

How to Raise a Theatre Critic

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Abstract: *This paper considers one of the primary (and increasingly distant) meanings of “theatre criticism” perceived as writing reviews /analyses/studies on theatre. One of the real problems of the contemporary Romanian theatre is related to a continuous postponement of the emergence of a wave of young critics who would not only mirror, but also revive the theatrical landscape. How to identify the predispositions for theatre criticism? How to develop these predispositions? How to convince that doing theatre criticism is more than a passing hobby? These are questions that the professors of the Romanian Theatre Studies Departments are frequently obliged to answer. This study aims to indicate a series of methods and practices verified over time, able to complete the training process of the young theatre critic.*

Key words: *theatre critic; theatrical instinct; aesthetic sense; theatre chronicle*

1. Introduction

This paper considers one of the primary (and increasingly distant) meanings of “theatre criticism” perceived as writing reviews /analyses/studies on theatre. It is, therefore, a meaning that is disencumbered of the new and useful nuances the concept of “theatre studies” encompasses, a return to the essence of this preoccupation - seeing and giving a written account of what you have seen, witnessing and leaving a tangible evidence, commenting a production in a professional manner, thus becoming part of the history of that performance.

One of the real problems of the contemporary Romanian theatre is related to a continuous postponement of the emergence of a wave of young critics who would not only mirror, but also revive the theatrical landscape. The number of theatre critics acknowledged by the guild, and who constantly satisfy, through profession-specific activities – participating in Festivals, initiating or taking part in debates on theatrical topics, publishing theatre reviews, interviews or studies -, the appellation of “critic” itself, does not exceed 20, which, relative to the number of theatres and actors (a couple of thousands) in Romania is, we have to admit, a very small one. Of these 20, half do not have theatrical studies, but come from the area of the Humanities, including Journalism.

Frequently, the utility of the existence of the theatre critic is questioned by those who are supposed to make the object of the criticism, in this case the artists, may them be directors or actors. What’s the point of theatre criticism?, some of them ask themselves, more or less rhetorically. In Romania, as I have previously stated, the act of criticism is considered to be exterior to the performance². The presence of the critic during rehearsals is an exceptional situation, their purpose being, almost constantly, defined in relation to what is, ambiguously, named “professional audience”.

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² See Călin Ciobotari, *Ten Unfulfillments Of Romanian Theatre* [„Zece neîmpliniri ale teatrului românesc”]. *Cultural Observer* [„Observator cultural”]. Oct. 2018. no. 941.

The Romanian theatre critic³ cannot make theatre criticism a job. They cannot live, financially speaking, from their reviews, situation that generates a quite unclear relation with the acts of seeing and writing about theatre. We are in the sphere of a hobby, rather than a profession; you put your passion into practice only once in a while, whence the lack of constancy of Romanian theatre criticism. Once at two or three years, a new signature emerges – it is strong, interesting, and it has a personality; two or three more years pass, and you realize that you haven't heard of them for some time, that they vanished as if they had never been there.

How to identify the predispositions for theatre criticism? How to develop these predispositions? How to convince that doing theatre criticism is more than a passing hobby? These are questions that the professors of the Romanian Theatre Studies Departments are frequently obliged to answer.

2. The First Signs

The ardour, the good fanaticism, a certain addiction to theatregoing, the joy of speaking about the theatrical act are signs that should immediately draw the attention of the Theatre Studies professor. The beginning of criticism lies not in the concern to find, at any cost, the weaker aspects of the show, but in the undisguised enthusiasm of the contact with the production, and in the temptation to share the echoes of this enthusiasm with the others. Somehow, the situation is similar to a love affair, when the lover feels the imperious need to speak to the whole universe about the one they love. In the case of authentic critics, this feeling arises at intervals, regardless of age or context, brought about by the encounter with major performances. The thin ice of academic rigour, the sobriety of the analysis, the (noxious) reflex of watching a show with an *interest* – all these fall through suddenly, and the critic amazedly rediscovers the pure bliss of the beginnings of their own career. The vocation of the critic, thence, is announced by the serenity of a joy, not by the analytical obstinacy of a deconstruction, although “not-loving theatre”⁴ is also part of the life of a theatre-maker. A semester is enough to understand which students have potential to be a critic, and which students should be channelled towards other aspects of theatre studies.

Frequently, these types of signs can be identified in students from different study programs (Directing, Choreography, Acting etc.). In time, I met, for instance, Directing students who would have been very good critics, and whom, as directors didn't make it. Would it be moral to turn a student away from the professional path they chose? Yes, if the Romanian theatrical pedagogy system allowed this “regimentation” into different study programs to take place only after a year of general theatre studies, a time during which the students could deepen their self-knowledge and their relationship with art⁵. In the context of the Bologna Process, and

³ An honest inventory of Romanian theatre critics can be found in Florin Faifer, *Incursions in The History of Romanian Dramatical Criticism [Incursiuni în istoria criticii dramatice românești]*, preface by Liviu Malița. 2010. Iași: Timpul Publishing House. It is a useful, necessary book, although, unfortunately, with a quite limited circulation.

⁴ The syntagm belongs to George Banu, and it is discoursed at large in George Banu, *Loving and Not-Loving Theatre [Iubire și ne iubire de teatru]*. 2013. Iași: Polirom Publishing House. „I have never been an unhesitating partisan of the theatre, but only loyal to it, periodically confronted with crisis related to my actual vocation, with distancing velleities, with the nostalgia of a different art... However, I always came back to it, because, after episodic doubts, seen today as beneficial, I reconciled with this source of satisfactions or dissatisfactions whose consequences for my own life always leave marks: each and every great performance is a lived experience.” (p.11)

⁵ George Banu and Andrei Șerban were, initially, studying Acting, and were redirected, in their third year, to Theatre Studies, respectively Directing. This, undoubtedly, speaks well for their professor, Ion Finteșteanu, who

the reduction to only three years for the duration of Bachelor's Degrees in the vocational study programs at universities, such a grievance seems a straight off luxury. However, it belongs to the sphere of university ethics to make your observation known to the student, and to allow a possible decision toward a reconversion to be taken by them alone.

The instincts, the aesthetic sense, the histrionism, and the ludic reflex encompass another category of signs.

a) The Theatrical Instinct

I asked myself on multiple occasions what does this "theatrical instinct" consist in, as this is a syntagm that, as it can easily be seen, obturates the rational and it guides the attention towards a primary level, one of intuitive viscosity. When it comes to theatrical criticism, the previously mentioned instinct equivalates to the pre-argumentative intuition that a theatrical product (regardless whether it is a role, a scenography, a choreography, a directorial concept) is valid or not. You simply know/feel if what you see on the stage qualifies as art or stays in an inferior region, the one of the craft or of the contentless shapes. The theatrical instinct ensures a series of auditorium-stage connections, placing you in a direct, frontal relation with the art. Unfortunately, many Romanian theatre critics, already acknowledged by the guild, lack theatrical instinct, their value judgements being frequently contradictory. Being loyal to the previously used love metaphor, this relation can be quantified through what can be called falling in "love at first sight" with the production or an actor's part, and also through its antonyms "aversion at first sight" or "disinterest at first sight" etc. If, for an actor, the theatrical instinct has numerous practical aspects (their presence on the stage, the genuineness of the relationship, the intuitive and immediate emphasis of the character's contours), for the critic, this instinct has significance in the theoretical area, in the post-show analysis/review. I don't believe that the theatrical instinct must be innate. It can sprout on a fertile cultural ground, as a personal attitude that is refined with time, and that becomes, at one point, active, functional.

b) The Aesthetic Sense

Unlike the theatrical instinct, you either have aesthetic sense or you don't. The turn for beauty, within the meaning of the Kantian definition of the "disinterested" beauty, is, I believe, an inherent component of the human being. The absence of this sense places oneself in an area of aesthetic relativity, and it even is, frequently, responsible of the onstage kitsch. The beauty of a director's solution, the chromatic or rich-in-symbols expressivity of a set design, the depth of an acting performance, the manner in which the shapes or the matter of a set communicate, the succession of movement phrases become truly inaccessible levels when lacking a genuine aesthetic sense. Certainly, this sense can be developed, perfected, trained, the same way

saw in these two the righteous paths they had within themselves. This story is told by George Banu in the book George Banu In Dialogue with Mircea Morariu, *The Second Life - Comments and Confessions About Theatre [Viața secundă. Comentarii și mărturii despre teatru]*. 2016. Bucharest: "Camil Petrescu" Cultural Foundation. "[...] How many times, later on, didn't I bless this blade of the guillotine, that, brutally and unsentimentally, beheaded velleities for whose satisfaction I was missing the abilities" (p.38). Andrei Șerban also depicts this moment as a turning point in his life: "How difficult must it be for those who, unlike the two of us, weren't fortunate enough to have guardian angels, by name Finteșteanu and Sanda Manu, to guide us toward the right address, fixing their own mistake of granting us admission in the Acting class. How many are those who lost years of their lives on the stage, with no one to cast them, when their place was, perhaps, vacant somewhere else", Andrei Șerban, *A Biography [O biografie]*, postface by Basarab Nicolescu. 2006. Iași: Polirom Publishing House, pp. 38-39.

there are trainings for the sight, the hearing, the sense of touch etc. In the absence of a sense, there is no natural way of refining it. The only choice is to resort to glasses, hearing aids, and other artificial devices of the same sort, that will try to reasonably replace the deficiency of that specific sense. Up to a point, the situation is similar when it comes to the aesthetic sense, too. A critic who is lacking aesthetic sense will always stay in a minor region of the commentary. Their analysis will be repetitive, stereotypical, shiny wrapping without any contents.

c) Histrionism and The Ludic Reflex

I met, through the years, many theatre critics, both Romanian and foreign. The best of them, the ones who artists respected and loved the most were histrionic and had evident sense of humour. A ludic demon was, from time to time, making waves in the waters of a very solid erudition and of an indestructible integrity. I don't think the veritable critic makes do with simply contemplating the world from the stage, but they have the secret ambition to inhabit it; they don't limit themselves to keeping an eye upon a great actor playing the role of Hamlet, but they also project themselves in that part, living from within the character and the actor all the dramatical tensions. For this, however, they must have a histrionic nature. Without it, the rigidity takes the place of the lust for theatre, the sterile comparison replaces the unique quiver of each experience lived in the theatre hall. Being dry when it comes to stylistics, just as in life, is tiring and boring. A histrionic critic communicates with the performance differently than the one who is caught in their own sobriety. I saw critics braking into fits of laughter during shows or genuinely shedding tears at the tragic moments of the story. Alongside them, there were other critics, with impenetrable masks, as expressionless as poker players, concerned, and even obsessed, about not giving any hint of what they were thinking about, of what they were feeling...

In my Theatre Studies students, I am looking for the sense of humour, the lust for self-duplication, the appetyency for playing, people whose self is a stage where, at any given moment, an inner show is on.

3. The Development of The Abilities to Analyse a Production⁶

a) The Attention to Detail

One of the fundamental abilities of a theatre critic is observing relevant details, may them be hidden or left in plain sight by the creators of that production. These details can belong to the set, to a theatre-related behaviour, to a pattern of movement, to a costume, and so on. In the case of valuable performances, the detail is frequently more important than the whole, due to the fact that, premeditated by the director or the scenographer, it has the value of an aesthetic decoder, of whose presence/ existence you must be aware. Certainly, details don't always hide something, and the risk of losing yourself in the small aspects can put you in the situation of overinterpreting the staging: you see meanings that no one intended to have there, and that have no actual relation to the real challenges those who are on the stage made themselves go through. However, in the cases of complex set designs, for example, the show is doubled by a second performance, the one of the details: lines and shapes that communicate directly, elements that have their own dialogue, the energies of a certain angle or of a certain structure which produce an atmosphere that, in the ideal case, should be identified. The situation is even more important

⁶ With certain amendments, I believe it is still recommendable to place on reading lists the chapter entitled "Steps to The Audience's Chair" [*Trepte spre fotoliul de spectator*], from Victor Ernest Maşek, *The Art of Being in the Audience. Contributions to the Aesthetics of Receptivity* [*Arta de a fi spectator. Contribuții la estetica receptării*]. 1986. București: Meridiane Publishing House, pp.9-92.

when it comes to the acting. The great actors are, usually, discreet in vaunting their technical means and personal charisma; they know that the character must not be provoked ostentatiously, but allowed to happen, allusively indicated, exactly through these previously mentioned relevant details: a vocal inflexion, a certain tuning of the intensity of the gaze, a specific positioning of the body in relation to the audience, and another million of “signs” like these, through which the actor expresses their and the character’s interiority.

This does not turn the critic into a constantly on the lookout semiotician, a cipher decoder or someone who solves theatrical aenigmas, but it places them in the innards of the creative process, where, all of a sudden, all the mechanisms become visible, in the entirety of their movement’s beauty.

b) Distributive Attention

The habit of following the text, so deeply rooted in the Romanian audiences’ consciousness, must be constantly doubled by channelling the attention towards collateral theatrical events. There is the prejudice that, when two characters are talking to each other, the entire interest of the audience is centred on, and only on them. The fact that the scene itself is an entire world, and that, in the world, the principle of the simultaneity is hard to call in question is omitted, forgotten even in the construction of the performance; there is always something else happening, different from what is in front of our eyes. Captivated by the text and the acting skills of those who say the words of the play in a certain sequence, the young theatre critic can miss out on important information related to: how do the other characters “get” the lines of the protagonists, how does the space react to the encounter with the speech, how does the general soundscape integrate the sound fragments generated by the two characters having a conversation, how does that exchange of lines affect the overall atmosphere, how are the invisible boundaries between the stage and the audience positioned/re-positioned etc. The distributive attention should be practised in time, until it becomes a reflex, an extemporaneous gesture. When it stays a strictly rational “business” of the one who watches, it can become an impediment in the profound fusion of the critic with the production.

c) The Attention Turned to the Self

What is happening to me as I watch a show? What transformations occur inside myself when I am in the middle of the reception process? How do my emotions, my states of being, my thoughts evolve during the production? Writing about a performance means, among others, writing about yourself⁷. It is the conclusion I came to after two decades of theatre criticism. The history of a production is also made up of the private histories its audience members, detail that is frequently overlooked. From this perspective, every theatrical review is a private document, a journal page. Unaware of themselves, the critic will have the tendency to write in a cold voice, distantly, as of something that does not concern them directly, something that does not involve them. Their review will be impersonal (an ideal that is still being perpetuated by the local critics!), allegedly objective (a sterile illusion when it comes to art!) that is not crossed by any thrill, by any breeze of reflexivity...

⁷ Of course, the review is not about yourself, but it contains you. Miruna Runcan observed that “nothing is more ridiculous than writing a review about yourself using the show. It has something indecent, too, I think...” (Miruna Runcan, *Theatre Criticism, Whither?* [*Critica de teatru: încotro?*]. 2015. Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing House, p. 26.)

d) *Consolidating One's General Knowledge*

Regardless how compromised the “general knowledge” syntagm might seem, it continues to be valid for the theatre critic. “Theatrical culture” is often brought into discussion, but basing yourself solely on this means undertaking a major handicap. It certainly is important to know what parts did a certain actor play or what other productions did a certain director stage, or other similar information, associated with theatrical culture. But when you interpret a show, and, implicitly, you aim to describe a world, the necessity to rely on more than names, dates, and years arises. This is when the general knowledge comes in, the knowledge you have from different fields, such as literature, fine arts, music, philosophy, anthropology, and suchlike. The richness of a review does not reflect only the richness of a production, but also the one of a knowledge. If, in the case of an actor, the erudition is reflected by a certain degree of refinement and intensity of their presence on stage, when it comes to a critic, it is what enlivens the words of the review, turning it into a second performance, one of ideas and images. I have stated this on previous occasions: I read George Banu's reviews as I'd watch a production that is parallel with the actual one, and that, still, converges with the one the critic wrote about; the real show meets the one of George Banu's erudition, and this is a high-level symbiosis through which the act of criticism becomes an act of creation⁸...

e) *Stage Praxis*

One of the prejudices that have severe consequences on the training of Romanian theatre critics is that theoreticians should not attend rehearsals. The segregation between praxis and theory is so deep, that whoever tries to take the step between those two peaks risks... falling in the abyss. Keeping the critic outside the making-of process of the production deprives them of a factual, applicative understanding of the steps in the performance-building process. They will, of course, know what the readthroughs are or what happens during the blocking rehearsals, they will hear the magic phrase “director's instructions”, the same way they will also only hear about the mysterious discussions between the director and the scenographer. All these will be familiar to them, but will have, for the young critic, a rather abstract nature.

It is wrong, I believe, to completely diminish the critic to a theoretician, and to place theatre criticism on the barren and arid terrain of pure theory. In the art of theatre, separating this radically these two sides does a disservice to art itself. For reasons I am a stranger to, directors prefer to have assistants from the field of Directing, and not Theatre Studies. As a professor, I attempted, several times, to lobby for the Theatre Studies students to have access to rehearsals. They were let in once or, maybe, two times, out of courtesy and not out of belief, and they were treated like mere visitors who come, see, and leave.

Experiencing the theatrical creation, witnessing the making-of process, taking part in building a production has long-term effects on the attitude towards theatre, on the attachment and the personal involvement of the critic. Moreover, it provides them with a set of definite reference points they know they must follow when, from the audience, they watch a scene. An authentic gourmand needs to know not only what they are served on the plate, but also what happens in... the kitchen.

The practical stages Theatre Studies students have taken place anywhere (literary secretariates, media editorial offices, schooling institutions), apart from the rehearsal room. During my entire career as a theatre critic, no director has ever asked me to attend a rehearsal;

⁸ Since the Inter-War period, Mihail Sebastian, disappointed by the level of the theatrical criticism of his time was insisting on this creative aspect of criticism (see Mihail Sebastian, *Encounters with the Theatre [Întâlniri cu teatrul]*. 1969. Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, p. 140).

this way, I almost resigned myself to the thought that there is a theatrical space or time that will forever be forbidden for me.

4. The Development of a Lucid Sense of Usefulness

It is impossible to be performant in a profession if you don't have a high sense of your utility. The sense of the usefulness is inherently connected to the one of responsibility. As long as you don't have any responsibility, your usefulness *there* is questionable. I have been witnessing, for many years now, a campaign that aims to minimize the role the theatre critics have in the Romanian theatrical system. Only an indulgent courtesy gets the artists to let this dubious character sit, too, at the Holy Communion of the art of theatre; even so, the seat is still very close to the corner of the table... The attitude of the Romanian artist towards the critics is bivalent: on the one hand, there is respect and indebtedness when the critic is part of juries or promotes that specific artist (writes well for them, publishes interviews etc.), but, on the other hand, there is also disdain, sometimes taken so far it takes the form of insults and denial, when the critic expresses opinions that are detrimental to the artist.

All these details must be explained to the Theatre Studies student who wants to take the still unpaved road of theatre criticism. Waiting for others to deliver to you your own sense of usefulness is, in theatre, a Beckettian wait. It is much more profitable to get this feeling on your own, with honesty and lucidity, constantly asking yourself about who do you write the reviews for. Are they for your contemporaries, for the ones who are not yet born but who will want, one day, to find out how the art of your time used to be, do you write them for yourself or in the name of a Hegelian end of History? Certainly, the answers differ, case by case, or will change with age, but the mere wording of the question makes the critic responsible, and, therefore, projects them into the meditation about usefulness. As much as the question about what the point of art is, the one about what the point of one's profession is is unsettling and serious. Understanding its complexity already is an exam passed successfully...

5. The Writing and the Style

The quality of a theatre critic notably depends on the quality of their writing. And this does not only concern the ability to synthesize, in a text of 5000 – 10,000 characters, multiple information about the performance, but also the knowledge to and the flair for turning the review into a text that is pleasing to read. The informative aspects of a review must always be doubled, ideally, by a spectacular nature of the writing itself.

It is one of the truly major challenges a professor of theatrical theoretical subject faces – teaching the students not only to write, but also providing them with the context in which they could develop a personal style. I often failed in this type of endeavour. You cannot modify or decisively influence someone's inmost relationship with the language they write in, the manner in which they perceive the rhythms and nuances of that language, the talent to choose certain words in the detriment of others, in order to describe an image, a situation, a relation. More than ever, the student is on their own here. What a professor can do is to signal the deficits their writing has, and, most importantly, to determine them to read as many... theatre reviews as they can. You can only hope that, after getting familiar with the different styles, they can discover their own voice. For this, regardless how unpleasant this quantitativist principle might seem, it is useful to practise writing habitually, may the attempts be unpublished or unpublishable.

Systematizing, here are some of the types of review that illustrate deficiencies exactly from the perspective of the writing style:

- a) The over-the-top review – it is the review where the critic, for reasons still unknown, feels the need to use overly-complicated and artificial linguistic structures in an avalanche that scares and tires the reader, and buries any interest in reading the review. If it's not downright ridiculous, it surely is boring.
- b) The essay-review – this paradoxical juxtaposition of terms is the result of the ambition some critics have to hybridize narration with scholarly analysis. Some do this, on the one hand, as they lack the virtue of simplicity, and, on the other hand, because they have the tendency to make a parade of their knowledge. A review followed by a reference list or crammed with footnotes already is, for me, at least, suspicious...
- c) The poor review – is the type of review that, after you read it, makes you feel that you no longer know anything about the performance. It does not make use of ideas, but it points out a series of information. The writing is technical, savourless, having no spice, nor any personal standpoint.
- d) The dry review – it contains a multitude of information on the production, but it can be read the same way you read the prospectus of a drug or a judicial decision. The absence of the personal style and of any kind of auctorial impress makes it uninteresting and, at the best, readable “between the lines”.
- e) The self-review – the critic excessively subjectifies the narration, placing themselves in every line they write. They will start by describing the frame of mind they had the morning of day they attended the performance, providing the reader with diaristic details related to how the wind seemed to be blowing or how the leaves were falling. Or they will start by recounting a moment from the past which had them as the protagonist and that only has a mere connection with the production or someone who is part of the team (usually the director). The critic has a personal style, yet they abuse it by an unnecessary literary and confession-like character.
- f) The poorly-written review – there are – scarce, indeed – very just reviews, with pertinent and valid observations, but they are undermined by the blunders of the writing. The critic has impeccable instincts and intuition, possesses specialised knowledge, knows what to look at and what to cut out from the scene in order to transfer to the page, but they simply don't have... talent, and, what is even worse, they are not aware of this.
- g) The stencil review – it is always structured the same way: it begins with a discussion about the playwright and it comes to an end with the analysis of the acting plus, a bonus, a general conclusion related to the performance. It is a generalised template in the worldwide theatre criticism, marking an implied path from the text towards the actor, and only rarely the opposite way, from the actor to the text. I don't think I was ever given the chance to read a critical text where the analysis begun with the acting. I identify in my own work this tentation of the stencil and I do my best to avoid it, although I am aware that a good stylistic can draw attention away from this indiscretion of structure. The idea of ‘template’ is not only related to the structure, but also to the repetitive use of certain linguistic stereotypies: “the functionality of the set design”, “the expressivity of the costumes”, “brilliant acting” etc., etc. You must use them yourself tens of times to realise you are dealing with infertile syntagms.

All the previously stated situations make the critic vulnerable, predictable, which, just as in the case of the stage artists, is a major handicap.

Orientating towards a profession that is not incompatible with theatrical criticism.

Nothing is more frustrating than when you feel that you're losing a bet you made on a student when they end up in a profession that is shifting them off the theatrical act. Gradually, the tendency to drift away from the theatre inevitably intervenes. Having taken refuge in IT or in whatever other corporatist "glade", the critic you put so much hope in enters the vast parlour of the abnegated ones. They not only stop writing about theatre, but also end up pushing back the idea of seeing theatre. They do it because, this way, they pragmatically and therapeutically kill the discreet nostalgia of what they could have become... During a time of my life, I did investigation shows for a local TV broadcast for seven years; my chance was that, simultaneously, I was also working as an editor of a well-known cultural magazine, and this double play, even if it were difficult, ensured keeping a connection with theatre.

Here's why, in the final year of College, the efforts of the professor should also be channelled on orientating the student towards a profession that is compatible with theatre criticism. For me, the ideal jobs from within which one can practise writing about theatre seem to be: literary secretariate or other departments of a theatre, teaching (ideally, in a university), cultural management, cultural journalism, cultural entrepreneurship. Anything else puts you in the situation of renegotiating your relationship with theatre and with what you will be tempted to define as a passing passion: theatre criticism.

6. Conclusion or about consolidating an ethics of the profession

I have the habit of asking my students, as early as the Freshmen year, to write a "decalogue" of their profession. In the third year, I repeat the exercise and I invite them to compare the answers with the ones they gave in the first year. What remains constant indicates the firm reference points each and every one of them will have in relation with this topic. I do not try to impose an ethics, but to only put them in the situation of meditating on their own on an ethics. I am not making a claim for my decalogue to be taken as a model, I only want to put to a test that I have such an ethical code that I try hard to not betray... I render it below.

You shall not lie!

You shall not hurt only for the sake of hurting someone⁹!

You shall respect art and celebrate it anywhere you recognize it!

You shall cultivate the affirmative, rather than the negative¹⁰!

You shall be responsible and always aware that, unlike the say, the word remains!

You shall have a high-level definition of the verb "to criticise"!

You shall cultivate your sensibility, emotions, your availability to play, and your sense of humour!

You shall always be aware of your limited, incomplete, and imperfect knowledge!

You shall never stop asking yourself questions that you only answer from time to time!

You shall refuse any decisive definition of theatre!

⁹ Bogdan Ulmu, in a different context, but one that is still relevant to the present discussion, used the syntagm "butcher-critics", in Bogdan Ulmu, *Pages from a Subjective-Anecdotic History of the Romanian Theatre [Pagini dintr-o istorie subiectiv-anecdotică a teatrului românesc]*. 2015. Iași: Junimea Publishing House, p.144.

¹⁰ I encountered the idea of the critical affirmative at George Banu: „Only a great production or a great actor effectively inspires a critic like me: an affirmative critic, seeking fulfilments, not one who is thirsty for disappointments” (George Banu in dialogue with Mircea Morariu, *The Second Life - Comments and Confessions About Theatre [Viața secundă. Comentarii și mărturii despre teatru]*, the cited edition, p.68).

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