

Abstract

In the first chapter, acting as Introduction – *Artistic and Pedagogical: Integrated Fields* – I state that my research themes are simultaneously present in the two main aspects of my activities. In my case the artistic and pedagogical activities are like two legs that I use to move in the direction of one research theme or another. Consequently, I will analyse my research interests in an integrated way and I will not divide this work's content according to the type of activity, but according to the tackled themes. Moreover, I will look back from the present, from the most recent themes to the distant ones, according to a principle I follow in both of my activities: harbouring in the present.

The second chapter – *Ethics or Aesthetics: Habits and Mentalities* – describes a fundamental direction of my researches, the crossover questioning of the Romanian contemporary theatre's two main tendencies. Giving the example of my most recent performance, *Slaves* by Maria Manolescu created at The Brush Factory in Cluj-Napoca and of an older performance of mine, *Krum* by Hanoch Levin created at the Liviu Rebreanu Company of The National Theatre in Târgu-Mureş, I describe how I realise in practice the questioning of the dominant mentalities in each of these spaces that function the first under the ethics (an engaged theatre) and the second under the aesthetics (an art theatre) with interrogation means specific to the other theatrical approach. Today we question everything, which makes the times we live in appear as extremely challenging to us, as one of the main consequences consists of us failing to agree on almost everything. What interests us all, what links us, what connects us is today, more than at any time in the past, a thing to be discovered with a lot of effort. That is why I consider that any research can start only by stripping, by removing the layer formed by the mixture of old mentalities with old theatrical instrumentation. First, we have to shake well everything and see what is still standing. Thus we shall be able to differentiate the structure from the facade, the supporting pillar from the attached adornment. In the end, an empty space will be there.

The third chapter is therefore dedicated to researching *The Space*. I start by describing the first theme that the master students in directing have to tackle in the program designed and run by me at the University of Arts in Târgu-Mureş, *The Secret Memory of A Non-Theatrical Space*, a theme conceived so that we can comprehend both the symbolic charge, infused by its past and the real one, given by its materiality, that any space contains. The principle of not covering, but accepting past's prints in a present event's texture works with the space's already encapsulated energy. The awareness, the understanding and the use of this energy in the theatrical act's composition pretends a practical research action on the specific performing space that is, in my opinion, compulsory. Only later, in total awareness, understanding the gains and the losses the each intervention on the space provokes, one can make an informed decision. In the next sub-chapter, *The Challenges of A Space: 74 Theatre*, I use the examples of two of my performances there, *American Buffalo* by David Mamet and *Criminal Genius* by George F. Walker to show that, by carefully analysing the difficult specifics of a non-theatrical space, The Butcher's Tower in the Târgu-Mureş's medieval

fortress that hosts the 74 Theatre, I could use this space's particularities to enhance some of the dramatic substance's essential aspects of these above-mentioned performances. With *A Piece of Plastic*, analyzing the creation of the performance based on this text by Marius von Mayenburg, I close the chapter dedicated to *The Space*. Researching the multiple relationships between the space and the theatrical representation takes into consideration another important element for the double transfer's experience between the spectators and the show – the position of the audience in relation to the performing space – that I consider in this last sub-chapter.

The fourth chapter – *Foray into Our Art's Traditions* – analyzes the relevance of our tradition and imagines ways to approach this. What does it mean, in fact, that we are functioning in within the Romanian theatre traditions (even by denying them)? Is anything particular defining us, as Romanian artists? Does an invisible and often denied, Romanian directing school even exist? The first sub-chapter is dedicated to a relatively newly introduced theme into the directing master program. Under the title *Theatrical Reconstructive Performance Essay*, this theme demands that the master student uses the prints discovered through theatrical anthropological investigations – publications, audio/video recordings, photos, drawings, collected records, critical references – to convey, on a first level, his/her understanding of the impact of a canonical Romanian theatre performance on its contemporaries. On a second level, he/she has to imagine the possible inheritance of this past artist, what of this artist's past important contribution to the development of the Romanian spectacology and in what proportion is still valid today. The additional difficulty consists of the form that the presentation of these results takes – not an oral presentation, not a written essay, but another performance, an essay-performance about another performance. The second sub-chapter – *The Public Opinion* – analyzes other aspects of the Romanian spectacology's traditions that I investigated through the staging of this play by Aurel Baranga at the National Theatre Radu Stanca in Sibiu. To test the mentalities this time, I decided to revive a well-known play of the communist era in order to see how we take this immersion into a period that we had violently rejected. Through my professional activity and through the specifically dedicated theme in the master program in directing I will continue to explore this very important research direction.

The next chapter – *Popular Theatre. Approaches adopted* – begins with the sub-chapter *Sample*, in which I describe a newly introduced master program theme dedicated to the popular theatrical language: how could we initiate the communication with a non-spectator, with a person who did not develop a habit of seeing theatre within the same theatrical discourse addressed in the same time to an informed spectator? What could be the link between the two, to what type of language could both of them respond? The students must propose a sample of such a theatrical language, accompanied by a theoretical approach. In the second sub-chapter – *Look Who's Back!* – I discuss the specifics of this performance at the Tompa Miklos Company of The National Theatre in Târgu-Mureş. Can popular culture give birth to monsters? This is the question, for me, opening a research direction that I plan to continue.

The sixth chapter – *Questions on the Economics and Personal Relations* – covers no less than five consecutive stagings of mine in the last two years through which I attempted to illuminate the consequences of contemporary capitalism on our lives. The five performances also give the sub-chapters titles: *Push-up 1-3*, *The Company Thanks*, *Top Dogs*, *The Tip of the Iceberg* and *My Cold Room* – in which I discuss the paths I took in each specific case by following some particular questions. In the last sub-chapter – *A Cycle in Progress* – I conclude that, in many respects, this cycle of performances built around questions about the contemporary world's economical forces' effect on the most intimate aspects of our lives represents one of the two major research directions I am interested in the long term, out of which many other spring. This cycle is inevitably in progress as long as I am actively reflecting on the world and our species is forcing its limits in a manner never before experienced, connecting us to one another in an unprecedented way. What is left of what used to be considered our humanity? Are we changing, are we transforming ourselves in a radical way? How?

The chapter *Science-fiction Theatre* touches the two steps I made in this direction. The first sub-chapter – *Possible Worlds* – is built around the same performance inspired by the parallel universes theory, that numerous scientists are interested in nowadays. They have elaborated different structure model of the so-called multiverse. How could a person bear the awareness of simultaneous existence in several universes? The second sub-chapter – *The Mysterious Island* – represents my only adventure in the children's theatre and rose problems of a different nature. Not having children and not spending time regularly with any child, I noticed I was not knowledgeable about their manner of playing, about the way they have integrated technology into their games, their preoccupations, and their imagination. I realised the only child I could rely upon was myself. Both projects have opened two new interests to be continued in the near future.

The eighth chapter – *A Playwright Guiding me Through New Ways: Marius von Mayenburg* – is a mostly important one, introducing my main research theme, approached from the beginning of my directorial work, when I was feeling a new world was springing around me and I could not understand it with the old theatrical instruments. Consequently, I was assigning myself the task to discover the theatricality allowing me to approach and understand the new times I was living in. And my main study material was from the beginning the new dramaturgy, for I was persuaded that this would open only with a new key that I did not inherit, but had to make myself. The six sub-chapters: *About A Piece of Plastic Again, from Another Perspective*; *Certainties and Fanaticism: Martyrs*; *Perplexed. Toward Nothingness, Playfully*; *The Ugly One: The Eternally Young Beauty Cult*; *The Stone: Personal History Revealed through What One Does Not Say* and *Fireface. Spatial and Temporal Darkness* analyse the particular ways of theatrical exploration that I take that many times. What connects me to Marius von Mayenburg is more than my interest for one or another of his plays, I conclude in the last sub-chapter, *My Personal Guide*. I consider him more of a travel companion, accompanying me in my researches. Reflecting on my relation to his dramaturgy, I notice that I use his texts as milestones on my long work road. His questions are also my questions. His ability to follow these questions to the last

consequences, regardless of how unpleasant is the territory they carry us away into, I strive to appropriate as my way of following them, too. This is, in fact, the main thing I am constantly re-learning from Marius von Mayenburg – a method of research in my work: follow the purpose, follow the question, let yourself be guided and notice where you have arrived. With one of his texts as backing, I fell like an explorer heading toward a blank spot on the map, ready to discover anything. As I am trying to briefly convey by analyzing my performances on his texts, the truth hides every time in a different place. What this produces is a new structure of his work every time and – this being the second thing I am constantly re-learning when working on his dramaturgy – a completely different structure for my performance. Different from everything I had made before, I add. What I find important is that I arrive at his new structure without experimenting with the form, but by following the sense of the search. Marius von Mayenburg does not write twice in the same way, for he does not write about the same thing. I myself chose the same path long ago: not to be preoccupied by my signature, but by where the question is guiding me. It is a major choice I made, the main one concerning my evolution as an artist, and Marius von Mayenburg is my main ally, demonstrating again and again that it is possible, always showing me the way. He is, in truth, my personal guide.

The next chapter, entitled *Dream*, describes a theme in the master program in directing following the questions: What if we staged sensations and not logical structures? Where could we access, each and every one of us, chains of very personal images and sensations, having no conscious psychological basis? In a dream. This theme proves, more and more over the time, extremely useful in freeing the master directing students' imagination, in the same time with imposing a very strict discipline in using the time and the structural limits of this theatrical reality. The final result is always very far away from what they have imagined when using the notions of oneiric or surreal before confronting themselves practically with staging a real dream.

The tenth chapter has a title-question – *Does Minor Genre Exist?* – as it aims to analyse through the creation process of four performances if a major question can be disguised in a minor key work. Could a bright comedy, a quiproquó-based mixture of thriller and farce, contain, under the thick layers of suspense and entertainment a grave intuition, an existential chill? The first sub-chapter, entitled after the performance *Cancun* is answering this question. The next sub-chapter, *Cloaca*, analysing the creation process of the same-title show, presents a way of putting a problem by the very materiality of the set. Tuning the set to the actors and characters bodies – the bodies of fifty years-old men – with their way of moving around, underlying a visible contrast between their claim for permanent youth and the biological reality that we clearly see with our own eyes makes terribly important what we see with our own eyes in the set, too. The fact that we are able to assess its solid, heavy materiality from close distance (we are in a studio-type auditorium) becomes a subliminal warning that things might get serious; that there is a substantial difference between their claim that nothing serious is happening and what boils underneath. The set's materiality analysis goes on in the next sub-chapter – *Panic (Three Men on the Point of Breakdown)* – while the last sub-chapter, *The Graduate*, describes how prudishness proved to be a double-edged weapon,

acting eventually against my wishes. The last sub-chapter, entitled *Is It Worthy Using a Minor Genre for Ambitious Ideas?*, acknowledging that minor happenings, failed acts and limited-span situations account for the bigger part of most of our lives states that it is to be continuously studied how major a weight can a minor genre sustain. The genre construction codes have to be respected, things have to stay relatively light, otherwise they cannot become funny, the actions consequences should stay reversible and the characters should contain a consistent dose of candour or even naiveté. In this genre, the melting of a major resonance heavy-weight problem is to be made with careful consideration for the dosage, is to be crumbled, to be hidden or to be disguised, like a bitter drug on a sweet desert. But in the end, the desert has to deliver on its promise that is sweet, good-tasting and pleasure-inducing.

The chapter *In the Company of Our Contemporaries* analyses the intentions and the effects of the first theme the master students in directing are attacking, the study of a performing arts essential contemporary artist. The first thing the students have to do is a presentation of the studied artist's theatrical thinking's force. It is not important that the student realises a mechanical, exhaustive presentation, but that he/she tries to understand what is the that artist's original contribution to the contemporary theatre landscape; what is his/her work touching, what is it we find in that work, why are we talking about that artist. Once this threshold crossed, we can move to the second step: the staging in the spirit of the studied artist. In the spirit of this artist does not mean an imitation of this artist. This theme aims toward a more general purpose and a personal purpose. The more general purpose aims toward a system of reference containing the contemporary performing arts' essential artists for the master students in directing and, through extension, their partners in the acting, design and choreography programs. The personal purpose aims that every directing students goes, through and for this theme, beyond the thinking and working templates the student has already acquired. Also, by starting the program with this theme, the program's orientation toward research becomes clear from the beginning, toward the interrogation that is the preferred way of contemporary arts, as a taking-off from the undergraduate studies. The student realises that this program's themes of study are nothing else but doors that could be open through a future professional applied research or through a doctoral or post-doctoral one.

The chapter *About the Artist's Role* opens another road, starting from my interest in *Scenes from an Execution* by Howard Barker, realised in very important moments of questioning art and artists' roles in two different theatres, in two different cities, in two different historical times. This road remains one to be taken at any moment, for Romania has a long tradition of artistic commands and of political interference with the arts, but also a public reticence to interrogative arts, revealing uneasy truths about ourselves. We prefer the high culture, the patrimony, and the patriotic and educative roles of the arts. I thus entered in the core of the problem. All of my previous statements can be therefore understood through my basic question, though my basic research the guides both my professional and my pedagogical activities.

The thirteenth chapter – *The English Model* – pans out the beginnings and the crystallization of my first research directions that I approached immediately after my

graduation of my directing studies at the UNTC in Bucharest. The prevailing model in the Romanian directing – the reinterpretation of classics in strong directorial concepts, illuminating eternal concerns – appear as not satisfactory to me in the new world that was taking shape all around me. I was heading toward the writing and the thinking of the British and later North-American spaces. And in order to understand the writing, I had to see myself the model of this world that, I was convinced, would become ours, too. The sub-chapter *First Directs Contacts* recounts the first meetings provoking essential questions on what I call a road of knowledge. The next sub-chapter *The European Directors School*, analyses the direct contact with the European directors of my generation and with such an artist as Peter Sellars, and experience that reinforced my belief, felt almost as a calling, that art for me is a road of knowledge, under the sign of humanism. The last sub-chapter, *The Royal Court Theatre International Residency*, describes how, together with Marius von Mayenburg, Juan Mayorga, Rafael Spregelburg, Dominick Parenteau-Lebeuf, Lucia Cachcanova, Petr Svojtka I had the feeling that we were beginning to account for a generation beyond our national borders and that we were learning to pay attention to one another. In that moment I had the intuition of a second axis orienting my activity, together and complementary to my practicing of art as a road of knowledge. I decided to cultivate the applied dialogue in my artistic environment as a way to create that cultural context that would be conducive to our ideas.

The chapter *A Historic Mission* presents the mission that I eventually defined for myself after my first active years, according to what I felt was my part in the history I was living and the direction this will take: performances based almost exclusively on contemporary texts that would promote interrogation as a means to approach the challenges of our times and, therefore, of knowledge; experimenting with different production and communication models, both in the state and in the independent theatre systems, to re-define the limits within which we function and to discover and apply new, more dynamic and efficient models; the design of new, more open and innovative courses in theatre education, with a greater emphasis on research and experiment; cultivating a dialogue through participation in round tables, seminars, conferences and through publication in different cultural magazines, mainly those dedicated to arts and performances and eventually of more ample studies and books.

The fifteenth chapter – *A Test-Course* – describes the circumstances of the creation of Theatre and Society course at UNATC. The course aimed to initiate a dialogue between me and the students in order to better understand some of our common needs: understanding the main international present-time interests, cultivating a Socratic-type dialogue, getting to know better the contemporary drama and arts. This course represents the extremely preliminary layout of what would eventually become my master directing course at The University of Arts in Târgu-Mureș.

The chapter *Panels, Boards, Round Tables, Workshops, Conferences* presents all the aspects that my decision to cultivate dialogue took, sometimes imagining new, original formulas to jury or to design and run workshops for young directors and actors. I give particular attention lately to the public presentation accompanying a doctoral thesis that I evaluating as part of the official committee, appreciating that this is a special occasion since

the one presenting the thesis has acquired special competences resulted at the end of a research effort that the committee has acknowledged, which creates the framework – and I assume this as a mission when I accept to be part in an evaluation committee because the research theme interests me – to launch new challenges and intuitions, that could lead to new doctoral research themes for the participants or a post-doctoral research theme for the one holding the public presentation. That is why I consider these public presentations important, for the ideas can fly there directly at high altitudes, spreading from a many-years doctoral research effort that we all benefit from.

The seventieth chapter, *Interventions in Cultural Publications*, presents succinctly my published articles, for a while as a permanent column first in the *Scena* magazine, later in *Teatrul azi*. These written interventions had and continue to have the role of signalling my preoccupations, stimulating reactions and dialogue. They are conceived so, that is why they started as some rather short, sometimes challenging statements – for they were aiming at stirring a reaction. The resulting dialogue is conducive to more nuanced opinions, to structuring more complex thoughts that lead to the research themes described in the present work.

The next chapter – *The Independence Road* – is focused on the decisive experience springing from my decision to, in parallel with my activity as guest director in public theatres, found and run twice independent theatre companies. The first of these started in Bucharest in 1996 under the name of 777 Theatre Company and closed its creative activity in 2000. In this chapter I present very briefly its activity, due to the fact that I have dedicated to it a chapter in my book *Overflow of People or Overflow of Ideas. The Pioneers of Independence in Post 1989 Romanian Theatre*.

The *Chapter North-America* contains a time in my life that I have never analysed in any work. The first sub-chapter, *A Master of Fine Arts at The University of Montana*, analyses the experience of taking part into this program with the help of a Fulbright grant and the two principles that I extracted to use in my activity at The University of Arts in Târgu-Mureș: that of permanent student public presentations during the school year (and not only during the examination session period) and that of an increases flexibility concerning the particular interests of each student. The sub-chapter *Inside the Canadian Francophony. Theatre Education* analyses the philosophy of the programs where I have been invited to teach at The University of Quebec in Montreal and The National Theatre School of Canada. The principle of cross-evaluations and that of guest artists' workshops are also two of the principles I adopted for the program created at The University of Arts in Târgu-Mureș. *The sub-chapter Inside the Canadian Francophony. Theatre* analyses the impact of the second theatre company that I founded and run in a completely different cultural context than the Romanian one and my conclusions resulting from comparing the two spaces' influence on the actors' creativity. The last sub-chapter *From the Canadian Francophony to the Romanian Space. Professional Awareness, Subsidies, Evaluations* approaches problems that could result in future research directions. The main difference between the Romanian system and the Canadian one consists of the fact that one is an inherited system, while the other is decide by the theatre artist in a general assembly and questioned periodically. Observing that the

Romanian reality proves to be more unstable, more complicated and that the Romanian theatre artists could not, in the last almost three decades, agree on a theatre system model, I consider that our ability to engage in a dialogue should become more pragmatic, more careful and pay more attention to each other, while the effort to build a dialogue-oriented cultural context with a natural flow of ideas is still a mission that I undertake, according to my abilities, but tenaciously and with maximum dedication. In this analysis I discuss some aspects in the subsidizing and evaluating processes and their impact on the theatrical works of the two spaces, but I also discuss some of the newest particular aspects, like the exhaustion of theatrical language in the manipulative, activist-driven spectacology and the difficulties of founding a professional organization to include the totality of Romanian theatre aspects.

The twentieth chapter – *Inter-disciplinary Resonances Applied Research. The New Europe College Experience* – closes my past research directions, mentioning my research field trip into the Polish theatre space and my presentations in for colleagues from other humanistic fields during my research fellowship at The New Europe College in Bucharest. The relationship with this institution marks the passage to present and future research directions.

The last chapter is entitled precisely *Present and Future Research Directions*. In the first sub-chapter, *Developments*, I present those research directions from the past that continue and develop in the present. The Ethics and Aesthetics Relationship is the first one of these. Can we still make art theatre without an interest in the present-day issues? Is the theatre that privileges ethics under-developing the aesthetics? What are the ways to communicate with the audience without involving manipulation mechanisms? Presenting the research themes that my four colleagues involved in the master program in directing are presently interested in, I realise that they are in direct connection with some of the master directing program's main themes, consequently feeding back this program and enriching it. Concerning the study of the Theatre Space, this theme now continues in partnership with the new artistic direction of the Liviu Rebreanu Company of The National Theatre in Târgu-Mureş. The research of the contemporary economics and politics' influence on our lives also continues with two Catalan texts, a region plunged into an acute identity re-definition: *Family Council* by Cristina Clemente at The North Theatre in Satu Mare and *The Adventure* by Alfredo Sanzol at The Youth Theatre in Piatra Neamţ. The direction researching aspects of popular theatre will continue with the staging of Roland Schimmelpfennig's *The Bee in Your Head* at The National Theatre in Târgu-Mureş and the one accompanying the creation of Marius von Mayenburg with the staging of his latest play at The National Theatre in Craiova. The last sub-chapter, *New Directions*, presents the two new research directions I am initiating at this time. The first one consists of a series of meetings with important contemporary European theatre artists that I invite to engage in a public dialogue with me in Romania. I am considering seven artists, whose presence in the Romanian cultural space I organize by two different ways, one within the frame of a cycle of public dialogues at The New Europe College in Bucharest and the other as part of an international festival organized by The National Theatre in Târgu-Mureş whose formula is still in the process to be defined. The second major research axis that I open is placed under the sign of *Intimacy*. This concept of

Intimacy is my reaction to what I perceive as being too great a preoccupation toward the social sciences, politics and economics and the treating human beings as a product of these relationships by the contemporary theatre. Counter-balancing this tendency, I head, with psychoanalysis' help (which interests me lately) toward the forces inside the human being, toward the unconscious. Concerning the master program in directing, I will carefully maintain the study formula open enough to allow me the introduction of new themes and seminars on a permanent basis, taking into account the dynamics of every group of students and the discoveries I might make by interacting with all these European artists I am inviting during the following years.