Devised theatrical endeavours in Transylvanian Hungarian theatre after the turn of the millennium

Abstract

Supervisor:

Dr. habil. ÁRPÁD KÉKESI KUN associate professor

Doctoral candidate:

RAMONA GECSE

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CONTENTS

The topic and objectives of the dissertation

At a time when a new theatrical language, which the literature calls devised theatre, was emerging in England, in the late sixties and early seventies of the last century, as theatre was moving away from the text- and director-centredness of performance, in the Hungarian theatres of Romania, under a rather strict dictatorship, one of the main aspirations of theatre-makers was to stage classical dramatic texts in a way that would serve the national ideals of the theatre, through the cryptic expressions of the language of theatre

It took more than three decades for new theatrical styles, forms and genres to appear in the practice of Hungarian theatre in Romania, which break the traditional theatrical hierarchy (text-director-actor), dare to use spaces outside the theatre, involve the audience in the creative process and force spectators to look at theatrical art from a different perspective.

My thesis examines the non-traditional, complex theatrical performances of the post-millennium period, of the last twenty years, which have been created partly or entirely through devised theatre methods by Hungarian theatre projects in Romania, and at the same time, I ask the question to what extent it is possible to break out of the cultural rules and the theatrical framework accepted by the social consensus: how are these experiments received by theatre institutions, audiences and critics?

Undoubtedly, after the turn of the millennium, there were and still are a number of efforts in Transylvanian Hungarian theatre life, both within and outside the institutional framework, which tried to override the logocentric and directorial-authority-centred conception of theatrical performance, typical of official theatre (stone theatre)[1], in the creation of which the actor participated as co-creator of the performance, and not only as executor of the director's ideas. The extent to which these attempts were successful, and to what extent the concepts of devised theatre were realised in them, I intend to assess, document and analyse by analysing the individual performances.

I have a degree in acting, and I myself participated in the creation of the performances and projects analysed in the second part of my thesis, as a full-fledged creator, so I also tried to show aspects of these processes that those who were not part of the creative team could not see as much. My main objective was to research some exemplary Hungarian theatre projects in Romania over the last twenty years, based on personal experience, but also informed by

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[1] By "official theatre" I mean the colloquial term "stone theatre", which corresponds to the definition of "traditional theatre". "The structural criteria for a traditional theatre are: 1. it has a permanent company; 2. it operates under a repertory system; 3. its mode of existence is factory-like; and 4. it falls within the state-funded theatre structure." Leposa Balázs, „Az ellenszínház mint alternatíva. A Stúdió K *Woyzeck*je, In *Alternatív színháztörténetek. Alternatívok és alternatívák*, ed. Imre Zoltán, 205-221 (Budapest: Balassi, 2008), 207.

theoretical and scientific methods and literature, which departed from the logocentric and directorial authoritarianism of the stone theatre, outside and inside institutional structures..

I describe and analyse all these phenomena through the theatrical concepts used in the devised theatre method. My aim is to prove that the performances I have highlighted, which move away from the logocentric and directorial-authority-centred theatre model and are created in an unconventional space, are of pioneering importance, and help to bring Hungarian theatre in Romania up to date with Western European theatrical trends, which we have missed for historical and political reasons that have also determined theatre creation.

Structure of the dissertation

In Part I of my thesis, I explain the concepts of theatre history and theatre theory that I most often use in the performance analyses in Part II. First, I clarify what I mean by logocentric theatre, the bourgeois theatre of illusion, theatrical naturalism, directorial theatre, i.e. the theatrical tradition from which devised theatre is moving away. I conclude this conceptual clarification with a historical perspective: I reflect on the Hungarian theatre tradition in Romania, which directly precedes the initiatives that in some way and to some extent can already be associated with devised methods.

I then delimit further concepts in the subchapters of the dissertation. I discuss outdoor interactive theatre and social theatre as theatre types related to the aspirations of devised theatre and the overlapping conceptual scope of devised theatre, as well as the shift in the position of the spectator/participant as a general phenomenon in these theatres. I have dedicated a separate sub-chapter to performance, because I consider an artistic genre that, although on the periphery of the concept of theatre, is in many ways related to devised theatre.

In Part II, I explore the characteristics of devised theatre, its origins and history, as well as its community aspects. I have primarily followed Alison Oddey's *Devising Theater: A practical and theoretical handbook* and Deidre Heddon and Jane Milling's *Devising Performance. A Critical History*, but I have also drawn on a number of recent publications on the subject.

In Part II I also review those Hungarian theatrical endeavours and performances in Transylvania which, although not employing all the methods of devised theatre, fit to some extent into this theatrical trend.

In Chapters III and IV, I use the conceptual framework of devised theatre to analyse performances in which I myself participated in the creative process – as an actor and/or director, or as a full-fledged member of the team. In particular, I focus on projects,

performances and experiments that were created using the devised theatre method in the period after the turn of the millennium. The following performances are analysed in detail:

1. Two experimental projects by the Tandem art ensemble, which were independent theatre experiments by young artists. There is no professional record of Tandem's experimental projects, so in this chapter I refer to the interview I conducted and published as an Appendix to this thesis, which highlights a very significant problem for Hungarian theatres in Romania.

2. I also describe the collective workflow of *The devil's casting*. The production, created within the institutional theatre, was the creation of Radu Afrim, who conceived and directed the story, but the text was written by the actors, working together.

3. I also analyse the rehearsal processes and concept of the classroom performances of Andrea Pass: *Stone, paper, scissors* and Beáta Adorján: *Pali and Lea*. These projects were also the collective work of the staff of a theatre institution.

4. I also share my experiences as a director and discuss the workshop work based on the drama *Dirt* by Béla Pintér, which was presented as a graduation performance. My students have performed this play in front of an audience several times, on the stage of the Târgu Mures Studio in 2019 and 2020. In my analysis of the working process, I mainly explore the question of how a team work, which can be evaluated as a collective creative process, becomes the individual property of the director, due to the traditional theatrical framework.

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND BASIC CONCEPTS OF THE DISSERTATION

I explain the basic concepts that form the nodes of the theoretical web of my thesis. First, I take stock of the established structures that devised theatre partially or wholly questions, and then I analyse the theatrical phenomena that devised theatre prefers and applies to varying degrees in its diverse practices.

Whenever I talk about the "**logocentric theatre model**" in this thesis, I am using the term in a Derridean sense. This kind of theatre is "dominated by speech, by the will to speak, by the project of a primordial logos which, not belonging to the space of the theatre, directs it from a distance"[2]. I follow the line of thought of Stratos E. Constantinidis in defining and explaining the concept of Derrida.

According to Constantinidis, in the logocentric theatre model, "a theatrical production always begins with a dramatic text, however varied or improvised, written by someone who

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[2] Jacques Derrida: A kegyetlenség színháza és a reprezentáció bezáródása. Transl. Farkas Anikó és Ivacs Ágnes. **http://www.caesar.elte.hu/gondolat-jel/94/derrida.html**. Downloaded on 2021.06.06.

functions as a 'playwright'."[3]. Only then can the director and the actor come to turn the written script into a performance. Constantinidis contrasts the term "logocentric" with the "deconstructor": the former is at the centre of theatrical activity, the latter is on its periphery, i.e. outside the structure. In Constantinidis' definition, deconstruction is a mode of analysis that "subverts the traditional ways of theatrical performance and questions definitions taken for granted in the Western theatrical tradition, such as 'text', 'author', 'reader'. Which 'text' is more important for theatre practice: the playtext, the prompt-copy or the rehearsal-text? Who is the 'author' of the most important text: the playwright, the dramaturg, the director, the set and costume designer, the actor, the spectator, the reader, the critic or the editor?"[4] He also asks who the main reader of the text is. Constantinidis considers that these questions of 'textuality', 'voice' and 'interpretation' carry value judgements and are more or less based on the established structure of theatre production in Western societies[5], since "in traditional theatrical production, a hierarchy of priorities and a chain of rules were created so that the system of attitudes and expectations could be controlled from the playwright to the spectator"[6]. Constantinidis also points out that in the Western theatre, well-organised rules guide the creation of performances, and deconstruction subverts the regularity of Western theatre companies, the hierarchy of the system.

Jaques Derrida coined the concept of logocentrism as a critique of Western philosophy. Constantinidis notes that the tradition of theatre production is still dominated by logocentric thinking. The deconstructivist, on the other hand, seeks to overturn the old and new hierarchies within the framework of the Western system of theatre production.

The **bourgeois theatre of** illusion is the kind of theatre that Derrida's deconstruction is directed against, i.e. the bourgeois drama and the theatrical illusion built around it, which became dominant in England and France in the mid-18th century. It refers to an "idealised play"[7] that takes place in an enclosed space, designated as a theatre, at a predetermined time, typically based around a dramatic text, and separates the performer and the spectator to provide for the illusion of the spectator[8].

Naturalism, in the context of theatrical performance, is a particular form of drama and theatre that is widespread in almost all European countries, and its most important

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[3] Stratos E. Constantinidis: Színház dekonstrukció alatt? Transl. Leposa Balázs. *Theatron 5*, 2. 2004, 3.
[4] Ibid. 5.
[5] Ibid. 5.
[6] Ibid. 5.
[7] Simhandl: op. cit. 129.
[8] Ibid.

characteristic is that it aligns art with the principle of verisimilitude.[9] One element of the theatrical naturalism movement is the theory of the "fourth wall" developed by Diderot[10], which requires the actor to pretend that the audience is not present during the performance.

In my thesis, because of my choice of topic, the question of where the boundaries of the director's work and responsibilities are, and what the **director's theatre** is, where the director's position is located, is constantly raised. Both Patrice Pavis and Katalin Gabnai warn that defining the work of a director is a difficult task: on the one hand, because it is a very broad and constantly evolving role, and on the other hand, because there are many different types of directors in a given era, and the typical methods and attitudes cannot be compared.

Throughout the history of the theatre, the director has had a very varied range of tasks. The brief historical overview of István Nánay's book on stage directing suggests that the identity and role of the director has always been determined by the theatrical aspects of the time. Until the emergence of the generally accepted role of the director, communication between the playwright and the spectator was in fact the main focus, with the actor playing the role of mediator, and the significance of the playwright was eclipsed as the role of the director was transformed and valorised. Theatre communication is no longer about interpreting the playwright's work, but about realising the director's reading and interpretation. As Pavis puts it, "the spectator only gets to know the play through the mediation of the director's reading".[11] Because there are countless directorial readings of a written work, the director becomes the primary author of the performance. In essence, therefore, directing means that the elements that belong together come together to form an organic whole.

Based on the historical part of the book *A rendezés színháza* (The theatre of directing) by Árpád Kun Kékesi and other works on theatre history, I present the views and work of theatre directors with whom the representatives of the devised theatre method were in dialogue, mostly by distancing themselves from them in formulating their views on the theatre director.

These artists have created workshops and laboratories for artistic experimentation beyond the institutional framework. Several of them also recognised that setting a date for a performance in advance would hinder the creative process, so they sought frameless possibilities: responsibility and commitment to the actors and the audience was their only voluntary commitment. Devised theatre and this type of directorial theatre are most similar in that the creators sought a completely independent space to rethink the essence and mission of

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[9] Peter Simhandl: op. cit. 209.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

theatre. In their search, they constantly oscillated between workshop experiments and institutionalism. Since the emergence of directorial theatre, directors have more or less decided whether they want to follow the ideal of collective authorship or whether they want to see theatre-makers as executors.

Exactly where the devised theatre and the directorial theatre models diverge is illustrated in the following table. In the first column, I list the characteristics of devised theatre – these distinctive features will be discussed in more detail in a later section devoted specifically to devised theatre principles and methods. I have included the second column in the table on the basis of the consideration that at some stage in their careers, these theatre directors experimented and rethought new artistic possibilities for theatre outside traditional theatrical frameworks, and I have used the table to summarise the characteristics of this work in relation to devised theatre principles. In the third column I take as a benchmark the possibilities that could be realised within the walls of a traditional theatre institution.

Devised theatre	The director's work outside institutional structures	The director's work within an institutional framework
Democratic work process	Feasible	Hierarchical - consultation
Can start from anything	Feasible	Feasible - consultation
The nature of the final product is unknown	Feasible	Not feasible
Group of cooperating individuals	Feasible	Feasible
Peer-to-peer relations	Feasible	Feasible - consultation
Use of everyday spaces	Feasible	Feasible - consultation
Risk taking, experimentation	Feasible	Feasible - consultation
Improvisation	Feasible	Feasible
Innovative approach	Feasible	Feasible
Spontaneity, group dynamics	Feasible	Depending on rules
Variability	Feasible	Not allowed
Reflecting on world events	Feasible	Feasible
Process	Feasible	Product

Going beyond the individual perspective	Feasible	Depending on the time limit

We can see that the director's work can be modified in all aspects, depending on the dynamics and intellect of the company. The director can take full advantage of the possibilities of devised theatre if he or she chooses to abandon the separation of creative roles. The elimination of hierarchy creates the possibility of teamwork, in which each creator does his or her part according to his or her competence. The work of these directors reflects this, as does the fact that the director's work is in many ways limited and restricted by rigid structural frameworks.

Social theatrical phenomena. Displacing the spectator

Already from the beginning of the last century, but especially in the decades following the Second World War, the notion of theatrical performance in European theatre studies has expanded to include theatrical events that did not take place in an institutionalised formal theatre, and the sharp boundary that previously separated the spectator from the performers and contributed to the illusion that the spectator was not present has disappeared, as the hierarchy of text-director-actor has begun to break down. This broadening of the conceptual scope of theatrical performance, however, also threatens to render the concept so general as to be meaningless. We must therefore ask what can still be called theatre and what can no longer be called as such.

According to the Italian theatre semiotician Keir Elam, although it often seems obvious what theatre is, it is in fact the so-called theatrical competency that distinguishes theatrical events from other similar events. The organisational and cognitive principles that allow us to draw the conceptual boundaries need to be acquired in the same way as other cultural rules.[12] Zoltán Imre, in his thesis titled *Alternatív színházkutatás* (Alternative theatre research), quotes Keir Elam and stresses that "the theatrical framework considered as traditional is not universal, not natural and not self-evident".[13] Using a theatrical example, he reminds the reader that "the creation and recognition of a framework for theatre is part of a continuous negotiation and part of a social consensus".[14]

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[12] Keir Elam: *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London and New York, Routledge, 1980. Idézi Imre Zoltán: *Alternatív színháztörténet*
 http://epa.oszk.hu/02500/02518/00308/pdf/EPA02518_irodalomtortenet_2005_02_210-240.pdf
Downloaded on 17.04.2021.
[13] Imre Zoltán: op. cit.
[14] Imre Zoltán: op. cit.

Following this line of thought, the theatre as an institution cannot be accepted as an exclusively universal and self-evident delimiting framework for the concept of the theatrical event, even if there is a social consensus in certain periods: there are many examples in European theatre from the second half of the last century that do not fit into this framework. In this part of my thesis, I will also refer to theatre performances that were produced outside institutional frameworks, in order to highlight the fact that since the second half of the last century the concept of theatre has moved away from a single definition towards a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations, and its boundaries have been greatly expanded.

Currently, the social consensus is that theatre is mostly associated with some kind of institution. Institutionalised forms of theatre, and the way it works in practice, are based on the relationship between performers and spectators, text and performance, actor and role, stage and auditorium.

It cannot be ignored that "as an institutionalised framework for the performance (performative action), European culture has historically created the sites, buildings (theatres) and occasions (performances, festivals) fixed in a time stream that have separated artistic performances from other actions of everyday life".[15] This led to the creation of the peep stage, which separates the actors from the audience with an imaginary wall. In a later period of theatre history, however, those seeking to eliminate the distance between spectators and actors created performances that removed the separation between the auditorium and the playing area. The theatre chose public spaces as its venues, i.e. "the theatre as a fixed and casual institution ventured into territories outside itself"[16], and is no longer defined by a building, a set of rules and associated expectations.

Drawing on these theoretical findings, I present in this chapter theatrical approaches and "performative actions" that have emerged from a desire to cross and break institutional boundaries.

Efforts that seek to achieve social change through theatre are called "social theatre phenomena"[17] by Péter P. Müller. The 20th-century theatrical innovators associated with these phenomena sought to change the relationship between spectators, audiences and actors, as well as the institutionalised framework. Such endeavours worked to "deflect and displace the dominant European (stone) theatre tradition"[18], by focusing primarily on the theatrical

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[15] P. Müller Péter: op. cit. 8.
[16] P. Müller Péter: op. cit. 9.
[17] Ibid.
[18] P. Müller Péter: op. cit. 21.

performance as an event rather than as a dramatic work of art, by seeking to displace the spectator from the position of mere spectator, to attract a larger audience than that of the stone theatre institutions, and by using theatre as a tool for social purposes. P. Müller believes that of all these efforts, the main concern of the creators is how to displace the spectator out of the position of a mere observer, because "the path to the (renewal-oriented) theatre's ability to bring about changes in society not by creating works of art, but by creating events, is through the spectator".[19]

These examples illustrate that the conceptual frameworks sanctioned by the social consensus in a given era are not universal, and that there are many exceptional examples of works outside the generally accepted rules of a particular era, mostly aimed at highlighting social problems that affect everyone. In the same way that Boal focuses the restaurant scene on the interpretation and understanding of Argentinean law, or that Nitsch and Schechner encourage the crossing of the boundaries of carefully guarded taboo areas, or that Abramović raises questions about the social determinacy of the spectator's behaviour. What these efforts have in common is primarily the impact on the spectator and the change in the status of the spectator. It is through the spectator that the theatre is able to bring about changes in society, not by creating a work of art, but by creating events. The only difference between these examples is the means and the degree of coercion used to achieve this.

In my thesis, I do not intend to go into the extent to which these performative actions can be considered theatrical events in all their aspects, but I would like to highlight certain elements of them that coincide with the means of devised theatre, most notably their characteristic of seeking to achieve social change through the means of theatre, by changing the status of the spectator.

Boal approaches the phenomenon of theatre from the perspective of everyday life and everyday events, Hermann Nitsch and Richard Schechner highlight the importance of the taboo-breaking spirit of performative action and the necessity of crossing boundaries, and Marina Abramović's concept of performance emphasises the experience of communal responsibility, and through her art, the audience can witness and participate in a crossing of boundaries that breaks down the formal framework of a visit to an art gallery or theatre..

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[19] P. Müller Péter: op. cit. 22.

II. DEVISED THEATRE

After a tour of the theatrical concepts and ideas that were supposedly exclusively valid, but have become questioned in the second half of the 20th century by theatre practitioners and theorists who were rethinking the European theatre tradition, I turn to the question of the sense in which I will use the term "devised theatre" from the title of this dissertation in subsequent performance analyses, beyond the often-used definition of devised theatre as "a kind of shared creative process that subverts classical theatre structures"[20].

In the international literature, the term devised theatre is most often used to describe theatrical performances in which the whole company participates as in a creative partnership. It has been used to describe prose and dance productions, such as those by DV8 Physical Theatre or Forced Entertainment Theatre, professional and community productions, as well as to document the creative process of theatre education performances.[21] This brief definition also indicates that devised theatre methods are a means of artistic endeavour that attempt to override the logocentric and directorial authoritarianism that characterises institutional theatre.

Alison Oddey's *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, published in 1994, was the first textbook to provide a comprehensive account of the theory and practice of devised theatre. In addition to a theoretical treatise, the author analyses the activities of thirteen professional devised theatre companies in the volume. In her research, she concludes that "what these radically different performances have in common is that they question the established theatrical structures, hierarchies or processes that are widely accepted in the Western theatre world".[22]

Ádám Bethlenfalvy identifies three aspects of theatre structures typical of traditional, bourgeois stone theatre. Firstly, the relationship between the play and the company: in the classical conception, the persons appointed by the institution are responsible for analysing, deciphering and staging the play according to some idea. He also discusses the relationship between the director and the actor: in the traditional approach, the actor's task is to carry out the director's ideas as accurately as possible in his or her performance. He then discusses the division of roles between the company and the spectator, which can also be seen as a constant structure: the spectator, the receiver, is passive, and the actors are active performers.

The devised theatre mode of operation challenges at least some of these classical theatre structures, and sometimes even overrides them. Bethlenfalvy illustrates this with concrete

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[20] Bethlenfalvy Ádám: Kié a színjátszás? *Drámapedagógiai Magazin* 65. April 4, 2019. 4–6.
[21] Bethlenfalvy Ádám: op. cit. 5.
[22] Ibid.

examples of theatre in which the content of the performance was determined by the actors, or in which the methods used were decided together by the company members rather than the director. Bethlenfalvy's examples include theatre performances that do not sharply separate the spectator space from the performance space, creating opportunities for the member of the audience to become creators of the performance.

It is important to emphasize that devised theatre is not based on a rigorous scientific theory, but is a set of theatrical phenomena that "can start from anything".[23] In other words, the process of creation differs from the logocentric theatre from the very beginning: the origin is not a dramatic text and its interpretation, but a community of creators who "create and shape the performance step by step, thinking together in the rehearsal room, improvising, researching, using personal responses to the given theme as raw material".[24] Compared to logocentric theatre, this means that in the "collaborative work process"[25] the "hierarchical supremacy of the text"[26] is eliminated, the text is only one of the components of the performance, it does not rise above the others.

"Devised theatre is an alternative to the dominant literary theatre tradition, which is the conventionally accepted form of theatre dominated by the often patriarchal, hierarchical relationship of playwright and director."[27] The greatest innovation of devised theatre is that it breaks with the socially constructed theatrical framework, the hierarchy between play and company, director and actor, the conventionally constructed patterns and forms of the relationship between company and spectator, and places the creators side by side as equals.

The meaning of the word "devised" also suggests that this type of creation is carried out in a heightened creative state, requiring improvisation, thinking, imagination, sponteneity and adaptation from the participants, who "make sense of themselves within their own cultural and social context, investigating, integrating, and transforming their personal experiences, dreams, research, improvisation, and experimentation".[28] Therefore, in the initial phase of the devised theatre process, the creators are just looking for inspiration, and the director tries to position and inspire the team members to eliminate the fixed patterns and habits. He or she tries to create an atmosphere in which the creator, faced with new possibilities, is in a position

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[23] Alison Oddey: *Devising Theater: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*. London – New York, Routledge, 1994, 1.
[24] Trencsényi Katalin: A nem-Eukledészi dramaturgia szabadsága és felelőssége (interjú). *Játéktér* June 2019. http://www.jatekter.ro/?tag=trencsenyi-katalin. Downloaded on 2021.04.08.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Alison Oddey: op. cit. 4.
[28] Alison Oddey: op. cit. 1.

to redefine what he or she has taken for granted. A sense of certainty, a feeling of having arrived, stifles creativity.

In the Hungarian literature, the English word "devised" is the most commonly used for this approach, as there is no uniformly accepted Hungarian term. If a Hungarian word is used to identify this type of theatre, it is usually refined by paraphrasing, as the Hungarian terms are not always exactly synonymous.

According to Oddey, devising is "a social expression of non-hierarchical possibilities; a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration; an ensemble; a collective; a practical expression of political and ideological commitment; a means of taking control of work and operating autonomously; a de-commodification of art; a commitment to total community; a commitment to total art; the negating of the gap between art and life; the erasure of the gap between spectator and performer; a distrust of words; the embodiment of the death of the author; a means to reflect contemporary social reality; a means to incite social change; an escape from theatrical conventions; a challenge for theatre makers; a challenge for spectators; an expressive, creative language; innovative; risky; inventive; spontaneous; experimental; non-literary".[29] The features of the devised method that Heddon and Milling have collected are fully consistent with those listed in Oddey's book.

Devised theatre does not always contradict traditional theatre, but rather, as Alison Oddey notes, it is "a response and reaction to the playwright-director relationship, to text-centred theatre, and to the ideology that subjects one person's text to another person's direction".[30]

What makes devised theatre most special is the freedom and possibility to go in many different directions during the collaborative work process, until a performable piece of theatre is created. This method "can produce more creative solutions than other forms of theatre, although this is fundamentally determined by group dynamics and interaction".[31]

Oddey believes that the devised process "is about the fragmentary experience of understanding ourselves, our culture, and the world we inhabit".[32] Devised artistic work therefore requires a liberated atmosphere in which creators can reflect on themselves and world events without constraints, so that they can express the results in the theatrical work.

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[29] Alison Oddey: op. cit. 5–6.
[30] Alison Oddey: op. cit. 4.
[31] Alison Oddey: op. cit. 3.
[32] Alison Oddey: op. cit. 1.

According to Oddey, what makes the workflow and the product unique in devised theatre is not only the team members' constant reflection on what is happening in the changing world, but also the team's invention, risk-taking and commitment. Oddey concludes that the inventiveness and eclecticism of this kind of theatre makes it almost impossible to encapsulate all devising in a single theory. Each of the thirteen professional troupes or groups Oddey describes in her book has its own particular way of dealing with different intentions, interests and subjects.[33] Therefore, any definition of devised theatre must at least include a process of working together to find common ways and means, and a collaboration whereby different views, beliefs, life experiences and attitudes to changing world events are brought together to create a product. In most cases, this interconnection means that the creators jointly invent and write stage situations and texts based on current social issues, not necessarily according to some dramatic rule, but in a "democratic work process"[34].

To summarise, I would like to illustrate by means of a table how the characteristics of devised theatre mentioned so far distinguish this type of work from traditional theatre, which I call logocentric theatre in the table's heading. I will draw a parallel between the aims and methods of the two types of theatre. The table does not aim to be exhaustive, since devised theatre is still changing and evolving, as the theories and scholarly literature trying to grasp the phenomenon continue to grow.

Logocentric theatre	Devised theatre (as alternative)
Its starting point is the dramatic work	Can start from anything
The final product is predictable	The nature of the final product is unknown
The director, the author, the institution decides	Decision by the group of cooperating individuals
Hierarchical relationship system	Peer-to-peer relations
Prefers conventional theatre spaces	It also uses everyday spaces
Risk-free process	Risk taking, experimentation, improvisation
The director's concept decides the process	Innovative approach
Framework, rules	Spontaneity, group dynamics
Tradition	Variability
Not necessarily reflecting on world events	Reflecting on world events

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Czirák Ádám: op. cit.

The director's individual vision prevails	Going beyond the individual perspective
Product	Process
The ideal of outstanding persons	The ideal of collective authorship
Hierarchical work process	Democratic work process

III. HUNGARIAN THEATRE PROJECTS USING DEVISED METHODS IN ROMANIA AFTER THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

After a review of the international practice of devised theatre, in this part of the dissertation I will briefly take stock of theatre projects from the last twenty years of Hungarian theatre in Romania that have used at least some of the devised theatre methods: either in the creation of the performance (e.g. building a non-traditional form of performance through teamwork and improvisation) or in their approach to the audience (choosing an unusual venue for the performance, not separating the performance space from the audience space, involving the audience interactively in the performance, etc.), or simply questioning the rigid, hierarchical theatrical relationships that characterize the artistic institutions of the region.

The vast majority of Hungarian theatres in Romania operate within an institutional framework, i.e. they are "organised and integrated with legal implication into the social system of production".[35] The theatre institution is therefore organised into a production-based structure based on a strict set of internal rules and must comply with legal requirements.

In my dissertation I explore how, under such institutional circumstances, a theatrical performance can be created that works with more or less devising theatrical methods, i.e. how a framework can be created that "enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative in the sharing and shaping of an original product that directly emanates from assembling, editing, and re-shaping individuals' contradictory experiences of the world".[36]

The dissertation specifically mentions some of the devising experiments of the Hungarian repertory theatres in Romania, the performances born from improvisation, and also monitors the devised methods of the Hungarian independent theatre companies in Romania, and discusses devising in the Hungarian theatre education in Romania.

IV. Creating theatre in Tandem – Methods of analysis

I analyse the performances in which I have participated as a full-fledged artist in terms of the genre of devised theatre. Following the Philther method[37], I will take stock of the events

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[35] Mérei Ferenc: *Közösségek rejtett hálózata*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2004, 34.
[36] Alison Oddey: *Devising Theater. A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*. London and New York, Routledge, 1994, 1.
[37] Philther (a portmanteau of the words philology and theatre) is a project of the Theatron Workshop Foundation, launched in 2009, which researches the history of Hungarian theatre after 1949, led by Magdolna Jákfalvi, Árpád Kun Kékesi and Gabriella Kiss. In 2015, a research team from the University of Arts in Târgu Mureș also joined the project, led by Ildikó Ungvári Zrínyi, thus extending the research to the history of Hungarian theatre in Transylvania. With the help of the net-philological method developed with Philther, the available visual and textual theatre monuments can be systematised with philological precision, and the peak performances of Hungarian theatre culture are made visible from a contemporary perspective.

(performances), examine their theatrical cultural context, dramatic texts, dramaturgy, direction, acting style, visual and aural performance, and the impact of the performances

About the experiences of Tandem's experimental theatre projects – The history of the Tandem group

The Tandem group was founded in the summer of 2012 by seven Transylvanian actors (including myself), a director, a set designer and a video artist, with the aim of creating an opportunity for theatre artists – including recent graduates and current students of the Târgu Mures University of Arts – to meet and work together, to experiment with theatre, after the season ends, during the summer break.

IV.2. *Measure for Measure* in Miercurea Ciuc – the Tandem group's first pilot project

The performance fits best into the genre of devised theatre: the democratic work process, the use of everyday found spaces, the peer-to-peer relationships, risk-taking, experimentation, improvisation, and the attempt to break down established structures. However, the performance as a whole was more of just a start towards the devised genre, and it was only through the second attempt the following year that we really got close to it.

IV.3. *Pictures of a Catalan family* – the Tandem's second experimental project

Tandem's second project can be seen as a kind of devised theatre event, including artistic innovation. Among the attributes of devised theatre, the most emphasised was the experimentation in pushing artistic boundaries against traditional theatrical concepts. Tandem created its particular event in a space that offered freedom to both spectator and actor. The secure, fixed velvet chair was replaced by a freer, less confined spectator position. The spectator could assume any posture, was allowed to sit, stand, lie down, or walk around.

In essence, the whole approach of the project offered new opportunities for both creators and the audience. There was no script. During rehearsals, all the creators lived in the same space: this constant togetherness, this shared space, also united energies. The recipient also perceived and appreciated the improvisational nature of the events in the present and the particular values of the location – just as in the case of Tandem's first project.

If we include the characteristics of Tandem's second project in the table used for the definition of devised theatre, it is clear that the project presented meets the genre requirements of devised theatre in almost all aspects.

General characteristics of devised theatre	Characteristics of *Pictures of a Catalan family*
Can start from anything	Found photographs were the starting point
The nature of the final product is unknown	The nature of the final product is unknown
Decision by the group of cooperating individuals	Decision by the group of cooperating individuals
Equal system of relations	Equal system of relations
It also uses everyday spaces	Only used everyday spaces
Risk taking, experimentation, improvisation	Risk taking, experimentation, improvisation
Innovative approach	Innovative approach
Spontaneity, group dynamics	Spontaneity, group dynamics
Variability	Variability
Reflecting on world events	Reflecting on world events
Going beyond the individual perspective	Going beyond the individual perspective
Process	Process
Prevalence of the ideal of collective authorship	Prevalence of the ideal of collective authorship
Democratic work process	Democratic work process

It can be seen, therefore, that Pictures of a Catalan family, the second project of the Tandem group, fits in every respect into the category of devised theatre works, one of the first in the history of Hungarian experimental theatre in Romania in the 2000s.

IV.4. Radu Afrim and casting: *The devil's casting*

The devil's casting is the debut production of Radu Afrim, one of the best-known and most talented Romanian directors, at the Tompa Miklós Tompa Theatre in Târgu Mures. It was announced as a surprise performance for season ticket holders, as the director did not want to stage a classic literary work, but rather to create a "non-verbal or text-less performance" with choreographer Andrea Gavriliu.[38] He planned to develop his own basic idea together with the company as a creative team during the rehearsal process, and to create the performance together. This meant that it was impossible to know in advance the title of the performance, its

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[38] Gál Boglárka: Egy hiteles naiv festmény. https://www.jatekter.ro/?p=8982. Downloaded on 04.06.2021.

duration or its cast, or where the basic story would develop during the creative process, or the direction the performative action would take.

The success of the show is mainly reflected by the fact that it has been running almost continuously since its premiere in 2014. It has attracted the attention of the profession for its innovation, both aesthetically and creatively.

IV.5. Classroom theatre performances of the Tompa Miklós Company in Târgu Mures. Genre features of a classroom theatre performance

Nowadays, it is not at all obvious that theatre has anything to do with education: professional theatre is averse to the role of educator for fear of being didactic. But the need and expectation that the theatre should attract a generation of young audiences and socialise them into regular theatre-goers is only going to persuade professional companies to exploit their pedagogical potential and "think of the theatre experience as part of a consciously organised learning process"[39]. In this conception, theatre education should be understood as applied theatre and represents a new turn. Theatre education programmes generally consider theatre as a tool and subordinate it to the subject matter that the company wishes to develop. However, being a tool does not mean that artistic sophistication is abandoned

The narrower creative team of the Tompa Miklós Company of the National Theatre of Târgu Mures does not aim to create a single classroom theatre performance, but a series of programmes with different themes for different target groups each year. The presentation and analysis of the two performances in succession will highlight how the experience of the first performance is incorporated into the next and how this initiative stands out from its context.

IV.6. The second classroom theatre project – Beáta Adorján: *Pali and Lea*

The fact that the classroom theatre production of *Pali and Lea* did not have a director made the creative process similar to devised theatre, as did the fact that the dramatic text was written during rehearsals, in the presence of the playwright.

If we create a new column next to the table used for the definition of devised theatre to enumerate the characteristics of the classroom theatre performance of *Pali and Lea*, it is clear that the project presented meets the genre requirements of devised theatre in almost all aspects.

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[39] Cziboly Ádám: *Színházi nevelési és színház pedagógiai kézikönyv*. Budapest, InSiteDrama, 2017, 78.

General characteristics of devised theatre	Characteristics of *Pali and Lea*
Can start from anything	A taboo subject, rarely discussed
The nature of the final product is unknown	The nature of the final product is unknown
Decision by the group of cooperating individuals	Decision by the group of cooperating individuals
Equal system of relations	Equal system of relations
It also uses everyday spaces	Only used everyday spaces
Risk taking, experimentation, improvisation	Risk taking, experimentation, improvisation
Innovative approach	Innovative approach
Spontaneity, group dynamics	Spontaneity, group dynamics
Variability	Variability
Reflecting on world events	Reflecting on world events
Going beyond the individual perspective	Going beyond the individual perspective
Process	Process
Prevalence of the ideal of collective authorship	Prevalence of the ideal of collective authorship
Democratic work process	Democratic work process

In the light of the above, we can say that the theatre education programme, including the analysed classroom theatre performances, is a niche, alternative pedagogical method, a form of education that provides experience and knowledge at the same time, in the school institution, during school hours, using theatre tools, and allows space for joint thinking about a current and important problem and topic.

IV.7. *Dirt* – based on the drama by Béla Pintér

Dirt, based on the drama of the same title by Béla Pintér, was originally planned to be performed only once by the acting students of the Hungarian Faculty of the University of Arts in Târgu Mures, at the final exam of their three-year undergraduate studies, but it proved so successful that it was included in the repertoire of the Studio Theatre in Târgu Mures, and was performed several times over the next two years, thus further serving the artists' experience and artistic development.

The author of this dissertation was involved in this project as an acting teacher and director. As *Dirt* was originally conceived as a graduation work, our primary aim was not to

create a great performance, but to allow the students to experience all phases of the creative process and to participate as creatively as possible, so that they could express themselves on stage with validity and clarity. We focused primarily on the rehearsal process, not on the result.

If we include in the table used for the definition of devised theatre the characteristics of the creative process of the performance of *Dirt* in parallel, it is clear that the rehearsal process of the performance presented tried to meet the genre requirements of devised theatre in almost all aspects.

General characteristics of devised theatre	Characteristics of *Dirt*
Can start from anything	Driven by pedagogical objectives (actor training, promoting actor development)
The nature of the final product is unknown	The nature of the final product is unknown
Decision by the group of cooperating individuals	The director kept in mind the decisions of the group of collaborators
Equal system of relations	The director tried to maintain an equal system of relations
Improvisation	I Improvisation
Risk taking, experimentation, improvisation	Risk taking, improvisation
Innovative approach	Innovative approach
Spontaneity, group dynamics	Spontaneity, group dynamics
Variability	Variability
Reflecting on world events	Reflecting on world events
Going beyond the individual perspective	Going beyond the individual perspective
Process	Process
Prevalence of the ideal of collective authorship	The director tried to implement the ideal of collective authorship
Democratic work process	The director tried to implement a democratic work process

Summary

In my thesis I primarily examine to what extent and how the devised theatre approach appears in Transylvanian Hungarian theatrical endeavours after the turn of the millennium.

The first two decades of the new millennium, when devised theatre was becoming more and more known in Eastern Europe, coincide with the period when I had my first theatre experiences as a young child, and in the first decade of the new millennium I started my career as an actor and then as a university lecturer in theatre, while I was involved in several alternative theatre projects that tried to promote devised theatre. So I know this period from personal experience: the problems and joys of the Hungarian theatre world in Romania, the changes in its relationship with the audience, the struggles of those who maintain the theatre structure, the actors' search for a way forward. At the same time, I felt that direct experience was not enough, I also needed to conduct theoretical, aesthetic and theatre historical studies and research, to move away from the experience, the subjectivity of involvement, and to examine this period of theatre through academic means, through the study of literature, from the perspective of a theatre movement, which had emerged and spread many decades earlier in England and the United States, and then around the world, mostly in Anglo-Saxon culture, but later also in Eastern and Central Europe, and which from time to time fertilised and to some extent renewed thinking about theatre and theatrical practice.

Yet the question arises as to how familiar the theatre profession and the theatre-going public in Romania and Hungary are with the devised theatre approach, even if they have encountered performances and theatrical endeavours that have used its methods. And the answer is: not enough, I am afraid. The very fact that there is no established Hungarian term for "devised theatre" shows that it has not yet taken deep enough root. The Hungarian theatre vernacular refers to it both as 'community theatre' –emphasising its audience-generating, audience-involving, participatory nature – and as 'collective theatre' – the latter term referring to the fact that theatre-makers create a performance together, democratically, breaking the traditional theatre hierarchy. Others argue that it is impossible to capture this way of 'theatre-making' in a single Hungarian word, and therefore not worth translating: they insist on the English word 'devised', as meaning something like 'invented', and thus emphasise as the characteristic of this theatrical movement that the theatre-makers do not stage a pre-written classical or contemporary text, but they themselves devise and create the text of the performance.

That is why I have devoted a longer part of the first half of my thesis to clarifying the concepts. I did not want to encircle, close, or rigidly encapsulate devised theatre phenomena with a single short definition, but instead I broadened the scope of my investigations from a theatre

aesthetic point of view, and examined from a historical perspective those theatre theoretical concepts from which devised theatre in some way departs or which it even denies. These concepts form the nodes of the theoretical web of my thesis. I discuss at length the sense in which I use the terms *logocentric theatre, bourgeois theatre of illusion, theatrical naturalism, and directorial theatre*, which appear frequently in the analyses in the second part of my thesis. In the same way, I also analyse the earlier theatrical phenomena that devised theatre acknowledges, seeks to follow and in some way applies in its diverse practices. In the first, theoretical part of my dissertation, I also discuss the logocentric and directorial theatrical traditions of Hungarian theatres in Romania.

Of course, I also reflected on the theoretical literature on devised theatre itself, in particular Alison Oddey's *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, published in 1994, which is an indispensable book for researchers on the subject, and Deidre Heddon and Jane Millinga's *Devising Performance*, published in 2006.

In the second part of my thesis, I analyse Hungarian theatre productions in Romania that use the tools and methods of devised theatre in different ways and to different degrees, with varying degrees of consistency. I would like to emphasize that I do not even mention all devised theatre projects that have been realised in the Hungarian theatre scene in Romania since the turn of the millennium, but I have chosen only one exemplary theatre phenomenon to analyse and present in detail. I have tried to focus my academic research on examples that I know intimately, by being actively involved in their conception and realisation. At the same time, I have tried to seek out all the professional and academic reflections, reports and analyses that surrounded the theatre productions in question, both at the time and afterwards. Moreover, I myself have interviewed theatre professionals about the present and future of devised theatre and alternative theatre performances in general in Transylvanian Hungarian theatre. I was also guided by the criterion of representativeness in the selection of the performances to be analysed: I tried to compile a varied 'sample catalogue'. The performances that could be related to the devised theatre approach were considered in order to create as colourful a picture as possible.

The two experimental projects of the Tandem art ensemble also caught my attention because they were an independent theatrical experiment, not the productions of a permanent company: artists signed to different theatres temporarily working together, pushing the boundaries of freedom and collaboration for the pleasure of themselves and their audience. The performances were staged in an abandoned building, once used for industrial purposes, and not in a conventional theatre space, thus erasing the spatial boundary between actor and spectator. The two Tandem productions are also a good example of how the theatre-makers created the performance in a way that is typical of devised theatre, collaborating democratically to produce all its elements, including the text. They

broke down the hierarchy of text-director-actor and involved their audience in the production in a way that is almost unthinkable in permanent, institutional theatre.

The devil's casting, the third production I analyse in my thesis, is an example of a production that can be performed in an institutional setting as a seasonal production and can incorporate elements of the devised theatre method. Here, the principle of collectivity was most prevalent in the creation of the text, the process and the structure of the performance. Although it was not indicated on the poster, the actors themselves created the verbal, vocal and non-verbal layers of the performance, working in collaboration with each other. Radu Afrim, the director, had more of a coordinating, organising and balancing role. In this performance, the principle of audience participation was not as prevalent as it is in devised theatre.

Precisely in order to make it clear and easy to see how a particular performance I am analysing corresponds to the ideals of devised theatre, at the end of each analysis I summarise in a table which devised characteristics are present in the performance in question.

In my analyses of Andrea Pass's *Stone, paper, scissors* and Beáta Adorján's *Pali and Lea* classroom performances, I mainly focus on the rehearsal processes and the concept. These are also projects that were carried out under the umbrella of a state theatre institution, by state employees. At the same time, the work of the actors was much more than just carrying out the director's instructions: the text was the product of their own experiences, and the rehearsals allowed everyone to express their ideas and creativity. What makes these types of performances unique and representative is the location chosen. The creators themselves went into the natural environment of the audience, their everyday life, the school, thus reaching out to those who would otherwise never go to the theatre or similar cultural spaces and institutions. This analysis also shows how important the role of devised theatres can be in educating future theatre audiences, in teaching the language of theatre to the next generation.

Finally, I analyse a performance created by my students, at the Art University of Târgu Mures, based on the drama Dirt by Béla Pintér. In this chapter, I discuss the issues of devised theatre principles and workshop activity, as well as the collective creative processes, pushing traditional theatre frameworks and education as an actor. Here, as in the other analyses, I record what has happened in Transylvanian Hungarian cultural life and formations, tracing the turns I have observed in my own theatrical practice.

To conclude, I would just like to point out what I think the implications of this thesis might be, and in what direction the research begun here could be continued.

At the end of my dissertation, my main desire and goal is to make this thesis a platform for professional dialogue between critics, theatre professionals, practicing artists and theatre institutions' decision-makers.

As an acting teacher, I feel that there is a great need to introduce as many practical elements of devised theatre as possible to students during their training, so that they can not only get an idea from books, studies and videos of the methods that have been practised in Western Europe for many decades, but also try them out for themselves, get to know them closely, practice them, incorporate them into their ideas of theatre, and then, once they leave university, initiate projects of this kind, now with a secure knowledge and skills. It would also be an important objective to ensure that student theatres master and practice at a higher level what this method and concept can offer to both professional and amateur theatre-makers.

Confronting the principles of devised theatre is an opportunity for managers of public or private theatre institutions and all theatre decision-makers to reflect on the question of how power is distributed in the theatre. Devised theatre works find it more difficult to fit into the strict, tight annual programme of theatre institutions: this trend gives a lot of space to creative freedom, considers it important that creative processes unfold naturally and mature, and therefore there is a great need for dialogue and cooperation with theatre managers.

While collecting, researching and organising reviews, reports and academic notes on the performances I wanted to analyse, I was sad to realise that these rather valuable initiatives, following devised methods, often remain only in the fleeting memory of the audience, without professional records, or at least not in the quantity and quality they deserve. I would also like to mobilise theatre historians and critics to engage with this type of Transylvanian Hungarian theatrical productions: to research, analyse and evaluate it, to bring devised works into the professional theatre discourse and into the space of attention of non-professional theatre-goers. What further research topics does this thesis open new avenues for? I have already mentioned that I did not aim for completeness when presenting the Hungarian theatre works in Romania that have devised theatre characteristics. It is up to further research and scholars to collect and critically classify all the theatrical phenomena that fall into this genre category. It would also be useful to map out the institutions and extra-institutional initiatives that operate this type of theatre practice. And the results of this research could be incorporated into the training of actors, as we should know what the needs of education are.

As I ponder possible future research directions, the future has already begun, often taking unpredictable, unexpected turns. The pandemic, the closure of public spaces, the temporary closure of theatres, for example, has given an interesting topicality to devised experimentation (window

theatre), explicitly favoured by the rather fearsome quarantine times. Theory and research must follow and investigate living theatrical processes. The future of Hungarian theatre in Transylvania will determine, first and foremost, the direction in which the subject of my thesis will be further expanded by the researchers of tomorrow.

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