

## Artistic flexibility in theater

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**Abstract:** *The 21st century brings with it a society with a great need for openness to a theater for all, for all tastes. At the same time, the theater, in this period, has the duty (a duty inherited from its beginnings) to put the mirror in front of society. The present work highlights some theatrical landmarks successfully validated over time. Also, the work, with the help of examples and conclusions, demonstrates the fact that the theater has gone through changes and artistic acceptances, proving its flexible capacity. It is necessary for the theater to remain open to new things, to exceed its own limits but without eliminating the history from which it originates. No matter how much technology will develop, the human being will remain at the center of the theater image, both on stage and in the hall.*

**Keywords:** *theater; society; rehearsal; director; actor;*

### Introduction

Theatrical production, whatever form of manifestation it takes (theatre, dance, opera, TV theater, radio theater, performance, documentary, multimedia, happening, art performance), is still in the 21st century, as it was in the past with 2,500 years a transfer of emotion between artists and audiences. The release of energy remained the main vein of theatrical destiny. The *Theatron* of the 21st century stands triumphantly on the same elements that the famous *Theatron* of Dionysos in Athens offered for the contemplation of the artistic act. "In ancient Greece, the spectators took their seats in the *theatron* (the place from which to watch). They surrounded the playing surface. In the orchestra, which was circular in shape, the play and choreographic evolutions of the choir were distributed in relation to the Altar of Dionysos (the mound), which marked the center and towards which converged the rays of the hemicycle (a semicircle of 240 degrees) that surrounded the device. The *Skene*, a small rectangular building tangentially bordering the orchestra circle, served as a backstage. It communicated through three gates with the *proskeion*, a platform intended for playing and slightly higher in relation to the orchestra. The choir's place in the orchestra, between the *skene* and the *gradene*, makes it a mediator between the protagonists and the audience."<sup>2</sup>

Beyond these elements that the theater has carried with it throughout time, both irrational elements such as emotion and technical ones, the changes that took place were natural and always adapted to the times whom they served.

### 1. Desacralization of the theater

"Theatre as a practice or form of artistic work is usually linked to the events or texts it includes. (...) Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski stripped the theater down to define it as the encounter between the actor and the audience, for them elements like light and sound had only secondary meanings. Directors such as Augusto Boal and Bertold Brecht used popular theater for political and social purposes, to educate and enlighten as much as to entertain.

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<sup>2</sup> Mihai Vasile. 2016. *Little dictionary of theatrical terms*, [Mic dicționar de termeni teatrali], fourth edition revised and added. Ploiești: Ed: Mythos, p. 112.

American groups such as *Living Theater* and *Bread and Pupper Theater* considered theater buildings limited, imposing restrictions related to the formal arrangement of the auditorium and the fact that in such a context their work only reached those who normally entered these buildings. That is why they took their performances outside the theater building, in community spaces, sometimes engaging in a kind of paratheatre, or presenting their creations within or as demonstrations.<sup>3</sup>

A form of theatrical expression that breaks away from traditional rules is theater in unconventional spaces (alternative theater, independent theater). The need to interact with the public in a more intimate space, the need of directors to enter a new paradigm that incites their imagination and last but not least the temptation of scenography to build in spaces to subdue them, are some arguments for that the theater wanted to live in a different way than ... properly.

The theater made friends with the streets, with the bars, with the private homes, went out to the parks, climbed the bridges or went down to the cellars. In these spaces devoid of any convention, the spectators stepped curiously, ready to give up the conventions and accept a closeness, taken to the extreme, to the stage emotion. Theatrical convention opened its arms and brought the audience closer to the pressure of the stage eruption. "What has changed, beyond the natural differences in ideological, aesthetic, social, political and religious perspectives that separate our time from that era, are both the creative and social concepts, as well as the managerial processes and technology necessary to produce and represent a show. On the one hand, creators and performers have deepened and diversified their languages, methods and techniques of artistic expression. On the other hand, the creator-spectator relationship has also undergone substantial transformations over time. In the last decades, for example, there has been a shift from a one-way relationship, whose aim, in the best case, was to facilitate access to culture based on democratic principles, to strategies for concrete involvement of the public in the process of creation or establishment of the repertoire. As a result, performance spaces have diversified, and distribution circuits have become increasingly complex, in order to cope with the new formulas of theatrical structures."<sup>4</sup> The development of the independent scene boosted the emergence of innovations within the theatrical culture subsidized by the Romanian state.

## 2. The theater has a panoply of nuances

The diversity of theatrical nuances refers to styles to techniques, forms and practices that make theater a complex art. Theatrical genres emerged and developed along with the evolution of various societies. Here are some examples: Comedy and Tragedy appeared in Ancient Greece, Medieval Mysteries in the Middle Ages and Pantomime has its roots in Greek and Roman Antiquity. Tragicomedy was originally born in Classical Antiquity to later develop in the Italian Renaissance and the Elizabethan period. In terms of styles and techniques, we can mention: classical theater, modern theater, postmodern theater, physical theater, experimental theater... And as practices and forms, theater has many examples through which it reveals its freedom of action: traditional theater ( meets on conventional stages), street theater (we meet it in the street, in open spaces), immersive theater (its unique element is the active participation of the audience), puppet theater (an environment of stories told by marionettes with the involvement of puppeteers), multimedia theater (uses effects

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Alain, Jean Harvie. 2012. *Ghidul Routledge, de teatru și performance*, trad: Cristina Modreanu, Ilinca Toma Todoruț. București: Nemira Publishing House, pp. 437-438.

<sup>4</sup> Luís Bonet, Héctor Schargorosky. 2017. *Managementul teatrelor. Modele și strategii pentru organizații și instituții de spectacol*, trad. Carmen Stanciu, Alexandru-Emil Avram. București: Editura Pro Universitaria, p. 24.

created by digitized technology), humanoid theater (modern concept that includes humanoid robots in the distribution).

### **2.1. Dance theatre**

The elements of theater combined with those of dance result in a performance in which theater and dance find their common points and compose a form of physical, mental, visual and auditory emotion, a form of total emotion. The protagonists of this kind of theater, regardless of whether they are basically actors or dancers, must access both theatrical and dance elements in such a way as to convey both the emotion and the technique of the perfect movement. It is a genre of theater that has a story to tell through theatrical methods and dance techniques. Theatrical elements include the entire palette used effectively, costumes, set, lighting and last but not least, text. Dance theater has its origins in modern theater and avant-garde theatre. "Although she was a dance choreographer, Pina Bauch had a profound influence on the theater through her pioneering work in the theater-dance hybrid form. His choreography's sustained emphasis on social experience and emotional expression successfully questioned the formalism, abstraction and aestheticism largely specific to ballet and contemporary dance. And the demonstration that performative bodies (and not just voices) can be deeply expressive, both emotionally and socially, challenged theater makers to use performers' bodies and develop movement to simultaneously produce expressive emotion and social critique."<sup>5</sup> The expression of emotion is defining, the dance movements like the texts used aim to create the characters and express the message clearly.

Romania has internationally renowned representatives in the field of theater - dance, choreographers who were passionate about this artistic genre. Among them are Gigi Căciuleanu, Mihai Mălai Mare, Vava Ștefănescu, Răzvan Mazilu, Iaona Marchidan... The first two artists named here were invited to work with the students of the Faculty of Arts from the "Ovidius" University in Constanta.

### **2. 2. Radio drama**

As with dance-theatre, radio and traditional theater have both similarities and differences. The acting techniques used in performing the stage show are also the basis of the radio acting techniques. But, the space undergoes changes because in radio the physical space is eliminated. There are no distances, there are no sets that, in the case of the theater stage, need to be changed. Radio theater first appeared in countries such as England, France, the USSR, Germany, Italy and Austria, during the years 1927-1928. In Romania, radio theater was born in 1929, when the one-act comedy *Ce sîe* was broadcast the village of V. Al. Jean. The cast included the eminent actors of the National Theatre, Maria Filotti and Romald Bulfinski.

### **2.3. Social theatre**

The theatrical (dramatic) art form that deals with highlighting socio-political and cultural problems and shortcomings is social theatre. Beyond its recreational purpose, it also has one that involves social change. The non-active techniques of running the program within the social theater involve the local community in its activities. This involvement is achieved through discussions and actions in society. "Augusto Boal constantly tried to demonstrate that

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Alain, Jean Harvie. 2012. *The Routledge Guide to Theater and Performance* [Ghidul Routledge, de teatru și performance], trad: Cristina Modreanu, Ilinca Toma Todoruț. București: Nemira Publishing House. p. 48.

theatrical activity has the potential to have a social and political impact. His work catalyzed the theater's struggle to maintain an interest in politics in what has been called the postmodern era, following the feverish agitation of the 1960s (...) Under the umbrella of the term theater of the oppressed, he has developed a number of performative techniques and modes that can operate in both theatrical and non-theatrical settings."<sup>6</sup> In his book *Games for actors and non-actors, the theater of oppression in practice*, Augusto Boal addresses both theater people and school trainers or amateur actors. "*The Theater of the Oppressed* is not a series of recipes, laboratory procedures, a catalog of ready-made solutions, it is, above all, a concrete work on a very concrete situation, at a given time, in a specific place. It is study, analysis, research. (...). One thing is certain: if oppression exists, it must end."<sup>7</sup>

## 2.4. Happening

The experiment, as a form of knowledge, discovery or study, was not avoided by artists. The combination of theatrical elements, elements of visual arts and performance in a spontaneous and interactive style created a new art form, the *Happening*. The period of the '50s - '60s is the time when, without having a prior script, the action being based on the improvisation of the artists and the direct involvement of the public, the happening without being left to happen by chance, had become a form of theatrical expression. The characteristics of *Happening* are improvisation, direct interaction, spontaneity, multidisciplinary, ephemerality... The emergence of the concept of *Happening* is linked to the name of the American Allan Kaprow. "*Happenings* are interdisciplinary events that are not text-based and use any medium or means available to artists, especially those outside their creator's own domain. (...). *Happenings* were predominantly based on visual and material elements, many of which were ephemeral or intentionally destroyed during the performance.

Practitioners consciously avoided using artists' materials or theatrical techniques to work outside their disciplines and beyond the familiar spaces of galleries."<sup>8</sup>

## 3. Theater vs. alternative ways of spending free time

Theater is a form of direct and unrepeatable communication. Each theatrical performance is unique in its own way, no one is similar to the other because the theater is a living organism. "The idea of the performance as - a living organism - can be seen from the very beginning, during the rehearsals, when the director (...) operates as if he had to - deal with a being that takes shape under his eyes, on stage, as if how the first drawing, put by him on paper, would become three-dimensional."<sup>9</sup>

Mirror of the life we live, mirror of the life lived by those before us, the theater speaks about what people feel, about their joys and sorrows, about achievements or failures, about the value of life. Every theatrical performance begins to build itself through an element that is based on a repetitive and creative process at the same time. "Everything in this life has an initial moment. In the theater it is the same. There is a moment around which a story will be ordered. A bead from which the butterfly spreads its wings and flies. (...). The period of rehearsals is, for each artist, for each creator, one of breaking away from what is usual or at

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Augusto Boal. 2005. *Games for actors and non-actors. Theater of Oppression in practice* [*Jocuri pentru actori și non actori. Teatrul Oprimațiilor în practică*], trad. Eugenia Anca Rotescu. București: Ed: Fundația Concept p. 8

<sup>8</sup> Paul Alain, Jean Harvie. 2012. *The Routledge Guide to Theater and Performance* [*Ghidul Routledge, de teatru și performance*], trad: Cristina Modreanu, Ilinca Toma Todoruț. București: Nemira Publishing House, pp.336 - 337

<sup>9</sup> George Banu. 2009. *Rehearsals and renewed theater – the century of directing, [Repetițiile și teatrul reînnoit – secolul regiei -], trad. Mihaella Nedelcu Patureanu și Paul Drumaru*. București: Nemira Publishing House, p. 336.

hand. It's a temporary removal from yourself, only to find yourself at the end, rediscovering yourself."<sup>10</sup>

The mirage during the rehearsals is transferred to each representation which in turn does not resemble each other, even if it is, in fact, the same story. But, social civilization has brought with it changes in the way of perceiving the world. Modern man now has diverse and diversified forms of communication, entertainment, relaxation. Cinema, television, the Internet, artificial intelligence, have a determining effect on the choices that the public makes. This is also the reason why the theater decided to adapt to the requirements of the time.

The design, construction and performance have adapted to the demands of an audience eager to experience new forms of theatre. The determining factor in this situation is the competition that offered alternatives to communicate with the public, different ways of spending free time. "However, as Kive Staiff, the famous director of the *Theater - San Martín* - in Buenos Aires, points out, - Theater is an art that will continue to live as long as it preserves the human presence; this is the advantage it has over other forms of artistic expression. There is an emotion, an unconscious vibration in the spectator, who is present, watching an artist, a performer in the flesh, manifesting before him on a stage."<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. The public mission of the theater

Every society needs theater. The culture of each society is directly responsible for the education and social consciousness of its members. The theater is obliged to exist and create its objectives with the creation of a theatrical repertoire that contributes through dialogue, reflections, changes, to the development of both the community it serves and the individuals who belong to this community. There are several social levels in which theater has found its place and mission: in education, in cultural guidance, in forum-type debates, in public awareness of contemporary reality. Theater is a good catalyst and at the same time formative of opinions and feelings. Because it is born from creativity, theater gives off energy.

Theatrical innovations set the imagination and thinking of the audience in motion. The development of empathetic quality is one of the most important theatrical objectives, which leads to the achievement of another important objective, the accessibility of all categories of spectators in the performance halls, by programming a varied palette of performances in the repertoire.

#### 5. Conclusions

Theatrical flexibility has the most varied implications. The theater itself, in which we find a multitude of roles, has its role. In order to - and fulfill its mission - the theater must respond to the various demands of playwrights, directors, actors, and the audience. This means having the ability to adapt to different working styles, to comply with various new techniques that are developing at an extremely fast pace, to be open to different directorial approaches for the realization of theatrical productions.

Also, artistic flexibility in the theater contains the necessity of the idea of openness to innovation and artistic experimentation. Interdisciplinarity is a concrete form of shaping theater in contemporary society. The social role of the theater has always been a first-rate one, even more so, this role is almost vital in the 21st century, where the whole world seems to be

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 340-341

<sup>11</sup> Luís Bonet, Héctor Schargorosky. 2017. *Theater management. Models and strategies for performing organizations and institutions*, [Managementul teatrelor. Modele și strategii pentru organizații și instituții de spectacol], trad. Carmen Stanciu, Alexandru-Emil Avram. București: Ed: Pro Universitaria, pp. 25-26.

sliding more and more down the wrong slopes of approaching life. There is a need for a theater that brings positive changes in society.

Through all these aspects, the theater fulfills its public mission, becoming a powerful tool of education, change and social development, without losing its quality of being artistically flexible.

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