

Outlines On The Craft Of Theater Directing

Aurel PALADE¹

Abstract: *The present study tackles with the attempt to offer an accurate representation concerning the director's role within the theater performance. Making a brief foray of the way the theater performance claimed this task, the paper work emphasizes the mechanisms used by directors to create a concept of the future play in connection with the actor, music, scenery. Highlighting the cooperation between all the necessary creative compartments in the stage space, directing becomes the central element of this complex organisms, a kind of command center that directs the component of the show. He is a free conductor to use the instruments engaged in the creative process in agreement and concordance with the score represented by the dramatic text.*

Key-words: *theater; director; performance; text; actor; scenery; creation*

1. Introduction

„(...) beyond the text, whatever it may be, there is something more that is also part of the dramatic art; something we still cannot define exactly and we do not take into account too much, possibly because we may not figure it out clearly. In short, I will name this something; *the craft of directing (...)*”²

What does a director represent? This is a standard question, likely, to cause trouble to the questioned person. If we were to look up on the *Internet*, this *Book of the Books* of the 21st century, we can find the following explanation upon the most well known site (*wikipedia*): „a person in charge with developing, directing, managing and supervising the production of a movie or theater play”.³ There are and there were so many definitions of a director/producer, that is really difficult to state something unravelling or completely clarifying the definition of this profession, which cannot be given a permanent definition.

2. Research and analysis in defining the idea of director

2.1. Incursion into history

It appeared as a function, more and more necessary, once there were the great scientific and technological discoveries in the world. For centuries on, since the first performances existed, the most important was the way an actor rehearsed a drama text. Ever since Antiquity, the importance of a theater performance was exclusively related to the actor's abilities to perform the text. The value of a text depended on the actor's skillful performance. There used to be a static type of theater/performance in which the actor managed through intonation to thrill the audience. This way, the stage performance existed in an ancient form and the actor's stillness did not manage to overcome the conservative borders. At the beginning of the 20th century, when there were new thinking trends, caused by social discomposured,

¹ Faculty of Arts, Ovidius University of Constanta, email address (aurel.palade@yahoo.fr).

² Adolphe Appia, *L'œuvre d'art vivant*, Unitext Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 10

³ https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regizor_de_teatru, accessed la 23.12.2020

which were to change humankind course, theater, in its turn, permanently tried to break conservative patterns. The domino principle initiated by industrialisation and scientific revolution manifested in art, too. In order to escape procrastination, theater must mingle within society dynamics.

2.2. Theorizing and the pragmatic need for the existence of a concept

The performance needs action. There is an obvious necessity of an outside perspective. If, up to that moment, there was a form of primitive coordination, with a technical-administrative role, now there is the need of a conductor/director to coordinate the artistic act: „(...) only the director is able to sense the emotional tones within a text and transform it in a performance in which actor's gestures and words suggest the main idea of a work”⁴. Thus, the world of theater invented a new profession, that of producer/director, which determined a revolution in the theater performance field. There were theoreticians: Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Gordon Graig, Appia, specialists in the theater field that managed to give a scientific perspective of drama art. They wanted to create methods concerning theater significance, so they managed to offer different points of view on the notion of theater play. Thus, no matter how much we would like to theorize drama art, it remains tributary to the subjectivity of the artist's senses. Theater is a vivid, empirical matter, a world of attempts where patterns do not function. In order to create a performance, the director faces a maze that has to be explored, where the discovery is more important than the search: ‘We meet to look for the unknown, not to find out what we already know’.⁵

I think that every producer/creator has in a way or another an answer of his own, not particularly original, but it should be sincere and in accordance with his feelings. To me, it is a restlessness state, of quest and desire to materialize an idea or a frustration that resonates and can be shared with the audience. Whether it is about a theater play or movie, the director/producer resembles an adventurer, troubled by a deep quest for the unknown, assuming the responsibility for an entire team on this journey, a team to which he must inspire trust to be on this road.

The creation of a team for the artistic act is one of the fundamental things in theater. Meeting the text, meeting the actor, the creator of the space and sound, the movement are essential elements defining the art of directing. In this respect, Gordon Craig considers the director „... a person capable to combine all talents, that should have been actor but also creator of scenery and costumes; who can understand stage-lighting techniques, the rules of dance and the rhythms; that can finish that work that the poet left unfinished from the mise-en-scene point of view”⁶. He is the trustworthy person to guide the future performance to the unknown way. Yet, like any expedition or journey, it involves preparations, plans, life experience, accomplishments and failures, all of the leading, ultimately, to the actual movie or theater performance. In this respect, Peter Brook asserts: „(...) work of creation implies an elaborate thinking: to compare, to come up with ideas, to make mistakes, to go back, to hesitate, to start again”⁷. Uncertainty, fears, all are quite uncomfortable, but the director must face them, mostly these unfamiliar situations manifest in front of the others involved in the artistic action, and he permanently must be confident. But these apparently shortcomings, actually create a creative agitation, that really opens the way towards the future performance. The director must be fine

⁴ Gordon Graig, *Craig on the Theatre* in Methuen Drama, 1999, p. 160

⁵ Monica Andronescu, Cristiana Gavrilă, *The Book of Workshops*, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013, pp. 13-14

⁶ Gordon Craig, *Craig on the Theatre*, Methuen drama, 1999, p. 46

⁷ <https://bookhub.ro/spatiul-gol-teatrul-si-formele-sale/>, accessed at 3.01.2021

and cold-blooded in his actions like a surgeon, delicate and dreamer like a poet, and strong, experienced and capable like an architect. A theater play, just like a building needs a solid, deep base in order to last.

The secret of the Leaning Tower of Pisa consists in that invisible part of its foundation, making the surface enchant and intrigue the world for centuries. In the same way, the director... is the one who is not in the foreground, through his text, he creates actors, space, sound, a complete structure capable to give birth to a work of art. For the actor, the reward of his work refers to the immediate reaction of the audience, the director/producer sees his work results through the play long-living on the stage or on the screen, this depending on how good his creation is. A valuable text and a talented team of actors do not guarantee a successful performance. It needs a concept that can emphasize the artistic act, the team, the scenery, the entire performance as a whole. Thus, every theater performance must have a particular something from one representation to another, in common, being its worthiness. Ultimately, it counts the most, the way the director turns the respective story into a stage performance.

2.3. The subjectivity of the director

If Caragiale's classical play, „*D'ale Carnavalului*” was transposed into the movie field, in the „*a la fin de siècle*”, picturing Bucharest during the interwar times, by the directors Aurel Miheleş and Gheorghe Naghi, Lucian Pintilie, dramatizing the same text, creates a real aesthetic masterpiece, perfectly compatible with the Romanian author creation, violence and pragmatism bringing a plus to the actual text. In this respect, both interpretations are valid, each of them dealing with a particular period of time. The most important is the perspective belonging to this „*master*”-as Giorgio Strehler used to call the director, who manages to turn the text into a moving image. He sees himself from the perspective of a director/producer: „I am not an artist, I am somebody who does his job, as a performer, I am the one who deals with art, performing with sensitivity and intuition ...As good as I am in performing something that others have already done, how well I sing, better than others, the musical parts that others have written! I am exceptional, irreplaceable but „*The Cherry Orchard*” was written, in 1903, by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, not by me. Personally I will never be able to write not one single line from „*The Cherry Orchard*”. But, certainly, I know how to read it”⁸. The craft of directing makes every performance to represent a particular creation of a story, whether classical or contemporary.

The text, being the foundation for a future stage performance, is submitted to a subjective analysis of the artist, capable to unveil possible or hidden meanings. And, if every work is unique, then, it cannot be the result of a pattern. From one creation to another, the director must find other means and meanings. Using the same procedures, would be a certain way towards repetition and monotony. This way, modern theater, the one giving priority to the craft of directing, made possible the steady existence of classical theater, while the director manages to find a way to say the story differently.

In a society, where dynamics is hard to control, rationality is essential, performance creators had to submit to the continuous change. Modern technologies and social media completely transformed this field, becoming almost indispensable in the making of a performance.

The director imagines the performance, disfavoring words. The text is substituted to the visual. The excessive use of these new means of expression created slips, that sometimes endangered the idea of performance, as such. Everything, in the name of the video-audible new technologies. The role of directing is to give balance, to reach an agreement between classical

⁸ Ezio Frigerio, *Fifty Years of Theater with Giorgio Strehler*, Skira Publishing House, 2017, p. 158.

and modern, between art and everything involving technology. Maintaining balance between the emotions transmitted by an actor rehearsing a theater text and the technical effects, must be in accordance to the image that cannot overshadow the acting process; this role belongs to the creator of the theater play/performance. Drama art can be defined as the emotion of words on the stage: „, where the author has stated words, not to subdue the director to it, on the contrary, to enhance his actions, so that he could transmit the thrill of creation to his team, to the actors, and through conventional wonders of the artistic act, may offer to the audience his perspective on their new life, artistically and emotionally portrayed, so it may remain within their mind.”⁹

The usual question, that every director can be asked at an interview, is referring to his/her dearest theater performance or movie, the answer will usually be that he cares for them all, equally, just like a parent cannot make a difference between his children. Surely, the question is rather tricky. It is impossible for him to choose, as his thinking is subjective. Every drama performance is the result of a mix of energies, whose destiny does not exactly depends upon its value. You have no idea about its fate. Dramatic art remains under the influence of the unknown. The artist is meant not to know. In this respect, in the paperwork *“The Last Quarter of Theatrical Century, A Subjective Panorama”*, the critic George Banu quotes Peter Stein: „If I know everything before, I do not need theater for this”¹⁰. The director must offer to the stage the proper environment so that the performance may develop. The director must prepare it, must produce it in good shape, capable to satisfy the requirements of the audience

3. Conclusion

This study regarding the status of the director, required an analytical foray into the history of theater performance in order to better understand the reason that led to birth of this profession that even today fails to fully meet an acceptable definition.

It is difficult to give a particular answer to the question „How do we define a director?” but I know this profession involves responsibilities that you must assume and accomplish, a path that you have to follow for a life time. You must turn into a permanent marathon contestant, in a continuous fight with the text, the ground for achieving our illusory life, with a fascinating entity, trustworthy but also slippery and unpredictable, the actor. There is also a permanent competition with your own self, with the fears and eternal failure trouble, haunting our dreams and most of the times, fuelling our energy.

Every performance represents a particular world, its birth implies information, quest, documentation, things that enhance creativity, stimulates inspiration, with the purpose to reach a particular concept, something that will be the guiding and motivational foundation for the future framework, that will ultimately become a theater representation or a movie. It is the job/profession where there is no time for relaxation or sufficiency, there are only anxiety and uncertainty, a permanent almost alertness, everything fuelling the need of dreaming, so that we should never chase away our inner child.

References

- Appia, A. 2000. *L'œuvre d'art vivant*. Bucharest: Unitext Publishing House.
 Andronescu Monica, Cristiana Gavrilă. 2013. *The Book of Workshops*. Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House.

⁹ Liviu Ciulei, *The Contemporary*, no. 45, Bucharest, November 4th, 1960

¹⁰ George Banu, *The Last Quarter of Theatrical Century, A Subjective Panorama*. Paralela 45, București, 2003, p. 118

- Banu, G. 2003. *The Last Quarter of Theatrical Century, A Subjective Panorama*. Bucharest: Paralela 45 Publishing House.
- Ciulei, L. *The Contemporary*, no. 45. Bucharest.
- Graig, G. 1999. *Craig on the Theatre* în Methuen Drama.
- Frigerio, E. 2017. *Fifty Years of Theater with Giorgio Strehler*. Skira Publishing House.

Web Sources:

<https://bookhub.ro/spatiul-gol-teatrul-si-formele-sale/>