han: “South Korean Theatre History from the 1980s to the 1990s”, in: *Performances and Reviews*, Winter 2013.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Kyung Hyang Daily News*, 17 November 1994.

⁷ *Hangyure Daily News*, 20 November 1994.

⁸ Sang-Cheol Han: “The three families contending with each other for modern theatre,” *BeSeTo 10*, in: *Theatre and Human*, Seoul, 2004, p. 181.

The Japanese adaptation of *King Lear* was invited to South Korea again 20 years later as a joint performance of the two countries dedicated to the 2013 Seoul Performing Arts Festival. Tadashi decided to cast Korean actors who had previously worked with him and to star female actresses this time for the roles of the three daughters of Lear.⁹ The biggest difference of this production from the past premiere was that there were Korean actors who had fully acquired the Suzuki Method this time. Because the director believed that it was the best time to practice his own theatrical methodology in South Korea, he planned to stage the play once again.¹⁰ Yet, it was pointed out that as the method required the actors to use their lower bodies only while maintaining the upper upright, “it seemed that their machine-like movement illustrated them as dolls rather than living characters” on stage and, therefore, “the Shakespearean tragedy was incongruous this time even though it was performed in Korean.”¹¹

Tadashi Suzuki’s adaptation of *Cyrano de Bergerac*¹² was also performed again from the 16th to the 21st of October 2009. It had been six years since the premiere at the 2003 BeSeTo Theatre Festival. “At the back of the stage, giving the impression of a Japanese garden, white chrysanthemum flowers bloomed in groups in the shape of a cleanly branched wooden fence and bare branches of cherry blossom trees stood on the right side of the stage. The flowers fell when a man died.”¹³ Suzuki staged the Kabuki-influenced stage art, including Kimonos, parasols, and Tatami, this time again. It was South Korean actors who played all the roles in the 2003 performance, whereas all but one of the actors in the 2009 production were Japanese actors. The director questioned about “the reason why Japanese audience had shown their steady love for the world created by Edmond

⁹ Goneril was played by Yoo-Jeong Byeon; Regon by Seon-Hee Park; Cordelia by Eun-Young Lee; Gloucester by Seong-Won Lee.

¹⁰ Tadashi Suzuki: “I have once cast actors from four different countries; Germany, the United States, Japan, and South Korea. As far as I remember there were only two Korean actors in total. But now I believe that many actors in Korea have studied and learned my methodology of acting and there are enough actors already who thoroughly understood it. This is the reason why I decided to practice the method on stage this time.” (*Yeon Hap Daily News*, 3 June 2013).

¹¹ Seon-Ae Bae: “The excitement of the incredibly Japanese Suzuki Method”, in: *Performances and Reviews* 52, 2013, p. 247.

¹² The performance for the 2003 BeSeTo Theatre Festival was held at the Grand Theatre of Euijeongbu Arts Centre on 18th of October and toured Myeong-dong Arts Theatre, Namsan Arts Centre, Daehakro Arts Theatre, and Sejong Culture Centre from the 16th to the 21st of October 2009.

¹³ Il-Joong Kang: *Yeon Hap Daily News*, 16 October 2009.

Rostand” and wished to answer it by “maintaining the French plot, adding Italian music, and embodying the both in a Japanese way of acting in theatre.”¹⁴ It is said that his adaptation created a multinational stage, not only in terms of nationality of the actors but also aesthetically.

Electra (Ansan Culture Arts Centre from the 2nd to the 3rd of October 2008 and the Grand Theatre of Arco Arts Theatre from the 10th to the 11th of October 2008) was also a joint production between South Korea and Japan prepared for the Seoul Performing Arts Festival in 2008. Putting an emphasis on an intercultural context, Tadashi Suzuki mixed the text of an Austrian author, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, with Midori Takada’s Japanese music and starred both South Korean and Russian actresses, Yoo-Jeong Byeon and Nana Tatisivili for the adapted Greek tragedy. As the previous project *King Lear* depicted the world as a hospital, *Electra* was also set in a mental hospital. The performance began with a chorus of five men in wheelchairs. “These male chorus, stamping feet and crisscrossing the stage in a synchronous order, became the Greek soldiers of Agamemnon who had conquered Troy and the alter ego of the protagonist Electra as well as judges or gods of sin.”¹⁵ In addition, it was highly praised that the most famous scene of the original play, where Clytemnestra is killed, was not presented on stage but described in words from backstage in order to delete the dramatic moment of the murder and to show the perfect moderation.

3. A leader of a third-generation of Little Theatre Movement, Hideki Noda, and his performances in South Korea

In the 1980s, the third-generation theatre directors of Little Theatre Movement in Japan became the favourite of the era. Hideki Noda and Shoji Kogami were part of them. Their dramaturgy was being renowned for its excessive verbiage and puns. Heating up the Little Theatre boom, the new directors received a spotlight both from young audience and media. Noda is certainly the most frequently introduced theatre director in South Korea among the third-generation dramatists. His “entertaining usage of pop art in theatre and unique point of view is said to guarantee the experimentalism and popularity of the show, leading him to be praised for having changed the flow of the contemporary Japanese theatres.”¹⁶

¹⁴ A leaflet of the 2003 performance.

¹⁵ Seung-Hyun Kim: “The masterpiece of Oriental pithy epic,” in: *The Seoul Arts Centre Magazine*, November 2008, http://www.sac.or.kr/magazine/s_m_view_a.jsp?mag_id=3237, [accessed: November 18, 2020].

¹⁶ Noriko Kimura: “A harmonious coupling of popularity and aesthetics in contemporary Japanese theatres”, in: *Performances and Reviews*, Winter 2004, p. 15.

The first visit of Hideki Noda to South Korea was in April 2005. Until then, he was not as well-known as he was in Japan and the reaction of the Korean audience to his performance was not always favourable: Noda presented *The Agricultural Girl* (directed by Byung-Hoon Lee) as the first performance of the 21st Century Contemporary Drama Series held by the Guerrilla Theatre but failed to receive positive responses from the audience. The play was critically reviewed because, as the playwright provided several episodes at the same time, it could not reach artistic completion and, also, because it was problematic to deal with Japanese fascism on the Korean stage.¹⁷ The 26 scenes of *The Agricultural Girl* “constantly shifted monologue into dialogue and talked about statutory offence, love triangles, conflicts between the urban and the rural, providing episodes filled with several metaphors and symbols in a real quick tempo.”¹⁸ However, another critic, Hyun-Hee Eom, reviewed favourably the performance, writing that it did convey a message that “the capitalist society transformed every human being into machines that only produce desire for consumption” but warned that “such Evangelism of the desire and unconsciousness of people could turn the urbanites into Hitler.”¹⁹

Only after *The Red Goblin* (written and directed by Hideki Noda) was staged from the 13th to the 16th of October 2005 at the Small Theatre of the Literary Centre for the Seoul Performing Arts Festival, did the Korean theatres begin to pay attention to Noda’s plays. He starred himself in the leading role, ‘Red Goblin,’ and worked with actors in Korea. In fact, the director already practiced this co-working in the United Kingdom in a similar way. The play is about a ‘stranger’ named Red Goblin who drifts towards a town where he is eventually rejected and thrown away. It was said to be appealing that the actors speedily shifted scenes as they divided and created spaces on an empty stage with only simple props and tools as if they were traditional Korean entertainers of an outdoor theatre. Critics pointed out that “the very theatricality of the performance console the audience who has had to witness the degradation of it in contemporary theatres.”²⁰ Moreover, it was highly praised for “dreaming a genuine communication between human

¹⁷ Sang-Cheol Han; Myung-Hwa Kim: “A diagnosis of Korean Theatres in 2005”, in: *The Korean Theatres*, December 2005, p. 38.

¹⁸ Seon-Hyung Lee: “*The Agricultural Girl* goes deaf”, in: *Korean Theatre Journals* 17, 2005, p. 130.

¹⁹ Hyun-Hee Eom: “Is everyone Desiring Machine?”, in: *Korean Theatre Journals* 17, 2005, p. 189.

²⁰ Kyung-Hee Kwon: “The dirge in the entertainment: the sound of the liberty bell in *the Red Goblin*”, in: *Korean Theatre Journal* 19, 2006, p. 131.

beings through theatrical encounters with the stranger who is, in fact, everywhere near us.”²¹ *The Red Goblin*, therefore, succeeded to imprint the director’s name onto the memory of the South Korean audience.

It was in June 2013 that he revisited South Korea to perform *THE BEE* (from the 7th to 8th of June 2013 at Myung-dong Arts Theatre). During the eight years since his first visit to Korea, Hideki Noda had toured Europe with actors from various countries and gained theatrical experiences around the world. The director himself played the role in *THE BEE* as well as three British actors. The plot is short: Ogoro escapes from prison and threatens Ido while taking his wife and children as hostage; then, Ido decides to hold the prisoner’s family as hostage in the same way, which ultimately ends up being irrecoverably violent. Hideki Noda said he started writing this play after the outbreak of the Iraq war and the 9/11 terrorist attack. A theatre critic in South Korea Soon-Ja Heo pointed out the commonness between the two co-producer theatres, Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre and Myung-Dong Arts Theatre. The producing theatres located in urban areas were expected to suggest a new model or alternative to contemporary Korean plays of the late 2000s. Their joint production *THE BEE* enabled the public theatres to consider how to overcome the vulnerabilities of their repertoires.²²

A year later, *Half Gods* was staged from the 12th of September to 5th of October in the same theatre. It was premiered in 1986 and well-known for showing the very feature of the director as the third-generation of the Little Theatre Movement. As the most recent performance of the play in Japan was the 6th regular performance of NODA MAP²³ in 1999, the Korean production was a revival after 15 years. *Half Gods* is about twins named Sura and Maria, where monsters suddenly pop up and intervene the sisters’ story. Piling up enigmatic questions of an old mathematician, the play stages several layers of time and space. These conflicts, confusion, and ambiguity are the pitfalls of the performance, but the charms of it as well.²⁴ *Half Gods* was praised for “providing the audience with an objective distance while intersecting the reality and fantasy by its entertaining puns and dynamic movement of the actors.” On the other hand, however, “it was difficult to

²¹ Sook-Hyun Kim: “A general review of the 2005 Seoul Performing Arts Festival: the accordance, difference, and variation of a theatrical point of view”, in: *Performances and Reviews*, December 2005, p. 160.

²² Soon-Ja Heo: “Warning for the violence dwelling in us”, in: *Korean Theatre Journals* 70, 2013, p. 36.

²³ A theatre production company founded by Hideki Noda in 1993.

²⁴ So-Yeon Kim, “An Interview with In-Young Joo, Sura of *Half Gods*,” *Korean Theatre Journals* 75, 2014, p. 102.

win the sympathy from the audience due to its unique complexity and excessive playfulness.”²⁵

Hideki Noda directed three of his Korean performances by himself except for *The Agricultural Girl*. Two of them were made with South Korean actors and the other with British actors. It seems that his recent activities are putting an emphasis on exchanges and communication, as he left the similar message in *The Red Goblin*. His way of traveling around the world and sharing problems with actors from various countries is the very practice of glocalism.

4. Yoji Sakate's interest in politics and the way of arousing attention

In the summer of 2009, a meaningful festival was held at the Small Theatre of the Arco Arts Theatre under the title of “Yoji Sakate Festival.” Two plays of the Japanese dramatist were performed: one of them was *The Attic Room* (from 8 to 28 June 2009, directed by the playwright, Yoji Sakate, himself) and the other was *The Flowers of Mugunghwa Have Blossomed* (from 2 to 12 July, directed by Kwang-Bo Kim).

In fact, it was after the translation of *The Kiss with the Emperor* was published as part of *Modern Japanese Drama Collection I* by the Korea-Japan Drama Exchange Council in 2013 that Yoji Sakate's work was first introduced to South Korea. Even though the play was not staged as a reading performance, it was enough to draw attention from critics and the audience in South Korea that his text critically portrayed the Japanese emperor as a theme. The title of it was borrowed from a book of a film researcher based in New York, Kyoko Hirano. The study was originally about the fact that the biggest concern of the censorship under the General Head Quarters after the defeat in the Second World War was the way of describing the Emperor and sexuality.

Sakate's play overlaps two sceneries together: high school students filming a movie for a screening night at a cultural festival which eventually gets banned from the school committee and the post-war occupation forces censoring Japanese films. The playwright won the Best Play Award at the 7th Yomiuri Theatre Awards in 1999 with this piece. Yoji Sakate is said to have played a special role as his works showed “the destruction of the myth about the Japanese Empire” to the audience in South Korea who had always undergone conflicts with Japan over the past history. In the leaflet of the performance Sakate insisted that: “Japan should be more broke, naked, and selfless. We need to find those who are still

²⁵ Hyung-Joo Ha: “The half-baked theories between ‘what is it?’ and ‘somewhere far away’-”, in: *Korean Theatre Journals* 75, 2014, p. 78.

willing to survive in such circumstance and admit that everyone of us have to transform ourselves fundamentally so that we could learn from those who have never jumped on the bandwagon.”²⁶ The South Korean audience would have had the desire to mirror their own society through his work as it would not be awkward to replace the word ‘Japan’ into ‘Korea.’

In fact, Sakate’s another piece *Blind Touch* was staged earlier than the festival by the director Kwang-Bo Kim in 2008. The same Korean director also presented Sakate’s *The Attic Room* in November 2006 at the Korea-Japan Theatre Workshop, but *Blind Touch* is said to be the first staging of Yoji Sakate in Korea as the 2006 try-out was a reading performance. The play is about a man who has been imprisoned for 28 years since he was arrested for leading the protest against the Okinawa Return Agreement and also about a woman who has waited for him without saying a word. Because they married only for a political reason, the so-called couple has never even touched each other’s face for 16 years and start to live together as a married couple after the release of the man. The husband and wife are distressed to see the world changed during their imprisonment but overcome it by opening their minds to one another. The play was critically reviewed in the light that it was rather difficult for the Korean audience to relate themselves to the Japanese political situation.²⁷ However, “in the final scene where the couple play the piano as they wish, their ‘blind touch’ tells the audience that the disharmony could be harmonized little by little when we recognize that the very essence of our lives is the co-existence of love and revolution, daily life and ideology, the soft and the strong.”²⁸

Meanwhile, as the co-hosting of the Korea-Japan World Cup in 2002 and the founding of the Korea-Japan Theatre Exchange Council eased the resistance to the open-door policy to Japanese culture, Japanese plays started to be more frequently performed on Korean stages. This tendency began to increase slightly and suddenly had reached peak since 2005. Between 2003 and 2004, there were approximately 10 performances of Japanese plays in South Korea. However, at least 30 performances were staged only in 2005 according to *the Literature Yearbook*. In 2009, the most frequently mentioned performances of the year were *Na Saeng Moon* – adaptation of a novel of Ryunosuke Akutagawa and directed by Tae-Hwan Goo; *The Unfortunate Woman* written by Hideo Tsushida and directed

²⁶ Yoji Sakate: Leaflet of the performance.

²⁷ *News Culture*, http://newsculture.heraldcorp.com/sub_read.html?uid=6333§ion=sc158, [accessed: October 29, 2020].

²⁸ Seong-Hee Jang: “Behind and ahead of the curtain”, in: *Korean Daily News*, 18 February 2008.

by Hye-Seon Park; *Doctor Irabu* written by Hideo Okuda and directed by Dong-Hyun Kim; *Tokyo Note* by Oriza Hirada; *Shakespeare of the 13th year of King Cheoljong's Reign* by Hisashi Inoue (the original title was *Shakespeare of the 13th years of Denpo*); *The Fairy in the Wall* adapted from a novel of Yoshiyuki Fukuda and directed by Jin-Chaek Son; *The Dressing Room* by Kunio Shimizu; *The Water and Wind Station* written by Shogo Ota and directed by Ah-ra Kim. There were so many contemporary Japanese theatres that it is hard to name them all. It is likely that the Yoji Sakate Festival was held in these circumstances. In fact, to hold a theatre festival putting forward the name of a Japanese playwright already showed how naturally the Korean audience could now accept the change of times.

Actually, calling the series of performances a festival might be odd as there were only two plays: *The Attic Room* and *The Flowers of Mugunghwa Have Blossomed* (the title of its original text being *Mr. Roly Poly Has Fallen*). Nevertheless, the festival published a collection of the playwright's plays under the title *The Attic Room*, adding *Un-Performed Three Sisters* to the series. Sakate himself directed the performance of *The Attic Room* in Korea, which drew a huge attention for 'the smallest stage in the world.' "17 actors presented various ways of experiencing the narrow space by playing 40 characters through 20 scenes as if the stage was to show numerous aspects of Hikikomori as known as a hidden loner."²⁹ The stage actually was nothing but an attic-like structure made of iron 1.8 meters wide, 0.95 meters deep and 1.2 meters high, in which 15 of the actors gathered around at the same time in some scenes. The crowdedness seemed to exhibit portraits of modern people trapped in the narrow world. The play was criticized for "borrowing many of the episodes from historical events of Japan or Japanese works of art that the Korean audience might not know" and for "not being suggesting an easy way to understand the performance because of the roughness of the Angra theatres."³⁰ However, many critics also commented that "Sakate's play was deeply related to the unique spatial aesthetics of the Japanese and their tradition of regretting and self-deprecating," which would have reminded the most of the Korean audience of our society."³¹ It is truly persuasive that "Yoji Sakate showed us a crippled Japan" and "the playwright led the audience to draw another image of us next to it."³²

²⁹ Man-Soo Cho: "A self-portrait in *The Attic Room*", in: *Korean Theatres*, July 2009, p. 66.

³⁰ Ki-Woong Seong, "The history of accepting Japanese contemporary plays", in: *Korean Theatre Journals* 55, 2009, p. 132.

³¹ *Dong Ah Daily News*, 25 June 2009.

³² Man-Soo Cho: *op. cit.*, p. 67.

The Flowers of Mugunghwa Have Blossomed was performed subsequently, adapted and directed by Kwang-Bo Kim. The image of the toy from the original title served as a metaphor of a man whose limbs have been cut off by stepping on a landmine in order to portray comically how inhumane and horrendous a war could be. Sakate's black comedy was originally set in a battlefield in Iraq, to which the Self-Defence Forces were dispatched, but it was adapted to be set in the De-Militarized Zones where the Zaytun Division from South Korea used to dwell. The changed title mentioning flowers of Mugunghwa also refers to a children's game. The play contains several episodes in an omnibus-like way so as to reveal the misery of wars and political plots behind them, mentioning the wars in Middle East countries, a mine research club in university, Yakuza searching for mines, a man working for a mine-making company and his family. Yoji Sakate discloses the global dangerousness of the landmines in this work despite the fact that it is known to be only locally problematic and criticizes Japan's contradictory policy to advocate the Total Defense – the principle of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces that they do possess combat power but never invade foreign countries – and to actually participate in war-related activities around the world. The South Korean playwright and director Ki-woong Seong commented that “his work emphasised the political mission of playwrights to open their eyes wide to see and catch invisible contradictions of the world” and agreed to the critical mind that Sakate had demanded to the Korean theatres.³³

5. Oriza Hirata's Quiet Theatre

In the 1990s, 'quiet' changes had occurred around Japanese theatres. Most of the so-called Little Theatre Movements were disbanded and as the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs opened its door to the indie artists a considerable number of the dramatists who had studied abroad came back to Japan and started a new beginning of their career. They decided to leave indie spaces and move on to commercial theatres and the media. Moreover, the new generation shifted their attention to theatre focused on daily lives. The beginning of Oriza Hirata's Quiet Theatre that declares a modern theatre of spoken language proves these silent changes.

Hirata founded a theatre company called Seinendan to practice his concept of the modern spoken language plays³⁴ and wrote a number of introductory guides of it. Being appointed as an artistic director of public theatres at a young age and

³³ Ki-Woong Seong: *op. cit.*

³⁴ Plays that are written as exactly used in Japanese daily life.

teaching at university, he became an opinion leader for the new generation of Japanese dramatists. It is interesting that Hirata was subsidized by the Agency for Cultural Affairs as well to study at the Department of International education of Yonsei University in Seoul for a year, which led to the idea of a work named *Seoul Citizens* that premiered in South Korea in 1993.

According to a newspaper article at the time, Hirata was invited to perform *Seoul Citizens* by a leader of Mokhwa Repertoire Company, Tae-Seok Oh, as it “combines the playwright’s experience of staying in South Korea for a year with James Joyce’s *Dubliners*.”³⁵ Hirata was a rookie at that time not only in Korea but also in Japan. It was from his revisit to Korea to perform *Tokyo Note* (from 22 to 24 October 1999 at Towol Theatre) that he began to draw attention of the Korean audience. Then his participation in a joint production titled *On the Other Side of the River* (from 28 to 29 June 2002 at Towol Theatre) enabled him to build up a presence in Korean theatres.

The director presented several series on the Korean stage: *Seoul Citizen Series*, *Tokyo Note Series*, and *Scientific Mind Series*. The first one was staged four times in total, including the premiere and the opening performance of the Yeonhui Street Troupe’s 30 Studio in October 2016. The second series and the third were all performed five times and *Tokyo Note* was once adapted with the title *Seoul Note*.

The relationship between Korean theatres and Oriza Hirata from 1993 could be summarized in four ways. Firstly, his performances in South Korea sparked discussions about hyper-reality or daily lives shown in theatres. The theatre critic Ee-Jeong Noh pointed out that “Quiet Theatres started as a new trend in Japan in the 1990s and have often been performed in Korea in recent years.” She analysed that “Japanese plays, including ‘Quiet Theatres,’ have excellent ability to catch trivial and detailed problems in daily life and allure the Korean audience with their intellectual and poetic charms.”³⁶ On the other hand, another theatre critic Kyung-Mi Lee said that “it is worth paying attention to the fact that the Quiet Theatres, in fact, thoroughly refuse to represent reality and function as a kind of a game that wears a mask of reality to confront it.” Mainly discussing the *Tokyo Note Series*, she pointed out that “the essence of the Quiet Theatres is the theatricality of the hyper-reality that offers the evidence of the lack of reality.”³⁷

³⁵ *Kyung Hyang Daily News*, 24 May 1993.

³⁶ “A quiet gust of Quiet Theatre from Japan”, in: *Hangyure Daily News*, 3 January 2008.

³⁷ Kyung-Mi Lee: “The lack of reality in daily life: Is watching fictional?”, in: *Korean Theatre Journals* 55, 2009, p. 208.

Secondly, the *Seoul Citizens Series* caused a dispute over the past history. The theatre critic Bong-Seok Jeong made a confession, or almost repented of his sins: “It seemed that (In *Seoul Citizen 1919*) Oriza Hirata wished to reflect on how deeply the Japanese were immersed in the arrogance of dominators and living in a self-centered way by restoring the daily life on the 1st of March Independence Movement of Korea on stage, which has no meaning at all for both of the past and present Japanese people. I cannot help but confess that I was also ashamed of myself when watching this post-imperialist history.”³⁸ It is utterly interesting that one performance could be interpreted as imperialistic and post-imperialistic at the same time. In fact, Hirata has written several stories set in the past colonies of the Japanese Empire and portrayed the wealthy Japanese traveling southwards in a luxurious ferry to find out a new land (*To the South*) or Japanese immigrants in Malaysia (*No sleepless nights*). He also caricatured the contradictory nature of the Self-Defense Forces of Japan in *Sand and Soldiers* by showing soldiers dispatched to the Middle East war field who cannot even fire a gun for the protection of their citizens. The playwright has said that “there were already a lot of plays mentioning colonial issues, but none of them succeeded to lead young audience in Japan to accept the issues as their own ones and face the problems in the present, which I wanted to achieve in this work.”³⁹ Regardless of his intention, however, a controversy is expected from now on as it is possible that the Korean audience would interpret the play in the opposite way and Hirata’s modern spoken language play, known as Quiet Theatre, was influenced by Kunio Kishida, who is often classified as a right-wing playwright of Japan.⁴⁰

Thirdly, Hirata has awakened the interest in science plays. It seems that it was when Doosan Art Centre produced the Science Play Series in 2009 that they became ‘popularized’ but in fact it would be more correct to say that a play called *Oxygen* (2003) initiated the discussions on the science plays. The critic Yoon-Cheol Kim argued that “plays that use science to portray scientific humans of nowadays uniquely function as they illuminate our times and society, and in that sense, science does become a natural subject of theatres in this era.”⁴¹ On *Scientific*

³⁸ Bong-Seok Jeong: “A report of a Japanese post-imperialist”, in: *Korean Theatre Journals* 30, 2003, pp. 190-191.

³⁹ *Yeon Hap Daily News*, 1 April 2002.

⁴⁰ See: Kojin Nishido; Atsushi Sasaki: “Japanese theatres after the 1990s” in: *Korean Theatre Journals*, Fall 2012, p.170. “When Oriza Hirata started his career in the 1990s, I had this impression that he was following the track of the modern theatre that Kunio Kishida had created before. Hirata also said he wanted to complete the modern theatre by himself and it seems to me he meant to it to some extent.”

⁴¹ Yoon-Cheol Kim: “The age of science theatre is coming”, in: *Culture and Arts*, May 2003, p. 55.

Mind 3: The Balkan Zoo of the Doosan Science Plays Series, another critic Mi-Do Kim commented as follows: “Eventually, the common denominator of the important issues shown in this work question ‘who is human.’ Where do they come from and to which extent are they human? How do you define the identity of a human being when his/her brain was in fact transplanted? The playwright does not stop questioning but leads them to his definition of <humanity>.”⁴²

Standing on the same side of Kim, she insists that science is anthropology after all and the science theatre is directly related to ontological questions of human. The *Scientific Mind* Series of Oriza Hirata were translated, published, and performed by the Korean director Ki-Woong Seong. Although it is difficult to investigate the exact causal relationship, after the performance there have been a series of science plays in 2014, such as *The White Cherry* written by Sam-Shik Bae, *C Major for Copenhagen Interpretation* as a theatrical combination of science and performing arts (from 12 to 13 September), *The Nap of a Physicist* (from 18 to 28 December), or *Constellations* (from 9 May to 1 June). In addition, a robot play named *Sayonara* was once performed at the Baekseonghee Jangminho Theatre in 2013 and *Me Working* in October 2016 in Daejeon. The previous performances using science in South Korea, including *Ever is Amazing* (19 February 2009), *A Bundle of Korean Traditional Music with Mum* (from 1 to 10 May 2009), and *Robot Princess and the Seven Dwarves* (from 13 to 14 November 2009), could not overcome the aesthetical deficiency and remained at the level of mere entertainment. On the other hand, in Hirata’s robot plays the robots take an important position of the drama or at least show the very presence on stage to equivalent extent to humans. There is still much left for scientists in South Korea to develop the robot theatres. It is expected to discover a hopeful hint for pioneering the world of the robot performances in the example of Oriza Hirata.

6. The meaning of the Japanese theatres on the Korean stage after the Millennium

In brief, the Japanese theatres and the contemporary Korean stage have had an influential relationship via the works of Tadashi Suzuki, Hideki Noda, Yoji Sakate, and Oriza Hirata.

Tadashi Suzuki combined a traditional style of Japanese theatre with modern practices to create a delicate stage and showed his unique method of extremely restrained aesthetics, sounds, lights, and even the tiny gestures of the performers.

⁴² Mi-Do Kim: “The meaning and achievement of the encounter between science and theatre”, in: *Performances and Reviews* 67, December 2009, p. 40.

His directing served as an utterly powerful stimulus to the Korean theatres, in which it was required to embrace the tradition in a modern way, and also left a tremendous influence on inventing the unique method. Before that it was widely assumed in Korea that one should rely on the Western acting methods in order to make plays systematically. This was perceived to be totally wrong after the Suzuki method, derived from traditional techniques of Japanese theatres such as Noh or Kabuki, was approved world-wide. It is likely that the Korean artists gained confidence from him. Moreover, Suzuki founded a theatre village called Dogasanbang in a town five or six hours away from Tokyo, which would have affected to and accelerated the leaving-Seoul or leaving-Daehakro movement in the middle 1990s. It would be reasonable to correlate Suzuki's theatre village and the tendency of South Korean dramatists to leave the capital city, including Mucheon Camp in Juksan, Michusanbang in Yangju, Yeonhuidan Street Troup in Miryang Theatre Village, theatre company Noddeul in Buyongri, and a performing arts group Ttuida in Hwacheon.

On the other hand, the case of Hideki Noda suggests the reason why young dramatist in Korea should work with theatre-makers abroad as the director himself have worked with actors from Korea or the United Kingdom in this age of glocalism.

Meanwhile, Yoji Sakate could also be an impressive example of wrestling with political and social problems. It is said that Korean people tend to be particularly 'convinced' when arguing about historical issues but there is still much to say about the deformational way of liquidating the past such as the experience of being colonised or the memories about the Special Research Committee on Anti-Racial Attitude. Sakate's plays could hopefully stimulate the Korean playwrights and directors.

Since the Millennium, theatre exchange between Japan and Korea got more diversified than ever, and Korean theatre criticism has made deliberate efforts to accommodate those diversifications. The most representative is the Korea-Japan Theatre Exchange Council, established in 2002 and the Japan-Korea theatre Exchange Center is its counterpart. While traveling back and forth between Seoul and Tokyo, they have translated and published plays and held reading performances and workshops. From the perspective of Korean-Japanese theatre, the most notable aspect of the exchange is that Korean-Japanese theatre critics have set a critical agenda every year together and held criticism-related symposiums. Together, both ends have investigated the present and the flow of Japanese-Korean contemporary drama and performances, the starting point of Korean-Japanese modern theatre, Japan-Korea contemporary theatre and

feminism, new trends and prospects of Korean-Japanese theatre, social events, and theatre. This is a forum where ‘exchange’ can really happen: critics from both countries can raise their voices on whatever they see as a theatrical issue in Korea and Japan.

The word *exchange* sounds neutral in value at first glance. However, it presupposes agreement and promises to achieve certain goals. If there is no choice but to cause an imbalance depending on the political and social conditions and the cultural environment, all our efforts may fall into “exchange for exchange”. This exchange seems going on the right track, although still a long way ahead. As it only takes a spark to get a fire going, so those various attempts will bring a new horizon to the East Asian theatre community.

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2

ARTA TEATRULUI – STUDII TEORETICE



DIE KUNST DES THEATERS – THEORETISCHE STUDIEN



THE ART OF THEATRE – THEORETICAL STUDIES



Measuring the Unmeasurable: A Tridimensional Gender Comparison Between *Measure for Measure*, Two Renaissance Plays and their Common Source

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Abstract

This article offers a tridimensional gender comparison between Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1604) and two other plays having the same *Hecatommithi* (1565) plot: Cinthio's Italian Renaissance play *Epitia* (1583) and Whetstone's Elisabethan play *Promos and Cassandra* (1578). Both plays were inspired by Cinthio's *Hecatommithi novella* (Story 5 from Day 8) before Shakespeare wrote *Measure for Measure*, so that the Bard's use of the proto-feminist spirit from the *novella* and the two subsequent dramatizations can be comparatively analysed. The second part of my article offers a further analysis of *Measure for Measure*, suggesting that it still can be seen as a proto-feminist drama, even if without a happy-ending, from a gender perspective.

Keywords: *Measure for Measure*; Shakespeare; gender; proto-feminism.

Rezumat

Acest articol oferă o comparație tridimensională între piesa lui Shakespeare *Măsură pentru Măsură* (1604) și două alte piese renascentiste care au drept sursă principală aceeași povestire din *Hecatommithi* (1565): piesa italiană a lui Cinthio *Epitia* (1583) și piesa elisabetană a lui Whetstone *Promos and Cassandra* (1578). Ambele piese au fost inspirate de Povestirea 5 din Ziua a 8-a din culegerea *Hecatommithi* a lui Cinthio, înainte ca Shakespeare să fi scris *Măsură pentru Măsură*, astfel încât se poate analiza comparativ felul în care Bardul a folosit spiritul proto-feminist din povestire și din celelalte două dramatizări. A doua parte a articolului oferă o analiză simbolică a piesei *Măsură pentru Măsură*, sugerând că aceasta poate fi considerată totuși o dramă proto-feministă, chiar dacă una fără happy-ending, din perspectivă de gen.

Cuvinte cheie:

Măsură pentru Măsură; Shakespeare; gender; proto-feminism.

1. A Tridimensional Comparison

The source-studies¹ on *Measure for Measure* consensually recognize, among Shakespeare's main sources, Cinthio Giraldi's Italian *novella*² *Hecatommithi* (Story 5 from Day 8) and also Cinthio's play *Epitia* (which is the first dramatization of the *novella*), with a few other possible sources being sporadically mentioned.³ This particular *novella* inspired not just Shakespeare, but also two other Renaissance dramatists: the Italian Cinthio and the Elisabethan Whetstone. While writing his dramatic *novella* variation, Shakespeare knew Cinthio's own dramatization *Epitia*, and he might have had access to Whetstone's dramatic variation *The Right Excellent and Famous Historye of Promos and Cassandra* (1578).

The relation between Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* and *Measure for Measure* has already been studied, regarding various aspects (such as the structure, the narrative strategies, plot, audience). My article will focus on the female characters of the *novella*, and of each of the three plays (including Shakespeare's), as well as on the dynamics of their dramatic stature and role in the plot. My main concerns revolve around two questions: were these pre-Shakespearean "Isabellas" proto-feminist figures? Was Shakespeare's Isabella herself a proto-feminist character?

¹ For more information on Shakespeare's source-studies on *Measure for Measure* see Louis Albrecht, in: *Neue Untersuchungen zu Shakespeares Maß für Maß*, Königsberg, Berlin, 1914, quoted by everyone who is working on the sources; see Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Routledge and Paul, London, 1958, pp. 420-513; see F. E. Budd, "Materials for a Study of Sources of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*", in: *Revue de Littérature Comparée* XI, Paris, 1931, pp. 711-736; Thomas C. Izard: *George Whetstone, Mid Elizabethan Gentleman of Letters*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1942, pp. 53-79; R. H. Ball: "Cinthio's *Epitia* and *Measure for Measure*", in: *Elizabethan Studies in Honor of George F. Reynolds* University of Colorado Press, Boulder, 1945, pp. 132-146; Mary Lascelles: *Shakespeare's Measure for Measure*, Athlone Press, London, 1953, pp. 6-42; and see Charles T. Prouty: 'George Whetstone and the Sources of *Measure for Measure*,' in: *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15, Spring 1964, pp. 131-145. See also P. S. Miller: *Measure for Measure: Redressing the Balance - A Critical Reappraisal of Shakespeare's Play*, Printed by Amazon, Great Britain, 2020, pp. 20-24 and Patricia Nedelea: *Femina Ludens Re-Con-Queering Shakespeare*, Rosedog Books, Pittsburgh, 2012, pp. 141-162.

² *Novella* means in Italian "Shortstory."

³ Other sources for *Measure for Measure* are considered to be George Whetstone's play *The Right Excellent and Famous Historye of Promos and Cassandra* (1578) and his short story in *Heptameron of Civil Discourses* (1582), republished as *Aurelia* (1592); other critics even consider *Promos and Cassandra* as the main source of *Measure for Measure*, see Prouty, p. 131. These differences in opinion do not impede our comparison.

We have the opportunity to perform a more complex comparison, by “measuring” Shakespeare’s play against an Italian drama, as well as against a drama of the same cultural context (Elizabethan England). These possibilities provide the start for a rich tridimensional comparison.

1.1. Cinthio’s *novella*.⁴

Measure for Measure source-studies scholars generally agree that Shakespeare must have known Cinthio’s *Hecatommithi* shortstories collection (which contains sources for not just one, but two of his plays), but not necessarily Cinthio’s play. A summary of the *novella* will show how Cinthio adapted the *novella* for the contemporary Italian stage, and allow us to analyse how Whetstone and, later, Shakespeare transformed it for the Elizabethan stage.

In *Hecatommithi* the story is told by a lady called Fulvia. The story denounces male ingratitude and injustice,⁵ and as a result it awakens spontaneous reactions among the other ladies in the *Hecatommithi* audience; in fact, the reactions and comments about it come exclusively from the ladies, as if the men were completely silenced and embarrassed by the behaviour of the central male character of the story.

Plot takes place in Innsbruck, during Emperor Maximilian the Great’s reign. Iuriste is appointed Governor, but the Emperor advises Iuriste to take this position only if he was absolutely positive he was the right person for it. The eighteen-year-old Epitia intervenes for her younger brother Vico (charged with the rape of a virgin), pleading for his life (he had been sentenced to death). Unlike her brother, Epitia is a female philosopher: she and Vico both study philosophy but, the narrator remarks, the brother made no good use of his learning.

Epitia is a good speaker. Her discourse instantly charms Iuriste, who asks her to repeat it; she does, even more persuasively; as a result, Iuriste is attracted to her. The arguments she provides in favour of her brother are his love for the young woman, whose honour could be restored by him marrying her. Vico’s beheading is postponed, but Iuriste makes her an indecent proposal: if he took ‘full pleasure’ of Epitia, her brother would be released, and Iuriste might even marry her. In fact, Iuriste has already ordered Vico’s beheading; next morning her brother’s corpse

⁴ The edition used here is Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio: *Gli Hecatommithi*, translated in English by J. E. Taylor, 1855.

⁵ Fulvia remarks: “Maximian the Great, a most worthy Emperor, sought at the same time to punish the ingratitude and injustice of one of his ministers.” See *Appendices*, in Brooke, p. 155.

is brought to Epitia – who shows no sign of discomfiture. Left alone, her acting comes to an end: she allows herself to weep and buries her brother. After the burial, she plans to take revenge by cutting off Iuriste's head, but then she decides to ask for justice.

Epitia's second performance begins: dressed in mourning clothes, she weeps and denounces Iuriste. The Emperor keeps his objectivity untouched until hearing Iuriste's version, but when Iuriste is called to the Emperor, he has a surprise: not expecting to see Epitia there, his body starts to quiver all over. He tries to flatter her, but the Emperor does not buy it: Iuriste's two sins deserve two punishments: to marry Epitia in order to restore her honour, and then to be beheaded for Vico's beheading. Epitia refuses to marry him, but then she does some rethinking and her natural kindness comes to the surface: she begs the Emperor to forgive her husband; by showing clemency, the Emperor would situate himself among the immortal gods, she says. Thus Iuriste is forgiven – for the sake of Epitia.

From a gender perspective, Epitia, the educated maid, is the active force of the story and, in the end, a successful manipulator. She made good use of her education, ending with two achievements: she saved her brother and married the Emperor's Governor. She is a performative character, always in perfect control of her emotions. After the *novella* ends, Fulvia the narrator concludes that the Emperor's clemency made him truly worthy of the Empire. What she does not say is that an Emperor was influenced by an intelligent, educated and manipulative female. Now let us move on to Cinthio's dramatization *Epitia*.

1.2. Cinthio's *Epitia*.⁶

Cinthio keeps the names from his *novella* for his characters, but he invents the happy-ending tragedy, in order to cheer-up the spectator, and that is the greatest difference between the *novella* and the play. Vico does not die, he gets to be saved by the Captain of Justice. Epitia has an ardent desire to get married: the last two scenes of act II reveal the bride-to-be's joyful wedding preparations. Her marital intentions, very subtly suggested in the *novella*, are now brought forefront: she has met Iuriste before, he has been in love with her for a long time. Iuriste is more 'human' this time: he intends to free Vico, but he fears the strict disciplinarian *Podestà* of Innsbruck. Similar to the *novella*, he spends the night with Epitia after he has already ordered the kill of her brother.

⁶ The edition used here is Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio: *Epitia*, Giulio Cesare Cagnacini, Ferrara, 1583.

Epitia inherits the theatricality from the short story; when receiving her brother's corpse, she even simulates gratitude. She takes her complaint to the Emperor, who accidentally arrives in Innsbruck at the right time. Now Cinthio complicates things a little bit, introducing a new female character: Angela, Iuriste's sister. Angela begs Epitia for her brother's life, mirroring the way Epitia has begged for her own brother's life. Neither the emotional exchange, nor the similarity of situation melt her heart: Epitia wants Iuriste dead.

The last *coup-de-theatre* of the play⁷ occurs during the moment of the execution. The Emperor orders Epitia to marry Iuriste before he will be beheaded. Unlike in the *novella*, she refuses to fulfil the imperial demand: she has the courage to oppose the Emperor's hegemonic order. The situation is saved by Vico, present incognito among the audience: he cannot endure his sister's grief, so he reveals himself. After learning that Vico is alive, Epitia agrees to marry Iuriste, and the Emperor forgives both men, on condition they marry the ladies.

In Cinthio's play there are two marriages instead of one, while Vico stays alive with the help of a fortunate bodily substitution; the plot is enriched through the presence of additional characters (e.g. Angela and the *Podestà*). The dramatic characters are not complex, except for Epitia, who keeps the manipulative qualities from the *novella*, but is enriched by her voluntary temperament. Iuriste became more fragile than in the *novella*. The scene of Angela's plea for her brother's life reveals Epitia's merciless side: there is no 'sisterhood' between the two women; when moved on stage, the heroine becomes more vengeful, even if all ends well.

1.3. Whetstone's drama *Promos and Cassandra*.⁸

When transferring the *novella* plot onto the London stage, new female characters are introduced to the plot (as it also happens in Shakespeare's case). Those peripheral dramatic characters belong to lower class: Lamia the courtesan and her servant, both doubly performative, being not just characters, but also performers and singers *within* the play. Whetstone changes the names of the

⁷ Similarly to the *novella*, the play *Epitia* has three *coup-de-theatre* moments: the first is when Epitia, prepared to become a bride, receives the dead body of her brother; the second is when Iuriste is convicted and the final one is when the real identity of the dead man is disclosed, it turns out that Vico is alive and the Emperor forgives everyone (in the *novella* the third and last *coup-de-theatre* occurs when Iuriste expects to be beheaded, but Epitia from the *novella* changes her mind and her plea for his life is successful).

⁸ The edition used here is George Whetstone, *Promos and Cassandra*, issued for subscribers by the editor of the Tudor facsimile texts, London, 1910.

characters and the location. Cinthio's 'Innsbruck' becomes 'Cyttie of Julio' (and later, in Shakespeare, 'Vienna'), while Emperor Maximilian becomes Whetstone's Corvinus, king of Hungary (and, in Shakespeare, the Duke of Vienna). The low-life characters from Whetstone and Shakespeare (whores, bawds, criminals) represent the low-life of contemporary London.⁹

Whetstone's heroine is Cassandra, the sister of Andrugio, who has a lover called Polina; Iuriste is called Promos. The virtuous Cassandra addresses an official complaint to Promos, who would reprieve her brother in exchange for the monstrous ransom to which she agrees with two conditions: Andrugio's pardon, and Promos will marry her afterwards. Not unlike the two previous Epitias, Cassandra wants to marry. One of the novelties of Whetstone's plot is that the 'Gayler' hears the young man's cries and decides to spare his life, presenting the head of a newly executed felon instead. Once freed, Andrugio will wander in disguise, while Polina cries at his tomb every day. Cassandra initially intends to commit suicide, but later decides to bring her story to the attention of King Corvinus; Promos is doubly punished, he has to marry her *and* be beheaded the day after. Before the execution Cassandra hopelessly asks Corvinus to spare her husband's life; then, Andrugio reveals himself, and both men are forgiven on condition they restore the ladies' honour by marriage.

The parallel comic sub-plot deals with the underworld characters. This is not the place for detailing Whetstone's sincere Puritan preoccupation with proper government, virtue and justice (as opposed to vice),¹⁰ which might explain the inclusion of such characters in the plot: courtesan Lamia, her bawd Rosko, Gripax, Rapax, prisoners, hacksters and other rogues; actually, as stated in his dedication to a famous magistrate of London, the author has divided the whole story into two comedies. Promos' lust for Cassandra is mirrored on two different levels/classes, by Promos' secretary Phallax's desire for Lamia the courtesan, and her maid Dalia's giving in to the charms of another low-class character, Grimball. This class-transgressing mirroring stops at the point when the Emperor takes care of the major characters that belong to the higher class; Whetstone does not give any account of what comes out of the punishment of Dalia, Rosko, and the other peripherals.

Whetstone presents a wide range of female typologies. After marrying Promos, Cassandra pleads for her husband's life, although she knows for sure that he has cheated her twice and killed her brother. Whetstone's respect for the proper

⁹ Prouty, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 132-139.

magistrate does not allow Cassandra's plea for her husband's life to succeed: such decision would be unjust. The perfect magistrate returns to town just in time in order to prevent Cassandra's suicide, to reinstall justice and bless a double marriage. Nevertheless, unlike Cinthio, Whetstone gives Andrugio's lover a voice (although one might notice that she is given voice mostly when it came to crying by a tomb that was not even her husband's). He also gives voices to two cheerful singing characters: the courtesan and her maid.

1.4. Shakespeare's Four Weddings and No Funeral

The simplest collective characterization of the female characters in the Bard's play might be Angelo's words: "These poor informal women are no more / But instruments of some more mightier member".¹¹ In the initial¹² corrupted magistrate story, the victim is the wife of the condemned.¹³ But if she is, instead, his *sister* (the case of Cinthio's *novella*), then there is enough room for honour-restoring marriage(s), which equate happy-endings. The *novella* ends with Epitia's marriage; Cinthio's drama ends with two marriages: Epitia's and Vico's, while Angela remains single. Whetstone too ends his play with two marriages: Cassandra's and Polina's. Shakespeare does much more: he introduces no less than four marriages involving all social classes (from the Duke himself, to a prostitute).¹⁴

There are great changes in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* in comparison to the *novella*, as well as to the other two dramas already discussed. The first is directly related to the heroine: she does not want to marry and chooses to become a nun instead (she is a novice within the St. Claire Order). Secondly, the 'good' magistrate does not actually leave the city, on the contrary, he is omnipresent in disguise. Thirdly, Shakespeare introduces a 'bed-trick' involving a female replacement. Fourthly, the brother's head replacement with the one of a dead prisoner (which has to be provided in order to save the brother) is a bit

¹¹ *Measure for Measure*, 5.1.

¹² I refer here to the ransom stories genre, stories which precede Cinthio's *novellas*.

¹³ *Measure for Measure*, 5.1.

¹⁴ The final four marriages are the most problematic moment of the play; the fabrication of no less than four marriages seems a bit exaggerated, not to mention that the one between Isabella and the Duke has never been announced before in the text; Hawking has shown that "Shakespeare's scholarly jury has been hopelessly split between those who can, and those who cannot, those who will, and those who will not, accept the ending of *Measure for Measure*," see Harriet Hawking: 'The Devil's Party: Virtues and Vices in *Measure for Measure*', in: *Shakespeare Survey* 31 (1978), pp. 105-114.

more complicated than in Cinthio's and Whetstone's texts, because the initial replacement felon (Barnardine) refuses to die, so there is a need for a replacement of the replacement. In addition, Whetstone's parallel low-world comic plot has been kept and enriched.¹⁵ In the following I shall focus on each of the female characters included by Shakespeare in his character list. The list contains female representatives of all social classes and statuses.¹⁶

There is a very meaningful difference between 'Isabella, Sister to Claudio' and all the other Epitias: not only does she not want to get married, but Shakespeare's heroine rejects the carnal sin as well. She does not want to be a wife but a nun, a Christian 'sister'. She desires to turn her role of being Claudio's sister (as listed by the author) into the one of being the 'sister' of all, a monastic sister. Ironically, while (and because of) focusing on becoming a Christian sister, she is unable to *be* Claudio's sister: she lets him die instead of paying the 'ransom' (all the corresponding heroines previously mentioned have chosen to be true 'sisters' and to give up their virginity in exchange for their brothers' lives): she lets her brother die instead of giving up her chastity, not impressed by his mundane despair.

At first sight, Isabella seems to be a pale shadow of the two unpredictable Epitias and the impulsive Cassandra, but in fact her subversiveness towards the institutionalized patriarchal order is deeper: she does not want to become a wife; although being desired by men, she wants to become a nun. The reaction of the previous heroines, when learning that the beloved brother has been beheaded, is colossal: they intend to commit suicide, as well as to kill Iuriste. In the case of Isabella, the reaction to the same news appears small: 'I will to him and pluck out his eyes,'¹⁷ is what she says.

¹⁵ Some critics have strongly contested this underworld presence in Shakespeare: "I am not sure that *Measure for Measure* should be acted, if its rendition necessitates the retention of much, or indeed any of the Froth, Pompey, Elbow, Mrs Overdone material," according to Odell. See George C. D. Odell: *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, Scribner's, New York, 1920, p. 23.

¹⁶ Relevantly, in the final scene, Mariana is questioned about her status: she might be a wife, a maid, a widow, or a 'punk.' (or, as already shown on stage, a nun - Francisca). The play contains a maid (Isabella), a widow (Mrs Overdone), a wife (Juliet), a 'punk' (Kate Keepdown). Mariana is a single woman, having a (possibly threatening) in-between status; for this reason the Duke wants to marry her to Angelo. In the end, all the female character (except for the widow and the nun) end up as wives.

¹⁷ *Measure for Measure*, in William Shakespeare, *The Unabridged William Shakespeare [Globe Edition]*, eds. William George Clark and William Aldis Wright, Philadelphia: Courage Books, 1997, 4.3.2246. This is the edition I am going to use in this article.

In fact, this minor reaction is just a prelude to Shakespeare's play with female characters. It is disappointing to see how easily Isabella has been tamed. In addition to her fervent desire to become a nun, when marriage is imposed on her by the Duke's repeated requests, she does not even have the courage to say no to his order. Her final lack of protest makes her nun vocation and her finally ambiguous matrimonial position appear dubious, suspicious, even mercantile: it looks like she was just pretending to become a nun, in fact she had been waiting for a 'worthy' marriage proposal.

Isabella is not necessarily as 'crafty' as Angelo suspects her to be, but she most certainly is not as 'ignorant'¹⁸ as she pretends to be either. She delivers just one relevant speech, which happens during her first encounter with Angelo: she convinces him to postpone Claudio's execution. Isabella does not actually act and speak by herself; her most important actions have in fact been catalysed either by Lucio¹⁹ (her first discussion with Angelo) or by the Duke (the bed-trick procedure and later her public complaint). She does not stand for sacrifice, but lets her brother die. She has no courage to act and speak independently: she is a passive instrument in the hands of first Lucio and then the Duke. She pleads (kneels) for Angelo's forgiveness for reasons that have to do with vanity (he was in love with her and lost his mind) and, in comparison to the other corresponding heroines, she lost her performative abilities along the way. Oscillating between the status of a nun and a bawd²⁰, she ends up married, which is exactly what she did not want. However, Isabella *is* a proto-feminist character. She actually uses her unique chance of being persuasive in the best way possible; in her speech she makes all sorts of substitutions and gender switches, and in the end she is convincing. Isabella is in fact a player and a gambler, one who refuses to get involved in any sort of game; she gambles on single stakes: the absolute, eternal Heaven; she would only roll her pair of dice for Paradise.

'Mariana, betrothed to Angelo,' seems to be one of the reasons why the Duke orchestrates the whole spectacle: she is the only concrete motivational lead given

¹⁸ "Let me be ignorant," says Isabella to Angelo, *Measure for Measure*, 2.4.1102; "I will keep her ignorant for her good," the Duke also says about Isabella. *Measure for Measure*, 4.3.2233.

¹⁹ Lucio gives Isabella a complete lesson of theatrical stratagems on how to persuade a man: 'Give't not o'er so: to him again, entreat him; / Kneel down before him, hand upon his gown; / You are too cold: if you should need a pin, / You could not with more tame a tongue desire it: / To him, I say.' *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.796-801.

²⁰ "Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd," she tells Claudio. Later, she will involuntarily turn into Mariana's bawd. *Measure for Measure*, 2.3.1388.

by Shakespeare for the Duke's performance. The two have known each other for a long time, and he seemingly has been waiting for Angelo to fall into the marriage trap, because legally he could not force this marriage. Mariana has been passively suffering in silence (for five years) and needed a male catalyst to rescue her from such a miserable condition. She quickly agrees to 'lend' her body for the bed-trick in order to force her ex-fiancé to marry her. Listed as 'betrothed to Angelo,' in fact she has not been betrothed to him at all for five years. According to the Duke, Mariana's reputation has been intentionally stained by Angelo, who got rid of her; still one might wonder why, when Angelo's temper has been stirred by Isabella, he says that 'Never could the strumpet, / With all her double vigour, art, and nature, / Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid / Subdues me quite.'²¹ What strumpet does Angelo refer to, considering his icy character, if not the only woman we know he has ever been related to? Perhaps, at stake is not Mariana's honour, but her socially dangerous status of being a single woman. Once this issue is resolved, the Duke suggests that, after Angelo's death, she should buy herself a better husband. The supposition that she would need to 'buy' a husband confirms not just the possibility that Angelo's discovery of her 'dishonour' might have been correct, but also Mariana's intuition: she has indeed been 'mocked' by the Duke with a husband. One might conclude that Mariana enters an erotic game and plays it to the end, accepting all consequences and risking everything.

'Juliet, beloved by Claudio' is the counterpart of Whetstone's Polina, but Shakespeare adds her pregnancy to the picture, and takes her speech away. While Polina has the chance to lament at Andrugio's grave, Juliet is not given the opportunity to express her true feelings. Instead, she is only allowed to repent her 'sin' to the fake priest. In reality, she does not seem to be so much beloved by Claudio, considering that he never mentions her or their future baby affectionately (he bitterly remarks that their mutual deed 'with character too gross is writ on Juliet'²²). The reason that makes him fight fiercely to stay alive is not her, but the fact that he loves life and is afraid of death. Juliet appears three times, but only speaks once; she is a passive, mute presence. The final resolution, the fourth marriage in the play, is the least explicit of all ('Claudio, that you wrong'd, look you're store,'²³ says the Duke *en passant*). Although the marriage between her and Claudio is legal, the Duke convinces Juliet to confess and repent it as a sin: 'I do repent me as it is an evil, / And take the shame with joy.'²⁴

²¹ *Measure for Measure*, 1.4.957-960.

²² *Measure for Measure*, 1.3.246.

²³ *Measure for Measure*, 5.1.2971.

²⁴ *Measure for Measure*, 2.3.1004-5.

‘Francisca, a nun,’ makes just one brief comic appearance and her name is never used; she leaves the stage shortly after delivering a few lines (the moment Lucio comes to speak to Isabella). She has no dramatic importance, except for quickly exposing the rules of the convent – all rules regarding ‘sisters’ relation to men, with whom ‘if you speak you must not show your face, / Or, if you show your face, you must not speak’.²⁵ Comically enough, the nun does neither, and leaves the stage instead, leaving Isabella alone with the young man. This peripheral character is just an illustrative variant of what Isabella might become.

‘Mrs Overdone, a bawd’ appears in the written text not by name, but by occupation: ‘bawd’ (or, ‘a poor widow’²⁶); still, the text contains a misogynistic joke on her proper name: she had nine husbands and was ‘overdone by the last’²⁷; her first entry is marked by Lucio’s use of the nickname ‘Madame Mitigation.’ Although Mrs Overdone has been raising Lucio’s child, she is denounced by him and finally exits the stage, being taken to prison. She is completely silenced, the last words addressed to her are ‘no more words.’²⁸

Kate Keepdown (‘a whore’) does not appear at all in the play; she gave birth to Lucio’s child, and he apparently promised to marry her; her absence is understandable, considering the recent proclamation.²⁹ From Lucio’s perspective, marrying her is definitely worse than hanging. Without even being asked, she is married to Lucio in her absence, not in the name of justice, but because her groom has made himself guilty of ‘slandering a prince.’³⁰

In conclusion, all the female characters of *Measure for Measure* have a proto-feminist potential, considering their occupation, estate, and/or performative abilities, but especially Isabella, the one-stake gambler. As a nun-to-be, she becomes *more* interesting and not *less* interesting. While the other female characters are rather being exposed than being ‘allowed to speak’ by Shakespeare, and there are more female stakes than female gamblers, Isabella is, in my view, an active gambling performer.

²⁵ *Measure for Measure*, 1.4.361-2.

²⁶ *Measure for Measure*, 2.1.642.

²⁷ *Measure for Measure*, 2.1.646.

²⁸ Escalus: ‘Away with her to prison. Go to; no more words.’ *Measure for Measure*, 3.2.1713-14.

²⁹ The proclamation from the play alludes to the September 1603 London proclamation (see Steele, *Catalogue of Tudor and Stuart Proclamations*, 1910) demanding the pulling down of brothels and gaming houses in the suburbs of London – a precaution against the spread of the plague by ‘dissolute and idle persons,’ see Brooke, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

³⁰ *Measure for Measure*, 4.1.2969.

2. Is *Measure for Measure* a Proto-Feminist Play?

2.1. The Gambling Game

Angelo plays the game of the hymen, using the Duke's stakes. His female opponents are two in one: Isabella and Mariana, while the Duke is the kibitzer. Ironically, his stake stands against the women he befriends. Isabella plays on Mariana's stake, namely the hymen 'borrowed' from her. Pleading for 'plan Mariana', the Duke does not only imitate financial discourse, but he also reminds us of the rule concerning winning in the medieval game of 'hazard', when the stake gets doubled: 'If you think well to carry this as you may, the doubleness / Of the benefit defends the deceit from reproof.'³¹ The double accusation in the end also reflects the concept of winning at the game of hazard: when the shooter loses, the stakes are doubled. Angelo wins the hymen, but Mariana too wins the game and so does the Duke. The only loser here is Isabella. By her entering this game, even if just 'formally' or 'provisionally,' Isabella has in fact failed in her big bet for Heaven. The last game is played on the occasion of the Duke's return. The players are Isabella, Lucio, Angelo and Claudio; each one's marriage is at stake. At this point, Isabella participates in the game because she has nothing left to lose. She has already lost her shot for Paradise,³² and as a follow-up she will marry the Duke, which is her best worldly chance.

First, let us come back to Isabella's discourse performed during the first encounter with Angelo. Her rhetoric contains joyful switches, replacements and role inversions, which win Angelo's attention and 'sense.' Although apparently there are major replacements going on in the play with regard to both the bed-trick and Claudio's presupposed beheading, I believe that the only moment when these replacements involve a gender-switching of roles is during Isabella's discourse. Isabella's rhetorical joyfulness inscribes her in the symbolic sphere as a player of language.

Even if there is a general disorder going on in 'Vienna,' there is no transvestism. The gender-regimented order has been kept safe in this regard: there are no male substitutes for females, and no female substitutes for males. It could be just one *male's* head replacing another male's (the visual sign of masculinity is the beard); a woman's head would never be cut; and a woman could only substitute another

³¹ *Measure for Measure*, 3.1.1498-9.

³² It is worth mentioning that, while I see Isabella's non-entry into the monastery as a failure, as her losing of the game, some critics have different opinions, seeing it as her rescue: Ellison considers that the play ends by 'saving Isabella from the nunnery,' see Ellison, James: "*Measure for Measure* and the Executions of Catholics in 1604," in: *English Literary Renaissance* 33 no.1 (2003), p. 87.

with the help of the bed-trick. Only men replace men and only women replace women. Gender is not interchangeable, and it is strictly hierarchical: Angelo tells Isabella that if *she* were more, she would be none; in response, Isabella ironically paraphrases him, saying that if *he* were less (meaning, *even* less than he was), he would be none.

However, there is one exception to the gender regimentation: Isabella's first speech, the one in which gender transgressions do happen, and Angelo responds to them promptly (and one might say affirmatively). Isabella provocatively enters the discursive game by doubting Angelo's capacity to absolve Claudio: 'But *can* you, if you would?'³³ she asks him. Then, she ambiguously proposes the first role-switch: he is supposed to imagine himself in her shoes, to replace himself with her. This first gender change proposed by Isabella is not crystal clear, it only involves the 'heart', the feelings. Within this switch, Claudio does not have a clear equivalent (Angelo does not have the sister he had in Whetstone's version): 'But might you do't, and do the world no wrong, / If so your heart were touch'd with tha tremorse / As mine is to him?'³⁴ Angelo's answer 't' is too late' does not discourage Isabella, who continues to propose other role-switches. What if this time Angelo was Claudio, she asks ('If he had been as you, and you as he'³⁵).

Then, altogether with the third switch, there comes the key moment in her plea. This time Isabella proposes a gender *and* power switch; because of this doubling, this time the gender switch becomes clearer. Isabella wishes she was Angelo, and wishes Angelo was her; this proposal illustrates how gender is related to power: being Angelo, she specifies that she would also get to be the judge; being Isabella, Angelo would be in a submissive position: 'I would to heaven I have your potency, / And you were Isabel! (...) / I would tell what 'twere to be a judge / And what a prisoner.'³⁶ Confirmation that this is the actual key moment of her persuasive attempt comes with Lucio's exclamation. Lucio, who has closely monitored Angelo's reactions during Isabella's speech, enthusiastically remarks, 'Ay, touch him, there's the vein.'³⁷ This might be the moment when Angelo found himself turned on, the moment his desire for Isabella was born from her declared intention to apprehend his masculinity and power. Even more, she implies that if she were the judge, there would most certainly be a prisoner too; undoubtedly, that prisoner would not be her brother, but more likely Angelo.

³³ *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.807.

³⁴ *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.810-1.

³⁵ *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.821.

³⁶ *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.825-8.

³⁷ *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.830.

A sadomasochist rhetorical game³⁸ has just been proposed; Angelo's response to Isabella's implicit demand to have him enslaved is to find himself suddenly interested and captivated. At this point he accepts that he is not the law, and 'it is law, not I condemn your brother.'³⁹ Angelo takes distance from the law, as well as from any responsibility, while implicitly submitting to an inferior (erotic) position. If he accepts a submissive position in relation to Isabella, he will not be in a position to take decisions anymore. But, even so, with any substitution ('were he my kinsman, brother, or my son'⁴⁰), Claudio still is a lost cause.

While Angelo continues to acclaim the law's high status even when detaching himself from it, Isabella continues to reverse the hierarchy. She shows him how relative any hierarchization really is: in relation to Claudio, in this particular moment, Angelo might seem superior; but, transposing the switching of roles on a metaphysical level, she shows that, in relation to God, the supreme judge, he is in the same position as Claudio, being the one to be judged. Her next replacement requires a move further, to the sub-human sphere: Claudio is compared to the 'fowl of season' that gets killed 'for our kitchens'.⁴¹

Angelo agrees to enter Isabella's play of replacements: he proposes Claudio replaces the first who commits the same wrongful deed; a precedent is needed, because there is no such precedent punishment. At this point, Isabella reveals that the replacement game is just a game, and Angelo is not 'a giant' even if, for the moment, he has the strength of one. In fact, he might as well be an angry ape, a soldier (and not a captain), which means that he might be, in fact, nothing more than a fake and a cheat. Meantime, while continuing her gender reversal, Isabella claims that she cannot be compared to her brother, not because she is a woman, but because she is 'more': 'We cannot weight our brother with ourself: / Great men may jest with saints: 'tis wit in them; / But, in the less, foul profanation;'⁴² she is the saint, and men who are not 'great' are less; her brother is less; Angelo, she implies, is the same.

³⁸ In her psychoanalytical approach to the play, Carolyn E. Brown treats the virtual pair Duke-Isabella as a sadistic-masochistic match. Actually, her view does not exclude mine, in which Isabella, playing the masochist in relation to the Duke, might be in relation with Angelo the sadistic, the one in control; Angelo could react in this game as the masochistic party. See Brown, Carolyn E., "The Wooing of Duke Vincentio and Isabella of *Measure for Measure*: "The Image of It Gives [Them] Content", in: *Shakespeare Studies* 22 (1994), pp. 189-219.

³⁹ *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.842.

⁴⁰ *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.843.

⁴¹ *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.846-7.

⁴² *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.893-5.

Isabella's discursive play has been complex, involving gender and power switches, metaphysical and non-human replacements. As a result, Isabella has been persuasive enough, since, as Angelo admits in the end, her sense became his own ('she speaks, and 'tis / Such sense that my sense breeds with it'⁴³); it is the final, most triumphal gender switch. Isabella is one representative of 'Vienna', the 'city of ladies' that the patriarch has been unable to rule over. The city falls when she gambles and loses the game.

2.2. The Utopian City of Measure

What is the 'measure' in this play? What should be measured? Vague references hint at old laws, which should be brought to life again and re-considered as measures, but nobody really states exactly those laws. We know for how many years those laws have been put to sleep (for nineteen zodiacs, or for fourteen years), but their content is never revealed. This is a play about meta-measurements: 'Lord Angelo is precise',⁴⁴ and because of being (too) 'precise', he tries to measure the non-measurable. Afterwards, the Duke himself attempts to measure Angelo's measures and measurements of the non-measurable. Finally, I will try to find and extract (at least) one of all the non-measurable, possible paths of the meaning, by measuring the Duke's measurements. That means, in fact, that we measure (the Duke's) measure for (Angelo's) measure for (Claudio's and all the other supposed sinners') measure. Let the meta-measurements begin, and let them be not 'precisely', but carefully done.

Measure for Measure illustrates the idea of unaccountability and non-measurability. While Angelo is the master of precision, introducing fixed rules and precise measures in 'Vienna', the Duke stands for multiplicity, the uncountable, Queer disorder. The play shows how Angelo's measurement is defeated, annulled, eradicated. The measures are measured. The Duke traps Angelo, his very special friend and cousin, deceptively appearing to encourage him to eradicate disorder; meanwhile, he does whatever he can to stop Angelo, to prevent the consequences of his decisions, and basically to maintain disorder. If 'Lord Angelo is precise'⁴⁵ (Angelo being the embodiment of measurement itself), then the Duke is the measurer of the measure.

Critics of the play noticed the very often temporal as well as nominal incongruence. The explanations given in this regard are either blaming Shakespeare's

⁴³ *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.909-10.

⁴⁴ *Measure for Measure*, 1.3.342.

⁴⁵ *Measure for Measure*, 1.3.342.

revisionists,⁴⁶ or the context (all Elizabethan players had little concern for strict timing);⁴⁷ some even give philosophical meaning (the double timing theory).⁴⁸ Still, I believe there are more obvious numeric inconsistencies (time being just one of them) in *Measure* than in other Shakespearean dramas. As an example, Claudio's execution has been fixed at 9 a.m.,⁴⁹ settled for 4 p.m.,⁵⁰ for 8 a.m.⁵¹ and then at 4 again.⁵² Angelo's precision seems to be mocked by the textual interference of numbers; however, this precision does not say much and cannot be fixed. When Angelo is in charge, there appears to be an urge to settle numbers and install measures. Still, this urge for precision seems to fail, it is usually rendered useless or unnecessary. An invasion of numbers begins with Angelo's coming to power, as if the dice started rolling; as a follow-up, numbers (trying to express exact measures) are drawn at random.

The female characters succeed in subverting numbers, transforming 'Vienna' into a 'city of ladies', a city of unaccountable female citizens. In *Measure for Measure* a woman's head *cannot* be cut off because there is no such identifiable measure as a woman's head: either she is pregnant and then there is more than one head; or she is painted or veiled, so that she cannot be seen and identified with certainty. If Angelo had tried to find a corresponding number for woman and considered man to be the number 1 (if he were less than 1, he would be none, 0), then the woman would have been its reversal, -1, and then Angelo's words would have made sense (the woman would be 'more', she is none, $-1+1=0$). Zero is perceived as woman's sign; the woman is perceived as the indefinable, the O, the pregnant cipher. In *Measure for Measure* women are not just the alternatives to the Duke's subversion as well as Angelo's reign of numeric precision, but a great threat to the dystopian city he intends to build. They sabotage any societal rule based on the nucleus of the family. There are no married women in the city of ladies: all of them evade the matrimonial system, one way or the other; even Mrs Elbow's honour (the only married woman in the play), is far from being without stain: when she was just a just pregnant wife (who apparently had 'respect' before getting married), she entered a brothel looking for the stewed prunes. The city

⁴⁶ Brooks, H.F. and Harold Jenkins (ed.): Introduction, in: *Measure for Measure* - The Arden Shakespeare, Methuen&Co, London, 1966, p. XVII.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. xiv.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Measure for Measure*, 2.1.489.

⁵⁰ *Measure for Measure*, 4.2.1937.

⁵¹ *Measure for Measure*, 4.2.1949.

⁵² *Measure for Measure*, 4.2.2027.

of the Duke seems to be in danger not because there is no future for it at all, but because the family system itself is in trouble: citizens do not want to marry any more. The only woman who is longing for traditional marriage is Mariana, who wants the marriage but cannot have it; she might have been the catalyst for the Duke's plan of provoking Angelo to change disorder into order, and allowed himself to be trapped in the process. For this reason, she is so important to the Duke: she is the only key to matrimony and order. This plan must work either way, for it has two possible outcomes: either the society really would be changed into what it had been before having 'too much freedom'; or it would not, but then Angelo would fall into its trap – one way or another – and would subsequently end up married. To fulfil this plan, the Duke risks a lot, surrendering his being to hazard.

The Utopian disorder is suggested by the use of the babies metaphor: 'liberty pluck justice by the nose; / The baby beats the nurse.'⁵³ The Duke wants to maintain the reign of accountability, turning the pregnant woman into the redoubtable enemy of precision, representing the becoming, the invisible, the two – or more – in one. Nevertheless, Lucio the slanderer connects the two, gossiping about the Duke who supposedly was paying for a thousand bastards. There is a strong subversive power embedded in women's pregnancy. Pregnancy can start by being a reiterative tool of patriarchal order and end by strongly threatening it. Once the reign of the 'precise' Angelo begins, he instantly turns against the great enemy of precision: the pregnant woman. 'Be that you are / That is, a woman: if you be more, you're none' (2.4.135-7). The pregnant women are 'more.' The first thing that bothers Angelo, once he is in command, is the indubitable (but muted) presence of pregnant Juliet. Angelo actually sentences to death not the thieves and murderers, but the man who has caused her pregnancy. The pregnant woman is also dangerous for the reign of precision, due to the fact that she represents non-accountability itself. From a numeric perspective, the pregnant woman is uncontrollable, the unaccountable, she is plurality in unity.

'Vienna' is invaded by single women with-child. Actually, *all* women in the play are or soon would be pregnant. Juliet's heavy, obvious pregnancy is what enables Claudio's fall; it is written on her body. Kate 'the whore' is pregnant with Lucio's child. Mrs Elbow is with child when longing for the two stewed prunes found in the bawd's house. Mrs Overdone is raising Kate Keepdown's (and Lucio's) child. Isabella sees the future perspective of having a bastard son with Angelo.⁵⁴

⁵³ *Measure for Measure*, 1.3.319-20.

⁵⁴ "I had rather my / Brother die by the law than my son should be / Unlawfully born", *Measure for Measure*, 3.1.1432-4.

At the end of the play, Mariana too might be pregnant with Angelo's child. The only solution is either to marry these women quickly and then confine them inside their houses, or, if not, confine them in prison (Mrs Overdone) or in nunnery (Francisca the nun). The pregnant woman is the O, the inevitable, she cannot be ignored: her power is written on her body in a 'gross' manner. She is the visual sign of disorder; she cannot be either beheaded or punished because of her condition. Juliet must be quickly taken out of Angelo's sight.

Pregnancy is not the only kind of writing on the female body; another kind is the 'painting' (applying make-up) characteristic of the 'whores'. On his list of peripherals, Whetstone enumerates 'Baudes / Courtesans / Painting- Painting, may help a courtesan, but in the end is a baude and a begger.'⁵⁵ It is true that courtesans are helped by painting which, according to Pompey, gives them access to the symbolic sphere of secrecy. 'Does Bridget still paint, Pompey?'⁵⁶ asks Lucio; and later the clown/bawd Pompey affirms that 'Painting, sir, I have heard say, is a mystery; and your whores, sir, being members of my occupation, using painting, do prove my occupation a mystery.'⁵⁷ The painted women are 'more' in a different way than the pregnant 'written' ones. However, sometimes they can be both painted and written, like Kate Keep down they have (too) many men. Mrs Overdone is 'more' in a different way, her excess being expressed by the number of former husbands (nine). There might be a proto-feminist potential in public women, as it is in pregnant women, but it has not been exploited in the play, both female characters being silenced.

The veil is theatrical, but Shakespeare did not stress this potentiality. The image of the veiled woman appears twice in the play, and its presence is also implicit in a third case, in three very different contexts. Firstly, it appears in the discussion between the nun and Isabella ('if you speak [with men] you must not show your face / Or, if you show your face, you must not speak');⁵⁸ The veiled characters *can* talk: this might be good practice for Isabella's rhetoric, considering that the audience of her speech would not be distracted by her physical appearance anymore (as are Lucio, Angelo, men in general – Claudio implies). In order to talk and be listened to by a man, the woman must hide her face (as God did, with Abraham). Secondly, it appears in the extra-scene of Mariana's night with Angelo; in this scene apparently both Isabella and Mariana were present, and

⁵⁵ Whetstone's marginal notations of "A Larges to the world" are quoted in Prouty, pp. 136-137.

⁵⁶ *Measure for Measure*, 3.2.1590.

⁵⁷ *Measure for Measure*, 4.2.1919-21.

⁵⁸ *Measure for Measure*, 1.4.359-62.

both are veiled. Isabella lets Angelo know that she will come accompanied by a servant; she needs to accompany Mariana because only she knows the way. Once Mariana gets inside, she will reveal her body to Angelo, but she will not talk, in order to keep her identity secret.⁵⁹ Thus, this second appearance of the veiled woman is the opposite of the nun: she is the voiceless sexual object, the ‘whore.’ Mariana’s third public appearance (act 5, scene 1) is veiled too: she hides her face like a nun, but this time she talks. Her status is ambivalent, she could be anything, from a virgin to a ‘punk’. In order to make her presence convincing in front of the law, she has to unveil and show her identity. By doing so, she stops being ambiguous and threatening to the law, and gets the marriage she was longing for.

2.3. (Un-)Accountable Resolutions

The title is ironic. This is neither a play about measurements, nor about the old ‘an eye for an eye’ law, even if apparently this is what the title promises. It is not about ‘Angelo for Claudio, death for death;’ Claudio does not get killed, neither does Angelo. This play is a demonstration of how numbers do not mean a thing, about the dubious certainty of numbers and measurements. It is a Procrustian bed story, a Cinderella story minus the happy-ending. Claudio and Juliet do not get the dowry they were expecting. A nun gets a marriage she did not expect or want. A big-mouth ‘fantastic’ is awarded a marriage he considers ‘worse than hanging’. A dubious ruler finds a wife who might be able to rule in his place. An anonymous pirate is sent to death instead of getting a fair trial. For his service, the second man in power is sent away, as a reward. Barnardine, the drunk sentenced to death, is released precisely because he is drunk all the time. The Bard transformed Cinthio’s happy-ending tragedy in a comedy without happy ending.

For Isabella, the only stake is paradise. Any other stake (her brother’s life, for instance) is ‘cheaper;’ even if ‘had he twenty heads,’⁶⁰ it would have been ‘cheaper;’ life is not infinite, while the after-life *might* be. Claudio sees things exactly the other way around: for him, Isabella’s stake is not the possibility of infinite Paradise, but a very finite ‘momentary trick.’⁶¹ Isabella is a gambler, and a fair one too. For her, entering the nunnery is entering the Paradise casino, where the only pair of dice worth rolling bet on the infinite reward. But she makes a great mistake by entering the Duke’s game of hazard: she believes him when he

⁵⁹ The author seems to imitate at this point the similar nunnery rules exposed by Francisca.

⁶⁰ *Measure for Measure*, 2.4.1212.

⁶¹ *Measure for Measure*, 3.1.1348.

says that if she bets on someone else's stake, she is not in fact gambling, while in reality she is. Even if she is just a formal presence at the table, Isabella plays hazard with Angelo, on a different stake this time. By doing so, she breaks her promise not to bet on anything other than Paradise; and that is when, in fact, she loses it.

There are different types of players reflected in the main characters: the Duke (who also mentions 'the dribbling dart of love')⁶² is the cheater who uses fake dice in order to let his people win ('twas my fault to give the people scope')⁶³ only to win their love in return, along with a Utopian society of unaccountability; Angelo is the gambler who uses fair dice, plays 'just' and bets on a head; Isabella too is a player who plays her dice fairly (which are her 'moving graces'), but bets only on the uncertain but infinite reward of Paradise. When she commits the irreversible error of provisionally entering Angelo's game (which is, in fact, the Duke's game) she loses *hers*. When deciding to 'provisionally' play against Angelo, Isabella has the hope to win: 'I'll send him certain hopes of my success';⁶⁴ she gambles in the small game, however losing Paradise in the end.

Conclusions

Apparently, Shakespeare missed the proto-feminist spirit from the *novella* and its two subsequent dramatizations of Cinthio and Whetstone. His play still inherits the ludic spirit of some female characters from the *novella* and the two plays, but he dramatically changes the ending, offering patriarchal resolutions to all the tensions in the play. Under the Duke's rule, Vienna became a utopian city of pregnant, painted and veiled women. Disorder threatens patriarchal law, so that numbers have to be reinstalled by the Duke's agent, Angelo. By tempting Isabella into making the error of entering a patriarchal game, the 'city of ladies' falls apart. Isabella loses her great game and her promise of an afterlife paradise. *Measure for Measure* can be seen as a proto-feminist drama without a happy-ending.

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⁶² *Measure for Measure*, 1.3.291.

⁶³ *Measure for Measure*, 1.3.327.

⁶⁴ *Measure for Measure*, 1.4.447.

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Time and Space - *The Chairs* **by Eugène Ionesco**

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Abstract

The article presents the relationship between time and space in the context of Eugène Ionesco's play *The Chairs*. This relationship is presented from the perspective of the director which analyzes the stage directions regarding time and space. In the absurd context of the play, the article clarifies Ionesco's point of view regarding the world he has created. It analyzes the light as a theme (as the Emperor enters the stage) and the circular space of isolation in which the characters are trapped.

Keywords:

absurd; Eugène Ionesco; *The Chairs*; space-time; circular; light; isolation.

Rezumat

Articolul prezintă relația spațiu și timp în contextul piesei *Scaunele*, scrisă de Eugène Ionesco. Această relație este văzută prin prisma regizorului care analizează didascalii spațial-temporale. În contextul absurdului reflectat în piesă, articolul clarifică punctul de vedere al lui Ionesco cu privire la lumea pe care a creat-o. Tema luminii este analizată (cu apariția Împăratului pe scenă) împreună cu cea a spațiului circular în care personajele sunt prinse.

Cuvinte cheie:

absurd; Eugène Ionesco; *Scaunele*; timp-spațiu; circular; lumină; izolare.

The Time and Space of the Absurd

The absurd is defined by Eugène Ionesco through its paradoxical power *to be right and to contradict itself simultaneously*: "The absurd is an imprecise notion. The absurd can be not understanding a thing, the laws of the world, it is born from the fight between my will and the universal will: it appears, too, from the conflict between me and myself, from my various wishes, contradictory impulses; I want at the same time to live and to die, or more likely I carry inside

to death, towards life; eros and thanatos; [...] it is a rather important opposition, surely, to give me the impression of being absurd."¹

Eugène Ionesco asks to be recognized for being *the founder of the absurd*, justifying that plays like *The Bald Soprano*, *Lesson*, *The Chairs*, etc. were staged in 1951, while *Waiting for Godot* was staged in 1953, accusing Esslin of intentional omission². The absurd created by Ionesco "is triggered by the encounter of opposites resulting from the previous splitting of a unit. The clash between me and myself from the playwright's formula is symptomatic. Likewise, the meeting between the real and the unreal in the economy of a play. The playwright's art lies in his skill to make the unreal become real, to give birth to the unforeseen."³ Ionesco manages to highlight the absence of the audience by using the empty chairs. Although the public is captivated by the story of the two elders, the invisible characters make themselves noticed along the way as well. Even though apparently, the play *The Chairs* presents the story of the couple "that reached the age of senescence (95 and 94 years old, the table of characters tells us) that appears to be an almost naturalistic investigation into old age and its inconsistencies."⁴ Ionesco's characters are at times incoherent due to their old age. From a psychological point of view, old age or growing old is seen as a regression, a return to our childhood and thus the absurd becomes more frequent, because it does not function under the normal logic of sane people. The beginning of the play *The Chairs* is comedic, but it ends in tragedy with the death of the

¹ Ionesco, Eugène: *Între viață și vis: convorbiri cu Claude Bonnefoy*, translated by Cioculescu Simona, second edition, Editura Humanitas, București, 2017, p. 128. „Absurdul este o noțiune imprecisă. Absurdul este poate neînțelegerea unui lucru, a legilor lumii, el se naște din conflictul voinței mele cu o voință universală: apare, de asemenea, din conflictul dintre mine și eu însumi, dintre diversele mele voințe, impulsuri contradictorii; vreau în același timp, să trăiesc și să mor, sau mai degrabă port în mine un *către moarte*, un *către viață*; eros și thanatos; [...] este o opoziție destul de importantă, nu-i așa, ca să-mi dea impresia de *absurd*.” (translation by the author).

² Ionesco, Eugène: *Căutarea intermitentă*, translated by Cioculescu Barbu, Editura Humanitas, București. 2017, pp. 42-44.

³ Balotă, Nicolae: *Lupta cu absurdul*, Editura Univers, București, 1971, p. 405. „[...] e iscat de întâlnirea contrariilor care rezultă din scindarea anterioară a unei unități. Ciocnirea între eu și cu mine însumi din formula dramaturgului, este simptomatică. Tot astfel, întâlnirea dintre real și ireal în economia unei piese. Arta dramaturgului rezidă în iscusința sa de a face ca irealul să devină real, de a da naștere neprevăzutului.” (translation by the author).

⁴ Tucan, Dumitru: *Eugène Ionesco, teatrul, metateatrul, autenticitate*, Editura Universității de Vest, Timișoara, 2015, p. 219. „[...] ajuns la vârsta senectuții (95 și 94 de ani, ne spune tabla de personaje) ce are aparența unei investigații aproape naturaliste despre bătrânețe și incoerențele ei.” (translation by the author).

two elders. “It is enough to accelerate the movement for comedy; slow it down for tragedy”.⁵ The rhythm of the play accelerates during the visits, it becomes a construction of comic situations, the agitation increases with each newcomer, tension is created and it explodes with the suicide of the elders in a macabre atmosphere. In a certain sense, the play, through its rhythm, reveals the cycle of birth - life - death, even Ionesco remarks that God created us with Death holding our arm and that the thread of life should be reversed. The characters have been married for seventy-five years. The old woman lives to take care of him and raise his morale, the old man without her would commit suicide, there is no other solution for them than being touched by death at the same time. The play *The Chairs* raises many questions, “A living masterpiece that confuses the author and the spectator alike, somewhat in contradiction with themselves.”⁶ We should not try to define it, because it would contradict Ionesco’s vision of the work of art: “A defined and classified work is a dead work.”⁷ Starting from the author’s vision: “It was said that the author writes a play, that the actors play another and that the spectators see in it a third. The situation is even more complex.”⁸ Somehow everyone perceives according to their own universe. Eugène Ionesco had a dialogue with Kenneth Tynan in a series of articles published in *The Observer* newspaper that included a critique of the play *The Chairs*: “The elders, just like the chairs, are trapped in an impenetrable cocoon of hallucinatory memories: whatever they are saying can only be understood by themselves, remaining incomprehensible to anyone else.”⁹ This is true only if you refuse to accept a logic other than the universally accepted one. About *the Chairs*, Eugène Ionesco tells us: “[W]hen I wrote *The Chairs*, I had at first the image of the chairs, then of a person bringing at the highest speed empty seats onto the stage [...] The seats remained empty because there was no one [...] The theme of the play was nothingness, not failure. It was a total absence, chairs with no one.”¹⁰

⁵ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2017, p. 120. „E suficient să accelerezi mișcarea pentru comic; s-o încetinești pentru tragic”. (translation by the author).

⁶ Ionesco, Eugène: *Note și contranote*, translated by Ion Pop, Editura Humanitas, București, 2002, p. 123. „O operă vie [...] îi pune pe autor și pe spectator în derută, oarecum în contradicție cu ei înșiși.” (translation by the author).

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 44. „O operă definită și clasată e o operă moartă.” (translation by the author).

⁸ *Ibidem*, „S-a spus că autorul scrie o piesă, că actorii joacă alta și că spectatorii văd în ea o a treia. Situația e și mai complexă”. (translation by the author).

⁹ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 131. „Bătrânii, precum și scaunele, sunt prinse într-un cocon de nepătruns de amintiri halucinante: ceea ce spun nu poate fi înțeles decât de ei înșiși, rămânând de neînțeles pentru oricare altul.” (translation by the author).

¹⁰ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2017, p. 69. „[A]tunci când am scris *Scaunele*, am avut la început imaginea scaunelor, apoi a unei persoane aducând în cea mai mare viteză scaune goale pe scenă [...] Scaunele au rămas goale fiindcă nu era nimeni [...] Tema piesei a fost neantul, nu eșecul. Era absența totală, scaune cu nimeni.” (translation by the author).

The dialogue between the characters combines the logical with the illogical or confirms truths that at times are known to be puns that point towards a devaluation of language¹¹: “In reality, the existence of the world does not seem absurd to me but unbelievable, because within existence and the world one can see clearly, one can discover laws and set *reasonable* rules. What is incomprehensible only appears when one climbs up to the sources of existence, only when one sits on the edge and looks at it as a whole.”¹²

The characters are depersonalized, they do not have names, but they are named after a characteristic, the Old Man and the Old Woman according to their age, the speaker according to their function. The old woman answers to the name of Semiramide when she is called by the Old Man. Ionesco proposes that they be played by young actors because they have a wide stage play that must sometimes be performed at a fast pace. As staging direction, we know that the Old Man is lame. The speaker is imagined by the stage directions as a Renaissance painter aged forty-five to fifty. The main characters, as from the title, would be the chairs or those who occupy the chairs. It is this absence of incarnate characters that can be the essence of the play. Like Beckett’s *Godot* where Godot never shows up, no one comes to take the seats. The characters communicate even if their verbal language is a deliberate crisis, “This language crisis is most often artificial, voluntary.”¹³ Communication is often inefficient, it seems abstract and incomprehensible, but among the nonsense you can read their drama: “Incommunicability does not exist. There is a lot of talk about the language: crisis [...] As for the characters in my first plays, they don’t want to, they are unwilling to communicate. They are emptied of any psychology, they are simply machines [...] people who just say slogans [...] If I really believed in absolute incommunicability I would not write.”¹⁴

¹¹ In the stage convention proposed by the author, the characters relate-communicate-understand each other but for the real audience seems ambiguous, in the created world it is harmonious.

¹² Ionesco, Eugène, *Însinguratul*, translated by Chiriacescu Rodica, Editura Albatros, București, 1990, cover 4. „În realitate, existența lumii nu mi se pare absurdă ci de necrezut, căci în interiorul existenței și al lumii se poate vedea clar, se pot descoperi legi și stabili reguli *rezonabile*. Ceea ce e de neînțeles nu apare decât atunci când urci la sursele existenței, decât atunci când stai pe margine și privești în ansamblul ei.” (translation by the author).

¹³ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 18. „Această criză de limbaj este cel mai adesea artificială, voluntară.” (translation by the author).

¹⁴ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2017, pp. 122-123. „Incomunicabilitatea nu există. Se vorbește mult și despre criza limbajului... În ce privește personajele primelor mele piese, ele nu vor, nu doresc să comunice. sunt golite de orice psihologie, sunt pur și simplu mecanisme [...] oameni care rostesc lozinci [...] Dacă aș crede cu adevărat în incomunicabilitate absolută n-aș scrie.” (translation by the author).

The characters in *The Chairs* cannot be seen as “psychologically realist characters, they could be universal, mythical figures who illustrate the incomprehension of humans faced with the unfathomable enormity of existence. Concurrently they manifest hope, through their tenderness towards each other and their vitality, both physical and mental, since they host this albeit failed convention on the meaning of life.”¹⁵ They can represent different things. The old Woman can be seen as Eve (the mythological figure) a woman, a mother, etc. The old Man can be seen as Adam (the mythological figure), the person in charge, the man, the father, etc.

The title of the play invites reflection, by mentally projecting the image of the seated man. The chair itself entails involvement in an activity. The chair can summon a wide range of images, chair (for the spectator in a theater, cinema, etc.) - baby chair, electric chair, royal chair (throne), wheelchair, torture chair, massage chair, airplane chair, etc. The farther we are from the earth, i.e. the higher the tower in which the two are (thanks to the Google Maps view in which you zoom out and the landscape shrinks) we can see how everything is surrounded by water because we live on a planet where water is found in a large proportion: “In *The Chairs* there are three expanding spatial levels, from the strictly determined space (the house), to the open space (the island) and the indeterminate space (the water). There is an obvious progressive dematerialization here, the obsessive Ionescian tendency towards evanescence, so present in his essays and journals. The limited, enclosed space is, in *The Chairs*, the Old Man’s obsession.”¹⁶ The circular space we are in creates an atmosphere of captivity. Before committing suicide, “The Old Man is the one who imagines the post-thanatic, lacustrine space of decomposition, in which our corpses will fall side by side and we will rot together in the aquatic loneliness [...] A symbol of evil, here, water drowns the being and stops the word.”¹⁷ The characters are grotesque: “The Old Woman who sees invisible creatures in *The Chairs*, meows grotesquely, and belly-dances

¹⁵ Gale, Maggie B.: *Fifty Modern and Contemporary Dramatists*, Routledge, New York, 2015, p. 119.

¹⁶ Buciu, Victor Marian: *Ionesco-Eseu despre onto-retorica literaturii*, second edition, Editura EuroPress Group, București, 2012, <http://www.europressgroup.ro>, [access: February 18, 2020] p. 114. „În *Scaunele* există trei nivele spațiale în expansiune, de la spațiul strict determinat (casa), la spațiul deschis (insula) și spațiul indeterminat (apa). Este evidentă aici o progresivă dematerializare, obsesiva tendință ionesciană spre evanescență, atât de preocupantă în eseuri și jurnale. Spațiul limitat, închis, e, în *Scaunele*, obsesia Bătrânului.” (translation by the author).

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 115. „Tot Bătrânul este acela care își imaginează spațiul post-thanatic, lacustru, al descompunerii, în care *Leșurile noastre or să cadă unul lângă altul și vom putezi împreună în singurătatea acvatică* [...]. Simbol malefic, aici, apa înecă ființa și oprește cuvântul.” (translation by the author).

lasciviously, defiling herself. The streets are full of dead birds with missing eyes. The long-awaited speaker is a bovine being that moos.”¹⁸

Eugène Ionesco managed to propose through *The Chairs* a variety of questions with unlimited possibilities for answers: “The work of art must contain in itself and crystallize a greater complexity of the debates whose answer or whose answers or whose wide question is it” through the unlimited interpretations of the play.”¹⁹

Dramatic time and space

Entrepreneur of new valences through the paradoxes, opposites and ambivalences that crushed him, Ionesco manages to find a new reality, that of the unseen through the proposed dramatic themes.

The space suggested by the stage directions for *The Chairs* is shaped as a semicircle and includes several doors. This multi-door landscape is reminiscent of Alice, the main character in *Alice in Wonderland*, who, following the White Rabbit, finds herself in a similar space.²⁰ The situation in which Alice finds herself, trying to escape from the closed door space, is similar to that of the elders in the play. She escapes by finding a golden key that fits a door’s lock while the elders escape from the maze of doors through death. Lewis Carroll tries to justify the fantastic-imaginary story that Alice lives through with the help of mushrooms, the bottle of poison, the compromised cake, etc. as a pure alteration of perception due to hallucinogens and poisoning from bottles / cakes. The elders in *The Chairs*, due to their advanced age, can confuse reality with imagination. The doors as symbols represent the connection between two spaces insofar as they isolate them, they foretell the arrival of the characters. As it is a space made up of several doors, we can assume that it is a meeting place, and their purpose is not to crowd people at the entrance. “A sumptuous door with two hinges, and two other doors, placed facing each other, framing the sumptuous door [...]”²¹

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 161. „Bătrâna care vede făpturi invizibile în *Scaunele* miaună grotesc, danseză lasciv din buric, defulându-se. Străzile sunt pline de păsări moarte, cu ochii scoși. Oratorul îndelung așteptat este o ființă bovină, mugește.” (translation by the author).

¹⁹ Ionesco, Eugène, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 17. „Opera de artă trebuie să conțină în sine însăși și să cristalizeze o mai mare complexitate a dezbaterilor al căror răspuns sau a căror răspuns sau a căror mai amplă întrebare este ea.” (translation by the author).

²⁰ See Carroll, Lewis: *Alice în Țara Minunilor*, translated by Blaga Victor Emanuel, Editura Anthropos, Oradea, 2001, p. 12.

²¹ Ionesco, Eugène: *Cântăreața cheală, Lecția, Scaunele, Regele moare*, translated by Russo Vlad, Zografi Vlad, Editura Humanitas, București, 2010, p. 95. „O ușă somptuoasă cu două batante, și alte două uși, așezate față în față, încadrând ușa somptuoasă [...]” (translation by the author).

recalls the structure of the Orthodox Church, which is very similar. The royal doors are two in number and placed centrally, framed by two other doors called deacons that are the doors to the altar. When they are closed, they make part of the service invisible to the parishioners, they play a role in the religious ritual whose purpose is to link heaven and earth. In the context of the play, the central door is the one through which the light enters at the end and the one through which the Emperor enters. “[T]he emperor is represented by a cold, naked light [...]. The supernatural becomes visible through the light and then disappears, and man finds himself in nothingness, without being able to touch it.”²² The chairs placed symmetrically in front of the windows are reminiscent of the interiors of medieval castles, with a chaise longue sill or even a chair positioned next to it. “The old woman lights the gas lamp. Green light.”²³ The green light indicated by the author creates a mysterious atmosphere. The place of the action is vague, it can possibly be an abandoned lighthouse or a tower. This tower is reminiscent of the Tower of Babel. The story of the Tower of Babel would explain why the communication between the characters is flawed. The confusion regarding the place where the characters are found is confirmed: “Water all around... water as far as the eye can see.”²⁴ The Old Woman’s reply and the fact that they are on an island in an indefinite time, as a historical development, do not indicate an exact place and a temporal coordinate. The elders discuss how they used to have light until midnight. It is possible that they live close to the Arctic Circle, where in the summertime the sun does not set and there is still light at that time.

The time when the events take place is not specified. It presents a spatial landmark, a chronologically distant time when the city of Paris sank, but “it became extinct, four hundred thousand years ago.”²⁵ Thus they can become the survivors of an apocalyptic event, for example a flood.

The space outside the place where the Elders find themselves is created by sound in the stage directions: “a boat is heard gliding on the water.”²⁶ These sounds have a dramatic effect by amplifying the tension on the stage. The sound plays an important role because the invisible characters who arrive become believable,

²² Jean-Blain, Marguerite: *Eugène Ionesco: mistic sau necredincios*, traducere Grăinaru Monica, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2010, pp. 68-69. „[Î]mpăratul... este reprezentat printr-o lumină rece, goală [...]. Supranaturalul devine vizibil prin lumină și pe urmă dispare, iar omul se regăsește în neant, fără să-l fi putut atinge.” (translation by the author).

²³ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 96. „Bătrâna aprinde lampa cu gaz. Lumină verde.” (translation by the author).

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 97. „De jur împrejur apă... apă cât vezi cu ochii” (translation by the author).

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 99. „[S]-a stins, de patru sute de mii de ani.” (translation by the author).

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 107. „[S]e aude o barcă lunecând pe apă.” (translation by the author).

a bell rings for each newcomer and boats can be heard on the water. There is no certainty for the viewer whether the characters that are introduced through the sounds of the boats are real in the convention of the scene or whether the elders are dealing with the unreal. This illusion animates the action of the play. Ionesco claims that “Illusion cannot give answers to our whys.”²⁷ During the play, the invisible characters lose their identity, becoming the invisible crowd. The stage is filled with chairs and the lines of the cast confirm the unreality of the stage reality: “There is no place to throw a needle here.”²⁸ The agitation is created using the sounds of bells, boats, chaotic play with invisible characters, bringing chairs, opening / closing doors (even a doubling of the Old Woman is suggested to speed up the movement) on stage and using countless doors. “Now all the doors close and open on their own.”²⁹ These stage directions create the scenic reality of the invisible. Also in the stage directions, collisions between characters are mentioned, reminding us of the raw physical comedy, of buffoonery. The illusion of appearances in the Ionescian context would translate as follows: “This strange and dramatic or tragic feeling that everything is an illusion, that there is no reality, has tortured me all my life. There is, however, a reality of the unreal, a reality of illusion, which is not illusory. In any case (if the expression in any case can be put here), the illusion (the illusion of illusion) is real. The consciousness of the illusion confirms my reality.”³⁰ The culmination of the illusion created by the crowd with invisible people is the moment of doubling the character of the Old Woman by another actor in order to make the accelerated movement plausible. The purpose of the doubling would be to bring even more seats in a short time. Through rhythm and objects Ionesco “creates images that remain in the mind of the spectator, the chairs that flood the stage”³¹. After the moment had

²⁷ Ionesco, Eugène: *Căutarea intermitentă*, *op. cit.*, 2017, p. 93. „Iluzia nu poate răspunde de ce-urilor noastre.” (translation by the author).

²⁸ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 128. „Nu mai e loc s-arunci un ac aici.” (translation by the author).

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 130. „Acum toate ușile se închid și se deschid singure.” (translation by the author).

³⁰ Ionesco, Eugène: *Căutarea intermitentă*, *op. cit.*, 2017, p. 90. „Sentimentul acesta straniu și dramatic sau tragic că totul este iluzie, că nu exista realitate, m-a torturat toată viața. Există totuși o realitate a irealului, o realitate a iluziei, care nu e iluzorie. În tot cazul (dacă expresia în tot cazul poate fi pusă aici), iluzia (iluzia iluziei) este reală. Conștiința iluziei confirmă realitatea mea.” (translation by the author).

³¹ Griffiths, Trevor: *The Theatre Guide*, A&C Black Publishers Limited, third edition, Trowbridge, 2003, p. 166. https://issuu.com/thetwister2000/docs/theatre_guide [access: April 30, 2020]

reached its maximum point of agitation and the number of seats on the stage, “at least forty; more if possible”³², the rhythm begins to gradually decrease according to Ionescu’s indications. The author explains the relationship of the chairs with the song: (about how *The Chairs* should be played) “important in this play is to create the crowd. If there are fifty seats, one must give the impression that there are many more, that there is an enormous and unseen crowd. If it is played with only twelve chairs, all that remains is the drama of two helpless old people who believe or pretend to believe that they are receiving a few friends, etc., and the play is not what it should be, it no longer illustrates its purpose”³³.

The elders are withdrawn - “Geographically and generationally they are alone in a world of vacuous repetition and stifling material accumulation.”³⁴ In reality, the couple, almost a hundred years old, has a son about whom they talk vaguely. Any information they release to us about their son is denied afterwards. We can deduce that the connection with their son was broken. He doesn’t talk to them anymore because he left home angry. The reason for the upset is the story of the birds: “the streets are full of dead birds, you have taken out their eyes”³⁵. Assuming that the bird is a symbol of freedom, we can say that the dead birds on the streets, without their eyes are a metaphor for lost freedom. It is possible that their son felt trapped because of his parents isolation and therefore left home. The landscape described at the departure of their son presents an apocalyptic vision in which the sky is as red as blood and the song of the birds is composed of their moans. Due to the departure of their child, they consider that they have never had children. It is possible that their son died and because of the pain the old woman could not talk about this subject. Their loneliness, together with the abandonment felt by the two old people because they no longer talk to their own child, as the Old Man sums it up, “pain, regrets, remorse, that’s about it ... that’s all we have left ...”³⁶ could

³² Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 130. „[...] cel puțin patruzeci; mai multe dacă se poate.” (translation by the author).

³³ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2017, pp. 93-95. „[I]mportant în această piesă este să se creeze mulțimea. Dacă sunt cincizeci de scaune trebuie dată impresia că sunt mult mai multe, că există o mulțime enormă și nevăzută. Dacă se joacă numai cu douăsprezece scaune, nu rămâne decât drama a doi bătrâni neputincioși care cred sau se prefac a crede că primesc câțiva prieteni etc., iar piesa nu e ce trebuia să fie, nu-și mai ilustrează scopul.” (translated into English by the author of this article).

³⁴ Denney, F. John; Gale Maggie B: *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

³⁵ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 122. „[...] străzile sunt pline de păsări moarte, voi le-ați scos ochii” (translation by the author).

³⁶ *Ibidem*, „[...] durere, regrete, remușcări, cam asta-i tot... asta-i tot ce ne-a rămas...” (translation by the author).

justify the suicide in the end. The old man cries pitifully, remembering how he left his “mother to die alone in a ditch”³⁷ because he was preoccupied with getting to a ball. Not finding her when he returned, the Old Man concludes that the sons are leaving their mothers and killing their father all the time, thus alluding to the Oedipal myth. The stories of the two elders succeed each other, each telling his own drama. This moment of pain alternately described by the two is immediately canceled by mutual contradictions when they become tearful. The time of old age is also the time of separation. Through this consolation or induction of memories, the Old Woman has taught the Old Man to deal with the immediate present. The remarks in which the truth of the facts is questioned reveal a deep pain. Among their inconsistencies are the traumas accumulated during their lifetime. The characters have a complex love relationship that includes love as a parent, as a couple, as a friendly attachment.

The time and space of light

The place we are in, as the Elder says, is a science conference: “You don’t bring young children to scientific conferences.”³⁸ From here we can conclude that the message he is working on for “[...] two hours a day”³⁹ is scientific in nature.

The seats turned with their backs to the audience create a theater inside the theater that has invisible spectators. Repeating the act of receiving guests on stage together with bringing the seats becomes an iterative movement. Cyclicity is also suggested in the text by the circular space and the ballet of circular movements performed by the elders. The author’s stage directions are: “[F]ollowing the trajectories of small circles”.⁴⁰ The elders reach symmetrical positions each near the windows on the stage. Their actions are similar, they each talk to insubstantial guests. The author’s indications are to stay by the window until the end of the play. The joy of the elders’ dialogue with imaginary characters is similar to the ecstatic delirium produced by a psychosis. The ritual performed by the circular movements opens another dimension for them. They can barely perceive each other, because now the invisible world is revealed to them. They see the unseen world, but they no longer see each other in the physical world. But by shouting, they can still hear each other. The invisible characters become impatient, the rhythm accelerates and fanfare music is heard.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, „[...] mama să moară singură într-un șanț.” (translation by the author).

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 126. „Nu se vine cu copii mici la conferințe științifice.” (translation by the author).

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 111. „[...] două ore pe zi.” (translation by the author).

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 130. „[U]rmând traiectoriile unor mici cercuri” (translation by the author).

The space and the time are sacred, ready to celebrate the coming of the Emperor, whom they have waited for all their lives: “When the sacred manifest itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the non-reality of the vast surrounding expanse.”⁴¹ The emperor is accompanied by a light that enters through the windows and the central door, but it is a cold light that absorbs energy into eternity: “The light that enters through the open door and through the windows has reached its maximum intensity; but it is a cold, naked light”⁴². The circular movements proposed by the author that brought the elders next to the windows and through which the ritual that preceded their trance manifested itself, now lead to an abeyance that is frozen in place. This anticipation is similar to rigor mortis, to death, to the last stage after death. Considering that physical death took place at the sight of light, that is, when the Emperor entered, and the characters no longer live in the seen reality, suicide would be the last form of liberation in the transcendental world. Ionesco has the ability “[...] to detach from the banality of the contingent tragic and absurd meaning of existence, the fatality of death, the splendor and nothingness of the human condition”.⁴³

The emperor is light, but a cold one, they call him Sun, but he is the type of light that paradoxically feeds on life, he does not maintain it. The two elders cannot cope with the manifestation of the sacred, in Ionesco’s words “[...] it is roughly said, but it’s honest”⁴⁴ and throw themselves out of the window.

The original title of the play *The Chairs* was *The Speaker*⁴⁵. From this fact we can understand the importance of this character on stage. After his appearance,

⁴¹ Eliade, Mircea, *Sacrul și profanul*, third edition, translated by Prelipeanu Brândușă, Editura Humanitas, București, 2007, p. 19. „Când sacrul se manifestă printr-o hierofanie oarecare, nu se produce doar o ruptură în spațiul omogen, ci și revelația unei realități absolute, care se opune non-realității imensei întinderi înconjurătoare.” Translation acquired from the *Sacred and Profane* by Mircea Eliade page 21, https://sufipathoflove.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/eliade_mircea_the_sacred_and_the_profane_1963.pdf [access: June 21, 2019].

⁴² Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 138. „Lumina care intră prin ușa deschisă și prin ferestre a ajuns la intensitate maximă; e însă o lumină rece, goală.” (translation by the author).

⁴³ Boerescu, Dan-Silviu: *Cei cinci români care au strălucit la Paris: Ionescu, Cioran, Eliade, Brâncuși, Enescu*, Editura Integral, București 2018. p. 11. „[...] de a desprinde din banalitatea contingentului sensul tragic și absurd al existenței, fatalitatea morții, splendoarea și neantul condiției umane”, (translation by the author).

⁴⁴ Ionesco, Eugen: *Eu*, Editura Echinoc, Cluj, 1990, p. 172. „[...] e spus urât, dar e pe față.” (translation by the author).

⁴⁵ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 242.

the Old Man has a monologue after which he hopes that they will remain forever in people's memory due to the message that will change humanity. The elders sacrifice themselves for the message they had to convey: "to be united in time and in eternity, if in space it is not possible, as we were in a plague: to die at the very same moment".⁴⁶ They are convinced that their life was not in vain and through the message they carry humanity will evolve, and the Old Man would thus become relevant. With the elders throwing themselves out of the window, the strong light that invades the scene ceases to exist: "[T]he muted sound with which two bodies fall into the water. The light that penetrated through the windows and through the big door disappeared"⁴⁷. This change of perception after the death of the two leads us to think that we saw the scene from the point of view of the Elders and everything that was illustrated up to this point is what they themselves experienced, not what was real.

The words written on the board by the Speaker could be a farewell to God.⁴⁸ The pun in French is impossible to reproduce in Romanian: *Adieu* and *A Dieu*, the two are pronounced identically⁴⁹, but they can also mean: to God, belonging to God, or of God, depending on the context. In the translated Romanian version the words written by the Orator (in three blocks) are: "ANGELBREAD ... NNAA NNM NWNWNWN V ... AADIO ADIO APA"⁵⁰. The message left by the Speaker may represent the suicide note of the elders. The suicide of the two was not accidental but premeditated. This can be demonstrated by the interaction with invisible guests, the preparation of the Speaker to convey the message, the positioning of the seats. The thought of suicide may develop in some people due to a simultaneous psychological state, "[T]hese two states are the perception of being a burden and the feeling of not belonging."⁵¹ This idea includes the fact that: "My death will be worth more than my life for family, friends, society."⁵²

⁴⁶ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 152. „[...] să fim uniți în timp și-n veșnicie, dacă în spațiu nu se poate, așa cum am fost în urgie: să murim în aceeași clipă.” (translation by the author).

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 152. „[...] zgomotul surd cu care cad două corpuri în apă. Lumina care pătrunde prin ferestre și prin ușa cea mare a dispărut.” (translation by the author).

⁴⁸ Marguerite, Jean-Blain: *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 153. „ÎNGERPÂINE... NNAA NNM NWNWNWN V... AADIO ADIO APA.” (translation by the author).

⁵¹ Joiner, Thomas: *Mituri despre sinucidere*, trad. Necula Cătălin, Editura Trei, București, 2013, p. 14. „[A]ceste două stări sunt percepția de a fi o povară și sentimentul lipsei de apartenență.” (translation by the author).

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 15. „Moartea mea o să valoreze mai mult decât viața mea pentru familie, prieteni, societate” (translation by the author).

– through the message they had to convey to humanity. The role of the Speaker is to transmit the message left by the Elder to the world, although he is deaf and dumb. There is a myth in popular culture that persons that commit suicide leave a farewell note. In reality, only twenty-five percent use this method⁵³ to explain their gesture and to say goodbye. But the lack of a note raises even more questions about the act of suicide than its presence.

About the Orator, Ionesco says: “[H]e exists no more nor less than the other characters. He is as invisible as the others, just as real or unreal; no more, no less. It’s just that you can’t do without his visible presence.”⁵⁴ The Speaker, when he starts sending the message, addresses the unseen crowd of guests. The absence of the crowd is created precisely by the paradox between what we see and what we do not see. Ionesco teaches us how to create absence: “[...] you can only create absence through opposition to some presences”⁵⁵. The theme of the absence of the characters embodied by the actors in *The Chairs* and the presence of the Emperor marked by light can be correlated with the author’s concern to debate absence in his works: “[...] the absence of the absolute or its presence brings back, in a beautiful paradox, everything to nothingness”⁵⁶. The apparition of the Speaker can dismantle the myth of unreal characters in the sense that they do not exist in the stage reality. If until now the game of the two was the interaction with the unreal, now it becomes an interaction with a visible reality. We hear the crowd as ambient sound only after the Speaker leaves the stage, only from that moment onwards is there the stage direction that the invisible crowd is heard. This presence of sounds can nullify the credibility of the characters’ reality. Does the Speaker’s message exist or is it void? It is possible that the message is nothing, an illusory salvation that only makes sense to the Elder: “In a world that begs for salvation from the courts of immanence, false saviors occupy the stage. In front of the crowds or, most often, in small groups, they place their (self) fallacious speeches. A theological braggart is the Old Man in *The Chairs*. And he believes himself, of course, the only one called to save the sick and lost humanity. The illusion that

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 128-136.

⁵⁴ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 240. „[...] el nu există nici mai mult, nici mai puțin decât celelalte personaje. E la fel de nevăzut ca și ceilalți, tot atât de real sau de ireal; nici mai mult, nici mai puțin. Atât doar că nu te poți lipsi de prezența lui vizibilă.” (translation by the author).

⁵⁵ *Ibidem* „[...] nu poți crea absența decât prin opoziție față de niște prezențe.” (translation by the author).

⁵⁶ Ionescu, Gelu: *Anatomia unei negații*, Editura Minerva, București, 1991, p. 17. „[...] absența absolutului sau prezența lui readuce, într-un frumos paradox, totul la nimicnicie.” (translation by the author).

he can accomplish salvation is complete.”⁵⁷ If the message really existed - then the death of the Elders, just like their lives, was in vain, they did not contribute to the evolution of mankind according to their beliefs. But if the revealing message does exist and the Speaker is unable to understand it and therefore cannot convey it, the elders can hope that someone will discover their message, no one knows when though. There is also the possibility of the message being so deep that the Speaker will remain mute, speechless. The third option seems the closest to Ionesco’s world. After the Speaker exits the stage, Eugène Ionesco adds details about the empty moment of the scene: “[...] (scene / pause / silence) to be long, you have to hear for a long time the murmurs, the noises of water and wind, as if coming from nothing, as if it came out of nothing.”⁵⁸

The last image the spectators see is that of an empty scene, devoid of human presence, but full of chairs. The noise from the invisible audience diminishes slowly as the curtain falls. Ionesco notes that this sequence should have a long span so that the real audience is imprinted with this ending. The end of the show: “[N]othing would begin to live inexplicably (this is the effect beyond reason, true in improbability, which we seek and want to achieve) perfecting the complete mixing of books and the confusion of logic.”⁵⁹ It is very important that the absence be perceived: “Given that the theme of *The Chairs* is the ontological vacuum, or absence, I think that the very expression of this absence should be the last, final moment of the play.” Felix Alexa interprets *The Chairs* as “the emptiness in which we struggle, an image of humanity in search of its own identity and a purpose to justify our lives. Illusory search. We are the remnants of humanity.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Buciu, Victor, Marian: *op. cit.*, p. 170. „Într-o lume care imploră salvarea de la instanțe ale imanenței, falșii salvatori ocupă scena. Înaintea mulțimilor ori, cel mai adesea, în cadre restrânse, ei își plasează discursurile (auto)falacioase. Un fanfaron al teologicului este Bătrânul din Scaunele. Și el se crede, desigur, singurul chemat să mântuie umanitatea bolnavă și rătăcită.” (translation by the author).

⁵⁸ Ionesco, Eugène: *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 240. „[...] (scena/pauza/liniștea) să fie lungă, trebuie să se audă multă vreme murmurele, zgomotele apei și ale vântului, ca și cum ar veni de la nimic, ca și cum ar veni din nimic.” (translation by the author).

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 242. „[...] nimicul ar începe să trăiască în mod inexplicabil (acesta e efectul dincolo de rațiune, adevărat în neverosimil, pe care-l căutăm și vrem să-l obținem) desăvârșind amestecarea completă a cărților și încurcarea logicii.” (translation by the author).

⁶⁰ Alexa, Felix: in: Ichim Florica: *Eugène Ionesco (Eugen Ionescu) pe scenă în România*, Editura Cheiron, București, 2010, p. 64. „Dat fiind că tema *Scaunelor* este *vidul* ontologic, sau *absența*, cred că tocmai expresia acestei absențe ar trebui să constituie momentul ultim, definitiv al piesei.” (translation by the author).

The Chairs is placed in a universal time and space, or better yet beyond time and space. There are multiple story lines within the play, one of the two elders, another of the unseen public manifested through the absences that appear and a story of the memories that are being relived through the course of our life. Although the elements that are used to build the play can be characterized as not being absurd, all of them put together makes them absurd.

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Thomas Bernhard: Der Theatermacher

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Abstract

This study focuses on the playwright Thomas Bernhard as a genuine creator of modern theatre starting from his play *Der Theatermacher / The Histrionic*, a controversial play issuing political and social aspects. Discussing the distinctive features and themes of this play, I will point out why Thomas Bernhard can either be liked or disliked by critics or the audience. Further a short comparison will be made with other classical plays, themes and motives, as well as underlying the condition of the performer on stage.

Keywords:

Thomas Bernhard; *Der Theatermacher (The Histrionic)*; social and political critique; misogyny; the actor / actress as performer.

Rezumat

Acest studiu radiografiază imaginea dramaturgului Thomas Bernhard ca pe un creator de teatru modern, pornind de la *Der Theatermacher / Creatorul de teatru*, o piesă controversată, din cauza aspectelor politice și sociale aduse în discuție. Analizând succint trăsăturile distincte ale acestei piese de teatru, voi evidenția motivul pentru care Thomas Bernhard poate fi iubit ori urât de către critici sau public. Totodată se va efectua o scurtă comparație cu alte piese clasice, pornind de la tematică și motive, cu evidențierea condiției actorului în sine.

Cuvinte cheie:

Thomas Bernhard; *Creatorul de teatru*; critică socială și politică; misoginism; condiția actorului / actriței ca interpret.

Thomas Bernhard gehört zu den umstrittensten Autoren der Gegenwartsliteratur, vor allem in Bezug auf seine Theatertexte. Die Vieldeutigkeit, welche von seinen Texten ausgeht, sorgt sowohl beim Leser als auch beim Zuschauer für Schwierigkeiten in der Deutung. Die Art und Weise, wie Bernhard an verschiedene Themen herangeht, kann ohne tiefgehende Kenntnisse in den Bereichen Literatur, Philosophie, Wissenschaft und Geschichte nicht so leicht verstanden werden. Somit lassen sich zahlreiche Bezüge zu den Werken von

Goethe, Cervantes, Molière, Shakespeare, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Kant, Spinoza oder zu Persönlichkeiten aus dem „Rad der Geschichte“¹ wie Marie Curie, Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolf Hitler, Winston Churchill u.a. feststellen. Das beste Beispiel hierfür ist sein Theaterstück *Der Theatermacher*, auf das sich die vorliegende Studie beruft.

In den Kreisen der Theaterwissenschaftler und -kritiker gibt es keine Grauzone in Bezug auf Thomas Bernhard: Er wird von diesen entweder als Meister des modernen Theaters gepriesen oder als solcher missbilligt. Der österreichische Dramatiker nimmt Stellung zu politischen Ereignissen, Weltanschauungen oder aktuellen Themen und wagt es diese in seinen Texten zu äußern, so dass die Kritik auf seine Werke entweder „völlig verständnislos“ reagiert oder ihm Beifall gewährt, eben weil „er sich nicht um eine eigene Meinung herumdrück[t]“². Demzufolge wurden ihm Etiketten wie folgende verliehen: „Zeit- und Gesellschaftskritiker“³, „Unterganghofer“⁴, „Alpenbeckett und Menschenfeind“⁵, „Kryptokomiker“ oder „Der größte lebende Schimpfer“⁶.

In dieser Hinsicht müssen sich Liebhaber der Bernhardschen Texte von Anfang an darüber im Klaren sein, dass „Die ganze Welt ist eine Bühne“⁷, sodass „ernsthaft[es] Theater zu spielen“, in der Gegenwart eher eine „Donquichoterie“ sei.⁸ Die Konfrontation des Alltags mit den künstlerischen Idealen werde demzufolge ein Kampf gegen die „Windmühlen“⁹, und so kann man sich als Leser oder Zuschauer mit Cervantes Don Quijote identifizieren, wenn man dann

¹ Bernhard, Thomas: *Der Theatermacher*, in: *Dramen*, Band V, herausgegeben von Martin Huber, Bernhard Judex, Manfred Mittermayer, Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin, 2011, S. 103.

² Schmidt-Dengler, Wendelin: *Von der Schwierigkeit, Thomas Bernhard zu lesen. Zu Thomas Bernhards „Gehen“*, in: *Bernhard. Annäherungen*, herausgegeben von Manfred Jurgensen, Franke Verlag, Bern + München, 1981, S. 123 f.

³ Vgl. Scheichl, Sigurd Paul und Hilde, in: *Bernhard. Annäherungen*, herausgegeben von Jurgensen, Manfred, Franke Verlag, Bern + München, 1981, S. 124.

⁴ Zitiert nach Franz Schuh: *Unterganghofer. Thomas Bernhard in Anekdote und Selbstzeugnis*, in: *Bernhard. Annäherungen*, herausgegeben von Jurgensen, Manfred, Franke Verlag, Bern + München, 1981, S. 124.

⁵ *Der Spiegel* vom 31. Juli 1972, S. 98.

⁶ Henscheid, Eckhard: in: *Pardon* 12 (1973), H. 7, S. 21 und 23.

⁷ Shakespeare, William: *Wie es euch gefällt*, Übersetzung August Wilhelm Schlegel, Reclam, Stuttgart, 1964, 2. Akt, 7. Szene, S. 38. Dieses Zitat steht in direkter Verbindung mit Bruscons künstlerischem Größenwahnsinn seine „Menschheitskomödie“ bzw. Welt-Komödie zu vollenden, die dennoch durch ihre Unvollendung scheitert.

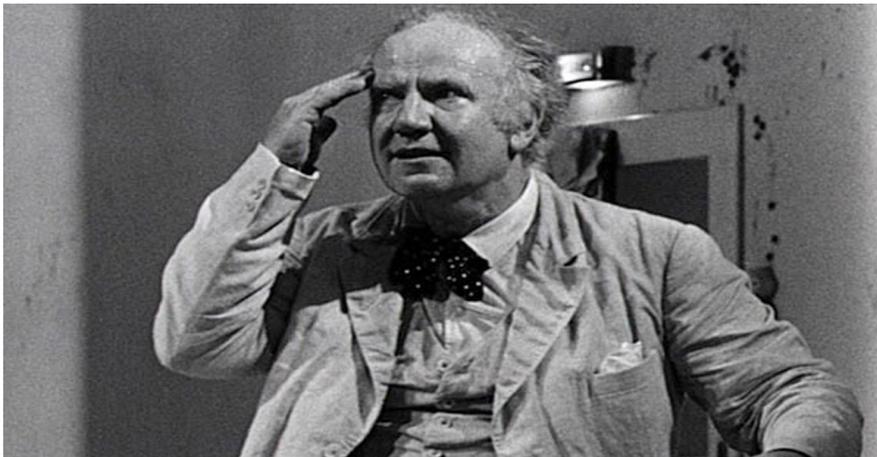
⁸ Reinhard, Max, in: Thomas Bernhard, *Der Theatermacher*, Über Theatermacher. Bilder und Texte, Burgtheater Nr. 1, Wien, 1986, S. 49.

⁹ Ebenda.

Gefahr läuft nichts zu verstehen, denn entweder wird einem alles vorgekaut, inklusive der Applaus auf der Bühne, oder man bleibt verwundert.¹⁰ Das ist nun einmal die Wirkung genau auf den Punkt getroffen, welche Thomas Bernhard beim Publikum verursacht.

***Der Theatermacher* – eine potentielle Menschheitskomödie**

Es ist faszinierend zu erfahren, wie es überhaupt zur Uraufführung des *Theatermachers* gekommen ist. Josef Kaut, der Präsident der Salzburger Festspiele, veranlasste Thomas Bernhard 1983 dazu, ein „Stück ganz besonderer Art“ zu schreiben, denn seine Theaterstücke seien „für alle Beteiligten unwiederholbare grandiose theatralische Ereignisse“.¹¹ Am 17. August 1985 war es dann soweit, dass die Premiere des *Theatermachers* als Koproduktion der Salzburger Festspiele und des Schauspielhauses Bochum im Salzburger Landestheater aufgeführt wurde. Zur Besetzung gehörten: Traugott Buhre in der Rolle des Staatsschauspielers Bruscon, Kirsten Dene spielte Frau Bruscon, Martin Schwab den Sohn Ferruccio, Josefin Platt die Tochter Sarah und Hugo Lindinger tauchte in die Rolle des Wirten.¹²



Traugott Buhre als Bruscon in Thomas Bernhards *Der Theatermacher*¹³

¹⁰ Vgl. ebd.

¹¹ Zitiert nach Mittermayer, Manfred: *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Thomas Bernhard und Josef Kaut*, in: Thomas Bernhard: *Der Theatermacher, Kommentar, Dramen*, Band V, herausgegeben von Martin Huber, Judex Bernhard, Manfred Mittermayer, Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin, 2011, S. 364.

¹² Vgl. ebenda, S. 370.

¹³ <https://www.bing.com/images/search>, [letzter Zugriff: 16.09.2020].

In Rumänien kam es leider erst nach der Wende von 1989¹⁴ zu einer Uraufführung des *Theatermachers*. Autoren wie Thomas Bernhard passten eben durch ihre Problematik nicht in das Konzept der kommunistischen Ära. Mittels gelungener Übersetzungen der Texte einiger österreichischen Schriftsteller der Gegenwartsliteratur kam es dazu, dass Bernhards Texte auch das „breite Publikum“, nicht nur die akademischen Kreise, erreichte.¹⁵ Am 19. Juni 2001 erfolgte die Landeserstaufführung von Bernhards *Theatermacher* unter der Spielleitung von Alexandru Dabija am Bukarester Privattheater ACT; die Hauptrollen besetzten dabei Marcel Iureş und Valeria Seciu, was zu äußerst positiven Pressestimmen führte.¹⁶



Valeria Seciu als Frau Bruscon in Thomas Bernhards *Der Theatermacher*, Spielleitung Alexandru Dabija¹⁷

¹⁴ Die Dezemberrevolution von 1989 führte zum Sturz des kommunistischen Regimes, der Ceauşescu-Ära, in Rumänien. Das Land wurde eine Republik, in welcher die Bürger nach Jahrzehnten wieder frei waren, ihre Meinung zu äußern, zu reisen, zu schreiben und veröffentlichen, was sie wollten. Vorher, in der Diktatur, gab es Zensur, Reiseverbot in westliche Länder und keine Meinungsfreiheit.

¹⁵ Ringler-Pascu, Eleonora: „*Rebellen aus Österreich in Rumänien? Nein danke!*“ *Ansätze zur Rezeption der dramatischen Werke von Thomas Bernhard und Peter Handke in Rumänien*, in: *Das rumänische Theater nach 1989. Seine Beziehungen zum deutschsprachigen Raum*, herausgegeben von Alina Mazilu, Medana Weident, Irina Wolf, Frank & Timme Verlag, Berlin, 2010, S. 377.

¹⁶ Vgl. ebenda, S. 380.

¹⁷ <https://www.rador.ro/2020/08/01/portret-actrita-valeria-seciu-o-combinatie-unica-de-talent-farmec-si-sensibilitate>, [letzter Zugriff: 16.09.2020].

Der Titel *Der Theatermacher* wird im Drama mit folgenden Synonymen von der Hauptperson, dem Staatsschauspieler Bruscon, erklärt: Erstmals sei ein Theatermacher eine Person, die eine Begabung für das Theater besitze, die also ein „Talent für Theater“ habe, folglich ein „Theatermensch“¹⁸ sei. Außerdem sei ein „Theatermacher“ ein „Fallensteller“¹⁹, zumindest fühlt sich Bruscon als solcher. Das zentrale Thema, um welches das gesamte Theaterstück kreist, ist die Bedingung eines Schauspielers als Theatermensch, als Teil der Bühne, als Dramaturg, Spielleiter, abhängig von der Zustimmung oder Abneigung des Publikums. Folglich wird dabei die Absurdität der menschlichen Existenz, des Theatermachers, dargestellt, der ohne Mühe keinen Genuss erlangen kann. Auch wenn ein Genuss erzielt wird, hält dieses Gefühl jedoch nur kurzzeitig an, bis es sich im Nichts auflöst. Der Theatermacher ist einem brutalen Schicksal, einem sinnlosen Unterfangen ausgeliefert, ähnlich wie Sisyphos, denn kaum meint er den Höhepunkt erreicht zu haben, rollt sein Leben erneut in einen Tiefpunkt, wo die ganze Mühe von Neuem beginnt. In diesem Hinblick kann Bruscon mit Goethes Faust verglichen werden, der „vom Himmel“ die „schönsten Sterne“ und von der Erde „jede höchste Lust“²⁰ fordert, wie ihn Mephistopheles als Menschentypus im *Prolog im Himmel* beschreibt oder wie dieser sich selbst als Geständnis in einem Gespräch mit seinem Famulus Wagner darstellt: „Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach in meiner Brust, / Die eine will sich von der andern trennen“.²¹ Beide Gestalten, sowohl Bruscon als auch Faust, sind ewig unzufrieden, unharmonische Menschen, weil sie ihren Verstand und ihr Gemüt, ihre Leidenschaft, nicht in Harmonie bringen können. Eben daraus entsteht ihre existentielle Tragik als Geistes- und Alltagsmenschen.

Das Theater als Experiment, „auf unsern deutschen Bühnen / Probiert ein jeder was er mag“²², als Versuch, führt den Leser oder Zuschauer auf Goethes *Faust, Vorspiel auf dem Theater* zurück. In diesem Sinne verflochten sich die literaturtheoretischen Anschauungen Bruscons / Bernhards mit jenen Goethes / der drei Personen, die im Vorspiel zu Wort kommen: dem Theaterdirektor, dem Dichter und der lustigen Person. Bruscon kritisiert den „Dilettantismus“ auf den deutschen Bühnen und warnt vor dem Mangel an richtigem „Sprechen“²³. Es geht allen dabei um die Aussagekraft des Theaterstückes, also um eine Problematik,

¹⁸ Bernhard, Thomas: *Der Theatermacher*, 2011, S. 100.

¹⁹ Ebd., S. 114.

²⁰ Goethe, Johann Wolfgang: *Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil*, Reclam Verlag, Stuttgart, 2000, S. 11.

²¹ Ebd., S. 33.

²² Goethe, Johann Wolfgang: *Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil*, S. 9.

²³ Bernhard, Thomas: *Der Theatermacher*, 2011, S. 160.

welche zum Nachdenken auffordert, aber auch um die Unterhaltungskomponente und um Profit. Demzufolge soll alles, der „ganze Kreis der Schöpfung“, das gesamte Rad der Geschichte, mit allen Gefühlen, der Freude und Trauer, in Stücken, Sequenzen dargeboten werden, da die Kritiker und das Publikum sowieso immer alles „zerpflücken“²⁴, denn „sie zu befriedigen ist schwer“²⁵ und sie werden es doch „vor die Säuewerfen“.²⁶ Darin lässt sich auch das Tragisch-Komische im *Theatermacher* erkennen.

Einer der Ausgangspunkte für seine Bernhards Ironie war der „Notlicht-Skandal“ am Ende der Premiere von *Der Ignorant und der Wahnsinnige* 1972.²⁷ Die zuständigen österreichischen Behörden verweigerten die vollständige Verdunkelung des Theatersaales aufgrund der damaligen Gesetzgebung. Diese Tatsache veränderte die Auswirkung der Vorstellung auf das Publikum und führte zu einem Presse-Skandal mit gerichtlichen Folgen für den damaligen Spielleiter der Vorstellung, Claus Peymann. Dieser Skandal wird durch Bruscon in seiner panischen Angst und Besessenheit getarnt verkörpert, die Furcht also, dass sein „Rad der Geschichte“ nicht in einer vollständigen Finsternis auf der Bühne beendet werden könne, wenn der Feuerwehrhauptmann keine entsprechende Genehmigung dafür erteile, denn nicht einmal das Notlicht solle mehr wahrzunehmen sein. Die Finsternis ist hiermit eine Metapher für den Theaterbesucher, der beim vollendeten Durchlauf des Kreises der Schöpfung, der gesamten Geschichte der Menschheit, in dieser „Menschheitskomödie“²⁸ völlig im Dunkeln bleiben soll, sich Fragen stellen und nicht durch eine irdische oder überirdische Macht in das Licht, „in die Klarheit“²⁹, oder Tragödie geführt werden soll.

Die Besessenheit von Bruscon findet ihre Lösung im Absurden. Der Vertreter der zuständigen Behörde ist gar nicht anwesend, nicht einmal die geplante Anzahl der Zuschauer, sogar die wenigen dreißig Anwesenden stürzen aus dem Saal hinaus, weil das leitmotivische Donnern – der Blitz eingeschlossen – das Pfarrhaus in Brand gesetzt hat. Somit endet die Vergleichs-Klimax des großenwahnsinnigen Bruscon: „Shakespeare / Goethe / Bruscon“³⁰ in einem persönlichen und schauspielerischen Fiasko. Jener, der gegen alle missgünstigen Zustände

²⁴ Goethe, Johann Wolfgang: *Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil*, S. 5.

²⁵ Ebd. S. 6.

²⁶ Bernhard, Thomas: *Der Theatermacher*, 2011, S. 178.

²⁷ Bernhard, Thomas: *Der Theatermacher, Kommentar*, S. 370.

²⁸ Ebd.

²⁹ Goethe, Johann Wolfgang: *Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil*, Reclam Verlag, Stuttgart, 2000, S. 11.

³⁰ Bernhard, Thomas: *Der Theatermacher*, 2011, S. 220.

gekämpft hat, der meint, alle Hindernisse überwunden zu haben, befindet sich aber in einem leeren Saal, wobei das Unwetter sich auch noch obendrein auf ihn und seine Darsteller ergießt.

Thomas Bernhard verarbeitet in seinem Theaterstück unter anderem auch politische Themen, ironisiert große geschichtliche und wissenschaftliche Persönlichkeiten, übt Kritik an der österreichischen Gesellschaft, am Kapitalismus und Sozialismus, am Nationalsozialismus, am Provinzdenken seiner Zeitgenossen, thematisiert den Frauenhass, das Krankhafte und den Größenwahnsinn mit Hilfe seiner zentralen Figur Bruscon.

Die vehemente Kritik gegen Österreich wird bereits durch die Festlegung des Ortes deutlich, wo sich das gesamte Geschehen abspielen soll: Das tatsächlich geografisch vorhandene Atzbach in Vöcklabruck wird durch einen fiktiven Ort „Utzbach wie Butzbach“ ersetzt.³¹ Hier, in der „Provinz“, sollen angeblich bloß 280 Einwohner in einem permanenten Schweinegestank, Staub und einer mit Müll überladenen Landschaft leben, „alles Kloake“³², demzufolge eine trostlose Landschaft, in welcher „Kulturlosigkeit“ herrscht³³, eben in einer „Zwerggemeinde“³⁴, sodass Utzbach im „Rad der Geschichte“ der Steinzeit entsprechen könnte - „ein Nest“³⁵. Auch die Menschen sind hier primitiv. Der Wirt hat nicht einmal das nur 10 km weitergelegene Sankt Radegund besucht. Die Bevölkerung besteht aus vorwiegend alten Leuten und eine Theaterveranstaltung habe es in Utzbach seit Jahrzehnten keine mehr gegeben. Das ist der soziale und geografische Kontext, in welchem sich Bruscon plötzlich wiederfindet. Eben vor diesem Publikum nimmt sich der Theatermacher vor, der sich mit keinen anderen Theaterschöpfern als Voltaire, Shakespeare vergleicht, seine Komödie vorzuspielen, die ins Französische und Italienische übersetzt werden solle, denn das ungebildete österreichische Publikum diene ihm als Versuchskaninchen, zum „Ausprobieren“ eben.³⁶

Der dominante Schweinegestank, der ebenfalls thematisiert wird, stammt von der Schweinemastanstalt des Ortes her, und außerdem gebe es in diesem Utzbach bloß „Kirchen“ und „Nazis“, sodass ein solcher Schauplatz der Aufführung als „Strafe Gottes“ wahrzunehmen sei.³⁷ Zu beachten ist die Tatsache, dass die Premiere

³¹ Ebd., S. 101.

³² Ebd., S. 171.

³³ Ebd., S. 110.

³⁴ Ebd., S. 103.

³⁵ Ebd., S. 111.

³⁶ Ebd., S. 113.

³⁷ Ebd., S. 106.

des *Theatermachers* 1985 im Landestheater Salzburg als Bühnenausstattung mit „700 bis 800 Fliegen und Kübeln voller stinkendem Schweinetrank“³⁸ hätte stattfinden sollen, um für einen wahrheitsgetreuen Geruch zu sorgen, was erneut zu einem Presseskandal führte. Thomas Bernhard provoziert folglich Politiker, Journalisten und Vertreter der Behörden gleichermaßen.

Das österreichische Volk wird durch Bruscons Abstammung, durch die österreichische Urgroßmutter „Irrsiegler“, als „pervers“, „grotesk“, „minderbemittelt“, „unzurechnungsfähig“ charakterisiert.³⁹ Auch in Bezug auf die nationalen Musikhelden Mozart und Schubert nimmt er sich kein Blatt vor den Mund, denn er würde zwischen den einzelnen Szenen für das Publikum lieber Verdi ertönen lassen, obwohl ihm das Schweigen aussagekräftiger vorkomme. Außerdem meint er über die Österreicher, diese verträten eine „widerwärtige Präpotenz“, seien nicht „liebenswert“, voller „Mißgunst“, „niederträchtige[r] Gesinnung“, „Fremdenfeindlichkeit“, „Kunsthäß“, „Stupidität“, wüssten nicht was „Kunst“ sei, würden „Scharlatanimsus“ verehren.⁴⁰ Für den Staatsschauspieler seien vor allem die kleinen österreichischen Orte solche der „Menschheitsverdummung“⁴¹, denn in den Voralpen seien die Leute menschlich, während sie in den Alpen „verdorben und verderbt“ seien.⁴² Er beschuldigt sie, dumm zu sein, „Idioten“, „Analphabeten“, nicht „sozialistisch“, sondern „nationalsozialistisch“, keine wahren Katholiken zu sein.⁴³ Dadurch ist für Bruscon Hitlers Bild als Bühnenausstattung besonders wichtig, denn auf dem Lande seien alle Männerportraits irgendwie Hitler: „alle sind hier Hitler“.⁴⁴ Demzufolge sei Österreich, „Austria“, „L’Autriche“ die „Eiterbeule Europas“, wo der Wald eine „Schottergrube“ und die Wiese „ein Zementwerk“ sei und anstelle von Menschen nur noch „Nazis“ anzutreffen seien: „wo ein Mensch war / ist ein Nazi“.⁴⁵

Es ist somit kein Wunder, dass Bernhard sich infolge solcher Kritik zahlreiche Gegner geschaffen hat. Einer von diesen ist der damalige Finanzminister und spätere Bundeskanzler Franz Vranitzky, der Bernhard beschuldigt hat, „sich die eigene Verklemmung vom Leib zu schreiben“ und dafür auch noch gute Bezahlung zu fordern, wobei ihn der Autor als „Säckelwart“ eines „unter

³⁸ Bernhard, Thomas: *Der Theatermacher, Kommentar*, S. 371.

³⁹ Bernhard, Thomas: *Der Theatermacher*, 2011, S. 123.

⁴⁰ Ebd.

⁴¹ Ebd., S. 133.

⁴² Ebd., S. 207.

⁴³ Ebd., S. 140.

⁴⁴ Ebd., S. 180.

⁴⁵ Ebd., S. 140.

pseudosozialistischer Präpotenz in sich selbst delirierenden Kleinstaates⁴⁶ abgestempelt hat. 1985 erklärt der damalige Unterrichtsminister Herbert Moritz, der frühere Vorgesetzte Bernhards beim *Demokratischen Volksblatt*, diesen als ein „Thema für die Wissenschaft“, einen reifen Studienfall für die Psychiatrie, so zumindest wird seine metaphorisch beißende Aussage von Bernhard-Anhängern gedeutet.⁴⁷

Die wohl heftigste anti-österreichische Aussage Thomas Bernhards ist in der kategorischen Absage zur Aufführung des *Theatermachers* 1987 in Brüssel im Rahmen der „Europalia“ zu vermerken: „Ich darf mich in Brüssel nicht von den österreichischen Ministerialbeamten als Kulturpolizisten mißbrauchen und exekutieren lassen. Meinen Theatermacher auf dieser durch und durch von nichts anderem, als von unserem tödlichen katholisch-nationalsozialistischen Ungeist zusammengerotteten Europalia zu spielen, ist für mich absolut unzumutbar.“⁴⁸ Durch die beißend kritische Stimme Bruscons in Hinblick auf das Heimatland und seine Mitbürger ist somit eindeutig jene von Thomas Bernhard zu vernehmen.

In der Person von Agathe Bruscon wird die Frau als solche angeklagt, denn der „größte Schauspieler / aller Zeiten“ ist ein Frauenfeind.⁴⁹ Er empfindet dieses Geschlecht als das minderwertige, krankhafte, kränkelnde, dumme und schuldige am Untergang Europas. Die Theatermacherin leidet anscheinend an mehreren eingebildeten Krankheiten, an „Hypochondrie“, „verhustet“ zudem den ganzen Text und hat auch noch die Dummheit begangen, teure Kostüme für den Auftritt anfertigen zu lassen, „proletarischer Größenwahnsinn“, denn die „Proletarier verlangen den Luxus“ und bevorzugen somit Samt anstelle von Leinen, Seide anstelle von Kunstseide.⁵⁰ Dadurch verallgemeinert Bruscon das Verschulden der Proletarier, und implizit auch das seiner Ehegattin, am Weltruin, da diese ihre soziale Klasse, ihre Bedingung überschreiten möchte(n): „Seitdem die Proletarier die Welt beherrschen / geht es mit der Welt bergab“.⁵¹ Dadurch wird auch der

⁴⁶ Vranitzky, Franz, zitiert nach: Bernhard, Thomas: *Der Wahrheit auf der Spur. Reden, Leserbriefe, Interviews, Feuilletons*, herausgegeben von Wolfram, Bayer, Raimund Fellingner und Martin, Huber, Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin, 2011 in: Bernhard, Thomas, Dramen V, *Der Theatermacher, Kommentar*, S. 380.

⁴⁷ Moritz, Herbert, zitiert nach Bernhard, Thomas: *Der Wahrheit auf der Spur. Reden, Leserbriefe, Interviews, Feuilletons*, herausgegeben von Wolfram, Bayer, Raimund Fellingner und Martin, Huber, Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin, 2011 in: Bernhard, Thomas, Dramen V, *Der Theatermacher, Kommentar*, S. 380.

⁴⁸ Ebd.

⁴⁹ Bernhard, Thomas: *Der Theatermacher*, 2011, S. 161.

⁵⁰ Ebd., S. 163.

⁵¹ Ebd., S. 164.

Sozialismus beschuldigt, denn dieser habe zu leeren Kassen beigetragen, das Theater zerstört und seinetwegen sei Europa „kaputt“.⁵²

Als Vertreterin dieser sozialen Klasse teile Frau Bruscon eben alle Anfälligkeiten: Sie soll Asthma und Hustenanfälle vortäuschen, statt wahres schauspielerisches Talent an den Tag zu bringen, sei eine „Schande“⁵³ für das Theater, wie alle Frauen, leide an „Kankheitsfetischismus“⁵⁴, Kopfschmerzen und Ohnmachtsanfällen, sei „brücheanfällig“⁵⁵, allergisch gegen Schweinegestank, „herzkrank“⁵⁶, lungenkrank; sie ist ironischerweise eine Theatermacherin, aber als Antithese zu ihrem Gatten, da sie den Text, den sie seit Jahren spielt, ständig vergisst. Daher rühre die Schwierigkeit für das Theater, Schauspielerinnen zu beschäftigen, weil diese dumm seien, sich nicht hundertprozentig der Vorstellung widmen, nicht in die „Theaterhöhle“ hineingingen, so dass sich daraus der „Tod des Theaters“ und der Komödie ergebe.⁵⁷

Trotz der Plage, Frauen im Theaterspielen unterrichten zu müssen, einem „Martyrium auf Jahre“, seien die Frauen dazu geeignet, die weibliche „Tragödin“ zu verkörpern.⁵⁸ An dieser Stelle ist die Begabung und Besonderheit Bernhards zu bemerken, der mit Wörtern spielt, neue Wortstrukturen aufbaut, anscheinenden Nonsense-Begriffen eine Bedeutung verleiht. Die doppelte Feminisierung der Tragödie als personifizierte Tragödin symbolisiert die Frau als Schauspielerin in einer Tragödie und ihre Rolle darin, das notwendige Absurde, der stete Versuch Theater zu machen. Die Frauen „machen Theater“, also spielen im Alltag Theater, während die Männer das „Theater“ sind.⁵⁹

Frauen hindern angeblich Männer in ihrer Entfaltung und besäßen keinen „Kunstbegriff“, keine „Philosophie“⁶⁰, deswegen wäre es wünschenswert, dass diese Schopenhauer und Spinoza lesen. Bruscon ist somit nicht nur ein Frauenfeind, sondern auch ein Gegner der Frauenemanzipation; die damalige Frauenbewegung sei, seines Erachtens, ein „Vormarsch in die Katastrophe“⁶¹ gewesen. Somit wird das allgemeine Versagen des Menschen, der Menschheit und Weltwirtschaft den Frauen in die Schuhe geschoben.

⁵² Ebd.

⁵³ Ebd., S. 219.

⁵⁴ Ebd., S. 189.

⁵⁵ Ebd., S. 167.

⁵⁶ Ebd., S. 173.

⁵⁷ Ebd., S. 119.

⁵⁸ Ebd., S. 119f.

⁵⁹ Ebd., S. 133.

⁶⁰ Ebd., S. 181.

⁶¹ Ebd., S. 182.

Auch der potenzielle Weltuntergang wird in Anbetracht der Gefahr durch die Atombombe auf eine Frau im Theaterstück abgewälzt, auf Marie Curie, deren Gesicht Bruscon für die geplante Aufführung mal ausnahmsweise völlig schwarz anmalen lässt. Schwarz ist somit eine Chiffre für den Tod, für die Vernichtung der Menschheit, genauso wie die totale Finsternis am Ende des Theaterstücks, ohne flackerndes Notlicht, eine Metapher für den Tod sein kann. Dabei kann der Tod des Theaters, der Komödie oder des Theatermachers *per se* gemeint sein.⁶²

Die zu Beginn des Textes anscheinend existenzielle Frage Bruscons, ob er eine Frittatensuppe zu sich nehmen solle oder nicht, wird gegen Ende des Textes tatsächlich zu seiner „Existenzsuppe“⁶³, da er – als Vergleich zum dänischen Prinzen - nicht nur über das Sein oder Nichtsein, sondern über Theatermachen oder nicht machen entscheiden muss. Das Scheitern, als Theatermacher vor einem leeren Saal zustehen, nimmt Bruscon schließlich als Klimax seines Verschuldens an: „Meine Schuld / Mein Größenwahn / Mein Verbrechen“.⁶⁴

Durch die Stimme des Staatsschauspielers Bruscon hallt eben auch die Stimme Thomas Bernhards mit, der ein wahrer Theatermacher der Gegenwartsliteratur ist, ein Schöpfer der modernen absurden Tragikomödie bzw. Komödientragödie, ein moderner Stürmer und Dränger, der zu politischen und sozialen Debatten provoziert, den man folglich entweder hasst oder liebt, denn im Falle Bernhards gibt es kein Dazwischen.

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⁶² Vgl. Klug, Christian: *Thomas Bernhards Theaterstücke*, Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Stuttgart, 1991, S. 240-244.

⁶³ Bernhard, Thomas, Dramen V, *Der Theatermacher*, herausgegeben von Huber, Martin, Judex Bernhard, Mittermayer Manfred, Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin, 2011, S. 132.

⁶⁴ Ebd., S. 208.

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3

TEATRU ÎN DIALOG



THEATER IM DIALOG



THEATRE IN DIALOGUE



Presence, co-presence, authenticity principles of questioning the *intimate* in one-to-one performance

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Abstract

The relational experiments of one-to-one performance make the promise of offering a psycho-emotional intimate encounter, understood as unique and ephemeral. The theoretical discourse about intimacy in performance art usually is determined by the dramaturgical and ethical principles of an (a)“live”, co-presence, and authenticity in the performer-public dialogue. The paper analyses the work *The Artist is Present* by Marina Abramović and Mădălina Dan’s performance *The Agency of Touch*, questioning a perspective of understanding these principles as essentialist aspects of one-to-one performance.

These works are analysed starting from the *dramaturgical* dimension of the principles of co-presence and authenticity – coordinates that would be constitutive for a present-oriented ontology of performance art (Phelan, Gomme, Zerihan). I also discuss the two works, based on the *ethical* dimension of co-presence and authenticity – using Emmanuel Levinas’ and Martin Buber’s dialogical philosophy. I demonstrate how the performer’s authenticity is constituted in these performances as a self-reflective and not an inter-relational process, as it is claimed by the artists. Moreover, the co-presence does not function as a symmetrical one-to-one affective dialogue, but as a hierarchical positioning of the performer. Finally, I argue that, based on these principles, the model of relating in both of these performances might create an experience of collective participation.

Keywords:

the *intimate*; (co)-presence; documentation; philosophy of dialogue; Emmanuel Levinas; Martin Buber; “collective one-to-one”.

Rezumat

Experimentele performative de tip “one-to-one” construiesc expectanța unei întâlniri psihoafective intime, receptată drept eveniment unic și efemer. Teoretizarea intimului în arta performance se fundamentează pe principiile dramaturgice și etice ale unei co-prezențe și autenticități vii “(a)live”, în dialogul dintre performer și public. Studiul

analizează performance-ul *The Artist is Present*, al Marinei Abramović și performance-ul *The Agency of Touch*, al Mădălinei Dan. Este chestionată o perspectivă esențialistă de înțelegere a acestor principii, ca fiind coordonatele principale ale performance-ului “one-to-one”. Sunt analizate cele două lucrări având în vedere dimensiunea *dramaturgică* a co-prezenței și a autenticității – coordonate care ar constitui ontologia prezenteistă a artei performance (Phelan, Gomme, Zerihan). Totodată, analiza se fundamentează pe dimensiunea *etică* a co-prezenței și a autenticității, făcând apel la filosofia dialogului a lui Emmanuel Levinas și Martin Buber.

Demonstrez cum autenticitatea performerului se constituie drept un proces autoreferențial, deci, nu intersubiectiv, așa cum este asumată de către artiștii performer. În plus, co-prezența nu funcționează ca un dialog afectiv simetric de tip unul-la-unul, ci ca o poziționare ierarhică a performerului. În final, susțin că pornind de la aceste principii, atât Marina Abramović, cât și Mădălina Dan construiesc o relaționare “one-to-one”, articulată, de fapt ca o experiență a participării colective.

Cuvinte cheie:

intimul; co-prezență; documentare; filosofia dialogului; Emmanuel Levinas; Martin Buber; “one-to-one” colectiv.

Presence, co-presence, authenticity. Revising of an essentialist view on the *intimate*

In performance art theory but also in the performance practice, the notion of the *intimate* is most frequently approached as being correlated with the typology of one-to-one performance – of a singularized, *in corpore* dialogue between a performer and a spectator-participant.¹ The theories that discuss the *intimate* in performance art, usually understand this concept in relation to a positive imaginary and the emotional connections between the performer and the spectator.

The *intimate* in one-to-one performance can be seen as a longing for an intense emotional encounter, as *intimus*², as a quality of the ephemeral and (a)“live” performative experience. This experience is based on the “real” dialogue of a

¹ Wake, Caroline: “*The Ambivalent Politics Of One-To-One Performance*” in: *Performance Paradigm*, vol. 13, 2017, pp. 163-173.

<https://www.performanceparadigm.net/index.php/journal/article/view/206/211>, [access: 18.09.2020]

² The etymology of “intimacy” derives from *intimus* (Lat.), meaning “innermost”, “most close”.

The common knowledge about the *intimate* perceives this concept through the lens of emotional and physical closeness.

“here and now” between the performer and the participant. The intimacy thus functions as an essentialist value. It is a quest.

One-to-one performance practitioners construct an emotional expectation that these artistic encounters will provide the spectator with a highly energetic dialogue, based on the affective (and dramaturgical) principles of presence, co-presence and authenticity.

This longing for the realness of the intimate encounter of the artists of one-to-one performance is also supported by the theoretical discourse of this performative practice. In this respect, Rachel Zerihan claims: “Live performances are *intensely alive* in their transitory ephemerality and then continue to work in the world through the traces they leave behind, through their retellings [emphasis added].”³

Moreover, the definition that Caroline Wake gives in *The ambivalent politics of one-to-one performance* with regard to these pieces for a singular spectator, is the following: “One-to-one performance is a form of *live art* wherein a solo performer stages a situation, action or event for a solo spectator. In most cases, the artist is spatiotemporally *co-present* with the audience member [emphasis added].”⁴

Thereby, I suggest a questioning of this affective ideal in one-to-one pieces, starting by analysing the principles of presence, co-presence, and authenticity – regarded as the main components of the *intimate* experience.⁵

Firstly, an analysis of the presence and co-presence in the performance art implies a reference to these terms according to the spatio-temporal framework in which the performative encounter might take place.

The theoretical approaches of presence and co-presence in one-to-one performance are primarily focused on assuming a dialogue, starting from a so-called (a)“live”, embodied presence, between the performer and the participant.⁶ Thereby, the co-presence in the one-to-one performance is related to an *in corpore* cohabitation, beginning from anchoring of the consciousness (both of the performer and participant) in an immediate present moment (performative “now”).

At the confluence between a debate on presence and co-presence and a discussion on authenticity, theoreticians and practitioners of performance refer to this practice

³ Chatzichristodoulou, Maria; Zerihan, Rachel (Eds.): *Intimacy Across Visceral and Digital Performance*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2012, p. 16.

⁴ Wake, Caroline, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁵ See, for the “presence-led” attribute of one-to-one performance, Zerihan Rachel: “*Intimate Inter-actions: Returning to the Body, in One-to-One performance*”, p. 7. <http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/vol0601/rachelzerihan/zerihan.pdf> [access:18.09.2020].

⁶ See, for a discussion on the corporeal engagement between one and another, in this typology of performance: Zerihan, Rachel, *op. cit.*, p. 1, [access:18.09.2020].

highlighting the *uniqueness* of the encounter, the importance of not recording/documenting the event.

One-to-one performance would be based on an immediacy (“liveness”)⁷ and spontaneity of the dialogue between one singular performer and one participant. Perhaps the most famous theory on the performative presence – that is dependable on the so-called “live” corporeality of the performer, is that of Peggy Phelan. Phelan posits that performance can only exist under the regime of “now”: it exists only in a “live” situation and in present time, – since any *reenactment* of the event corresponds, in fact, to other art forms.⁸

In contradiction to Phelan’s approach on the notion of presence in the performing arts, Henry Sayre, Elinor Fuchs, Philip Auslander, and Power Cormac⁹ (following J. Derrida’s *deconstruction*) support the idea that a co-participation in a “performative present” can no longer be read in terms of an immediate connection.¹⁰

In her analysis of the ontology of performance art, Phelan brings also into focus the authenticity of this art practice – being strictly connected with a dialogue of embodied presences in an ephemeral moment that rejects being recorded, archived. In this regard, she suggests:

“Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have *an experience of value*, which leaves no visible trace afterward [emphasis added].”¹¹

⁷ In this case, I discuss the term “liveness” with the meaning of the “living” presence of the performer’s body, that “(a)liveness”. See, also the deconstruction of this meaning that Philip Auslander operates – since from his perspective, a dichotomy between “live”/recorded no longer exists.

See, Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Routledge, New York, 1999.

⁸ Phelan, Peggy: *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 146.

⁹ It is worth a careful reflection on the three types of presence that Power Cormac synthesizes (under the influence of W. Benjamin, J. Derrida, and others) in *Presence in Play: A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2008. Power Cormac discusses a typology of a fictionalized presence, of an auratic presence, and of “literal” mode of presence. These correspond to three ways of “putting presence into practice”: “to make present”, “to have the presence”, and “to be present”. The “literal” mode of presence is the one that represents the affective *co-presence*, as it is discussed in this analysis.

¹⁰ See in this regard, Cormac, Power: *Presence in Play: A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2008.

See, also, Fuchs, Elinor: “*Presence and the revenge of writing, Re-thinking theatre after Derrida*” in: *PAJ, A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 9, no. 2/3, 1985, pp. 163-173.

¹¹ Phelan, Peggy: *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 149.

Caroline Wake takes Phelan's argument one step further and finds it to be specific to the relational experience of one-to-one performance par excellence.¹² Thus, an important question to consider is the following: how is this intimate connection based on a "here and now", deconstructed in the condition in which these performances are using archiving/recording instruments?

I assert that the co-presence and the authenticity are experienced in a continuous negotiation between the in corpore presence and the multiple occurrences of the mediated presence (of the performer and the participant). Usually, these elements of intermediality are not assumed by one-to-one performance practitioners, as influencing the intimate sphere of their encounters.

The ethical dimension of authenticity

Besides this aspect of authenticity already stated – correlated with the ontology of the performance – another dimension of this concept regards the encounter that might create an affective "investment" or reciprocal availability – between the performer and the participant. Starting with this understanding of an authentic experience, seen as an ethical command, the authenticity might be divided between a self-reflective and an intersubjective/interrelational typology. The self-reflective authenticity of the performer concerns centeredness on himself/herself. This category of authenticity can be discussed according to the performer's goal to protect his/her innermost self from becoming vulnerable, from a process of self-disclosure. In this case, the quest for an intense psycho-affective connection in a performance event would be oriented towards the singular self of the performer.

Self-reflective authenticity infers overexamination of the intrapsychic dimensions of the performer, where, introspection is correlated with an "essence of personal uniqueness."¹³ Being "authentic", then, is the equivalent of affirming a "unique truth" about one's own self.

On the other hand, intersubjective authenticity relates to being open to *another* – in this case, to the spectator-participant of the one-to-one event. For the performer, this *other*-oriented authenticity implies exposing the deepest affective structures of himself/herself during the encounter.

These aspects of authenticity within the "ethical event" of one-to-one performance can be discussed, by appealing to Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of dialogue.

¹² Wake, Caroline: *op. cit.*, p. 168.

¹³ Fisher, Martin (Ed.): *Intimacy*, Springer Verlag, Boston, 2012, p. 7.

From a Levinasian perspective on alterity, the question of authenticity lies not on maintaining congruence with one's own "true" identity, – but distancing oneself from this equivalence with a supposed "unique", singular self. According to the thinking of Levinas, authenticity manifests itself, not when I am self-oriented, maintaining congruence with my inwardness, but when I take responsibility for the need, for the call of the *other*.

For Emmanuel Levinas, a preoccupation for preserving the consistency with one's own self is the equivalent of an egocentric quest, that is contrary to self-disclosure. As Levinas claims, an openness towards the *other* would mean: "an uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness, [...] exposure to [...] vulnerability"¹⁴.

As long as the ethics of one-to-one performance is focused on a reciprocal connection between the performer and participant, Levinas' perspective on an ethic of authenticity, will thus be necessary for analysing one of the most famous one-to-one encounters in the history of performance art.

Marina Abramović: *The Artist is Present*

The hierarchical co-presence

Marina Abramović's performances still remain the most significant reference for the history of this art, influencing radically both the practice and the theoretical reception of the one-to-one relational experiments.

The Artist is Present (2010) was an experience in Museum of Modern Arts, New York, in which Abramović built a so-called transformative connection, limited to sustained visual contact, with any spectator who paid to sit in front of her.

The way the practitioner perceived this relational framework was that it would facilitate a transformation of the identity of the participants due to a subjectification of the encounter between herself and each one of them. For the performer, the fundamental coordinate on which she tries to build an "energetic dialogue" is an embodied co-presence determined by a singularized connection, personally addressed to every participant involved in *The Artist is Present*.

The performer understands co-presence on the basis of a deeply subjectified connection. The serialness of the one-to-one encounters is articulated around what

¹⁴ Levinas, Emmanuel: *Otherwise Than Being, Or, Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis. Kluwer, Dordrech, 1991, p. 48., *apud*. Pickett, Howard, *op.cit.*, p. 202.

she calls a process of “unconditional love.”¹⁵ Moreover, when discussing that physical and emotional mutual engagement, Abramović claims: “The important thing about the audience at this performance was that I had been interacting with them as individuals, not as a group [...]”¹⁶

Starting from the artist’s way of understanding co-presence,¹⁷ I propose an investigation of her statement which points out that the audience is not engaged in this performance as a collective – but as one individualized spectator.

Abramović’s perspective is supported by Patrice Pavis, who understands one-to-one performances as experiences “during which the performer assumes the task of asking the spectator more or less personal questions, in isolation from the rest of the artists and the audience, so as to establish an *individual* communication [emphasis added].”¹⁸

For that one-to-one communion, that emotional co-location to be fulfilled in this work, Marina Abramović idealizes an exchange of “(a)live” presences – which are shared in a mutual gaze. Through physical proximity to the spectator-participant, that bodily participation of the artist would cause an energy flow, creating a strong connection with the audience.¹⁹ For Abramović the spatio-temporal medium of *being with* another, influences an affective co-presence as well.

The way the artist understands this communication is by the supposed “uniqueness” of the performative present moment. The artist’s discourse about the presence functions similarly to the essentialist perspective that Peggy Phelan uses in theorizing performance. For Phelan, the presence of a performer is dependable on his/her so-called “live” corporeality.

Nevertheless, how are these moments of affective intensity (of the performative “now”) reached when, during the performance Abramović uses cameras for

¹⁵ See in this regard, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/may/12/marina-abramovic-ready-to-die-serpentine-gallery-512-hours>, [access: 23.08.2020].

¹⁶ INTERWEAVE for MAI, *Marina Abramović: a lecture on performance art*, <https://mai.art/as-one-content/2016/4/7/on-performance-art>, [access: 23.08.2020].

¹⁷ I refer to co-presence seen in the spatio-temporal dimension of the concept, that influences an affective co-presence as well.

¹⁸ Pavis, Patrice: *The Routledge Dictionary of Performance and Contemporary Theatre*, translated by Andrew Brown, Routledge, London-New York, 2016, p.153.

¹⁹ See Abramović, in Mary Richards, *Marina Abramović*, Routledge, New York, 2010, p. 24., “[...] the artist should not have any objects between him and the public, just a direct energy dialogue”.

Discussing this relational experiment, Abramović anticipates it to be “an intense performance”, that will transform all participants.

recording her presence? Are these one-to-one sessions still working as *personally* addressed interactions?

Is there a sustained one-to-one co-presence, a “being present for”²⁰ another, in a spontaneous “here and now”, that would lead to an intense exchange of energy, to that transformative power of the encounter? ²¹

Does Abramović relate equally with the same heightened *attentiveness to every singular participant who sat with her?* ²²

During the interaction, the supposed feedback loop (between the artist and the “viewer”) was recorded. HBO created a documentary (directed by Matthew Akers, 2012), based on the work, which captured the emotionally charged moments that the audience should confront. For this reason, it is questionable how an in-depth personal²³ connection in the dialogue between the performer and the public works, when the performance is (also) built under the spotlights and under the eyes of hundreds of people waiting to become participants.

The performer constructs an anticipated presence: knowing that she is being recorded, she can no longer remain “stabilized” in the “spontaneity of the stage”, since archiving media are used in this performance and the “live event” has an anticipated, theatricalized structure.

Thus, the performer’s “here and now” presence is not particularized – just for an audience of one. The artist is connecting at the same time with the *other* that she encounters face-to-face, but also with the potential spectator that might watch the HBO documentary. Therefore, the shared co-presence, that in-depth connection the artist is craving for, rather than being born from performative “liveness”,

²⁰ For the presence as “witnessing and interaction”, as “being before” or “being in the presence” of another, see Giannachi Gabriella, Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks: *Archeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being*, Routledge, London, 2012, p. 2.

²¹ I refer to the transformative potential of performance, as discussed by Erika Fischer-Lichte in her famous study *The Transformative Power of Performance: A new Aesthetics*. See, Fischer-Lichte, Erika: *The Transformative Power of Performance: A new Aesthetics*, Routledge, London, 2008.

²² See in this regard: Fuchs, Anne: *Prekarious Times, Temporality and History in Modern German Culture*, Cornell University Press, New York, 2019, p. 118.

“[...] The artist is Present was about the deliberate enactment of slow and equal time: Abramović looked at all sitters with the same focused intensity.”

²³ Zerihan, Rachel: “*A study room guide on works devised for an audience of one*”

https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/OnetoOne_Final-copy.pdf, p. 3 [access: 19.09.2020].

is appearing as a *representation* of presence. This *representation* is created for a future audience.

The exposure of the artists in front of a numerous audience cancels the act of welcoming the other in his/her “subjective personal narrative”²⁴ and any “monogamy between the two”²⁵, as Rachel Zerihan defines one-to-one encounters. In consequence, taking into consideration the principle of co-presence, this work fails to accomplish “personal and intimate connection”,²⁶ that mutual engagement in empathy, as the performance intended.

Finally, these experiences of a mediated co-presence that the artist creates, influence the way of understanding the authenticity of the performative event.

In the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic nature of performance art, Abramović claims that this practice offers an authentic emotional space, correlated with the irreproducibility of the live event.²⁷ On the contrary, by using recording media in her practice, the artist and the viewer cannot accomplish a genuine one-to-one connection, as long as the event is recorded and that *singular*, one audience member no longer experiences “the piece on their own.”²⁸

The self-reflective authenticity of the performer

If we interpret this relational experiment taking into account Emmanuel Levinas’ thinking and Marina Abramović’s perspective on this performance, the artist builds the expectation of an authentic mode of relating (as a quality of the *intimate*), as a response to the need of another,²⁹ addressing the vulnerable self of the participant.

²⁴ Zerihan, Rachel, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

²⁶ Bogart, Anne: “*Time. And Then, You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World*” Routledge, New York, 2007, p. 65, in Ryan, Lader: “*The Artist Is Present and the Emotions Are Real: Time, Vulnerability, and Gender in Marina Abramović’s Performance Art*” <https://www.bu.edu/writingprogram/journal/past-issues/issue-6/lader/>, [access: 17.09.2020].

²⁷ Abramović claims: “All that matters is to be there, in real time, you cannot repeat the same performance twice”. See in this regard: https://www.ted.com/talks/marina_abramovic_an_art_made_of_trust_vulnerability_and_connection/transcript, [access: 19.09.2020].

See, also: “You had to hate theater, to reject all the artificiality of the theater, the rehearsal situation, in which everything is predictable, the time structure and the predetermined ending” Abramović, Marina interviewed by Nancy Spector, in Abramović, Marina: *7 easy pieces*, Charta, Milan, 2007.

²⁸ Zerihan, Rachel: “*A study room guide on works devised for an audience of one*”, p. 5. https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/OnetoOne_Final-copy.pdf, [access: 19.09.2020].

²⁹ Pickett, Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

One crucial aspect regarding the intersubjective authenticity, from the philosopher's standpoint, is that this category of authenticity would determine shifting my "unique" individuality, as a result of encountering the other.

In the thinking of Levinas, a solipsistic preoccupation with investigating and exposing a singular self/presence is the equivalent of egocentric existence.³⁰ For Levinas, an ethical dimension of relating to the other is not that of protecting a self-centred, stable identity but, precisely that of becoming authentic as a responsibility for the other.³¹ This interrelational authenticity means the exposure of a "non-coincidence"³² with one's own self, perhaps even an unconcern for the process of being true to one's self.

Taking this into account, is Abramović offering an affective space for that intersubjective dimension of authenticity, seen in Levinasian terms as a responsibility, oriented towards other?

The answer is no. The performer has a concern in exposing the same self-oriented, even auratic presence³³. The fact that Abramović does not express her emotions in front of the audience, or reacts precisely through control of her gazing, is the equivalent of a non-recognition of the other's personal identity.

In this sustained one-to-one visual contact, as a *spectator-performer*, the artist experiments with a self-referential dimension of authenticity. She is protecting herself from being known by the other, by censoring access to the less visible parts of her own identity. The artist censors an emotional feedback loop, in which through mimicry of facial expression, she and the participants are connected to the same expressiveness. Considering this, she also implicitly censors reciprocity in an expression of vulnerability – thus, an interrelational authenticity.

Each participant relates to the performer from their own solitary emotionality, but does not experience a reciprocal mirroring of their own emotions, neither in relation to her nor in relation with the other participants. The only mode of relating in *The Artist is Present* in which an *alter* is recognized in personal individuality is the artist's encounter with her ex-partner. At that moment, Abramović allows herself to react to the presence of another and she changes her posture.³⁴

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 181.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² Pickett, Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

³³ For the *auratic* mode of presence of the actor/performer, see Cormac, Power, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-96.

³⁴ See in this regard, <https://youtu.be/xlf68X2qEpM>, [access: 19.09.2020].

Instead, her positioning towards the spectators is found by perceiving them as *anonymous-others*. That “one” from the “one-to-one” is, surprisingly not recognized in their own identity.³⁵

Marina Abramović’s model of involving the spectator is not that of “immersing himself/herself in a truly subjective experience”³⁶, in “an individual performance tailor-made especially for you”³⁷, as Rachel Gomme defines one-to-one performance. The performer artist’s extreme exposure to hundreds of participants who sat in front of her determined an impersonalisation of her one-to-one relationship with the audience.

Irrespective of the fact that the spectators were part of the live event, or that they experienced the performance as an archive, through its video documentation, in the case of this bodily encounter the participants share the fact they were not recognized in their singularized identities.

Mădălina Dan: *The Agency of Touch*

The affective experience of co-presence

In a similar performative encounter – created by an artist that is not that interested in such an extreme self-exposure as Marina Abramović – the spectator-participant is also caught in an unequal way of relating. In *The Agency of Touch* (2015) the spectator is also not recognized in his personal individuality.

Mădălina Dan proposes in her relational experiment a series of one-to-one massage sessions. During this performance of touching another, she builds a choreography, as a reaction to the corporeality of the participant.

Starting from engaged corporeality, the intimate connection that she seeks to form (by taking care of the participant), becomes, by contrast, a way of controlling the body of another.

³⁵ On the contrary, a different perspective is assumed by Rachel Zerihan in Edinburgh, Campbell: *Theatrical reality: space, embodiment, and empathy in performance*, Intellect, Bristol, 2016., subch. *Encountering subjectivity*, https://books.google.ro/booksid=E7irDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=ro&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, [access:22.08.2020].

“One-to-one performance [...] refused the inherent anonymity that traditionally structures the shield of mass spectatorship, in One-to-One we are lifted out of the passive role of the audience member and re-positioned into an activated state of witness or collaborator [...]”

³⁶ Zerihan, Rachel, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³⁷ Gomme, Rachel: “*Not-So-Close Encounters: Searching for Intimacy in One-to-One Performance*”, in *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 12, p. 282, <http://www.participations.org/Volu%2012/Issue%201/18.pdf>, [access: 19.09.2020].

In the case of this relational art, there is a dissolving of the intimate mode of relating due to the structure of co-presence, understood both in its temporal and affective dimension.

The artist perceives these encounters, assuming a communication in which the intensity of the sensorial exploration (and of the physical hyper-proximity), would determine an intensity of an emotional response, from the public. In Mădălina Dan's words: "I aim to facilitate pleasant, calming tactile experiences, as a way to put people in a dialogue close to the body, and the sensorial, the emotional, the energetic, the anatomic, the transcendental, the potential to give and receive care."³⁸

The main point to be pursued in *The Agency of Touch* is the fact that in this engagement between the two, the spectator comes into contact with a hierarchical, unbalanced co-presence, being placed in an inferior position.

A definition given by Mădălina Dan to her performance is that it would be a "form of artistic-sensorial therapy."³⁹ Seen as a therapeutic practice, the massage sessions aim mainly at a category of vulnerable spectators: patients with incurable diseases, respectively elderly.⁴⁰

The therapeutic potential of the performance, connected with an affective engagement, based on reciprocity becomes questionable depending on the power dynamics that the performer arouses in the dialogue with the participant.

The Agency of Touch does not determine emotional reciprocity, in this corporeal and emotional sharing with another. Although seen as a collaborative process, in which the spectator-participant is perceived as a co-author, the body (and the self)

³⁸ See in this regard, <https://www.cndb.ro/spectacole/amprenta-madalina-dan-the-agency-of-touch-one-on-one-format>, [access: 21.09.2020].

„Îmi propun să facilitez experiențe tactile plăcute, calmante, ca mod de a pune oamenii într-un dialog strâns cu corpul și cu senzorialul, emoționalul, energeticul, anatomicul, transcendentul, potențialul de a da și primi îngrijire”, [translated into English by the author of the article].

³⁹ See, <https://www.cndb.ro/comunicate-de-presa/the-agency-of-touch-au-inceput-atelierele-somatice-sustinite-de-coregrafele-madalina-dan-si-valentina-de-piante-niculae>, [access: 21.09.2020].

⁴⁰ *The agency of Touch* takes place on the one hand in an artistic space, a tent built by Mădălina Dan, respectively in a care center for incurable patients and, also, in a care center for elderly people. This therapeutic value is, however, incorporated in the case of each "regular" participant.

See, for the therapeutic function that the performance assumes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xs513pJc1rA&t=644s>, [access: 21.09.2020].

of the spectator are not recognized in an ethical relationship “grounded in care and openness”⁴¹, as being equal to the performer.

The one-to-one performance theorists such as Rachel Zerihan assert that these encounters are created against keeping the spectator in a passive, anonymous role, in which he would be placed by the structures of classical theatricality. Following the scholar’s point of view, during a one-to-one piece, the two participants would affirm each other in their subjectivities.⁴²

Instead, in *The Agency of Touch*, although seen as a co-creator, the spectator has a mainly passive role. The artist follows her reactions to the other’s body, building a kind of massage-narrative “in which the spectator is participating with and on his/her own body in a sensorial choreography.”⁴³ The participant’s body is seen as a stimulus, as a “stage-body”,⁴⁴ as Mădălina Dan claims. Thus, more than being acknowledged in that equality of co-presence, the participant receives the role of the performing-spectator, a role that objectifies him/her.

These dynamics of an emotional co-existence manifested in this work, can be analysed starting from the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber.⁴⁵

The personal connection that Mădălina Dan seeks to fulfill, understood from the perspective of Martin Buber, is manifested exclusively through a mutual affective co-presence. For this philosopher, the connection with the *alter* is made through a *being with* – by having the ability to respond actively to the interaction with the other. In this case, that affective cohabitation would have a symmetrical, intersubjective dimension:

“The present, not the punctual one [...] that is the appearance of a ‘here and now’ on this flow of time, but the real, in-depth present, exists only where there is presence, encountering, connection. The present is born only when *You* becomes present [emphasis added].”⁴⁶

⁴¹ See Gomme, Rachel: *Being Here Now: Performance, Presentness and the Opening to Wonder*, Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 2019, p. 58.

⁴² Zerihan, Rachel: “The function and development of the encounter is reliant upon shared economies of [...] identification and understanding.”

⁴³ See in this regard, <https://www.cndb.ro/comunicate-de-presa/the-agency-of-touch-au-inceput-atelierile-somatice-sustinite-de-coregrafele-madalina-dan-si-valentina-de-piante-niculae>, „(...) în care spectatorul e participant cu și pe propriul corp la o coregrafie senzorială”, [translated into English by the author of this article], [access: 21.09.2020].

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ Buber, Martin: *Eu și Tu*, translated by Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Humanitas, București, 1992.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 38. „Prezentul, nu acela punctual (...), adică aparența unei opriri în această curgere – ci, acela real și deplin, nu există decât acolo unde există prezență, întâlnire,

Buber's philosophy of alterity is structured on two possible ways of relating to another: an affirmation of the other in an *I-You* relationship, respectively domination of the other in an *I-It* attitude towards his/her individuality.

The first way of relating presupposes a recognition of the *alter* as a *person*. Taking into account this acknowledging of an *alter*, the philosopher points out: "By invoking [...] the concept of person [...], an individual is recognized for its uniqueness by himself/herself [emphasis added]." ⁴⁷ On the other hand, regarding the *I-It* mode of relating, this means an impersonal orientation towards the other, reducing him/her to an instrumental function.

Taking into consideration Buber's discussion on meeting the other, Mădălina Dan situates the corporeal exchange from her performance in the realm of a connection with an *It*. In these encounters for "an audience of one", in which the participant cannot easily leave the space of the performance, the body of the participant is objectified. More than an equal exchange between the performer and the participant, there is emotional self-gratification of the performer in these massage sessions.

The feedback loop – lacking temporal co-presence

Besides this dissolution of the *intimate* through the deconstructing of one-to-one affective co-presence, through an instrumentalization of the body of the spectator, in *The Agency of Touch* there is a deconstructing of the *intimate*, determined by the dynamics in which the temporal co-presence is structured.

Referring to co-presence, understood as that "spatio-temporal collocation"⁴⁸ of the consciousness of the performer and the participant, it might be canceled in the case of the actions that involve close physical proximity.

During this massage therapy, a mental disengagement of the performer and/or the participant may occur. In the one-to-one sessions working with an intensity of physical closeness, the participants are prone to accept the continuation of the session, irrespective of whether they have a pleasant or psycho-emotional uncomfortable, even abusive experience.

relație. Prezentul se naște numai datorită faptului că Tu devine prezent." [translated into English by the author of the article].

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 161., „prin invocarea (...) conceptului de *persoană* (...) unei persoane i se recunoaște unicitatea de sine stătătoare prin ea însăși." [translated into English by the author of the article].

⁴⁸ Trott, Abbie Victoria: "Being With: Establishing Co-presence Between Multimedia Images and Performers in Multimedia Performance", p. 2, https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/data/UQ_379824/s33270294_mphil_submission.pdf, [access: 17.09.2020].

In this work, the only option of the participant for an “exit” from the performative context is that of a mental non-participation, by detaching the attentiveness from a “here and now” state.⁴⁹

A second important point through which that experience of a close affective connection, (based on a temporal co-presence) ends up being dissolved, refers to the way Mădălina Dan asks for feedback from the participant.

In *The Agency of Touch* (but also in *The Artist is Present*) to make possible a co-presence, a corporeal and affective exchange between the performer and the participant, is required a feedback loop. This feedback loop is based on instantaneity, on the immediacy of relating.⁵⁰

Both Marina Abramović and Mădălina Dan use documentation in their performances, rather than giving feedback “in the moment”. Particularly, in the action of Mădălina Dan, the *participant* is asked to document the ephemerality of the performance, of that full body massage.

The artist-performer requires the participants to reflect on the sensations that they experienced, to create a drawing after the massage session. All the drawings of the spectators were exhibited together.⁵¹

In *The Agency of Touch* the participant is not asked how he/she feels, in a dialogue of co-presence in the “here and now” carried out during the performance, but only after the live event is over. Thus, a shared presence, that is understood as a spatio-temporality of the present moment, in which the consciousness of the performer and the participant function simultaneously, is not “activated”.

Or, insofar as this relational work is intended to be an encounter based on emotional reciprocity, the feedback loop would be necessary to nurture this connection with a singular spectator, to respond actively in front of the other.

⁴⁹ Based on my own experience, as a participant in this action, I tried to mentally disengage from the touches I felt, especially when a bottle of water was insistently rolled on my body—a fact which I did not anticipate.

⁵⁰ Regarding the *transformative* potential of performance art, and the spontaneity/contingency of the feedback loop – see, Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The transformative Power of Performance: A new Aesthetics*, Routledge, London, New York, 2008, pp. 38-75.

⁵¹ Mădălina Dan proposed “a documentation of the tactile into drawing, color, shape, feedback (...). All drawings and papers are then collected and displayed on a wall in the space where the installation occurs.” *The agency of Touch*, <https://graphis122.org/proiecte/the-agency-of-touch/>, [access: 20.01.2021];

„transpunere a tactilului în desen, culoare, formă, feedback (...). Toate desenele și hârtiile sunt apoi colectate și expuse pe un perete în spațiul în care are loc instalația”; [translated into English by the author of the article].

Although in *The Agency of Touch* at a certain level such an intimate engagement is sought, due to a lack of an emotional co-presence, it is not fulfilled. However, is there any “emotional benefit” to connecting by this delayed feedback, which does not take place in the hic et nunc of the performative event?

The emotional value of this “listening to another” would be that this type of feedback brings participants together in what we might call a closed “feedback community”. Thus, Mădălina Dan’s work is positioned among one-to-one private experiences that engage the participants in a collective affective dynamic.

Unlike the audience of traditional theatre performances, in which one can create a sense of belonging through the contagion of emotions between spectators, in the case of *The Agency of Touch*, the performative community was built through this objectified reflection, through an exit from the so-called subjectivism of the one-to-one relating.

Conclusion

Based on the principles of presence, co-presence and authenticity, the way of interacting with another, built by Marina Abramović and Mădălina Dan is more than a one-to-one dialogism, a collective mode of relating. Thereby, the dramaturgical model of participation in the one-to-one performance should be considered more than a particularized connection with a singular spectator, seen as a co-author.

One-to-one performance might also be an encounter of “collective one-to-one”, that might be experienced in a public space (like in *The Artist is Present*), or in a private encounter (like in *The Agency of Touch*).

Using the ethical thinking of Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber, we observe that in these performances there is not responsibility or reciprocity in the dialogue with the spectator – but self-centeredness on the persona of the performer.

The supposed intimate encounter is equal either to a non-recognition of the other (by Marina Abramović) or to an objectification of the other (by Mădălina Dan).

Consequently, in these performances, the presumed empathic experience takes place within the emotional *distancing* from another. Further research could usefully explore how is intimacy addressed in one-to-one performance, paradoxically through other psycho-emotional, dramaturgical, aesthetic, and ethical structures of *distancing*.

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TIMVAL-Projekt: Trotz Ferne ganz nah (oder: wie man virtuelle Nähe in finsternen Zeiten schaffen kann)

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Abstract

The TIMVAL project was carried out during the first term of the academic year 2020-2021. It consisted of a virtual exchange between students from the West Univesity of Timisoara (Romania) and the Universitat de València (Spain) in times of pandemic.

Keywords:

TIMVAL-Project; *virtual exchange*; lecture-performance; literature and performing arts; COVID.

Rezumat

Proiectul TIMVAL s-a desfășurat pe durata primului semestru al anului universitar 2020-2021. Acesta a constat în schimbul virtual dintre studenții Universității de Vest din Timișoara (România) și Universitatea València (Spania) în perioada pandemiei.

Cuvinte cheie:

proiectul TIMVAL; schimb virtual; spectacol-lectură; literatură și artă performativă; COVID.

Einleitung

Der Einsatz von Körper, Bewegung und Sprache hat sich in der Unterrichtspraxis immer als sehr erfolgreich erwiesen. In den letzten Jahren haben wir im Rahmen des Faches *Estudios de teatro y artes del espectáculo en lengua alemana* des Bachelors *Moderne Sprachen und ihre Literaturen: Maior Deutsch*

(Universität de València, Spanien) feststellen können, dass die Anwendung von Dramapädagogik im Deutschunterricht zu folgenden Ergebnissen führen kann: die Überwindung von Schamgefühlen; die Interaktion und die aktive Verhandlung innerhalb der Gruppe; das Fördern von Kreativität, Vorstellungskraft, Spontaneität, Toleranz und Empathie, sowie das Entwickeln von dem eigenen Bewusstsein und der Berücksichtigung des Anderen; das Lernen und die Verinnerlichung von Konzepten wie Teamgeist oder Verantwortung; und das *andere* nähere Wahrnehmen von literarischen Texten. Aber dann kamen finstere Zeiten geprägt von online Unterricht, hybridem Unterricht, Masken, hygienischen Maßnahmen, die auf Distanz setzen... Der Einbruch der Pandemie hat uns dazu gezwungen nach Alternativen suchen zu müssen, denn wie konnten wir eine Nähe schaffen, die es nicht gab? Dank der Bereitschaft unserer Kollegin Eleonora Ringler-Pascu haben wir eine Möglichkeit im virtuellen Austausch gefunden.

Kontext

Unser Kontext besteht dieses Jahr aus drei Teilen: (1) INNOVA-TEA, einem seit dem akademischen Jahr 2015-2016 laufenden Innovations-Projekt der Universität de València, das vom *Servei de Formació Permanent i Innovació Educativa* finanziert wird, und zu dem die TIMVAL¹ Lehrkräfte gehören. (2) Die Teilnahme an einem von UNICollaboration organisierten Seminar zu *virtual exchange* (<https://www.unicollaboration.org/>). (3) Das Konzept Lecture-Performance, da dies das Endprodukt, das die Studierenden als Gruppenarbeit vorstellen müssen, ist². Die grundlegenden Fragen, die sich den Studierenden am Anfang mit der Arbeit um die Lecture-Performance stellen, wären einerseits bezüglich des Inhalts: Wo kann ich Informationen zu meinem Thema finden? Wie wird das Wissen strukturiert? Und andererseits bezüglich der Form: In welcher Form wird das Projekt vorgestellt?

Wir haben immer versucht, theaterpraktische Arbeit im Unterricht zu integrieren. In unserem Fall geht es konkret um die Kombination von theoretischen-literarischen Kenntnissen und Theaterarbeit³.

¹ TIMVAL ist das Akronym für Timișoara und Valencia, das unserem Projekt den Namen verleiht.

² Wir verstehen Lecture-Performance als ein Hybrid zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft, als Alternative da, wo in irgendeiner Form Vorträge gehalten werden, als *work in progress* und Projektarbeit. Siehe diesbez. Peters (2011), Calero (2019), Giménez (2020).

³ Sehr hilfreich sind die Publikationen zu performativem Lehren und Lernen von Manfred Schewe und Susanne Even (2016), sowie Birgit Oelschlägers Theaterhandbuch (2017).

TIMVAL Verlauf

Die Durchführung einer Lecture-Performance ist obligatorischer Bestandteil des Faches *Estudios de Teatro y Artes del Espectáculo en Lengua Alemana*. Die Themen, die in dieser Gruppenarbeit bearbeitet werden, stimmen mit den im Seminar behandelten Inhalten überein. Somit setzten sich die Studierenden in der Lecture-Performance kreativ mit folgenden Themenbereichen auseinander:

- Episches Theater.
- Das Lehrstück.
- Die Komödie. Die Groteske.
- Postdramatisches Theater.

Diese Themen werden durch ausgewählte Lektüren praktisch veranschaulicht und kommentiert, und sie bilden die Grundlage, auf der die Gruppenarbeiten basieren:

- *Der Jasager & Der Neinsager*, Bertolt Brecht.
- *Der Besuch der alten Dame*, Friedrich Dürrenmatt.
- *Woyzeck*, Georg Büchner.
- *Bildbeschreibung*, Heiner Müller.

In den vergangenen Jahren wurde diese Gruppenarbeit ausschließlich von den regulär an der Universität de València für das Fach eingeschriebenen Student*innen realisiert. Aber im akademischen Jahr 2020-2021 stand den Studierenden eine weitere Option für die praktische Umsetzung dieser Arbeit zur Verfügung, denn dank der Kooperation mit der West-Universität Timișoara, der Hochschule für Musik und Theater konnte die Arbeit auch im Rahmen des TIMVAL Projekts geleistet werden, das heißt, in Zusammenarbeit mit den Studierenden der rumänischen Institution.

Das TIMVAL Projekt sollte als eine sehr relevante Bereicherung in jeder Hinsicht wahrgenommen werden. Dadurch, dass die Teilnehmer*innen aus verschiedenen Ländern stammten, wurde das Deutsche als Verkehrssprache unter ihnen verwendet, was ihnen offensichtliche Vorteile einbrachte. Aber auch die Tatsache, dass die Studierenden aus Timișoara im Fachbereich der darstellenden Künste (Schauspielstudium in deutscher Sprache) tätig waren und die von der Universität de València philologische Studiengänge studierten, wirkte sich äußerst anregend und positiv aus. Bei TIMVAL handelt es sich, um ein interkulturelles Projekt auf Deutsch, dessen Ziel die Vermittlung von Kultur, Literatur und Kunst aus unterschiedlichen Annäherungsperspektiven sowie Kulturtraditionen ist.

Bereits in den ersten Sitzungen des Semesters wurde das TIMVAL Projekt angekündigt, erklärt und eingeführt, um somit die Studierenden zur Teilnahme zu motivieren und zugleich mögliche Befürchtungen oder Ängste zu überwinden. Innerhalb weniger Wochen sollte die Entscheidung fallen, ob sie am TIMVAL Projekt mitarbeiten wollten oder nicht. Ungefähr zwei Drittel der Studierenden haben sich für die Teilnahme entschieden.

Anschließend wurde die nächste Phase des Projekts initiiert, in der die Mitglieder beider akademischen Institutionen sich offiziell vier Mal online trafen. Dafür wurde zwei Mal die Plattform *Blackboard Collaborate* verwendet und zwei Mal die Plattform für Videokonferenzen *Google Meet*.

Das erste Treffen wurde als Kontaktaufnahme und „Einander-Kennenlernen“ konzipiert. Zuerst stellten sich die Lehrkräfte kurz vor, und danach präsentierten sich die Studierenden. Daraufhin wurden mehrere Gruppen gebildet, welche sich in unterschiedlichen virtuellen Räumen zusammentrafen. Diese kleineren Räume und kleineren Gruppen, jeweils von 4 oder 5 Studierenden, dienten dazu, die ganze Situation ein bisschen angenehmer und vertraulicher zu machen, damit sie den letzten sprachlichen Widerstand brachen oder ihre Hemmungen überwältigen konnten. Nach ungefähr 15 bzw. 20 Minuten wurden die Gruppen neu verteilt, um das Kennenlernen weiterer Teilnehmer*innen zu ermöglichen.

Parallel zu diesem ersten Treffen wurde auch ein Interaktionsraum über die Plattform *Padlet* angeboten. Es handelt sich hierbei um eine digitale Pinnwand, die in unserem Fall als Nebenraum fungieren sollte, in dem die Studierenden außerhalb der akademischen Veranstaltung kommunizieren bzw. sich austauschen konnten. *Padlet* setzten wir demnach als Eisbrecher ein, und wurde schon bald von den Teilnehmer*innen benutzt, indem sie Bilder und Kommentare hochluden.

Darauffolgend wurden drei weitere Treffen organisiert, welchen ebenfalls unterschiedliche Zwecke und Funktionen zugeschrieben wurden. Beim zweiten Treffen hatte sich die definitive Zusammensetzung der Gruppen herauskristallisiert. Zudem wurden für dieses zweite Treffen einige Ausdrucksübungen vorbereitet, welche sehr hilfreich für die Durchführung einer Lecture-Performance waren, die unter ungewöhnlichen Umständen realisiert werden musste, das heißt, ohne sich zu begegnen, online, vor der Kamera und vor dem Bildschirm.

Vor dem dritten Treffen, das ca. vier Wochen vor dem offiziellen Klausurtermin stattfand, hatten die Studierenden einige Wochen Zeit, ihre Projekte weiterzuentwickeln. Es gab immer wieder Rückmeldungen und Fragen bezüglich der Arbeiten, die im Laufe des Semesters geklärt wurden. Eigentlich diente diese Sitzung dazu, den Fortschritt der Projekte zu bestätigen und zugleich zu

kontrollieren. In dieser Kontrollsituation stellten die Studierenden den Stand ihrer Arbeiten im Plenum dar, und diskutierten über die Dynamiken und Routinen, die sie dabei entwickelten, und über die Probleme und Hindernisse die sie lösen und beseitigen mussten.

Das vierte und letzte Treffen fand am Tag nach dem offiziellen Klausurtermin statt. Bis dahin hatten die Studierenden ihre Arbeiten, das heißt, ihre Vidcasts samt einem deskriptiven Bericht, auf die *Aula Virtual* des Faches hochgeladen. Diese Vidcasts und diese Berichte / Protokolle wurden dann von den Lehrkräften nach dem Treffen bewertet. Bei diesem Treffen wurden die Endresultate präsentiert, und nach jeder Präsentation wurde auch ein Zeitraum eröffnet, um Fragen zu stellen, Kommentare oder Anmerkungen zu machen, damit die Studierenden nicht nur von den Dozent*innen sondern auch von ihren Kommiliton*innen Feedback erhalten konnten.

Ergebnisse

Trotz des Experimentiercharakters der Erfahrung haben wir in mitten von Corona-Zeiten wichtige Ziele erreicht. Im Folgenden soll eine Zusammenfassung der Eindrücke aus der Sicht der TIM-VAL Lehrkräfte angeführt werden:

Aus der VAL-Perspektive: „Die deutsche Sprache hat als Bindeglied fungiert, und zukünftige Schauspieler*innen haben mit zukünftigen Germanist*innen Hand in Hand virtuell gearbeitet und sich gegenseitig bereichert. Unsere Rolle als Dozent*innen bestand hauptsächlich in der Leitung und Orientierung des Lernprozesses. Die Studierenden haben autonom Probleme gemeistert und erfolgreich gelöst. Das Ergebnis ist für alle Teile so zufriedenstellend und ausgezeichnet, dass wir bereits ein zweites TIMVAL-Projekt für 2021-2022 planen.“

Aus der TIM-Perspektive: „Das gemeinsame Projekt konnte beweisen, dass TIM mit VAL sehr gut harmonierten, in Bezug auf die Themenaufgabe und ihrer Ausführung, aber insbesondere auf der Ebene des kulturellen Austausches. Brückenschlagende Projekte, auch wenn online ausgeführt, können ihr Ziel erreichen und die Kreativität der Teilnehmer fördern.“

Die Nähe, die in finsternen Zeiten in der Ferne entstanden ist, lässt sich schließlich anhand der Gesichter und der Aussagen der Protagonist*innen ablesen:



Ille Raluca: „Ich sah dieses Projekt als eine Gelegenheit, mich selbst zu entwickeln, neue Menschen kennenzulernen und mit ihnen im Rahmen eines Erfahrungsaustausches zu interagieren. Das Wichtigste ist, dass wir neue Freundschaften geschlossen haben.“



Luis Torrico Giménez: „Ich hatte viele Erwartungen. Durch unser Projekt, eine kurze Inszenierung des Stückes Der Jasager. Der Neinsager habe ich Theaterspielen und Improvisation gelernt.“

Andrea Zehani Gómez: „Die Besonderheit bestand in der Kommunikation, d.h. wie wir es geschafft haben zusammen zu arbeiten, zu Lernen und Spaß zu haben indem wir den zwischenmenschlichen Konflikt in Brechts Stück aus der Sicht der Coronakrise betrachtet haben.“

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4

**INCURSIUNI ÎN LABORATORUL
ARTEI SPECTACOLULUI**

**EINBLICKE INS LABOR
DER DARSTELLENDEN KÜNSTE**

**VIEW IN THE LABORATORY
OF PERFORMING ARTS**

“One mask beneath another” - an interview with Colombina

ANCA MARINCA

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Abstract

This paper is an exercise imagining an interview with Colombina, the *commedia dell'arte* character that I had interpreted as acting student during a production of the Faculty of Music and Theatre from the West University of Timisoara.

Keywords:

fictional interview; Colombina; *commedia 'dell arte*; acting student.

Rezumat

Acest articol reprezintă un exercițiu de a-mi imagina un interviu cu Colombina, un personaj de *commedia dell'arte* pe care l-am interpretat ca studentă la actorie într-o producție a Facultății de Muzică și Teatru a Universității de Vest din Timișoara.

Cuvinte cheie:

interviu imaginar; Colombina; *commedia 'dell arte*; studentă actorie.

I've thought a lot about whether to do this interview or not, but I came to realize that the best way to get to know Colombina is to ask her a few essential questions. I always imagined what it would be like to be able to talk with the character I'm playing. So, I figured now's the perfect time to do this. Let's begin!

I'm in a piazza in Florence and, suddenly, a young lady appears before me - petite, slim waisted, wide hips and a long, lacy neckline. I nervously approach her and say:

Anca: Ciao, Colombina! I'm happy you decided to respond to my invitation. I'm sorry we can't speak in the Tuscan dialect...

She gives me a slightly surprised look, then puts on a wide smile and says:

Colombina: Ciao! That's OK, we can speak in Italian, although I'm very fond of the Tuscan dialect. That's why I sing all my songs in this dialect.

Anca: Since you mentioned singing, could you tell me what kind of music you like?

She thinks for a bit and then raises her hand, which is a sign she's about to say something. She sighs, then says:

Colombina: I usually like rhythmic songs, songs for which I can use the tambourine.

Anca: Tell me more about yourself. Could you describe yourself for me?

Colombina: I'm just your average, common girl from Tuscany. I came to Florence to work as a housekeeper, to make something of myself. I like working, I don't shy away from work. I'm a well-mannered girl with clear principles. I'm full of life. I always know what I have to do, and do those things for the benefit of myself and my loved ones.

Anca: Which households have you worked in thus far?

Colombina: Since I came to Florence I've been working as a servant for the Pantalone family. I've been getting along very well with Pantalone's daughter.

Anca: What about Pantalone? How do you get along with him?

I can see that she's looking at me slightly confused, trying to look for the proper answer. She takes a few seconds, then answers:

Colombina: Nothing to complain about. Although I have to confess, I dislike when he comes on to me and I try to ignore him. I'm very resourceful and I can usually handle any kind of conflict.

Anca: I'm glad to hear that! You never give up and that's great! Now, let's change the subject a bit. I'm wondering if coming to Florence was the best decision you made. Was it?

She puts on a wide smile and begins gesticulating with her hands. First, she rubs her hands together, in a sign of unrest. Then, she moves her right hand to her chest to arrange her cleavage. This character intrigues me more and more.

Colombina: Yes, I'm glad I made this decision. Here, in Florence, there's always something going on. When there's a theatre show, us women are allowed to dance, which gives me great joy, because I love dancing.

Anca: Speaking of which, do you have a dance partner?

Colombina: Yes, I almost always dance with Arlecchino. I like him.

Her tone of voice begins to shift, and her face becomes more joyful. I carefully look at her to make sure I notice all of her reactions.

Anca: Given the way you're smiling, I can see that Arlecchino is very important to you. Can you tell me a bit about him?

Colombina: Arlecchino is a servant of the Dottore family. He's a joyful and naive young man, and I feel the need to protect him. Even though sometimes I might scold or punish him, I do it because my heart belongs to him.

Anca: Is there something you dislike about Arlecchino?

Colombina: I don't like the fact that he jumps head first into something, without thought. I like to use my brain and plan things out before I act.

Anca: I understand! Like all women, you long for attention. What else can you tell me about yourself?

Colombina: I'm happy and always willing to help set up meetings between lovers. One usually gives their love letters to me and I pass them on to their lover. I'm always one step ahead and know everything that's happening.

Anca: Speaking of lovers, why are you so willing to help them?

Colombina: Because I can relate to them. Because I also have a lover, Arlecchino, with whom I sometimes meet in secret. Given that we work for different families, we prefer being discreet to avoid any gossip.

While she answers, I'm carefully analyzing her and thinking about how I would go about asking her to take her mask off. I feel, however, that now's not the time, and move on to another question:

Anca: How about you? Do you gossip?

Colombina: A well-mannered woman never gossips! The advantage of working as a servant is that gossip finds its way to you, whether you like it or not. But I'm not the kind of woman that actively goes looking for gossip. I try to mind my own business as much as I can.

Anca: We've only spoken about your qualities so far! Do you have any flaws?

She looks at me, smiles, and answers with a slight laugh:

Colombina: That's a question for the town gossipers to answer...

Anca: So what you're saying is that you don't have any flaws. Are you bothered by what others think of you?

Colombina: I don't generally listen to what others think and I'm quirky, so I don't really care for these things. I'm an outgoing woman and love to mingle.

Anca: What's your biggest dream?

Colombina: I wish to become an excellent housekeeper someday and, perhaps, marry Arlecchino.

Anca: Can you tell me one of your secrets?

Colombina: One thing I keep secret is that, although I love Arlecchino and my heart will always belong to him, I like being courted by other men as well. Like any woman, I think it's important to feel loved.

Anca: That's true! But, tell me, what do you like to do in your free time?

Colombina: One of the things I enjoy is reading. I also like dancing and writing.

Anca: What's your hidden talent?

Colombina: You'll laugh. It's something quite crazy... I discovered that I can make my breasts and other parts of my body squeak.

I burst out laughing and can hardly get myself to stop. That's the craziest thing I've heard.

Anca: That really is crazy! That's the first time I heard something like this! Amazing! Maybe you could teach me that someday.

Colombina: I'll try, but keep in mind that it's not an easy thing to do.

I get up the courage and ask her to take off her mask.

Anca: I bet! I'm sorry, but can you please take off your mask so I can see who you are?

Colombina: That won't help you see who I am. I'm wearing flashy makeup underneath. I wear one mask beneath another. Honestly, I wait for people who want to get to know who I am underneath all these masks!

Anca: Maybe in time I'll get to know you too. You're an enigma to me. I'm really glad you accepted this interview. Thank you for your time.

Colombina: You're welcome! It was nice meeting you!

Colombina wanders off into the distance. Before she disappears, I notice her familiar walk - slightly swaying, her hips pushed forward. I can't see her anymore. I can only see the roof of the Baroque Dome in Piața Unirii. I then realize that I'm sitting here at a café terrace, thinking of my character, Colombina, seeing her reflection in all the girls that pass me by.

5

INTERFERENȚE



INTERFERENZEN



INTERFERENCES



Die klassische Musik und der Film

Classical Music and Film

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Abstract

Classical music and the film industry began collaborating from the beginning of the 20th century in a very interesting way that gave birth to controversies, debates and influenced the rise of film music, as it is known today. Which role did classical music play in the development of film music and how was classical music used by some of the most famous movie directors? How did this collaboration between the two arts evolve and who are the most renowned classical music composers that also choose to compose for movies? These are just few questions that will be addressed in the following article.

Keywords:

movie; classical music; film music; famous movie directors.

Rezumat

Muzica clasică și filmul au început să colaboreze încă de la începutul secolului 20 într-un mod deosebit de interesant care a născut controverse, dezbateri și a influențat apariția muzicii de film, așa cum este ea cunoscută în prezent. Care a fost rolul muzicii clasice în dezvoltarea muzicii de film și cum a fost întrebuințată muzica clasică de unii dintre cei mai mari regizori ai cinematografeiei? Cum a evoluat această colaborare dintre cele două arte și care au fost compozitorii renumiți ai muzicii clasice care au ales să compună muzică pentru filme? Acestea sunt doar câteva dintre întrebările la care următorul articol dorește să ofere răspunsuri.

Cuvinte cheie:

film; muzică clasică; muzică de film; regizori de film renumiți.

Musik und Film, eine kurze Geschichte

Die Geschichte des Zusammenhangs zwischen Theater und Musik beginnt im antiken Griechenland, wo Musik und Tanz die griechischen Komödien und

Tragödien begleiteten. In Indien werden die zwei Disziplinen im 4. Jahrhundert (v. Chr.) zusammengeführt und in China beginnen Musik und Theater ab der Sung Dynastie (960 – 1279 n. Chr.) zu harmonieren.

Die Geschichte der Filmkunst beginnt Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts mit den Stummfilmen, welche aber schon ab den ersten Jahren von Musik begleitet wurden, weil die stille, lautlose Vorführung als ein eher unangenehmes Erlebnis betrachtet wurde, so wie es George Benyon, einer der Pioniere der Filmmusik bemerkte: „Watching a movie in silence represents an unforgiving offence and should be avoided at all costs. No film should be showed in silence, no matter what the situation would be.”¹

Der Stummfilm wurde vom Erlebniswert als etwas eher Unangenehmes angesehen, wie aus den Zitaten der berühmten Komponisten Hanns Eisler und Theodor Adorno hervorgeht: „Music was introduced as a kind of antidote against the picture. The need was felt to spare the spectator the unpleasantness involved in seeing effigies of living, acting, and even speaking persons, who were at the same time silent [...]. Music was introduced not to supply them with the life they lacked – this became its aim only in the era of total ideological planning – but to exorcise fear or help the spectator absorb the shock. Motion – picture music corresponds to the whistling or singing child in the dark”.²

In den ersten Jahren wurden die Filme direkt im Kinosaal, hauptsächlich von Pianisten oder Organisten begleitet. Gleichzeitig mit der Filmhandlung interpretierte der Pianist eine Partitur, passend zu den verschiedenen Momentendes Films. Diese Aufgabe war gar nicht leicht zu erfüllen, vor allem wenn die Dauer der Filme sechszig Minuten zu überschreiten begann.

Einige Kinos, zum Beispiel das „Babylon“-Kino aus Berlin, in welchem wöchentlich ein Stummfilm mit *live* Orgelbegleitung aufgeführt wird, bringen diese Kunst der *live* gespielten Filmmusik in letzter Zeit wieder zurück. Es ist eine wundervolle Erfahrung in die Vergangenheit zurückzukehren und diese verlorene Kunst *in Echtzeit* zu beobachten.

Die klassische Musik und das Filmwesen

Klassische Musik wurde von Anfang an zum Grundbestandteil der Stummfilme, wobei insbesondere der Stil der romantischen und impressionistischen Musik eine wichtige Komponente in der Entwicklung der sogenannten „goldenen

¹ Benyon, George: zitiert nach Mervyn Cooke: *A History of Film Music*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2008, S. 1.

² Eisler, Hanns: zitiert nach Mervyn Cooke: *A History of Film Music*, S. 6.

Zeit“ der Filmmusik darstellte. Es ist bekannt, dass einige der berühmtesten Komponisten klassischer Musik in den letzten hundertzwanzig Jahren mit der Kinoindustrie zusammengearbeitet hatten, wobei der erste unter ihnen Camile Saint-Saens war. Im Jahr 1908 hatte der französische Komponist den Auftrag angenommen, die Musik für den Film *L'assassinat de Duc de Guise* unter der Regie von Charles le Bargy und Andre Calmettes zu schreiben. Dieser Film dauert nur fünfzehn Minuten und stellt den Beginn der *Film d'Art*-Strömung dar, eines Stils also, der Literatur, Musik und Film zusammengebracht hatte, so dass ein Film mit einem bemerkenswerten künstlerischen Inhalt entstehen konnte.

In Russland war Dmitri Shostakovich der Komponist, der die Musik für nicht weniger als sechsundzwanzig Filme komponierte. Seine Position dieser Kunstform gegenüber brachte er wie folgt zum Ausdruck: „*It's time to take cinema music in hand, to eliminate the bungling and the inartistic and to thoroughly clean the Augean stable. The only way to do this is to write special music*“.³ Da er ein außergewöhnlicher Pianist war, konnte Schostakovich seinen Lebensunterhalt bereits während seiner Studentenzeit mit dem Klavierspielen in diversen Kinos verdienen.

Einer der ersten berühmten Komponisten im Bereich der klassischen Musik, dem eine Karriere in Hollywood gelang, war der Wiener Erich Wolfgang Korngold. Der Österreicher komponierte neunzehn Filmpartituren und beeinflusste die Entwicklung der Filmmusik entscheidend.

Den Erfolg sicherte sich Korngold über seinen Vertrag mit Warner Brothers, da ihm bestimmte bis dahin außerordentliche Vorteile angeboten wurden: die Pflicht zur Komposition von nur zwei Partituren im Jahr, die Möglichkeit der Ablehnung jedwelchen Films, der ihm missfiel, und nicht zuletzt exklusive Autorenrechte für seine Partituren. Er verwendete später viele Fragmente aus der Filmmusik in seinen eigenen Kompositionen klassischer Musik. Ein ebenfalls sehr erfolgreicher, inzwischen weltweit bekannter Filmkomponist, der unter dem Einfluss von Korngold stand, war der Amerikaner John Williams, der unter anderem die Filmmusik von *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, *Schindler's List* oder *Saving Private Ryan* komponierte.⁴

Korngold betrachtete die Filmmusik im Wesentlichen als Opernmusik ohne den Gesangsteil und behauptete, dass Puccinis *Tosca* die beste je geschriebene

³ Shostakovich, Dimitri: <https://www.gramophone.co.uk/features/article/three-pioneers-of-film-music-shostakovich-korngold-and-copland> [letzter Zugang: 12.10.2020].

⁴ Vgl. Williams, John: <https://www.starwars.com/news/from-world-war-to-star-wars-the-music> [letzter Zugang: 12.10.2020].

Filmpartitur sei.⁵ Er war der Meinung, dass das Drehbuch eines Films dem Libretto einer Oper entspricht und widmete dem Lesen des entsprechenden Drehbuches vor dem Beginn der Komposition immer sehr viel Zeit. Die Verbindung zwischen Oper und Film bestand und besteht auch in der Gegenwart, nicht nur durch die Komponisten, die in beiden Branchen gearbeitet haben, sondern auch durch die Regisseure und Produzenten, die in beiden Kunstbereichen tätig waren. Regisseure wie Patrice Chereau, Serghei Eisenstein, Joseph Losey, Luchino Visconti, Franco Zeffirelli oder Ingmar Bergman haben außergewöhnliche Theater- und Kinoproduktionen geleistet.

Es gibt einige Filme, die Opernfragmente auf eine sensible und geniale Weise integrieren: Der Regisseur Francis Ford Coppola verwendet im Film *Godfather (Der Pate, Teil III)* in einem entscheidenden Moment des Films, genau am Ende der Trilogie das von Pietro Mascagni komponierte *Intermezzo* aus der Oper *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Der Regisseur überlagerte das musikalische Fragment mit einer tragischen Szene und beeinflusste praktisch die Entwicklung und Wahrnehmung dieses *Intermezzos* in der Musikgeschichte.

Im Film *The Shawshank Redemption* in der Regie von Frank Darabont gibt es eine beeindruckende Szene, in der das Aufbäumen des Häftlings Andy Dufresne, interpretiert von Tim Robbins mittels des Brief-Duetts aus Mozarts Oper *Die Hochzeit Figaros* zum Ausdruck gebracht wird – er läßt die Musik über Lautsprecher erklingen und provoziert damit die autoritäre Gefängnisleitung. Sein Kumpel Red, dargestellt von Morgan Freeman, komentiert mit Begeisterung: “I have no idea to this day what those two Italian ladies were singing about. Truth is, I don’t want to know. I like to think they were singing about something so beautiful it can’t be expressed in words, and makes your heart ache because of it.”⁶

Ein ähnlich besonderer Moment erscheint im Film *La vita è bella*, eine Tragikomödie in der Regie von Roberto Benigni, der Jacques Offenbachs *Barcarolle* als Musikunterlage einfügt, um dem Häftling Guido im Nazi-Konzentrationslager Linderung zu bringen.

Grundsätze der Filmmusik

Im Filmwesen wird der Großteil der Musik auf Anfrage der Regisseure und der Produzenten komponiert und muss sich an den Charakter bzw. Inhalt

⁵ Vgl. Cooke, Mervyn: *A History of Film Music*, S. 95.

⁶ <https://www.operaphila.org/backstage/opera-blog/2017/something-so-beautiful/> [letzter Zugang: 12.10.2020].

jedes Films anpassen. In diesem Sinne hat Claudia Gorbman die Grundsätze der Komposition der Filmmusik im Buch *Unheard Melodies* vorgestellt:

- I. *Unsichtbarkeit*: der technische Apparat der nicht-diegetischen Musik muss nicht sichtbar sein;
- I. *Keine Wahrnehmbarkeit*: Musik ist nicht dazu bestimmt bewusst angehört zu werden; sie ist dem Dialog, den visuellen Künsten untergeordnet – also den Hauptelementen der Erzählung;
- II. *Bedeutung des Gefühls*: die Soundtrack-Musik hat die Möglichkeit verschiedene Zustände zu zeigen oder bestimmte Gefühle zu unterstreichen, welche von der Erzählung angedeutet werden, aber die Musik steht für die Bedeutung des Gefühls selbst;
- III. *Erzählanweisung*:
 - *Erzählreferenz*: die Musik bietet eine Erzählungsanweisung durch die Gewährung einer Sicht, in Vertretung formaler Abgrenzungen und durch Festlegung des Rahmens und der Charaktere;
 - *Erzählkonnotation*: die Musik „interpretiert“ und „illustriert“ die Erzählereignisse;
- IV. *Kontinuität*: die Musik sichert die formelle und rhythmische Kontinuität zwischen den Szenen durch die Ergänzung des Raums, der sich in den Transitionen bildet;
- V. *Einheit*: durch die Wiederholung und Variation des musikalischen und instrumentellen Materials hilft die Musik zum Aufbau der formellen und erzählerischen Einheit;
- VI. Eine Filmpartitur kann alle oben genannten Grundsätze verletzen, unter der Bedingung, dass diese Verletzung gut definierten Grundsätzen dient.⁷

Diese Grundsätze stellen zwar Grundpfeiler der Komposition in der Filmmusik dar, *Keine Wahrnehmbarkeit*, *Kontinuität*, *Erzählanweisungen* oder *Einheit* können aber – wie im folgenden Abschnitt gezeigt werden soll, – im Fall von Regisseuren wie Stanley Kubrick, Andrei Tarkovsky oder Ingmar Bergman nicht angewandt werden.

⁷ Vgl. Gorbman, Claudia: *Unheard Melodies, Narrative Filmmusic*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1987, zitiert nach: Mervyn Cooke: *A History of Film Music*, S. 84.

Berühmte Regisseure und klassische Musik

Ab den 1960er Jahren griffen Regisseure vermehrt auf Stücke aus bestehenden klassischen Kompositionen zurück. Viele Kritiker sahen das nicht gern, da sie der Ansicht waren, dass ein sehr bekanntes Musikstück die persönlichen Erfahrungen der Zuhörer in den Film „hineinbringen“ und dadurch die Wahrnehmung des Films beeinflussen würde.

Stanley Kubrick, einer der wichtigsten Regisseure der Kinoindustrie, widersetzte sich den Filmmusikkomponisten und behauptete: „However good our best film composers may be, they are not a Beethoven, a Mozart or a Brahms. Why use music which is less good when there is such a multitude of great orchestral music from the past and from our own time?“⁸

Stanley Kubrick, der die klassische Musik auf die einfallsreichste und kreativste Art verwendete, entschied stets allein über die verwendeten Musikstücke und ihre Verbindung mit den von ihm als passend betrachteten Bildern. Auch in der Zusammenarbeit mit jungen zeitgenössischen Komponisten wie György Ligeti oder Krzysztof Penderecki bevorzugte der Regisseur Fragmente aus den von ihnen schon bekannten Kompositionen Stücke für den Soundtrack seiner Filmproduktionen zu wählen.

Der Film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, erschienen im Jahr 1968, stellt einen Wendepunkt in der Geschichte der Filmkunst dar. Kubrick führte klassische Musikstücke auf geniale Weise in seinen Film ein. Die Neuheit seines Umganges mit der Musik besteht darin, dass er sehr bekannte klassische Kompositionen, beispielweise die sinfonische Dichtung *Also sprach Zarathustra* von Richard Strauss und den Walzer *An der schönen blauen Donau* von Johann Strauss (Sohn) mit der modernen Musik von György Ligeti verband. Die Intention des Regisseurs war ein eher nonverbales Experiment zu wagen, wobei die Musik eine wichtige Rolle in der Wiedergabe der besonderen Stimmungen spielen sollte. Von der Technik her ist es auffallen, dass die Musik nur vor und nach dem verbalen Teil der Dialoge zu hören ist und nicht als Background eingeschaltet wird. Der Dirigent John Mauceri, der für die Aufnahmen des Soundtrack für den Film das Orchester leitete, bemerkt: „In short, Kubrick and his music editor played with irony (*Blue Danube*) and gravity-free descriptive (Ligeti) – and of course straight-ahead musical lexicon for immense power as well as empathy for loneliness in traditional classical music terms (Strauss and Khachaturian).“⁹

⁸ Kubrick, Stanley: zitiert nach Mervyn Cooke: *A History of Film Music*, S. 22.

⁹ Mauceri, John: <https://brianwise.net/2001-a-space-odyssey-50-soundtrack/> [letzter Zugang: 12.10.2020].

Ursprünglich wollten die Produzenten von MGM keine schon bestehenden klassischen Kompositionen verwenden und verpflichteten Carl Orff und Bernard Herrmann die Musik für diese Filmproduktion zu komponieren. Doch man entschied sich letztlich für Alex North, der bereits über 40 Minuten Musik komponiert und aufgenommen hatte als ihm Kubrick, weil er für den Rest des Films nur akustische Effekte verwenden wollte, den Auftrag entzog. So kam es zu der noch heute von Kubrick angesehenen innovativen Einsatztechnik der klassischen Musikwerke. Die Anfangsszene des Films beginnt mit dem ersten Teil der symphonischen Dichtung *Also sprach Zarathustra* von Richard Strauss, einem Werk, das auch auf Grund dieser Filmproduktion im allgemeinen Gedächtnis als ein mit einem Sonnenaufgang oder mit dem Weltall verbundenes Stück bleibt. Die BBC hat diese Komposition schließlich auch in dem Bericht verwendet, in welchem die Mondlandung zum ersten Mal ausgestrahlt wurde.

Ein Dialog von Kubrick mit dem berühmten Regisseur Sergio Leone bezüglich der Fimmusik und ihrer Bedeutung für diese beiden Kunstmenschen ist bekannt: „I’ve got all Ennio Morricone’s albums. Can you explain to me why I only seem to like the music he composed for your films? Leone replied: Don’t worry. I didn’t think much of Richard Strauss until I saw 2001.“¹⁰

Im Film *L’Âge d’Or* unter der Regie von Luis Buñuel und Salvador Dalí (1930) wurde die klassische Musik genau als Gegensatz zur obigen Idee verwendet, und dies auf eine Art, die dazu bestimmt war, das damalige Bürgertum zu schockieren. Es wurden zwar wiederum bekannte Musikstücke berühmter Komponisten (Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Wagner) verwendet, diesmal aber in Verbindung mit grotesken Szenen. Eine besondere Rolle spielt Wagners „*Liebestod*“ aus der Oper *Tristan und Isolde*. Diese unerhörte Nebeneinanderstellung schockierte das Publikum viel mehr als es wohl ein neues, von einem zeitgenössischen Komponisten im zeitgenössischen Stil komponiertes Musikstück getan hätte.

Alfred Hitchcock verwendete in der ersten Variante seines Films *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) ein Symphoniekonzert, nämlich die *Storm Cloud Cantata* des australischen Komponisten Arthur Benjamin, um das Erzählgeschehen zu unterstützen. Ein ständiges, etwa vier Minuten langes *Crescendo* endet mit einem Pistolenschuss, mit dem Laut der Tschinellen synchronisiert. Für die zweite Version, das Remake des gleichnamigen Films aus dem Jahr 1956 wurde Bernard Herrmann beauftragt die Musik zu komponieren. „Herrmanns Musik ist im Vergleich zu anderen Partituren eher zurückhaltend und kurz. Die meisten Stücke dauern zwischen einer und zwei Minuten. Aber er hatte gute Gründe für

¹⁰ Kubrick, Stanley: zitiert nach Mervyn Cooke: *A History of Film Music*, S. 442.

den Film nicht zu viel Musik zu schreiben: In der Schlüsselszene des Films wird der Zuschauer schon unfreiwillig zum Konzertgänger gemacht und das ganze 8 Minuten lang, ohne Dialog! Das Prelude am Anfang welches mit dramatischem Schlagwerk (1 Pauken, 1 Bass Drum, 2 Side Drums, 1 sus. Cymbals und ein Becken) aufwartet gibt dem Zuschauer schon einen Vorgeschmack und teilt ihm gleichzeitig mit, dass die Musik eine wichtige Rolle spielen wird. Käme jetzt auch noch ein gut beladener Soundtrack daher, wäre der Zuschauer von der Musik erschlagen und sie würde ihren Glanz zum Schluss hin verlieren. Die Wirkung des Films wäre zunichte gemacht. Herrmann war sich also bewusst, der Cantata der Vorrang zu geben und hatte damit auch recht behalten, denn anders würde der Film nicht funktionieren.“¹¹

Drei der besten Regisseure der Kinogeschichte – Andrei Tarkovsky, Stanley Kubrick und Ingmar Bergman – zeigten einen außergewöhnlichen Respekt für die in ihren Filmen verwendeten Kompositionen klassischer Musik. Die drei stellten die Musik in dem Licht vor, das sie verdient und vermieden es, sie im Hintergrund oder zur Konsolidierung der Erzählung zu verwenden. Keiner der drei Regisseure hat beispielsweise Dialoge über die klassische Musik gelegt sondern, im Gegenteil, insbesondere Bilder hinzugefügt, welche die Wahrnehmung der Musik positiv beeinflussten. Auch hat keiner der drei klassische Kompositionen als einfache Transitionen von einer Szene zur anderen verwendet.

Als Folge davon wurden viele der Bewunderer der Filme von Andrei Tarkovsky auch Liebhaber der Musik von Johann Sebastian Bach oder, im Fall von Ingmar Bergman, der Musik von Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart oder Ludwig van Beethoven. Berühmt bleibt das Geständnis des schwedischen Regisseurs: „If I had to choose between losing my sight or hearing – I would keep my hearing. I can’t imagine anything more horrible than to have my music taken away from me“.¹²

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¹¹ <https://www.soundtrack-board.de/topic/5028-der-mann-der-zuviel-wusste-bernard-herrmann/> [letzter Zugang: 12.10.2020].

¹² Bergman, Ingmar: <https://www.ingmarbergman.se/en/universe/unrequited-love-music> [letzter Zugang: 12.10.2020].

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6

RECENZII

BUCHREZENSIONEN

BOOKREVIEWS

Eine erste wissenschaftliche Darstellung des Internationalen Theaterfestivals aus Hermannstadt

CHRISTINE DANCSO

(Erlangen)

Alina Mazilu: *Festivalul Internațional de Teatru de la Sibiu ca promotor al dramaturgiei contemporane. Aspecte din dramaturgia română actuală*, Editura Universitaria, Craiova, 2019, ISBN 978-606-14-1515-1, 240 Seiten.



Abstract

The review describes the publication of Alina Mazilu concerning the role of the International Theatre Festival from Sibiu in promoting the contemporary dramaturgy.

Keywords:

International Theatre Festival from Sibiu; theatre; contemporary dramaturgy; actual Romanian dramaturgy.

Rezumat

Recenzia descrie volumul publicat de Alina Mazilu, în cadrul căruia se prezintă rolul Festivalului Internațional de Teatru de la Sibiu în calitate de promotor al dramaturgiei contemporane.

Cuvinte cheie:

Festivalul Internațional de Teatru de la Sibiu; teatru; dramaturgie contemporană; dramaturgia română contemporană.

Alina Mazilus persönlicher Einblick in die gegenwärtige Theaterwelt ist schon von der Einleitung der Publikation an wahrzunehmen, wobei ihre bekenntnishaften Äußerungen den außerordentlichen Enthusiasmus und die besondere Lust an der Recherche des rumänischen gegenwärtigen Theaterphänomens innerhalb des europäischen Kontextes unterstreichen. Die eingehende Analyse des Werdegangs und des Verlaufs der Editionen des Internationalen Theaterfestivals aus Hermannstadt für die Zeitspanne 1993-2012 stellt eine Premiere dar, weil sich eine wissenschaftliche Untersuchung zum ersten Mal diesem Kulturphänomen widmet. Somit wird ein Stück aktuelle Theatergeschichte geschrieben, insbesondere von der Tatsache ausgehend, dass dieses Festival weltweit als eines der wichtigsten Kulturevents dieser Art gilt, das unzähligen Dramatikern bzw. Künstlern aus Rumänien und aus der ganzen Welt eine Chance bietet, ihr Können unter Beweis zu stellen. Die „Mamuth“-Dimension des Hermannstädter Festivals verdankt es einem äußerst klugen Manager – Constantin Chiriac, der einfallsreiche und tatkräftige Motor, der diese Kulturveranstaltung 1993 ins Leben gerufen hatte und weiterhin ihren Bekanntheitsgrad als Vorsitzender stets steigert. Um die Einmaligkeit dieses Festivals hervorzuheben argumentiert Alina Mazilu ihre Position mittels der Stimmen von bekannten Theaterwissenschaftlern und Theaterkritikern wie George Banu und Victor Parhon. Zugleich unterstreicht sie die akademische Dimension des Festivals, das nebst den künstlerischen *indoor* und *outdoor*

Veranstaltungen, Buchpräsentationen, Konferenzen mit Theatermenschen, Lese-shows mit dramatischen Gegenwartstexten, Workshops für Schauspieler und Schauspielstudenten bzw. eine Sondersektion für die Produktionen der Schauspielschulen umfasst.

Die Erfahrung der Autorin als Dramaturgin am Deutschen Staatstheater Temeswar, an dem Nationalen Theater „Radu Stanca“ aus Hermannstadt, als Forscherin in Luxemburg bzw. Deutschland und insbesondere als Mitorganisierende im Team des Internationalen Theaterfestivals aus Hermannstadt bilden einen Ausgangspunkt für den kritischen Blick und die kompetenten Einschätzungen bezüglich dieses komplexen Kulturphänomens. Die vielseitige Tätigkeit als Herausgeberin, Lektorin, Übersetzerin der Anthologien und zugleich der Publikation *Zeitschrift der darstellenden Kunst (Jurnalul Artelor Spectacolului)* vervollkommen den Werdegang einer Kennerin der aktuellen Theaterlandschaft.

Eine besondere Aufmerksamkeit schenkt die Autorin in diesem Buch den Anthologien mit dramatischen Texten des rumänischen und internationalen Gegenwartstheaters, die speziell für die jeweiligen Festivaleditionen publiziert und teilweise unter ihrer Aufsicht vorbereitet wurden. So erfährt der Leser Einzelheiten über die jeweiligen Anthologien, die in der Zeitspanne 1999-2019 herausgegeben wurden, über die Selektionsmechanismen der Texte, über die Entwicklung und die Änderungen des Ausgangskonzepts, über alle Hürden und Erfolge. Erstmalige beispielhafte Untersuchungen reflektieren wichtige Veränderungen, zeigen ästhetische Merkmale auf, integrieren die selektierten Texte in den Gesamtkontext der aktuellen literarischen Strömungen. Festzuhalten ist die ganz besondere Rolle ihrer Initiatoren, Constantin Chiriac, Mircea Ivănescu und Valentin Silvestru, bzw. des amerikanischen Professors Kenneth Campbell, die zusammen eine Plattform für den Dialog der dramatischen Texte aus der ganzen Welt im *jetzt* sicherten und damit zugleich die Gegenwartsdramaturgie aus den verschiedensten geografischen Zonen fördern. Von den 166 zweisprachig herausgegebenen Texten (in Originalsprache und in rumänischer Übersetzung) selektiert Alina Mazilu ein paar wesentliche Beispiele, um ihre Vielfalt darzustellen. Das Interesse der europäischen Gegenwartsdramatiker für das Schicksal der Ausgegrenzten sticht hervor, wobei auch eine Umkehrung der Beziehung Zentrum – Peripherie und eine ausgeprägte Tendenz zur Authentizität im Sinne eines neuen Realismus zu bemerken ist.

Bezüglich des aktuellen rumänischen Theaters äußert sich die Autorin über die wichtigsten Mutationen, die unter den gegebenen politischen Umständen stattgefunden haben. Viele bislang noch nicht recherchierte Aspekte werden

hervorgehoben, mit dem Ziel den Kontext der Entstehung der Werke und ihrer Inszenierung wahrzunehmen, um die aktuelle Entwicklung zu verstehen. Auf die rumänische aktuelle Dramaturgie nach 1989 bezogen stellt Alina Mazilu berechtigterweise fest, dass diese, in Vergleich mit der europäischen Dramaturgie, eine eindeutige Übergangsphase erlebte, begleitet von der Suche nach neuen Ausdrucksformen und sämtlichen Experimenten. Diesbezüglich übernimmt sie eine von Alina Nelega vorgeschlagene Klassifikation, wagt aber einen Schritt weiterzugehen, um eine Neubewertung anzubieten. Zugleich akzentuiert sie den Unterschied zwischen „dem schreibenden Dramatiker“ und dem „Autor von Bühnentexten“, mit der Erklärung, dass der letztere seine eigenen Texte inszeniert. Dadurch entsteht eine Änderung in der Beziehung Dramatiker – Bezug zur Realität, Autor – Text, Text – Inszenierung. Ein dazu passendes Beispiel ist Gianina Cărbunariu nebst anderen Vertretern der jungen und jüngeren rumänischen Dramatikergeneration, die viele von ihnen stark vom Programm des Dramafest und dramAcum beeinflusst wurden, also von Projekten, die sich ihrerseits die Förderung der rumänischen Dramaturgie als Ziel gesetzt haben.

Hervorzuheben ist, dass zwei von Alina Mazilus eigenen nebenswerten Projekten als Ausgangspunkt für die Recherche dienen: *Das rumänische Theater nach 1989. Seine Beziehungen zum deutschsprachigen Raum*, eine ausführliche dokumentierte Publikation, herausgegeben zusammen mit Irina Wolf und Medana Weident im Frank&Timme Verlag (2011), nebst der Sondernummer der belgischen Theaterzeitschrift „Alternatives Theatre“ mit dem Thema *La scene roumaine. Les défis de la liberté* (Nr. 106-107, Nov.2010), die sich exklusiv mit dem rumänischen Gegenwartstheater befassen. Schwerpunkt der Forschung bildet in diesen Publikationen das noch in vielen Teilen Europas unbekannt rumänische Gegenwartstheater, das zwar mit einem kritischen Auge und dennoch die Originalität und Besonderheiten im Blick behaltend betrachtet wird. Namhafte Theaterwissenschaftler und Theaterkritiker wie George Banu, Sorin Crișan, Alina Nelega, Daniela Șilindean, Cristina Modreanu, Iulia Popovici und Nicolae Prelipceanu, deren eingehende Studien für das entstehende Gesamtbild ausschlaggebend sind, kommen zu Wort. Nebst sämtlichen Porträts und Interviews mit namhaften Theaterschaffenden wie Andrei Șerban, Silviu Purcărete, Mihai Mănuțiu, Alexandru Dabija, Radu Afrim werden auch bekannte Dramatiker erwähnt, darunter Matei Vișniec, Ștefan Peca, Alina Nelega, Gianina Cărbunariu, Saviana Stănescu.

Ein anderer untersuchter Aspekt bezieht sich auf das *in-yer-face* Phänomen, das Ende der 1990er Jahre von dem britischen Theaterkritiker Aleks Sierz eingehend beschrieben worden ist. Somit gelangt Alina Mazilu zur Schlussfolgerung,

dass viele Gegenwartsautoren radikale, schokierende, tabubrechende Themen bevorzugen, geistesgestörte, brutale dramatische Figuren aus der Peripherie ins Licht rücken. Dazu bietet die Autorin ein paar Fallbeispiele – Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Anthony Nelson, Tracy Letts, Martin McDonagh, Patrick Marber, Naomi Wallace, David Greig – wobei gleichzeitig darauf hingewiesen wird, dass sich nicht alle ihrer Werke in diese Strömung einordnen lassen.

Das Schlusskapitel konzentriert sich auf die rumänische aktuelle Theaterlandschaft, indem ästhetische Aspekte wie die spezifische Thematik und der Sprachstil der Autoren untersucht werden. So gelingt besteht der Versuch, die Profile einiger herausragender rumänischer Gegenwartsdramatiker zu skizzieren. Unter den prominenten Dramatikern werden folgende Autoren erwähnt: Matei Vişniec, Alina Nelega, Gianina Cărbunariu, Lia Bugnar und Ioan Peter Pit. Ein Sonderstatus erlangt dabei Matei Vişniec, der weltbekannte rumänische Schriftsteller, dessen Theaterstücke beim Internationalen Theaterfestival aus Hermannstadt, sowie in diversen Inszenierungen aus Rumänien und aus dem Ausland, unter anderen auch als Gastschauspiele aus Chicago oder Tokyo präsent sind.

Schlussfolgernd kann bemerkt werden, dass es Alina Mazilu es gelungen ist eine ausführliche Untersuchung der aktuellen rumänischen Gegenwartsdramaturgie aus der Perspektive der internationalen Dramaturgie zu unternehmen, nebst der akribischen erstmaligen Recherche des Internationalen Theaterfestivals aus Hermannstadt, diesem außerordentlichen Kulturphänomens.

Zwischen den Welten – Einblick in postkommunistische Kulturen

ELEONORA RINGLER-PASCU

(Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara)

Carola Heinrich: *Was bleibt? Zur Inszenierung von Gedächtnis und Identität im postsowjetischen Kuba und Rumänien*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, 2020, ISBN 978-3-487-15847-1, 209 Seiten.



Abstract

The bookreview presents the newest publication of Carola Heinrich. The publication focuses from postcolonial point of view the cultures that had mainly been influenced by the Sowjet hegemonic power – Cuba, Romania and Republic of Moldavia. The comparative research operates with forms of cultural translation, examining theatre, performance, film, video, radio drama since 1989 from the mentioned countries.

Keywords:

postcolonialism; postcommunism; cultural translation, Sowjet hegemony; Cuba; Romania; Republic of Moldavia.

Rezumat

Recenzia prezintă cea mai recentă publicație a Carolei Heinrich. Focusul publicației se concentrează din punct de vedere postcolonial asupra culturilor care s-au aflat sub influența puterii hegemoniale sovietice – Cuba, România și Republica Moldova. Cercetarea comparativă operează cu forme ale transferului cultural examinând teatrul, performance-ul, filmul, video-ul, teatrul radiofonic începând cu 1989 în țările menționate.

Cuvinte cheie:

postcolonialism; postcomunism; transfer cultural, hegemonia sovietică; Cuba; România; Republica Moldova.

Die Publikation von Carola Heinrich setzt sich als Ziel, eine umfassende vergleichende Recherche über den Einfluss der sowjetischen Machtstrukturen auf die Ostblockstaaten zu unternehmen, indem gegenwärtige performative Werke vorwiegend am Beispiel vom postkommunistischen Kuba und Rumänien, ausgehend von den aktuellen Theorien der Translation (kulturelle Übersetzung), durchleuchtet werden. Zwei verschiedene Translationsprozesse stehen im Fokus: eine Untersuchung der Erinnerung des kulturellen Gedächtnisses auf zeitlicher Ebene und eine Untersuchung der Hybridisierung von Konstruktionen kultureller Identität auf räumlicher Ebene. Der klar formulierte Forschungsgegenstand umfasst Fallstudien, die das Bild des Anderen bzw. das kulturelle Fremdbild, Gedächtnis- und Identitätskonstruktionen in den verschiedenen Inszenierungsformen, über Theater, Performance, Film, Video und Hörspiel fokussieren, wobei ähnliche Aspekte und zugleich Differenzen hervorgehoben werden.

In der ausführlichen Einleitung bringt die Autorin theoretische Argumente, definiert diverse Begriffe, wichtige Instrumente, mit denen operiert wird. Hervorzuheben ist, dass es zu den untersuchten Einzelfällen bislang keine ausführlichen Studien gibt, womit der innovative Aspekt der Publikation hervorsticht, da es sich um Pionierarbeit in diesem Segment der Feldforschung handelt.

Eine zentrale Frage der Untersuchung wird mittels der Fallbeispiele erörtert, indem der Fokus darauf liegt, wie es den performativen Werken gelingt, über den *translational turn* anhand von eigenen Darstellungsverfahren zur Konstruktion, Reflexion und Transformation kultureller Wahrnehmungsmuster beizutragen. Die Recherche beweist wie die unterschiedlichen Translationen das kulturelle Gedächtnis, die positive und negative Identitätsbeschreibung beeinflussen bzw. steuern. Die kritische Betrachtung, das Verständnis der interkulturellen Verhandlungs- und Übersetzungsprozesse zwischender ehemaligen Sowjetunion bzw. dem Nachfolgestaat Russland als postkoloniales Zentrum in Bezug auf die Peripherie, vertreten durch Kuba und Rumänien, hebt die Translation auf zeitlicher und räumlicher Ebene hervor.

Das Kapitel „Postsowjetische Erinnerungskulturen“ umfasst eine ausführliche Studie der Erinnerungsstrukturen, wobei die Beziehung Translation und Gedächtnis im Zentrum steht. Repräsentationen des kollektiven Gedächtnisses, Lesarten der Vergangenheit, Fremdbilder und ihre Rolle, das Generieren von Selbstbildern, Projektionen der Gegenwart und Zukunft – sind nur einige der zentralen Aspekte, die erörtert werden. Ausgehend von den aktuellen kulturwissenschaftlichen Diskussionen bezogen auf das kulturelle bzw. kommunikative Gedächtnis bildet der Prozess des Sich-Erinnerns mit der Selektion und den Transformationen der Inhalte den Schwerpunkt der Untersuchung. Um diese Facetten zu beleuchten untersucht Carola Heinrich acht Werke und gliedert wiederum die Recherche in vier Unterkapitel, wobei nebst den Einzelanalysen nochmals umfassende theoretische Exkurse vorangestellt werden. Berechtigterweise wird festgestellt, dass die Manifestation von Komik, Karnevalisierung und Nostalgie in den untersuchten Fallbeispielen für die Entmachtung der früheren Hegemonialmacht stehen, genauer für die Entlarvung eines totalitären Systems und zugleich Parodierung einer schizophänen, absurden Welt, insbesondere im Falle der Kunstschaffenden aus Rumänien – darunter Vlad Zografi, Horațiu Mălăieșe, Gianina Cărbunariu und Matei Vișniec. Bezogen auf die kubanischen Künstler – Daniel Diaz Torres, Alessandra Santiesteban, Ulises Rodríguez Febles und Nacional Electrónica Gruppe – konstatiert die Autorin, dass es sich um eine Gegenbewegung handelt, um eine historische Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit, die teilweise einen leichten Humor aufweist, Komik generiert und zugleich nostalgische Zukunftsvisionen ermöglicht.

Das zweite umfangreiche Kapitel „Postsowjetische Positionierung“ fokussiert die Auseinandersetzung mit Russland als postkoloniale Macht bzw. die Manifestation der Überlagerung verschiedener Traditionen, präsent in den untersuchten Einzelwerken, wie auch die Strategien ihrer Inszenierung. Somit wird dem Gegen-

satz zwischen dem fremden Russen-Bild und dem Selbstbildnis Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt, wobei eine Neupositionierung und hybride Identifikation über explizite oder implizite Wertungen, Handlungen und deren Verortung feststellbar ist. Ziel ist zu verdeutlichen wie die Inszenierung die Konstruktion und Revision von Machtverhältnissen und ein abweichendes Verständnis von kollektiver Identifikation vermittelt. Anhand von sechs „hybriden“ Werken demonstriert die Verfasserin drei verschiedene Spielarten der Hybridisierung als Translation – und setzt diese in Beziehung mit Unübersetzbarkeit, Mimikry und Migration. Beeindruckende Analysen durchleuchten die Werke von Esteban Insausti, Rodrigo Orizondo, González Melo aus Kuba bzw. jene von Ion Borș, Nicoleta Esinescu, beide aus der Republik Moldau und von Saviana Stănescu, der in den USA lebenden Dramatikerin, rumänischer Herkunft. Festgestellt wird, dass die KünstlerInnen aus Kuba und Rumänien ähnliche Positionen, bezogen auf ihre Haltung im Hinblick auf Russland, dem Nachfolgestaat der ehemaligen Hegemonialmacht Sowjetunion einnehmen. Dennoch gibt es divergierende Tendenzen – in Rumänien eine Orientierung in Richtung dokumentarische, politische Kunst, in Kuba hingegen ein Abwenden von der Realität zu einem autoreferentiellen, intertextuellen Spiel.

Der besondere Wert der Publikation besteht darin, dass die komparatistische Untersuchung zum ersten Mal Aspekte aus postkolonialer Perspektive über die Nachwirkungen der sowjetischen Dominanz auf die Kulturen des postkommunistischen Kuba, Rumäniens und der Republik Moldau, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Translationstheorien zur Diskussion stellt.

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erzaehlen,25057.html; *Germanenrezeption in der niederländischen, skandinavischen und deutschsprachigen Literatur*, 2019: Philipp Schmidt: *Germanenbilder. Germanische Stoffe und Motive in den skandinavisch-, deutsch- und niederländischen Literatur von der Vorromantik bis 2013*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2018. Abrufbar unter: <https://literaturkritik.de/schmidt-germanenbilder-germanenrezeption,26062.html>. Forschungsschwerpunkt: ältere deutsche Literatur, Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft und Sprachwissenschaft, historische Sprachwissenschaft.

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studii și articole în *Banatica*, *DramArt*, *Estudios Filológicos Alemanes*, *Lenau-Jahrbuch*, *Symbolon*, *Thalia Germanica*, *Transcarpathica*, *Zeitschrift der Germanisten Rumäniens*. Cărți: *Unterwegs zum Ungesagten. Zu Peter Handkes Theaterstücken „Das Spiel vom Fragen“ und „Die Stunde da wir nichts voneinander wussten“ mit Blick über die Postmoderne* (1998); *Österreichisches Gegenwartstheater zwischen Tradition und Innovation* (2000); *Österreichische Literatur ohne Grenzen. Gedenkschrift für Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler*, Attila Bombitz, Renata Cornejo, Slawomir Piontek, Eleonora Ringler-Pascu (ed.) (2009); *Kurzdrama – Minidrama*, Excelsior Art, Timișoara (2009), *Drama der Antike* (2010), *Österreichische Literatur. Traditionsbezüge und Prozesse der Moderne vom 19. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart*, Laura Cheie, Eleonora Ringler-Pascu, Christiane Wittmer (ed.) (2018). Traduceri: Peter Handke: *Absența* (2000); Armin Klein: *Managementul proiectului cultural* (2005); Thomas Bernhard: *Immanuel Kant* (2013). Arii de cercetare: teatrul austriac și german contemporan, teatrul minorității germane din Banat.

Studium: Anglistik-Germanistik an der Universität Temeswar (1979). Franz-Werfel Stipendiatin an der Universität Wien. Promotion über Peter Handkes Theater – Universität Wien (1997). Habilitationsschrift: *Dramatik im 20. Jahrhundert: Experiment, Antitheater, postdramatisches oder neodramatisches Theater, Rückkehr zur Tradition* Kunstuniversität Târgu-Mureș (2013). Österreichisches Ehrenkreuz für Wissenschaft und Kunst der Republik Österreich (2017). Univ.-Prof. an der Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Department: Musik – Darstellende Kunst, Schauspiel (rumänische und deutsche Sprache), West-Universität Temeswar und Direktorin der Doktoratschule für Musik und Theater. Vorsitzende der Rumänisch-Deutschen Kulturgesellschaft Temeswar (2014-2017). Publikationen: Studien und Artikel in *Banatica*, *DramArt*, *Estudios Filológicos Alemanes*, *Lenau-Jahrbuch*, *Symbolon*, *Thalia Germanica*, *Transcarpathica*, *Zeitschrift der Germanisten Rumäniens*. Bücher: *Unterwegs zum Ungesagten. Zu Peter Handkes Theaterstücken „Das Spiel vom Fragen“ und „Die Stunde da wir nichts voneinander wussten“ mit Blick über die Postmoderne* (1998); *Österreichisches Gegenwartstheater zwischen Tradition und Innovation* (2000); *Österreichische Literatur ohne Grenzen. Gedenkschrift für Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler*, Attila Bombitz, Renata Cornejo, Slawomir Piontek, Eleonora Ringler-Pascu (Hg.) (2009); *Kurzdrama – Minidrama* (2009); *Drama der Antike* (2010), *Österreichische Literatur. Traditionsbezüge und Prozesse der Moderne vom 19. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart*, Laura Cheie, Eleonora Ringler-Pascu, Christiane Wittmer (Hrsg.) (2018). Übersetzungen: Peter Handke: *Absența* (2000); Armin Klein: *Managementul proiectului cultural* (2005); Thomas Bernhard: *Immanuel Kant* (2013). Forschungsschwerpunkte: österreichisches und deutsches Gegenwartsdrama, deutschsprachiges Theater im Banat.

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to the Theatre around the World, *More Glimpses of the Theatre, More Glimpses of the World*; *Theatre and Humanism in a World of Violence*, Kalina Stefanovna, Ian Herbert (ed.), (2009); cărți de ficțiune *Ann's Dwarves (a story for all ages)*, (2004) și *The Last Way Out*, (2010) publicate în 9 țări. Editorul primului volum de piese chineze în limba bulgară (*Introduction of Contemporary Chinese Drama*, Bulgarian Bestseller, 2020); prima anthologie de teatru esteuropean în limba chineză (*Metamorphosis, Selected Plays from Eastern Europe*, două volume, China Theatre Press, 2019); prima prezentare a teatrului din Bulgaria în limba engleză (*Contemporary Bulgarian Theatre*, două volume, Routledge, 1998). Numeroase studii publicate în 26 de limbi, în 28 de țări și 14 cărți despre teatru. Dramaturgia producției *Pentecost* de David Edgar, regia Mladen Kiselov, Stratford Festival of Canada. Domenii de cercetare: teatrul contemporan, critică de teatru.

Studium: Theaterwissenschaft und Theaterkritik, Nationale Akademie für Theater und Film (NAFTA), Sofia (1986); Promotion, Nationale Akademie für Theater und Film, Sofia, Titel der Dissertation *Besprechung des amerikanischen Gegenwartstheaters: Modelle and Merkmale* (1993). Theaterkritikerin und Universitätsprofessorin, Sofia. Fulbright Visiting Scholar an der New York Universität (1990-1992), British Council Fellowship an der City Universität, London (1996), Visiting Scholar an der Universität aus Cape Town, Südafrika, (1998) und an der Meiji Universität, Tokyo (2010). Ständiger Visiting Scholar an der Shanghai Theatre Academy, Lecturer und Vorträge an zahlreichen Universitäten aus China. 2016 zum Visiting Distinguished Professor of the Arts School of Wuhan University ernannt und zugleich zum Distinguished Researcher of the Chinese Arts Criticism Foundation of Wuhan University. Vorlesungen und Seminare über Theater und Theaterkritik in Südkorea, China, Chile, Kanada, Portugal, Malta, Istanbul, Zagreb, Amsterdam, Warschau, Singapore, St. Petersburg, Durban, Stellenbosh and Pietermaritzburg (Südafrika), Japan, Lettland. Ständige Bewertungsexpertin für Kultur- und Bildungsprojekte der Europäischen Kommission. Bulgarische Theaterexpertin der Europäischen Kommission. Vizepräsidentin der International Association of Theatre Critics (2001-2006) und Direktor Symposia (2006-2010). Best Critic Award der Bulgarischen Künstlerunion (1999) und Idea for Theatre Award der Stiftung „Idea for Theatre“ (1999). Kulturexpertin der EC seit 2001. Redaktionsmitglied – *Theatre Art*, Shanghai Theatre Academy; *Artos*, Theatre Academy of Osjek; *European Stages*, CUNY New York. Litteraria Copernicana, Nikolas Copernicus, University of Torun, Poland. Publikationen: Bücher in Englisch und Bulgarisch – *Who Calls the Shots on the New York Stages*, *Eastern European Theatre After the Iron Curtain* and *Who Keeps the Score on the London Stages?* Harwood Academic Publishers/Routledge (1994 – 2000); *Going to the Theatre around the World, More Glimpses of the Theatre, More Glimpses of the World, Theatre and Humanism in a World of Violence*, Kalina Stefanovna, Ian Herbert (Hg.) (2009); Autorin von zwei fiktionalen Werken - (*Ann's Dwarves (a story for all ages)*, (2004) und *The Last Way Out*, (2010), herausgegeben in 9 Ländern. Herausgeberin der ersten Publikation von chinesischen Dramen in bulgarischer Sprache (*Introduction of Contemporary Chinese Drama*, Bulgarian Bestseller, 2020); erste Anthologie des osteuropäischen Dramas in chinesischer Sprache (*Metamorphosis, Selected Plays from Eastern Europe*, two volumes, China Theatre Press, 2019); erste Präsentation

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Studies: BA in Comparative Literature from the Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University (2012), Master’s Degree in Performing Arts from the Faculty of Theatre and Film, Babeș-Bolyai University (2017); PhD candidate at the Doctoral School of Theatre and Performing Arts, at the Faculty of Theatre and Film, Babeș-Bolyai University – with a thesis about the (re)presentations and politics of intimacy in Performance Art (2018-present). Publications: “*The Slippages of the Present and the Stage Presence in the Long-durational Performance – A Deconstructivist Perspective in the Context of Post-theory*” in *Ekphrasis: Aftermaths of Critical Theory* (2018). Conferences / lecture-performances / seminars, presenting topics like: the structure of temporal regimes in theatre and performance, the dramaturgies of the “intimate theatre”, the environmental performance during The Anthropocene. Collaboration with different associations, facilitating theatre workshops for teenagers.

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