

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF ARTS TÂRGU MUREŞ
GRADUATE SCHOOL

**Transylvanian Dance Theatre – a Network
Investigation.**

DOCTORAL THESIS ABSTRACT

Supervisor:

Magdolna Jákfalvi, DSc

Doctoral candidate:

Noémi Bezsán

2023

1. Introduction

The scope of the research

My thesis examines the phases of the formation, historical background, operation, and artistic development of Transylvanian dance theatre. In presenting the scope of the research, I consider defining the context of the term “Transylvanian dance theatre” as a priority. The term “dance theatre” in a broad sense encompasses the entire spectrum of dance art applied on stage, ranging from folklore to classical ballet. The compound term “dance theatre” designates a contemporary choreographic trend that became known primarily through the works of German *Tanztheater*, particularly Pina Bausch.¹ From the 1980s onwards, it spread widely across Europe, incorporating concepts of movement theatre and physical theatre. Dance historian Lívia Fuchs describes the emergence and dissemination of the concept of dance theatre as a consequence of the multiple redefinitions of dance.² As a result of artistic experiments in the field of dance, a process of detheatricalization took place initially (towards pure dance), followed by a return to theatre (postdramatic theatre) starting from the 1980s.³ As a result, the trend spread by juxtaposing the concepts of dance and theatre, creating an artistic form that blurs the boundary between theatre and dance. Transylvania encompasses the geographical area that belongs to present-day Romania, comprising a total of 16 counties in the western part of the country. Due to its historical context, existence as a minority society, unique culture, and distinct network of cultural institutions, it can be regarded as a separate region. In my thesis, I use the term “Transylvania” as a designation for this region, which encompasses the territorial ensemble of Inner Transylvania – Partium – East Banat. Since the turn of the millennium, a distinctive theatrical trend, the phenomenon of dance theatre, has begun to take shape in Transylvania. The institutionalization process of this trend is still evolving up to the present moment. This trend cannot be defined as a phenomenon tied to a single location since it started to unfold through multiple parallel threads that interconnect at various points.

Therefore, the phenomenon of Transylvanian dance theatre is defined by a network structure, whose development is primarily active due to the processes of transmission between generations.

¹ Patrice Pavis, *Színházi szótár*, transl. Gulyás Adrienn, Molnár Zsófia, Rideg Zsófia, Sepsi Enikő, Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2006, 429.

² Fuchs Lívia, “Mit nevezünk Fizikai színháznak?”, *Színház*, 2011/4, 38.

³ Ibid.

My research focuses on examining the relationship between the past and the present, intending to explore the current aspects of the Transylvanian dance theatre sphere by mapping out the dance and movement artistic tendencies of the last century in light of their antecedents. Based on the examination of the antecedents from the 20th century and the initiatives in the 21st century, the time frame of my research is determined to be between 1920 and 2020, comprising two distinct periods. The thesis pays attention to the formation of distinctive characteristics influenced by historical events. The examination of these factors is essential because in Transylvania, the impact of the cultural policy events during the state socialism of the 20th century significantly influenced the development of dance art, thus also affecting the development of dance theatre. As such, the consequences of interrupted continuity are considered a prominent factor. The thesis extensively examines the context in which the beginnings of the movement theatre trend unfolded, through exploring historical connections. In further studies the effects of this context on the formation of the evolving dance theatre network after the regime change.

The focus of the research

The objective of my research is to comprehensively map out the diverse practices of the emerging dance theatre trend in Transylvania, exploring its various directions and potential points of intersection at a national level. As a hypothesis, I propose that Transylvanian dance theatre represents a distinctive direction within Romanian contemporary dance art, defining its identity more from the perspective of theatre rather than dance. My investigation extends to substantiating the assumption that in Transylvania, dance theatre initiatives carry the legacy and aesthetic patterns of the 1980s. As the phenomenon of Transylvanian dance theatre is characterized by a diverse network structure, my thesis does not aim for a definitive delimitation or strict definition. Instead, it endeavors to explore the similarities and differences among the constituent elements that shape this structure. As a result, it aims to study its distinctive characteristics, identify its developmental directions, and thereby indicate its place in Romanian contemporary dance art. The research focuses on three main aspects: exploring the emergence context of Transylvanian dance theatre, modeling its network of connections, and examining its artistic development.

The phases of the research

As the first phase of the research, I set the goal of defining the concept and practice of dance theatre. To begin the definition, I identify the phenomenon of boundary-crossing present in the term “dance theatre”. The definition is divided into three subsections, focusing on the historical antecedents of dismantling the boundary between dance and theatre, the origins of dance theatre, and the analysis of its formal language’s characteristics in the examination of dance theatre practice. I approach the genre and aesthetic characteristics of dance theatre by studying the theatrical avant-garde impulses that influenced it. The following chapter provides an overview of the structure of the Transylvanian dance theatre network. It presents the constituent elements of the network structure, where the subjects (artists and associated workshops) and their relationships are depicted using graphic representations to make the unique structure of the network, which will be further explored in the subsequent chapters, more comprehensible. This structure encompasses the patterns, initiators, receptive platforms, independent or professional institutions, and the interactions among them. Following a historical chronology, the research identifies three major phases: the first involves uncovering the antecedents before the turn of the millennium, the second focuses on examining dance theatre initiatives integrated into the theatre and folk dance structures, and the third encompasses the study of the establishment and development of movement and dance theatre companies. The dance theatre patterns before the turn of the millennium are distinguished according to two perspectives: one based on dance art and the other on theatrical art. In the comparative analysis of 20th-century dance art antecedents (Bucharest – Transylvania), I explore the emergence of various trends embedded in different patterns due to historical influences. Primarily, my aim is to clarify the question of how the noticeable difference arose, namely the divergence between Bucharest, where the dance art field developed, and Transylvania, where this direction emerged in connection with neo-avant-garde theatrical experiments. The thesis traces the stages of the post-millennial formation of the dance theatre network by examining the programs of institutions that first provided a home for this genre. I conduct an in-depth examination with a special focus on the innovative movement theatre series of the company defined as the main hub, which served as a meeting point for artists from Transylvania, Hungary, and Romania. My research is limited to examining the experimental programs of folk dance ensembles that played a defining role in the formation of dance theatre tendencies, which continue to actively create a fusion between folk dance and contemporary dance. The third phase presents a detailed analysis on the

work of workshops and companies that were established in the professional or independent sphere with a specific focus on experimenting in the field of movement and dance theatre. In the final chapter, I aim to juxtapose the difficulties and obstacles of the institutionalization process with the stages of development, summarizing the characteristics of Transylvanian dance theatre. By conducting an analysis comparing the Transylvanian dance theatre network with the contemporary dance scene in Bucharest, I conclude the validation of my hypothesis.

The methodology of the research

Throughout the research process, I prioritize the application of the network analysis method. The origins of network research cannot be attributed to a single discipline, as simultaneous initiatives of this nature have been observed in multiple fields. Although it became well-known primarily as a method in the field of sociology, today it is recognized as a widely used approach across almost every scientific discipline.⁴ In the field of history, network science has gained popularity in Western Europe over the past two decades. Bálint Kovács's study highlights the limited number of Hungarian-related researches conducted in this area.⁵ Network science examines the interactions between entities, models them by identifying labeled nodes, and uncovers the pattern of connections between them, revealing the underlying network structure. The types of analysis in this method can be distinguished based on two aspects: *quantitative* analysis focusing on examining the number of connections, *qualitative* analysis studying the *quality* of connections, and research based on the combination of both.⁶

In my research, I define the Transylvanian dance theatre milieu as a cultural micro-network. In Transylvania, the activities and interactions of artists and related organizations (various entities) in the field of dance theatre form a cultural system, creating the *Transylvanian dance theatre network*. By analyzing the network, I intend to study the structure of the Transylvanian dance theatre sphere and the artistic orientation determined by the resulting interactions. As a result, the research methodology places a strong emphasis on network modelling and reconstruction, which involves summarizing the dance theatre precedents, initiatives, organizations, and companies that have emerged in the region, along with the connections between them. My research examines individual artists

⁴ Tiszberger Mónika, *A hálózat kutatás módszertani vizsgálati lehetőségei – szakirodalmi összefoglalás*, Pécs, Pécsi Tudományegyetem, 2015, 1.

⁵ Cf. Kovács Bálint, "A hálózatelemzés alkalmazásáról a történettudományban", *Világtörténet*, 3-4, 2012, 187.

⁶ *Ibid.* 191-192.

and companies as part of the network, thus aiming to conduct a contextual analysis. It defines the nodes, the directional relationships, the temporal aspects, and the network events. It maps out when and how the network was established, how it evolved, and to what extent it can be considered a closed or active structure. Through this method, the research makes the structure and functioning of the Transylvanian dance theatre network transparent, while shedding light on its strengths, breakpoints, shortcomings, and areas for improvement.

The research technique is manifested in the analysis of cause-effect mechanisms while preserving the historical chronology. The examination of the network's interconnectedness is complemented by reception criticism, aiming to address various stages of proving the hypothesis. In my research, the historical phases of the network's formation are reconstructed, and the aesthetic patterns employed by the members of the network, along with the connections between them, are studied. Through this, the network analysis, impact analysis, and aesthetic analysis are interconnected in my study. The applied research method prioritizes the transition between theoretical and practical approaches. I substantiate the statements outlined in the hypothesis by utilizing data obtained from both theoretical research and empirical knowledge. The research relies on the examination of related literature, field studies, critical reviews, press articles, the oral history method, reconstruction of performances, and personal professional experiences.

My research employs a qualitative technique, focusing on the experiential understanding and analysis of the phenomenon of Transylvanian dance theatre. The thesis is structured around a triad of exploratory, explanatory, and predictive research, as it uncovers the characteristics of Transylvanian dance theatre, explains the reasons behind their formation, and indicates the guiding directions of their changes and development. In my research, the qualitative technique incorporates oral history interviews as a crucial methodological element. These interviews hold significant importance as they shed light on a cultural network that has limited similar sources available. The individual interviews conducted with the participants of the network are structured along a specific guiding line – the perspective of investigating Transylvanian dance theatre. This perspective primarily focuses on the informal network of Transylvanian dance theatre as a cultural community and the aspect of participation within it. The subjective responses recorded in the oral history interviews are utilized based on their comparison with each other and, if available, with other types of sources. Due to the limited number of sources in the researched field, the dissertation pays attention to providing brief introductions to the artists who are part of the network, using informative footnotes.

In the examination of the aesthetic characteristics of Transylvanian dance theatre, the reconstruction of performances from the workshops that contribute to the network is also employed as an essential method. The analysis of performances sheds light on the similarities, differences, and connections between the stylistic features represented by various creators and artistic teams. The framework used for performance analysis follows a triple perspective. One perspective focuses on the specific characteristics of the dance theatre trends in the 1980s, based on the specific characteristics noted in the first study of the thesis (chapter 2.3.). The second analytical aspect follows the tripartite categorization of staging proposed by Hans-Thies Lehmann. In his essay “Problems of Performance Analysis”, Lehmann distinguishes three main types of staging. In his analysis, the author first characterizes the metaphorical staging, where the interpretation of a literary text takes precedence, and the performance is created as a metaphor of that text. The scenographic staging, on the other hand, is independent of a literary text and does not aim to present its interpretation; it appeals to the senses and allows for multiple interpretations. As the third type, he defines situational staging, which emphasizes the active participation of both the audience and performers in the performance.⁷ The analysis’s third aspect reflects on the aesthetic differences between dramatic and post-dramatic theatre. The convergence of these three perspectives is necessitated by the transformation of dance theatre language, which is characterized by a shift from a dramatic orientation towards a post-dramatic direction in the process of network development.

2. Defining the concept and practice of dance theatre from the perspective of boundary-crossing phenomena

In my thesis, I approach the definition of dance theatre and its practice from the perspective of boundary crossing. The subchapters explore the historical antecedents of the boundary between dance and theatre, the origins of dance theatre, and the genre and aesthetic characteristics of dance theatre practice. In my research, I study the aesthetic patterns of dance theatre influenced by theatrical avant-garde impulses. I focus on aspects such as the *Körper–Leib* duality, embracing effort, the situation of peril, nudity, and fragmented composition. Concluding the findings from the three subsections, the study culminates with several key observations. Building upon Jákfalvi’s ideas⁸, which suggests

⁷ Hans-Thies Lehmann, “Az előadás elemzésének problémái”, transl. Kiss Gabriella, *Theatron*, 1999-2000, 2/1, 46-60.

⁸ Jákfalvi Magdolna, *Avantgárd – színház – politika*, 14.

that classical dance completely separates the everyday body from the transformed, refined stage body, it can be observed that expressive dance uses it as a starting point. Dance theatre takes this a step further, not only breaking down this distinction and dispelling the illusion of the dance's ease but also directing the viewer's attention towards the materiality of bodies. Through embracing effort, embracing the present moment of peril, and even embracing the vulnerability of nudity, dance theatre offers the opportunity to contemplate the extreme states of the body. This state can be regarded as a transformation of the body, one that primarily affects the viewer's senses and body through affective stimuli. Artaud's perspective, which explicitly emphasizes the importance of eliciting bodily reactions from the audience in relation to the impact on the viewer, is reflected in the functioning of dance theatre performances. Another aspect of audience activity can be seen as a consequence of fragmented composition, since, within the fragmented structure, the impact of the real-virtual duality alienates and provokes the mode of perception of the audience. During character portrayal, it hovers between the transition of "I" and "we", where the "I" represents the individual body, and the "we" can be seen as the perception of the collective body. It is neither the illusion of a fictional world nor the completely rationally perceived reality; instead, it operates as a play between fantasy, memories, the process of imagination, and the subtle post-Brechtian effects of reality intruding upon it. Through various modes of perception, the complexity of imaginative association and the affective nature of bodily engagement sublimates into the process of perception, where the multi-dimensional nature of audience reception can be found across different planes.

In her study titled "A kisiklás tapasztalata" (The Experience of Derailment), Gabriella Kiss formulates the consequence of crossing boundaries within a theatrical context, suggesting that "the success of crossing boundaries can only be described and understood within the context in which *mise en scène* is able to transport the viewer beyond the limits of observation, by means of impact and narrative".⁹ The birth of dance theatre as a genre and the formation of the term through the merging of words can be linked to the expansion of the boundaries of observation, examining both from the perspectives of dance and theatre. It leads the viewer to an intermediate realm, a space between the conventions of dance and theatre. By doing so, we can connect to Turner's theory, where the main characteristic of liminality (i.e., the threshold phase) is regarded as the state of being placed "in the intermediate area".¹⁰ The initial experiments in dance theatre proved to be boundary-

⁹ Kiss Gabriella, "»A kisiklás tapasztalata«. Gondolatok a politikai színházról és a színház politikusságáról", *Alföld*, 2007/2, 63.

¹⁰ Turner Victor, *A rituális folyamat: struktúra és antistruktúra*, transl. Orosz István, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2002, 108.

pushing phenomena within the receptive environment of dance, due to the redefined expression, content, and critical attitude, which led to its segregation from the discipline of dance.¹¹ It was questioned whether it was dance or not because it did not fit into the formalistic approach of dance, which completely suspends the conveyance of thought and emotion. The innovative aspect of dance theatre in dance performances is primarily related to the redefinition of the viewer's role, as it transcends the boundaries of form perception, stimulating experiential effects, association, and the possibility of creating meaning in the recipient. According to Susan Foster, the hybrid nature, eclectic vocabulary, and disruptive syntax characteristic of dance theatre in aesthetic practice encourage the audience to participate in "the free play of meaning", leading to transformative experiences.¹² In the context of theatre as well, dance theatre expands the viewer's perception by surpassing the linguistic effects and boundaries of verbal communication and foregrounding the materiality of the body. As Pavis puts it, it "takes the spectator on a journey between distant fiction and lived performance".¹³ The dance theatre form places the body in a theatrical context in such a way that it highlights the revelation of its vulnerability, and through performative acts, it enhances the viewers' sensory, associative, and critical perception.

3. The structure of the Transylvanian dance theatre micro-network

Building upon the studies in the previous chapter, it can be asserted that in Europe, specifically in Germany, the genealogy of dance theatre is undeniably connected to the field of dance. However, an important conclusion to draw is that in its aesthetics, it strongly reflects the impulses of postmodern dance alongside prominent influences from the theatrical avant-garde. In Transylvania, the phenomenon of dance theatre began to unfold along various directions, characterized by diverse initiatives. However, its trajectory has been significantly influenced by the lack of continuity and development in dance artistry, as well as the closed nature of dance education. As a result of experimental endeavors in the realm of performing arts, movement and dance theatre experiments began to take shape, giving rise to a distinctive genre that struggles to maintain its legitimacy. Primarily associated with theatre companies breaking away from traditional theatrical

¹¹ Anna Kisselgoff, „Dance that Startles and Challenges is Coming from Abroad”, *The New York Times*, Section H, October 13, 1985, 14.

¹² Susan L. Foster, "Postbody. Multibodies?". In: Daily, Ann (ed.), "What Has Become of Postmodern Dance?" *The Drama Review*, Vol. 36, No.1, 1992, 68-69.

¹³ Patrice Pavis, *Előadástelemzés*, transl. Jákfalvi Magdolna, Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 2003, 116.

practices, this genre sought to find its individual path inspired by neo-avant-garde influences, moving beyond conventional spoken theatre conventions.

Transylvania can be considered as a region covering an area almost the size of a country, with a population of nearly two million. Perhaps this is also an explanation for the fact that the emergence of dance theatre as a genre in this region is not attributed to a single creator, company, or place. Instead, it forms a network of various attempts unfolding in different ways and locations, involving the cities of Gyergyószentmiklós (Gheorgheni), Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe), and Udvarhely (Odorheiu Secuiesc). As a result, the Transylvanian dance theatre milieu can be defined as a cultural micro-network, with its constituent elements classified into two types: the subjects (choreographers, directors, companies, workshops, organizations) and the relationships between these subjects (relations, connections). This chapter aims to provide an overview of the network structure, which I intend to make more comprehensible through graphical representation (See Figure 1).

According to the historical chronology, the first group of subjects consists of creators and companies representing patterns from before the turn of the millennium. The second group includes innovative creators and receptive workshops that emerged around the millennium. Lastly, the third group comprises independently operating movement and dance theatre organizations. This cultural environment structures itself into a network system through various interactions between subjects, and the defining nature of these interactions is determined by the content of the relationships. In terms of the content of relationships, several types of relations (exchange relationships, embeddedness relations, communication relationships, collaboration relationships) can be observed. However, the uniqueness of the Transylvanian dance theatre network lies in the intensity of the intergenerational transmission chain, which is the most characteristic aspect. As a result, the strength of the vertical interconnectedness determines the basic structure.

While Bálint Kovács argues that a common goal defines the foundation of the network¹⁴, in the case I examined, we can observe a network generated by multiple, independent but similar goals, rather than a single common goal. In terms of its formation, the verticality showing the transmission of the tradition is crucial, complemented by the horizontal connection segments linking parallel planes. I distinguish these two different types of connections on the graphic representation with vertical connecting lines and horizontal lines, marking the main directions of influence with arrows. The Transylvanian dance theatre network can be considered as a structure with two central elements (Lóránt András

¹⁴ Kovács Bálint, "A hálózatelemzés alkalmazásáról a történettudományban", 191.

and Péter Uray) and one main hub (Figura Studio Theatre) in terms of centrality. Its peculiarity lies in the fact that the two central elements do not have a direct connection with each other; instead, their influences converge at the hub.

I consider the network as an open structure, with its formation primarily driven by active intergenerational transmission of tradition. Regarding the development of the network, the slow and delayed process of institutionalization also plays a role. Due to the lack of creative spaces and training, the genre of dance theatre primarily attempts to find its way within the structure of theatre and later within the framework of professional folk dance, leading to the incorporation of significant characteristics from these contexts. As a result of inviting choreographers, performances, and instructors from the Romanian (mainly Bucharest), Hungarian, and later, international environments, new influences are integrated into the structure of the network. With the launch of higher education programs, the interactions between generations, and the impact of initiatives emerging in the independent sphere, the network begins to expand with new technical and aesthetic impulses.

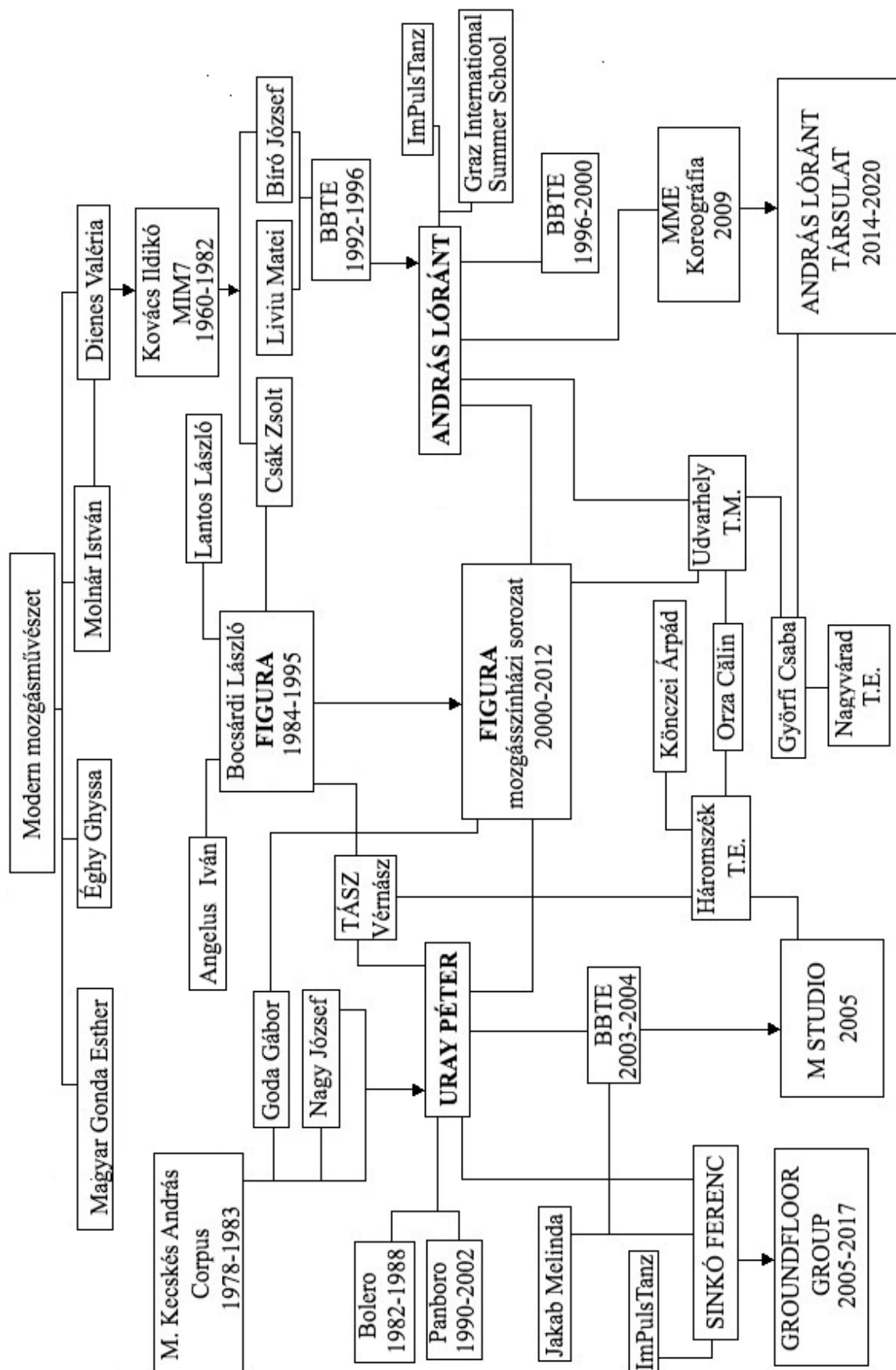


Fig. 1

4. The models of the Transylvanian dance theatre before the turn of the millennium

In this chapter of my research, I examine the initial phase of the development of Transylvanian dance theatre. The aim of my study is to provide a comprehensive overview of the historical background and antecedents of dance theatre in Transylvania during the 20th century. It seeks to explore the cultural context, the key figures, teams, and workshops that played significant roles in shaping the emergence of this art form in the region. As a first step, I focus on exploring the antecedents of dance art, followed by an investigation into the historical context of performing arts.

The train of thought for researching dance art precedents is based on the observation that the Romanian contemporary dance scene and the Transylvanian dance theatre tradition developed along different paths and had little interaction in their formation. I intend to begin the examination of these processes by uncovering the precedents in dance art. For the purpose of comparing the two independent trends in the development, I will examine the emergence and spread of modern and contemporary dance in Romania. In the 20th century, modern movement art started to emerge within the framework of private schools in present-day Romania. The establishment of these schools is associated with dance artists who came into contact with the emerging trends of modern dance in Europe during their studies abroad. Upon returning home, they further developed their experiences in the spirit of experimental creation characteristic of modern dance, which allowed them to shape their own styles. In addition to the private schools, they also disseminated the knowledge and spirit acquired abroad through their stage creations. After World War II, this flow was interrupted, and starting from 1949, the cultural policy changes led to the establishment of state institutions and the suspension of private initiatives. Western influences could seep into the cultural life of Romania, which was part of the socialist bloc, but under strict restrictions. In my study, I examine the possibilities of the spread of modern dance in Romania amidst the political events that took place during the 20th century. By tracing the process of connection with the methodology and philosophy of modern dance, and comparing the initiatives in the Romanian capital and Transylvania, I conclude that the defining characteristic of the development of Transylvanian dance theatre is its lack of connection to the roots of modern dance in Romania. The background of this lies in the halting of the work of the main representatives of dance in Transylvania – Esther Magyar Gonda, István Molnár, Ghyssa Éghy – who were rejected by the state socialism. In the capital, an unofficial, mostly background process began to create a preparatory platform

for the Romanian contemporary dance scene. In contrast, in the region of Transylvania, the connection with the direction of modern dance seemed to be severed, leading to a decline in dance renewal.

In the second part, approaching from the perspective of theatre, I examine the precedents, studying the process through which the genre of dance theatre carved its path in the theatrical context. The pantomime movement can be considered an important source of movement art in Transylvania, which became known mainly among puppet theatre and theatre creators during the years of state socialism, primarily through the work of Ildikó Kovács. The most influential initiative was represented by the Mim7 pantomime group established at the Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) Puppet Theatre. In the first part of my study, I examine the activities of Kovács Ildikó and the Mim7 group, as well as their indirect legacy. The revival of the pantomime movement is credited to Ildikó Kovács not only in Kolozsvár but also at the national level. The influence of pantomime, as a precursor to movement theatre, was passed on through her students.

In the second part, I examine the first appearance of movement theatre through the study of the predecessor of Figura Studio Theatre. Based on the examination of the historical background, circumstances, and operation of the Ős-Figura (the initial ensemble of the Figura Company), I provide evidence for the proposition that the first appearance of movement theatre in Transylvania is linked to Figura Studio Theatre. I thoroughly examine the role of movement in the experimental work and performances of the emerging company between 1984 and 1995, with a particular focus on their movement theatre production titled “Übű Király” (King Ubu). They brought Alfred Jarry’s satirical drama, which caricaturizes dictatorship, to the stage by transposing it into a dynamic system of grotesque movements. Instead of a logocentric structure, the body was placed at the center of the performance, resulting in a significant abbreviation of the dramatic text. The performance was characterized by the fusion of metaphorical and situational staging approaches. The interpretation of Alfred Jarry’s drama was translated into a unique stage language, characterized by prioritizing the body as the main channel of communication. The specificity of situational staging lay in the aspiration to make both the audience and the performers participants in the events. Throughout the work of Ős-Figura, there was a consistent rejection of conventional theatrical norms, an intention to activate the connection between performer and audience, and a unique use of the body. This created the characteristic profile of this group by their interest in community work and the neo-avant-garde, where intense bodily presence and movement-centricity played a significant role. The work of the members of the company showed a new direction in Transylvanian

Hungarian theatre, and their performance of “King Ubu” became famous as a movement theatre production in Transylvania. After the regime change, Figura, which evolved into a professional theatre, continued to focus on movement-centric experimental performances during the period between 1990 and 1995, with the participation of artists such as Zsolt Csák, László Lantos, and Iván Angelus.

5. Dance theatre initiatives embedded within the structure of theatre and folk dance

Based on the examination of the prehistory of Transylvanian dance theatre, it has been proven that the genre of movement theatre found its way within the realm of performing arts. In the second phase, this genre found its place in the program schedules of theatres and later in folk dance ensembles. At the turn of the millennium and in the following few years, Transylvanian Hungarian theatres provided opportunities for presenting dance theatre performances. However, these performances mostly represented individual occasions in the repertoire of the theatres.

Between 2000 and 2012, the Figura Studio Theatre represented the theatrical environment in Transylvania that showed the greatest openness to the genre, introducing a continuous process of creating movement and dance theatre performances into its repertoire. Its former spirit and experimental nature were mainly preserved by aligning itself with the movement theatre trend. Each season, one or two movement theatre performances were included in the theatre’s program, which contributed to the expansion of the movement theatre palette in Transylvania through the creations of invited artists from Romania and Hungary. As a result, the Figura Studio Theatre became the main hub of the Transylvanian dance theatre network at the turn of the millennium. As the director, Tibor Szabó initiated the process by inviting Lóránt András and Péter Uray to stage performances, and under the directorship of László Béres, this initiative grew into a series of movement theatre performances. Based on the reconstruction of the performances by the five invited artists (Lóránt András, Péter Uray, Vava Ștefănescu, Yvette Bozsik, Gábor Goda), I conclude that there is an observable trend in the series towards moving away from the dramatic aspect and leaning towards the post-dramatic direction in theatre. Additionally, there is a shift from linear, narrative, and cause-and-effect structures to mosaic-like, fragmented compositions. András’s performances followed the dramaturgical arc of absurd drama, while Uray’s adhered to the narrative thread of ballad-like stories. Ștefănescu’s productions marked the transition, with

his first performance being closer to the dance-dramaturgical structure, and then in his second performance, he created a unique structure based on the fusion of three absurd dramas. In Bozsik's first performance, elements of cause-and-effect narrative can be detected, while her second performance was based on Handke's post-dramatic experimentation. Goda, moving beyond the realm of meanings, targeted the zone of phenomena in his performance, aiming for a shared experience by merging the spaces of the audience and the performers. The movement theatre series was considered a unique initiative in Transylvanian theatre culture, running from 2000 to 2012, and it came to an end with a change in the company's directorship.

In addition to the main hub emerging in the theatre environment, another part of the network can be seen in a smaller circle, which represents the dance theatre direction developing within the program of Transylvanian professional folk dance ensembles. In this chapter, I aim to study the reasons behind the emergence of dance theatre initiatives within the professional folk dance environment, which led to a shift from authentic folk dance performances towards more dramatic dance experiments. Based on the research, I conclude that three directions have emerged in the context of professional folk dance in Transylvania: one perspective strongly focuses on promoting and preserving folk culture through the presentation of folklore performances; another direction seeks to explore the unique connections between folk dance and theatrical performances within the structure of stage arts (folk dance theatre); the third perspective represents efforts to create an individual movement language that approaches contemporary dance. As a conclusion, it can be inferred that the unique adaptations of folk dance for the stage have initiated a series of dance theatre experiments that appear in the programs of Transylvanian folk dance ensembles. Due to the influence of Hungarian models and the spirit of the Bartók model, the Transylvanian stage folk dance art has primarily gravitated towards the creation of dramatic dance theatre performances. This endeavor, as a result of a process passed down from generation to generation, is currently manifested in the representation of fusion between folk dance and contemporary dance. Árpád Könzei, following the patterns of the "Hungarian school", advocated for the initiation of dance theatre (nowadays, folk dance theatre) tendencies in the program of the Háromszék (Trei Scaune) Dance Ensemble. Călin Orza, who started his career in the Háromszék Dance Ensemble and learned from representatives of the "Hungarian school" during his higher education studies, initiated the series of dance theatre experiments in the program of the Udvarhely (Odorheiu Secuiesc) Dance Workshop. Thanks to the contributions of invited artists, this initiative progressively expanded the repertoire in more progressive directions. Csaba Györfi, who started his

journey from the short-lived experimental workshop (2007-2012), now continues the experimentation with various dance and theatrical languages in the current Nagyvárad (Oradea) Dance Ensemble as a director-choreographer, shaping the contemporary dance theatre profile of the professional folk dance ensemble. Today, the Nagyvárad Dance Ensemble is considered the sole professional folk dance group in Transylvania that operates both a folk dance division and a contemporary dance theatre division. In its early period, this division enriched its artistic palette by incorporating influences from Hungary, while in recent years, primarily through the work of director-choreographer Csaba Györfi, it has embraced a dramatic direction based on literary works and has been experimenting with contemporary dance techniques.

6. The development of movement and dance theatre companies and the launch of advanced choreography training

In the sixth chapter of the dissertation, I explore the processes of establishment, operation, and development of three Transylvanian dance theatre workshops (a studio, an association, and a company). I determine the fact that the establishment of all three workshops is linked to creators with a theatrical background, providing the basis for their theatrical orientation. Péter Uray's journey began in the field of pantomime in Hungary, and in the 1980s, he developed his unique creative language through the influence of dance theatre initiatives flowing in from Europe, as a fusion of contact improvisation-based training systems and theatrical directing. After starting his career as a young actor with Uray Péter in movement theatre productions, Ferenc Sinkó became an active practitioner of contact improvisation through his foreign study trips. In addition to his acting activities at the Hungarian State Theatre of Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), he started experimenting with performances at the intersection of dance, theatre, and performance art. Lóránt András, also starting his professional journey with an acting career at the Hungarian State Theatre of Kolozsvár, and having a background in competitive dancing and pantomime studies, steered his path towards dance theatre through the impulses of his international study experiences.

In the first subsection, I examine the circumstances, operation, and development of the M Studio, led by Péter Uray. In the operation of M Studio, representing the only professional movement theatre in Transylvania, I identify two distinct periods. In the first period (2005-2013), the professional profile of the company was defined by Uray Péter through the movement theatre adaptations of dramatic works and the unique adaptations that emerged from the fusion of contact dance and dramatic theatrical tools. By analyzing the

performance of “Romeo & Juliet”, I note the characteristics of Uray’s metaphorical staging. As the main characteristic, I define in Uray’s language the conveying of dramatic situations through condensed and symbolic structures created by movement compositions, interpreting the dramatic structure and narrative along unique lines. I study the tendencies related to this orientation by reconstructing Dóra Barta’s performance titled “A per” (The Trial), among the guest artists invited by Uray. I also consider the presence of prose theatre performances as another aspect that reinforces the dramatic direction, alongside the dance theatre productions.

In the orientations of the second period (2013-), I examine the tendencies marked by postdramatic theatrical elements, resulting from encounters with guest artists representing various directions and styles in their artistic language. During the period under the artistic direction of Imola Márton, in the absence of a resident director-choreographer, the repertoire of the company is shaped by the works of invited guest artists from various fields. Renowned figures from the Hungarian scene, such as Pál Frenák, Ferenc Fehér, and Dóra Barta, are among the returning guest directors and choreographers whose works leave a significant impact on the ensemble’s artistic direction. In recent years, collaborations with Romanian artists have become increasingly prominent, with the participation of young choreographers such as Andrea Gavrilu, Arcadie Rusu, Ioana Marchidan, and Simona Deaconescu. I analyze the performances of guest choreographers Pál Frenák and Ioana Marchidan, comparing them with the influences absorbed from significant Hungarian and Romanian theatrical scenes during the second period of the M Studio. In Frenák’s distinctive language, I highlight the *Körper-Leib* duality inherent to dance theatre through the symbolic visual world, caricature-like theatrical gestures, and the vulnerability of the body, including nudity, in the performance “romeo@julia.com”. In the performance “Are we human or are we dancers?” created by Marchidan, I observe an approach that leans towards conceptual dance, emphasizing the suspension of this very duality. Based on these analyses, I conclude that a trajectory of change can be observed in the company’s work. While the first period prominently represented the characteristics of dramatic movement theatre, the second period carries the features of postdramatic tendencies in dance theatre. In the context of intersecting with the peculiarities of Romanian contemporary dance, the company also starts to approach the performativity and conceptual characteristics.

In the second subsection, through the examination of the activities of the GroundFloor Group Association in Kolozsvár, I ascertain that the performances of this independent organization, particularly represented by Ferenc Sinkó’s direction, significantly deviate

from the dramatic theatrical orientation. The main characteristic of the performances that blur the boundaries between theatre, dance, performance art, and the visual arts lies in the collaborative nature of the creative team based on the so-called devised method, as well as the highly personal involvement of the performers (dancers, actors, civilians). The performances completely broke away from the dramatic approach, narrative structure, and editing methods, focusing instead on raising questions related to social issues such as the representation of the body, experiences of otherness, acceptance, rejection, and intergenerational tensions. Through a detailed analysis of the performance “Parallel” (2015), which brought national and international recognition, I explore the multidisciplinary characteristics represented by the GroundFloor Group. This performance is regarded as a unique and genre-defying contemporary artistic creation, showcasing a distinct approach to contemporary performance art.

The activities of the association, spanning a period of ten years, came to a halt in recent years. The cessation of activities was not initially intended as a disbandment. Nonetheless, it coincided with the downsizing of the Paintbrush Factory, a space dedicated to contemporary and performing arts in Kolozsvár. First, the educational activities and festivals were discontinued, primarily due to the lack of financial support. This was related to the government decisions in 2012 concerning the functioning of AFCN and ICR¹⁵, which brought difficulties in cultural funding for the independent sector in Romania.¹⁶ The loss of its headquarters greatly contributed to the cessation of the GroundFloor Group’s activities. Based on the interview conducted with Sinkó in 2019, it was revealed that “we are currently in clinical death; not dead yet, but on life support”.¹⁷ The ten years of work by GroundFloor Group were considered pioneering and unique in Kolozsvár and Transylvania. On one hand, the availability of international workshops and festival programs, and on the other hand, the distinctive and unclassifiable nature of contemporary artistic expressions addressing societal issues, led to packed houses and indicated both audience interest and professional recognition.

In Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş), in the early 2010s, the emergence of dance theatre initiatives was significantly influenced by the establishment of the choreography training program in Hungarian higher education, followed by the activities of the independent

¹⁵ The ICR (Institutul Cultural Român, i.e. Romanian Cultural Institute) is an autonomous administrative authority under the direction of the Romanian Parliament, functioning as a legal entity. It is responsible for representing, safeguarding, and promoting national culture and civilization both within Romania and beyond its borders.

¹⁶ Cf. Adorjáni Panna, Beszélgetés Imecs Magdó Leventével (Váróterem Projekt) és Kelemen Kingával (GroundFloor Group), “Mi fán terem a független”, *Játéktér*, 2013/1, 72.

¹⁷ Dialogue between Noémi Bezsán and Ferenc Sinkó, November 2, 2019, Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca).

dance theatre company, the András Lóránt Company. As the head of the choreography department at the University of Arts Târgu Mureş and the founder and artistic director of the company, Lóránt András's work can be considered a shared reference point in these initiatives, as one of the pioneers of post-millennium dance theatre experiments in Transylvania. In my research on the Marosvásárhely dance theatre initiatives, I investigate both the establishment of the choreography training program within the higher education system and the circumstances surrounding the creation of the related dance theatre workshop. As part of the research exploring the context of the establishment of the program, I examine the shortcomings of institutionalized dance education in Transylvania, which I attribute to the negative effects inherited from cultural-historical precedents. The choreography program proposed by Csongor Könczei can be considered as an important milestone in the institutionalization process of Transylvanian dance theatre within the framework of the University of Arts Târgu Mureş.

Starting from the academic year 2010/2011, Lóránt András became involved in the choreography program in Târgu Mureş, where for the first seven years of his teaching activity, he defined and shaped the structure of the subject "The Art of Choreography" as a lead instructor. Lóránt András's creative work, as well as his experience as a practicing choreographer and director-choreographer, serve as significant precedents in shaping the strategies and approaches he adopted while leading the choreography program. The influence of dance theatre tendencies from the 1980s is considered significant in shaping his professional trajectory. "The Art of Choreography", the course led by Lóránt András, provided a platform for students that encouraged daily workshop work, experimental approaches, and collaborative creative processes. These elements contributed to the development of a desire among some graduating students of the second and third years to form a company nucleus. The processes involved in the production of exam performances within the course included collaborative work, ranging from handling sound and light engineering tasks to creating visual designs and executing costume and set designs. These aspects already hinted at the operational structure of an independent theatre company. The idea of staying together emerged as a result of the desire to sustain the created performances and continue the collaborative artistic process, which ultimately led to the intention of forming the company. After the third graduating class of the department, and through the initiative and leadership of Lóránt András, the group, composed of some students from all the three graduated classes, formed the András Lóránt Company, an independent dance theatre.

During its six years of operation, the independent dance theatre workshop served the promotion, introduction, and dissemination of dance theatre as a genre in Marosvásárhely. The András Lóránt Company primarily offered an open opportunity for emerging choreographers to present themselves, further their education, and engage in creative work. The performances of young choreographers are significantly influenced by the impulses that inherit and concentrate Lóránt András's artistic language and choreographic methodology, which are rooted in the dance theatre tendencies of the 1980s. In András's artistic orientation, there is a duality in his relationship with the body. On one hand, it appears as a condensed reservoir of emotions and personal experiences, and on the other hand, as the representation of caricatured, sometimes detached-from-reality figures. In his performances, there is a recurring theme of the intricate workings and failures of human connections, the vulnerability of individuals in search of their identity, their resistance to expectations, and their sense of loneliness. He plays with a density of theatrical signs, distancing himself from fixed meanings and enhancing the freedom of interpretation. The characteristic motifs of András's unique world form a cohesive style through various contexts and changing inspirations, creating different constructions.

As a result of the András Lóránt Company's activities in both Transylvania and Hungary, they started gaining attention from the professional community, as evidenced by festival invitations, critical writings, and recognition. Through the analysis of the most acclaimed performances, namely Noémi Bezsán's "Femme" (2015) and Györfi Csaba's "Fade-out" (2015), I explore the distinctive characteristics of the methodology represented by the artistic director and the intersection of individual artistic visions within the András Lóránt Company. As a result of their foreign study trips, encounters with international choreographers, and collaborations with theatre directors, young choreographers experimented with developing their own individual styles. These innovative approaches emerged from the duality of their theatrical orientation and the influence of contemporary dance impulses. This duality was evident both in the adaptation of dramatic works into movement-based and physical theatrical performances, and in the creation of productions based on scripts exploring personal themes. The challenges faced by the independent dance theatre company, which escalated to an unsustainable situation, were primarily related to difficulties in maintaining a self-sustaining structure, amplified financial pressures, and the lack of support. The survival operation of the András Lóránt Company came to an end in 2020 with the outbreak of the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic.

7. The place of Transylvanian dance theatre in Romanian contemporary dance art

The seventh content unit focuses on defining the place of Transylvanian dance theatre in Romanian contemporary dance art. In this chapter, I summarize the common difficulties arising from the institutionalization processes of the Bucharest-based Romanian contemporary dance scene and the Transylvanian dance theatre network. These challenges include shortcomings in educational structures, limited budgets of dance companies, funding issues, and a lack of professionals in managerial roles. In comparing the evolution of aesthetic characteristics, I note the differences in the origins studied in the previous chapters, the variations in points of connection after the regime change, and finally, the interactions between the two regions. As a result of these findings, I summarize the conclusion stated in the hypothesis. Comparing the processes before and after the regime change, it can be concluded that two distinct structural approaches emerged in relation to the Transylvanian and Bucharest dance scenes. The roots of the Transylvanian network are primarily connected to the theatre, while the Bucharest scene is more closely linked to the field of dance. As a result, within the Transylvanian dance theatre network, the initiatives are characterized by a dance theatre style that inherits the patterns of the 1980s through a theatrical orientation. On the other hand, in the Bucharest scene, the contemporary dance movements were influenced by a stronger conceptual approach, leaning towards performance arts, mainly due to their close ties with France. However, due to the intersections of various influences, we cannot speak of purely categorizable identities, as this cultural phenomenon is precisely characterized by crossing borders. Moreover, both scenes are shaped by entities evolving in different directions due to the changing of generations. As a result, connections between the two scenes can also be observed.

8. Summary

I consider the history of the Transylvanian dance theatre network not as a closed entity, but rather as an ongoing process of constant shaping, vulnerable to its surroundings. The formation of the network was influenced by the constraints set by state socialism in the pre-transition period, and after the regime change, it experienced an unstable process of institutionalization, bearing the effects of that transition. In the slow-paced process of institutionalization, we can observe development, stagnation, and regression. Anikó

Varga's brief overview titled "Van és nincs között" (Between Is and Is Not) reflects this well in relation to the Transylvanian dance theatre.¹⁸ The current situation of Transylvanian dance theatre is defined by the lack of institutionalized educational structures on one hand and the economic and operational challenges faced by the company structures on the other hand. Due to the artistic direction of the Figura Studio Theatre, which also embraces the movement theatre approach, the ten-year-long initiative was excluded as a result of the director's decision. Over the years, the various manifestations of dance-theatrical experiments have become a subject of debate within the professional folk dance community in Transylvania. Alongside the tensions arising from the continuous innovative intent of contemporary directions and the preservation of authentic traditions, the question of the different training models for dancers (folk dance/contemporary dance) also poses a relevant issue. In the professional folk dance milieu, the establishment of the contemporary dance section within the Nagyvárad Dance Ensemble provides a municipality-funded platform for the development of dance theatre directions. During the research period (2017-2023), the activities of the aforementioned independent organizations operating within the mentioned structure came to an end. The cause of termination in both cases is related to the unfavorable situation of the independent theatre sector in Romania. Iulia Popovici's analytical study reflects well on this unfavorable situation: "From an institutional perspective, the independent cultural sector in Romania is unstructured; there is no legal framework for the establishment of companies or teams, and there is little collaboration among organizations, with no nationwide networks in place."¹⁹ For dance companies, the prospect of independence is even more challenging and bleak. The GroundFloor Group defined itself not as a company entity, but through project-based collaborations, establishing its activities through public funding and grants. The András Lóránt Company tried to operate as a private enterprise-based theatre with permanent members and repertoire, seeking to sustain its structure through private sponsorships and support. In Romania, however, neither of these operational strategies proves advantageous, partly due to the sponsor laws and partly because of the reduction in opportunities for public funding support allocated to the independent sector.²⁰ The activities of M Studio, integrated into the institutional theatre structure, demonstrate the most stable functionality. This economic and operational stability is primarily a consequence of the financial support provided by the municipality, which significantly aids the organization of the ensemble's

¹⁸ Varga Anikó, "Van és nincs között", *Színház*, 2019/12, 41-43.

¹⁹ Popovici, Iulia, *Függetlenül Romániában*, trans. Tompa Andrea, *Színház*, 2013, december, URL: <http://szinhaz.net/2013/12/11/iulia-popovici-fuggetlenu-romaniaban/>, download date: 06.07.2023.

²⁰ Ibid.

own international movement theatre festival. In terms of programming, both periods are characterized by complete independence from both the sponsoring and receiving institutions, ensuring full artistic freedom.²¹

The lack of shared goals, as mentioned in the section studying the network's structure (Chapter 3), also influences the fluctuating tendencies of the network. While strong connections based on shared goals have characterized and continue to characterize the emerging clusters on the vertical level, a small number of tendencies can be observed on the horizontal level in terms of interactions, co-productions, and collaborations between parallel workshops. I quote the words of Imola Márton: "On one hand, they were very young initiatives at that time, and on the other hand, the financial situation of each company was much more unstable. (...) Neither party made any specific initiative in the direction of jointly creating an event or activity between the GroundFloor Group and the M Studio. Similarly, there was no collaboration established with the András Lóránt Company either: somehow, the two companies went their separate ways, and there was no point of connection between them."²²

In terms of its aesthetic characteristics, the emerging dance theatre network in Transylvania, shaped under the mentioned unfavorable circumstances, appears to be a hybrid phenomenon. The activities of the artists representing the network and the related (existing and past) workshops share a common denominator in the form of a theatrical orientation, which branches out into three directions in terms of its artistic language. One prominent direction is the use of theatrical tools, unfolding through metaphorical language in the dramatic approach, as well as operating with fragmented compositions employing post-dramatic theatrical elements. In addition, a shift towards incorporating performance art influences and multidisciplinary can be observed (mainly represented by the GroundFloor Group and evident in the second period of M Studio).

In conclusion, summarizing the significant historical and current endeavors of the development process, I consider it crucial to outline a future perspective as well. The development trend towards institutionalization requires the improvement of intermediate-level dance education, the establishment of financially supported company structures, and the initiation of regular professional reflection. In contrast to the disadvantaged economic situation of the independent sector, the establishment of dance and dance-theatre departments within theatrical institutions can offer an alternative for the further development of the dance theatre network. Furthermore, strengthening the network can be

²¹ Dialogue between Imola Márton and Noémi Bezsán, January 5, 2023, online.

²² Ibid.

facilitated through improved communication and interaction among creators, organizations, and companies, as well as the establishment of shared goals.

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