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Támogatók



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Master Suzuki during the rehearsals of *Dionysus* in Jakarta, 2019 (source: tsingapore.com)

For the Powerful Existence of Performing Arts*

Owing to the global development of the system of information and communication, people everywhere can now feel and know closely about other than their own cultures. Compared with the olden times when people experienced everything on the spot and thus nurtured wisdom required for coexistence with other human beings, our world is permeated by something completely new, a change which enables us to know and understand things without actually 'being there'. The change has been brought about by means of thorough exploitation of 'non-animal' energy (electricity, oil, nuclear power etc.) and is necessarily going to increase in the future.

It is, however, dangerous to trust this 'non-animal' energy too much, which claims to connect people with each other with maximum speed. For it can lead to the forgetting or weakening of the rich possibilities of 'animal' energy stored up in the bodies of human individuals. Human cultures have bloomed and borne fruits through the refined uses of 'animal' energy. It is precisely in this way that performing arts, such as theatre, dance, and opera, have become a heritage of humankind irreplaceable by such media as television or film.

The same applies to sports. Both performing arts and sports provide the ground for better understanding of and deeper caring for human beings by means of bringing people together to the very spot where they are taking place. No matter how enormous and necessary the system of communication by 'non-animal' energy may become for our actual life, it would be suicidal for humankind to forget or ignore the values embodied by performing arts and sports.

Needless to say, the way people train, refine, and enjoy the 'animal' energy varies from nation to nation, from place to place. But it is those very differences that preserve and assert the cultural identities and *raison-d'être* of each nation. The greater the amount of 'non-animal' energy, which tends to reduce our lives to uniformity, the greater the contribution which performing arts are expected to make to the quality of human life in the future. The significance of cultural projects in these technological days lies in the fact they help to make possible shared experiences of similarities and differences inherent in various nations.

It is the belief of the International Committee of the Theatre Olympics that, as we enter the 21st century, the powerful existence of performing arts must prove a sign of profound encouragement and hope for truly global communication.

Tadashi Suzuki

* https://www.performingarts.jp/E/pre_interview/1903/1.html



theatre olympics



“...We Do Not Have Much Time Left”

Zsolt Szász Talks to Attila Vidnyánszky
About the 2023 Theatre Olympics Hosted by Hungary¹

– Attila Vidnyánszky participated in the third Theatre Olympics in Moscow in 2001 already with his Beregszász (Beregovo) company. How is it possible that almost two decades later, Hungary won the right to host the 2023 Theatre Olympics? Is it by virtue of MITEM, which has integrated the National Theatre, Budapest, into international theatre life?

I met Tadashi Suzuki, a founding member of the Theatre Olympics board, in Moscow back in 2000. One year later, at the third Olympics, organized by Yuri Lyubimov, we appeared with the Beregszász company in the programme series conceived by Anatoly Vasiliev and titled *The Eye – Slanted Scythians View*. So the fact that we are currently in the international bloodstream was preceded by a rather lengthy process. Valery Fokin was admitted to this body after the death of Lyubimov, and it was due to his nomination that in 2009 I received the award for innovative directors founded by himself at the Moscow Meyerhold Centre. This happened back in the time when I was theatre director in Debrecen. The story is built up bit by bit. Yet it is true that the reputation and acceptance of MITEM helped us most to position ourselves solidly. At the same time, professional relationships like the one we have with Eugenio Barbara for instance, have also contributed to this. Before we signed up to host the Olympics, I consulted with the Ministry, and with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in person. After all, it is such a large-scale enterprise as requires substantial state resources. On receiving positive response from all levels, we wrote an official letter to the present Olympic board asking them to consider our intentions.²

¹ The first part of the interview was made on 10th March 2020, while the second one on 12th August 2021.

² The board has fifteen members: Theodoros Terzopoulos (Greece) – president; Giorgio Barberio Corsetti (Italy); Choi Chyrim (South-Korea); Nuria Espert (Spain); Antunes Filho (Brazil); Jürgen Flimm (Germany); Valery Fokin (Russia); Jarosław

Poland was the first one from this region to host an Olympics in 2016, in Wrocław, as part of a cultural capital project. Confined to this city alone, it was a modest enterprise in comparison with the previous ones. We are now having a large-scale event in mind.

– *After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the last Olympics was also notable for the fact that Fokin apparently did not think in terms of St. Petersburg exclusively. He wanted to have the whole of Russia culturally redefined by this major theatrical event.*

Now Russia is also facing the blatant contrast between great cultural centres and peripheries, with regard to the number of theatres among other things. This has been a focal issue in Russian cultural life for four to five years. It is no coincidence that one day Valery Gergiev, the internationally renowned conductor, artistic and general director of the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, collected his ensemble and went on a tour all over Russia. A state which wants to look creditable will try to remedy this inequitable situation. We launched the Déryné programme for the same reason in Hungary.³ A central element of my vision is to open up the Olympics even wider than the Russians have done, so that this event can embrace and have an impact on the entire country.

– *In the middle of the current pandemic, Madách's mystery drama, The Tragedy of Man, an exploration of the fate and future of the world, with the possibility of destruction also on the horizon, is gaining ever more importance. How could this "world drama" be staged and brought into focus in 2023, the year of Madách's Bicentenary, so that it becomes a truly memorable world theatrical event?*

This bicentenary is indeed a good opportunity to internationally position Madách's work. For instance, it would be worth taking stock of the translations of the *Tragedy*. As far as I know, in Poland, for example, there is only a fairly old translation available, while Russia has an excellent new version, made seven or eight years ago. I know from Miklós Hubay that the French translation is satisfactory, too, and the German is yet to be checked. I am constantly trying to draw attention to this work within my scope, however, contemporary theatre practitioners tend to shy away from such a large-format dramatic proposition. It is no accident that in today's theatre world there are hardly any directors who have the courage to stage the full *Faust*, although – thanks to the cultural dominance of the German language – its adaptations appear here and there. Unfortunately, these great topics are not in the spotlight these days. The year 2023 could for instance see a students' Madách mini-festival come into being.

Fret (Poland); Tony Harrison (the United Kingdom); Georges Lavaudant (France); Liu Lubin (China); Wole Soyinka (Nigeria); Tadashi Suzuki (Japan); Ratan Thiyam (India); Robert Wilson (the United States of America)

³ This government programme run in the spirit of "Theatre for All", the most important objective of which is to provide high-quality performances in rural Hungary, was launched in the spring of 2020.

This dramatic piece may need to be approached from the angle of actor and director training, even at an international level.

– More than a year and a half have passed since the last Theatre Olympics organised by Russia and Japan, with the COVID 19 pandemic having three waves in the meantime. Did you consult with the Olympic board during that period?

Communication was continuous between us, I was mainly in contact with Valery Fokin and Theodoros Terzopoulos. The latest development is that several board members would like to come to Budapest for MITEM in October this year – my admission to the board will presumably be announced then. Now planning already at the level of specific details has been given the green light. This process was paralyzed by the pandemic everywhere. Although theatres did not shut down in Russia, festivals got cancelled one after the other or were only partially realised. And the same goes for all the other countries which are connected to the idea of the Olympics.

– *All continents are represented on this board. At the same time, the Hungarian theatre profession is not sufficiently aware of the competencies of this body and its activities during the period between two Olympics. Is it engaged in selecting productions for the next event, for example, and does it have any intentions to outline what is going on in the world theatre?*

There are great creators and returning guests who both shape as well as organize these Olympics. They will present their performances at this upcoming event in Hungary. The current processes of world theatre can best be traced through their work, experiments, or the changes in their manner of speaking. It is a very good thing that these major theatres and outstanding directors appear here time and again, because this way you can feel where a particular company or theatre culture is heading. There is an incredibly rich range of choices, whether we think of MITEM or the previous Olympics. Also, these events carry continuing positive consequences. Take India for instance, the host of the 2018 Olympics, where theatres are now receiving regular state support as a result.

– *In India, the Olympics has promoted the creation of a European-type theatre structure. The board apparently not only deals with professional issues in the strict sense, but also considers it important to strengthen the institutional background. You played a key role in amending the Hungarian Law on Performing Arts. Will the benefits of this new ten-year system be seen at the Olympics on home ground?*

We are given a lot of freedom in what we are focussing on. For example, the board welcomed our plan, unseen at the previous Olympics, that we want to involve Hungarian theatres in the countryside and beyond the border as early as in the stage of organisation. We would like Hungarian theatres to get in touch with cross-border, European or even overseas companies, and to host guest performances in their own place or actually select them for the programme at the

Budapest-based series of events. And all this would be covered by the Olympics budget without us having a say in their choices. By the way, such initiatives can also be adopted by later Olympics, which is a very good practice. We are often begrudged in Europe when it comes to Hungarian theatre structure and the support system. In our country, the government spends much on performing arts, above all on institutions of prominent and national status. According to Eurostat, cultural subsidies as a whole are constantly increasing in Hungary – at the moment, this amount ranks highest as a proportion of GDP in the European Union.

– In December last year, a consultative body, the National Cultural Council was established in Hungary. Has the issue of the planned Olympics been raised during the negotiations in a meaningful way?

By the end of August this year, each cultural sector will have to draw up a package of medium-term development plans, including the question of funding. I would like to focus on two events: the Theatre Olympics scheduled for 2023 as well as the Madách Bicentenary due in the same year. These two series of events are, of course, also closely related. What is more, a central role is attributed in this package to the renewal of higher arts education. The Cultural Council has proved its viability during its short history; representatives of certain fields of the cultural sphere have never sat at the same table like now. It is clear that professionals in public education, museology, the related arts as well as higher arts education can cooperate much more effectively through this direct dialogue in order to remedy even decades-long problems.

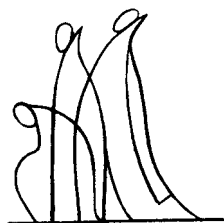
– Am I right in thinking that the Theatre Olympics we are to organise will be one of the first stress tests of this new cultural strategy? And that a successful outcome will largely determine the image of Hungary, which is currently very controversial from the point of view of Western Europe?

The board of Theatre Olympics has always sought not to divide but to unite. However, while we are encouraging openness, bridge-building and constant communication between different theatre cultures, we consider the preservation of sovereignty also essential since, after all, there would be no point in working together without it.

– The current pandemic has shed light on the vulnerability of our profession. What are your expectations for the coming months?

We need to realize that it will take years to catch up with 2019 audience numbers again. The cautiousness and distrust of the viewers is understandable. Yet feedback is positive after the reopening here in late May. Country people seem to be more courageous somehow – in Debrecen, for example, summer theatre productions were running full house. We still have two MITEMs to come before the 2023 Theatre Olympics – which may be sufficient for us to find one another again both at home and on the international theatrical scene.

Translated by Nóra Durkó



“There Is Still Hope for Truly Global Communication”

Tadashi Suzuki on the Philosophy of Theatre Olympics
(Interviewer: Tadashi Uchino)*

In 1976, Takashi Suzuki and the Waseda Shogekijo (currently the Suzuki Company of Toga (SCOT)) theater company moved from Tokyo to Toga Village (currently Toga Village, Nanto City) in Toyama prefecture, and now more than 40 years have passed since the move. Originally, it was in the traditional gassho-zukuri (literally “praying hands”) style A-frame thatched-roof farm houses remaining there in the isolated mountain village that triggered theatrical inspiration in Suzuki and his group and led them to convert one into a theater they named Toga Sanbo, and now the area has evolved into an international performing arts base called the Toga Art Park comprising four theaters and training facilities, two outdoor theaters rehearsal studios and a number of residential houses (with lodging capacity for 200). Although the village’s original population of 1,500 has gradually shrunk to less than 500, the area’s annual visiting and exchange population now exceeds 200,000, with people residing from overseas to study theater and attend performance, like last summer’s SCOT Summer Season (two weeks of continuous performances of SCOT productions) that attracted an audience of 7,000 from Japan and abroad to the village.

The 9th Theatre Olympics (to be held in Japan from Aug. 23 to Sept. 23, 2019) is a program organized jointly in Japan and Russia with the Toga Art Park and the National Theatre of Saint Petersburg as the main venues. It goes without saying that Tadashi Suzuki is a world famous theater director known for the Suzuki Method of Actor Training (*) but he is also a creative activist whose achievements in the conception and execution of artist-led

* (Presenter Interview. Tadashi Suzuki and Theatre Olympics, https://www.performingarts.jp/E/pre_interview/1903/1.html) 7. May, 2019.

programs that include the organizing of Japan's first international theatre festival (Toga Festival) (1982), followed by the launch of the Theatre Olympics (established 1993) and the Japan-China-Korea BeSeTo Theater Festival (established 1994). In this interview, Suzuki speaks about the significance of Toga Village, the significance of artists working together on theater festivals and his thoughts about the state of the Theater world and the people in it.

– Seeing as I was a graduate student when I first had the opportunity to visit Toga Village, I can't help but feel a bit nervous being here now to speak with you (laughs). I also have many memories like serving as interpreter for the American director Robert Wilson when the 1st Toga Festival was held in 1982. This year the 9th Theatre Olympics is being held as a joint program by Japan and Russia. Twenty years have already passed since the second holding in 1999 when you were general artistic director of Shizuoka Performing Arts Center. Now that the Theatre Olympics is being held with your base of artistic activities, Toga Village as one of the main venues, I think this is a historical development. There are a lot of arts festivals today, but I think that The Theatre Olympics are different in that it is held with the artists working together in residence.

We were originally planning to hold it with Toga Village as the sole venue, but then the request came from people in Russia saying they also wanted very much to have it, and that led to the Theatre Olympics being held jointly in two countries for the first time. When you say it is being held jointly by Japan and Russia, it might sound like it is a program of cultural exchange between the two



Aerial view of Toga Art Park in Toyama Prefecture
(source: theatre-oly.org)

countries, but that is not the case. What it is, is a program planned by the Theatre Olympics committee members from countries around the world being held as an international theater festival with venues in the two countries.

It is very interesting to have the same program being held in two places as different as the theater in Toga village where the population is less than 500 people and the palatial national Alexandrinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg, a city with a population of 5.35 million people, and to still have the spirit of the artists to come and work together in harmony is wonderful. It is an opportunity to transcend the questions of scale and the number of people in the audience that can see the performances to come together to work with socially recognized artist who are known for the quality of their work. This is what makes theater

and artists so amazing. The Theatre Olympics program aims to be a symbol of the fact that we can transcend the boundaries of ethnicity and national borders and wall and discrimination.

If you look at the Greek Tragedies that were created 2,600 years ago you will see, theater has always been thinking about things like how to act with other ethnic peoples, how to think about crime, what rules people need to keep in order to live as a community, the individual and a community, universal problems that transcend ethnicity. I believe that is why the Greek Tragedies and plays like those of Shakespeare have become the shared heritage of humankind that transcends nationality. Despite the fact that we have the word globalization today, the direction or orientation to create that kind of shared heritage anew



King Lear, poster for Tadashi Suzuki's production to open the 9th Theatre Olympics, 2019 (source: chncpa.org)

has been lost in politics and economics today. That kind of orientation toward creating new rules of coexistence that can bridge this type of contemporary division is the theme of the Theatre Olympics this time, which is "Creating Bridges." I want us to think about the need for this kind of value, this kind of spirit for people to share; to think about the rules for coexistence.

The Japan-side program that I will be managing consists of 30 performances (from 16 countries) with Toga Village as the main venue, but we will also use the outdoor theater in Kurobe City, where the factory of the Chairman of our TOGA Asia Arts Center support committee, Tadahiro Yoshida (Member of the board of YKK) is located, and the hall at Unazuki Onsen. The opening program is *King Lear*

and performing in it will be actors from Germany, Russia, America, China and Korea Rep. There will also be actors from various countries performing in the production of *The Trojan Women* starring Theodoros Terzopoulos. The artists naturally have nationalities, but unlike the sports Olympics, they do not compete as representatives of their countries. I believe that the role of the arts is to transcend ethnicity and nationality and pursue our shared universality as human beings.

– *Would you tell us more about the TOGA Asia Arts Center support committee?*

Even if artists have ideas, they don't have the power of money (laughs). They can't do things unless they have people to support them. When we thought about the future of Toga and created the TOGA Asia Arts Center as a base for the creation and education of artists involved in Asian performing arts, people

like the governor of Toyama Prefecture, the mayor of Nanto City and people in enterprise like Yoshida san got together and said they would support us. It is because of this support that we are able to do things like the Theatre Olympics this time. We are very grateful for the way the support committee brings together the public and private sectors. Soka Gakkai (lay organization, based on Nichiren Buddhism) donated free of charge some land that they owned in Toga Village and we built a new residence facility on it. I believe that young theater makers in Japan should have more faith that there are people here who will support them in this way if they approach them with plans of things they want to do and the ideals behind them on a level that they can understand.

– *The Theatre Olympics were founded in 1993, a quarter of a century ago. Do you feel that theater and the state of the theater world were different then for today?*

There were two aspects to our launching of the Theatre Olympics. One was the fact that entering the 1990s it was getting harder for internationally active theater people to do theater. At the time there were theatre people who were recognized internationally and as artists their work gave people spiritual pride, and as such people thought that they were valuable asset of society, intellectually, artistically and traditionally. So, they were respected even by people with different mindsets and positions, and there was a consensus in society that they should be supported as a valuable asset to everyone. But with the spread of globalization, there came a trend to think that economic stability for the country was more important than that spiritual value and it became harder for theater people to do theater. In answer to that problem, we thought that artists should join together to do something about this global issue.

The other aspect was the situation in the world at the time. In 1989, America's President Bush and the Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev declared the end of the Cold War, and with events like the reunification of Germany in 1990, the world seemed to be headed toward a more peaceful era. In fact, however, war broke out in the multi-ethnic former Yugoslavia and in other places in the world were plagued with inter-ethnic struggles and territorial disputes. The Cold War era had been one of conflict between the communist nations and democracies with capitalist economies, but since the two sides had been divided by ideologies and values, so although there were some problems, the societies still held together on that basis. When that social order fell apart, it resulted rather in an increase in conflicts. It is similar to the current problem in the EU. At the time, when the Greek theater director Terzopoulos (current Chairman of the International Theatre Olympics Committee) came to Japan, he said when the Cold War ended they thought Europe was headed toward peace, but it didn't happen that way. He said there was a terrible situation with things like ethnic strife, and it lead to huge numbers of refugees. Amid the political instability, people were hurt and losing hope. And he concluded that it was frustrating for artists to be unable to do anything in this situation. That

being the case, he said we should band together as artists and do things with a kind of love that transcends barriers of nationality.

Although it isn't directly related too the Theatre Olympics, at the time I got a telegram from a theater maker from Sarajevo saying that they wanted me to do a play there in Sarajevo, and that they would come and pick me up in a military plane. The awareness that it is important to do theater during a war is amazing. Historically, Europe has been a place where there is a strong belief in using theater to think about fundamental issues of living in a society, like what is a human being, what is a nation, what is crime, so during the conflict at that time they wanted to use theater as material for thinking about what the new world order should be like. In fact, Susan Sontag did go and do theater there, but for some reason I lost contact with them somewhere along the way and ended up not going.

– Why are artists able to work together that way, even though their backgrounds and means of expression are different?

For a child, the place where they are born is their hometown, but as we grow older, the place where we raise our families or the place where we grow old and eventually die is our hometown. But, I believe that artists are people who by nature don't believe there is a place where they can live with a sense of security a hometown implies. A hometown is a place you can go back to, a where you can feel safe, but for an artist, I think that place is probably in the heart. Perhaps I would say that home is a place where hearts connect by being moved by something, even if that is a somewhat lonely concept. The artist works hard to create works that a lot of people will come to see. But, usually it doesn't work out that way (laughs).

Artists like that can work together because they believe not in things you can see, like monetary worth, family, high and low, rich and poor, or man and woman, but in a shared belief in some kind of human value that can't be seen. So, if you don't have the desire from the beginning that you want many people to share that feeling, something like the Theatre Olympics would never be possible. You don't do theater because you have a theater, you don't get ideas for projects because you have a publicly funded grant.

– The Theatre Olympics began in Greece and gradually spread and grew in scale.

It was first held in Delphoi, a place with a population of only about 3,000, chosen as a holy place in ancient Greece of the kind where Oedipus received the fateful prophecy, in order the strengthen the spiritual resolve of solidarity. After that, there were voices from the government saying they wanted to give it financial support, and with that it gradually grew in scale. With that, there was the need to work with people like politicians or entrepreneurs who could provide leadership, but then there was the fear that the original spirit of the Theatre Olympics might be forgotten. But there was also a trust that the final outcome would be good, in the spirit of the words attributed to the Zen Master

Ikkyu that the roads toward the mountain's summit may be many but in the end they all lead to the same view of the pure Moon above.

But this time, some members of the International Committee said it would be good to return to the original spirit of the Theatre Olympics and do it in a place like Toga where the artists could reconfirm their solidarity and think about what the problems are now and what the world needs now. In Toga Village there is the foundation that SCOT has built up over the years, but because the theaters are small and the lodging facilities are limited, the audience it could draw would not be in the tens of thousands. So, the scale might be small but it would be just right for exchange between the artists and thinking about a lot of things.

– Ever since your Waseda Shogekijo work was first introduced at the Théâtre des Nations Festival in Paris in 1972, you have been a pioneer of overseas activities for some 45 years. SCOT productions have visited some 33 countries and your Suzuki Method of Actor Training has been taught in many arts schools, ranging from The Juilliard School in the U.S. to China's Central Academy of Drama.

It wasn't to advertise Japan that I went overseas. If asked why then did I go overseas, I would say that it was to show our work to professionals overseas who are thinking on the same level about theater, society and the human condition. If Constantin Stanislavsky had wanted to see what we do, I would have wanted him to see our work, and since Jean-Louis Barrault invited us I went to Paris to show our work to him. I didn't go to show our work to people overseas who like Japan but, while the background of our work is Japan, I went to show it to people who have the eye to see the universal aspect of the art of theater.

The important thing is to find people from other countries that we can work together with, but too often the trend today is to go overseas because you have received funding from the government or because a friend gave you an introduction to someone overseas. What's more, such people go overseas on the pretext that what they are showing is Japanese culture. They are not showing their work as artists but as Japanese advertising Japanese culture. It is no good if the audience you are performing to there is made up only of foreigners who like Japan and overseas Japanese.

– So it is just as a form of contemporary exoticism that is taking them overseas, isn't it? Neither the people that are inviting them and the people who are accepting the offers have a more serious sense of purpose. However, Toshiki Okada of chelfitsch did something different to thwart that level of exoticism, when he was commissioned to do a new work at Kammerspiele in Germany, he made sure it wasn't the exoticism they had hoped for by doing a collaborative work with Thai artists, and he had it performed in Paris in Thai. Of course, that was an exception, and in the case of most young theater makers today they seem to be looking inward and have little interest in working seriously abroad in the real sense. On another note, I would like to ask you to talk about new overseas developments in Asia. I haven't been there yet but in 2015



Dionysus, a co-production
by SCOT Theatre and Purnati Indonesia
at the 2019 SIFA Festival in Singapore
(source: sifa.sg)

an outdoor theater was built for you in Gubei Water Town north of Beijing, wasn't there?

A famous Chinese developer built an outdoor theater with a view of the Great Wall along with a residence facility and studio on land belonging to the Beijing municipal government. Every year in April I go to teach the Suzuki Actor Training Method there. We also did rehearsals for Kachi Kachi Yama and *Dionysus* there for two or three weeks. The Great Wall is of course a famous sightseeing destination and some six million people visit there annually. And since they want to make it one of China's representative international spot, they told me I can do any type of project I think would be good there. The developer wants the area to be used strategically for cultural purposes, but he

didn't want it to be just a theme park, saying that it had to be for art, and it is interesting that he said it didn't need to be a Chinese artist but it could be a Japanese artist like me.

– *Do you use Chinese texts for your plays there?*

Yes. Many people misunderstand the fact that once a work is translated into the local language, whether the original is a Greek Tragedy or Shakespeare, once translated it becomes that country's play. Every language has tradition behind it, and since it is spoken in daily life it relates immediately to physicality as well, so as soon as a play is translated into Chinese, it belongs to the Chinese people.

– *In Toga Village you have people coming from Indonesia to learn the Suzuki Actor Training Method, and in 2018 you had a 3-language performance of Dionysus done by Indonesian, Chinese and Japanese actors. It was also performed at an outdoor theater in Jogjakarta, Indonesia. What was the reception like there?*

We did it in three languages, and nothing like that had ever been done in Indonesia before. In short, if all the actors are trained in the same method and are thinking the same way, it is possible to do quite interesting collaborative work with Indonesian actors. So, you don't simply have to learn from what is being done in Europe or the United States, if you have a common starting ground you can build on, it will be OK. It was an experience that showed me if you have a shared set of rules and principles that transcend ethnicity and nationality, you can collaborate and do quite good work.

Until now, there was an idea in Asia that you could learn from European theater, but instead of doing that, we now have changed to an idea that we can

do things together if we have a different working ground of our own. When you think about sports, there are clear-cut rules that mean players from any country can play together in football or baseball or Sumo wrestling or any sport. So that means that as long as you the same rules and you train properly under the same system, everyone becomes equal. Every country's people have amazing potential, so there is no reason to feel culturally inferior.

– *Lately we see a lot of so-called international collaborations in theater and dance, but what you are saying is that in order to do something that isn't a collaboration in name only with no lasting meaning, you need to have shared working principles from the beginning, don't you?*

For example, in football if there are players from a number of countries playing you don't call it a collaboration, and you don't call it a joint team. Also, Japanese theater doesn't become international just by doing an international collaboration.

– *Do you mean that people should pursue principles that anyone can share in, and to think seriously about that?*

Yes. That is what they have to strive for. We will be doing a production of *Cyrano de Bergerac* in Russian and Japanese, and until now I have done productions in Japanese and English, Japanese and German and also productions in Chinese. Why are we able to do this? It is because everyone involved shares the same approach to theater, does the same training and knows the ideas behind the Suzuki method. It takes a lot of time and effort to get to this points of sharing the same objectives and training, but once it is achieve we all stand on the same footing and can work together. It is a completely different issue from whether a work is interesting as Japanese theater. My nationality is Japanese, but my aim is not to do Japanese theater. I am doing Suzuki theater. I say we have Noh, Kabuki, Takarazuka Review and Suzuki theater (laughs)!

The rules of Suzuki theater have become international, the question is not whether individual plays become popular or not. When you look at the individual works, some are good and some are unsuccessful. But since there is a shared knowledge of the rules under which they are made and the ideas behind the works, whether they are done in Russia or China, the lighting, the movement the voice projection tell you immediately that it is Suzuki theater. When we did a production with Russian actors at the Moscow Art Theatre, I was told, "Even though it was Russians doing it, it was still Suzuki," and it is the same as football—no matter who plays it, it is still football, and that is actually an amazing thing.

– *As it was with Stanislavsky, it is surely because, although it has the Suzuki name to it, it is a method by which the physicality, the movement is properly controlled so that it projects the play to the audience it is intended to reach, and the lines of the script tell the story in a way that clearly reaches the ears of the audience it is intended for. That is proper acting, and I believe it is my duty to point out that you, Tadashi*



The Trojan Women at the 2016
Wrocław Theatre Olympics
(photo: Filip Basara, source: strefakultury.pl)

Suzuki, created a proper method for doing this.

It can be seen that way. That is why professional actors from 16 countries come to Toga for training in my method, and they say it is very helpful for them. None of these people think they are doing Japanese theater, it has spread to these countries because they find it useful as basic theater training. There are even some people I don't know who are teaching the Suzuki Method somewhere (laughs).

– Along with your method for acting, you have created stage

adaptations of Western theater ranging from the Greek Tragedies to Chekhov that communicate a worldview. Another thing you have done is to take Japanese novels or songs as bases for theater that does not belong to the general categorization of “Japanese” but has been thoroughly worked by you into your own personal world of theater. Recently you have also been actively posting a blog that shows your stage directing notes and daily activities, and you have published stage scripts with detailed explanations of the contents.

Back in our day, we had people from other fields coming to see our works that they found interesting. Some examples are the novelist and critic Shōhei Ōoka, Japanese literary scholar Donald Keene, critic Shūichi Katō, poet and literary critic Takaaki Yoshimoto, architect Arata Isozaki and well as the Nobel Prize-winning author Kenzaburō Ōe. That led me of necessity to study up on their areas of expertise, and we would talk at the cafes. When we first did our production of *The Trojan Women* at Iwanami Hall, Kabuki actor Ennosuke Ichikawa came to see it, and actor Hisao Kanze, who played the role of Menelaos, is said to have asked how we were able to act the way we did. When Kabuki actor Tamasaburo Bando saw our production of *On the Dramatic Passions II* he said he wanted to borrow from the vocal presentation technique of actress Kayoko Shiraishi when he played the role of Nanboku Tsuruya, so I sent him a recording of her performance.

It is from the things you learn from people like these from the other arts that gives you new knowledge to draw on that leads to the birth of new of looking at theater. This is a stage that today's young theater people haven't been through. There is now a theater research institute in the New National Theater, Tokyo, but not much can be accomplished by simply inviting acting instructors and directors from abroad to give lectures. Creators need to begin by studying and

gaining an understanding of Japanese literature, philosophy, aesthetics, music sociology, economy, performing arts and the traditional arts.

– In that sense, I think it is important that you are now talking about your own creative activities, and I think that the Toga Village Theatre Olympics is an increasingly important program. From the era of the Toga festivals, your practice of not interfering during the course of the festival left us free to talk about whatever we wanted, and admittedly a lot of it turned out to be useless talk we were doing (laughs).

That is important, however. Theater can provide the kind of environment that gathers people from diverse backgrounds to talk together. By watching the same performances, those people have the opportunity to discuss and share their different perspectives on what they have seen. That becomes an opportunity for your perceptions and misconceptions to be corrected. We had a salon atmosphere where knowledgeable people from various fields could come together to see the same things and then discuss about them and in some cases realize where our perspectives were still limited, or where we needed to do more studying and thus grow with objectivity. It may be that those kinds of platforms are too few today.

– There is a trend for young Japanese theater makers today to do theater for the purpose of self-acknowledgement. And because that is what the audience wants too, they react to strong physicality, strong theatrics and strong words that may negate their own values as a form of violence.

There is that aspect. I did a theater course for young theater makers at Kichijoji Theater, and I found that they were all intelligent, but they lacked energy. When we were young there was a tendency to be rebellious, but a lot of us gathered together and built a theater shack with our own hands and did theater like we wanted to. And there were people then that were interested in that kind of thing, but today there aren't people doing things like that or interested in it.

– I went to the “SCOT Summer Season 2018” last year, and on the final day I had the opportunity to see for the first time the talk where you took questions from the audience at large, and it surprised me. You were answering in careful detail some strange questions from young people that I myself would have had a hard time not getting angry at. From that kind of dialogue, I felt that the existing foundations were being shaken to the roots within those young people. From the 2013 SCOT Summer Season, you stopped charging the usual admission fees for the audiences and switched to a voluntary donation system, and I felt that after that there were many more people in the audiences that had never seen SCOT productions before, many who weren't used to seeing theater and hadn't been to Toga Village before, especially young people and visitors from other Asian countries. There is a production of Greetings from the Edge of the Earth (Sekai no Hate kara Konnichiwa) at the outdoor theater that is popular for its fireworks displays, and it has become known among young people today by the abbreviated title “SekaKon.”

It costs a lot for the public transportation to get to Toga, so in order to enable people who want to experience and are interested in our activities to come more freely, we decided to make the performances more open to them. Since we made it a voluntary payment system it is that much more open to them. There are some difficulties, but we are doing it anyway. We have now seen people like one who quit the National Defense Academy of Japan and came to Toga wanting to join SCOT, so things are gradually getting more interesting.

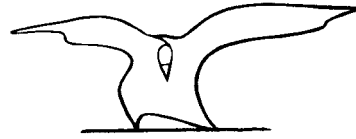
I am asked about our future plans for Toga Village, and since we have recently expanded our facilities, I want to see us start a school that will gather students from around Asia. Already, the National University of Singapore and China's Central Academy of Drama are sending students here each year. And although it will be a drama school, I don't want to be teaching students with no previous experience from step one, I want to gather students who have a basic foundation in theater. I want us to teach the Suzuki Actor Training Method and make theater productions and then critique them among us. I also want to bring in economists from Asia and have them gain a global perspective by thinking together with them.

It is also the case with theater festivals, but I think the important thing is that we build a network of international artists together without borders. You can't create such a network unless you speak about your ideas and what you are fighting for. I want that to be one of the fundamental things we teach in our school.

– In this time of so much division, what will be the strength of artists who come together in such a network of collaboration?

I don't know. But, interesting things will happen. In the Theatre Olympics we have been invited to perform Macbeth in Sardinia, and the local government is sending a chef of Sardinian cuisine along and told us to enjoy the cuisine at Toga Village. If the venue were Tokyo, you wouldn't see these kinds of very human touches occurring. It is Toga Village that inspires these kinds of things that build interesting relationships.

Perhaps it isn't my place to comment in this way, but I think that there is a sort of unpredictable anarchy to Toga Village that makes anything possible. For example, even if the electricity goes off and it is completely dark at night, Toga Village is the kind of place where that can be forgiven and accepted. In the era of the Toga Festival, perhaps because I was younger then, it was fascinating how an isolated place like that could take on such a festive air. But now I feel that Toga has an anarchy that is connected to the world at large, there is a lot to learn there and theater makers and the young audiences always find something to take away with them from their experiences there. Like the admission system now, I felt it is truly a place where everyone is at their liberty to give and take as they will. I am really looking forward to the kinds of collaborations that will come out of it.



“Spectators Want Genuine Human Encounters”

Interview with Valery Fokin by András Kozma*

– For the average spectator, the concept of Olympics is mostly associated with competition and sports. To what extent is the spirit of Theatre Olympics related to those or ancient Greek tradition, especially that the Theatre Olympics also started in Greece, on the initiative of stage director Theodoros Terzopoulos?

Indeed, this event is related to the Olympic movement in the sense that it also started in Greece and the first international Theatre Olympics were organized in Delphi on the initiative of Theodoros Terzopoulos and Tadashi Suzuki, later joined by Heiner Müller, Bob Wilson and other well-known theatre practitioners. Delphi is one of the cradles of Greek culture and ancient Greek theatre, so the first Theatre Olympics hosted there had symbolic significance, too, since they took place on the site of the ancient Olympic stadium. It is a huge open space and an overwhelmingly beautiful place; and my performance was also guest on that open-air stage. Thus, after some 100 years after the beginning of the modern Olympic movement, the idea of a theatre Olympics was born, and after serious preparation, this special festival of theatre arts came to be realised in 1995. However, unlike at the Olympic Games in sport, there are no prizes or medals awarded and there is no competition. I think this is right, since art cannot be measured by objective gauges like performance sports, but that is not the goal either. To me, theatre is the field of dialogue between various cultures, so the basic idea of Theatre Olympics is to create a meeting of theatres not competing with each other, but representing diversity. After all, theatre is an area of diverse preferences, which does not exclude the possibility of mutual understanding or at least dialogue.

* The interview was made on 28 September 2019 in St. Petersburg, at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, on the occasion of the guest performance by the National Theatre in Budapest of *Rocco and His Brothers*, which was invited to the 9th Theatre Olympics.

– We know many famous theatre festivals in Europe with a tradition of decades like the Avignon festival, the “Fringe” in Edinburgh, but I could also mention the BITEF in Belgrade. Over the years, each festival has created its own image. How would you define the concept of Theatre Olympics? What principles, aspects and organizing activities is the festival programme based on?

The concept of the Theatre Olympics is complex, but it follows a philosophy which is obvious to me. The most important aspect is to be able to offer a broad spectrum of the “output” of world theatre, from traditional performances to the most experimental productions, that is we are trying to present the widest possible range of current theatre trends to the audience.

Of course, this means that we do not put together the programme based on a uniform and clearly delimited aesthetical aspect, on the contrary, we are “omnivores” in a certain sense. But at the selection, we consider originality and outstanding professional level as by all means decisive. We are explicitly interested in productions where cultural interaction is seen in the performance itself: such are this year for example *Macbeth* coming from India, or the fully unique experimental production by Rimini Protocol, playing synchronously on various locations of the city, with the inhabitants getting involved in the performance. At the same time, the traditional production by the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, or other classical, famous theatres have their place, too, as long as they can generate a strong effect on the audience through their intellectuality and theatricality. A director may belong to either the younger or the elder generation, if they are capable of creating a “living” theatre, we will find them interesting. I could also say that we are following the path of “total theatrical diversity”. All the more so, as the Theatre Olympics feature not only stage productions but numerous pedagogical, scientific and educational programmes as well. We also hold meetings, master classes and trainings. We organize a vast number of accompanying programmes serving deeper professional cooperation and understanding. I consider intense professional dialogue most important, since it is often missing from festival programmes. I have felt its benefit especially now in Vladivostok, where both Theodoros Terzopoulos and Tadashi Suzuki held a master class and an actor training, respectively. What a special geographic situation: Vladivostok is only one hour away from Japan by plane, but eight hours away from Moscow, and yet it had only been the first time that Suzuki visited this Far Eastern Russian city. It seems peripheral from a geographic point of view; nevertheless, local artistic intellectuals, students, and also the wide audience, had been looking forward to this meeting with huge expectations, as if literally “thirsty” for this cultural dialogue. I have to confess that during the organization and preparations I was a bit afraid that the Olympics this year would be too ramified and too “proliferating”.

Of course, putting together the festival programme is the result of a long process, during which we take into consideration the suggestions and

recommendations of the art directors of the Theatre Olympics. Each Olympics has its own artistic expert team, led by the art director of the specific event. The art director of the festival in Delphi was Theodoros Terzopoulos, in Japan it was Tadashi Suzuki and at the 2001 festival in Moscow the preparations were led by Yuri Lyubimov. I am the art director of the Olympics this year, but – of course – I rely strongly on the work of my team. Nevertheless, organization and logistics are extremely demanding and time-consuming tasks and first I was afraid that it would be very hard to cover such a vast territory from St. Petersburg over Siberia to Vladivostok, but now I can safely say that all our efforts have been worth it, since the result is proving us right. Due to the fact that we geographically extended the locations of the Theatre Olympics so much, it reached a vast number of people and visitors who had perhaps experienced the magic of theatre for the first time. For example, I was stunned to see that in Yalta or Sevastopol spectators were sitting on the beach on pillows or armchairs, wrapped up in blankets, in front of huge screens, watching *The Government Inspector* in my direction or other productions, and they were laughing, reacting to what they saw, as if they had been watching a movie.

I would not have believed that this event would move such a large audience. But I am convinced that the more people we are able to attract into the theatres, the closer we can bring the divergent groups of society to each other. One of my favorite examples is what recently happened in Magadan. A Spanish theatre ensemble from Barcelona came to Magadan – this event itself reminds one of Hašek’s absurd world, since it is almost unbelievable. But even more stunning is that the luggage of the ensemble got stuck at the Sheremetyevo Airport in Moscow, so their stage set and their props did not arrive in time. Obviously, the Spanish ensemble got quite depressed and so did the residents of the city, who almost even rioted. They forced the officialities to take action in order to solve the problem, to make phone calls and write to Moscow... since “our Spanish friends have come to us”. Nonetheless, the first performance was cancelled since the stage set and props had not arrived, but a spontaneous meet-the-artist session was held instead. Not one person wanted to have their ticket refunded. Everybody came to this meeting to listen to the Spanish actors who ended up talking enthusiastically about themselves, their show, their theatre,



N. Gogol: *The Government Inspector*,
Alexandrinsky Theatre performance, d: V. Fokin
(source:: theatreolympics2019.com)

and eventually it was a very successful event with a personal note and a very pleasant atmosphere. This proves also that spectators want genuine human encounters and that it can happen under any circumstances if there is a will and openness. The Spanish ensemble was very impressed by the reception, but we were also surprised seeing the emotional heat of the audience. Luckily, the next day they were able to perform the show.

The guest play of the Finnish National Theatre on the Sachalin islands was a similarly important event on the island never visited before by a foreign ensemble. The fact that we were able to make this Theatre Olympics such an important international event, especially within the framework of the Year of Theatre, made many people interested in theatre. However, I would like to emphasize that the intense and extremely inspiring encounter with the representatives of theatre arts was equally important to us. It is completely different to watch a show or listen to a discussion with a grand master on the Internet, or to meet them live, look them in their eyes, really experience their art and exchange information personally.

– *In the history of Theatre Olympics since 1995 it has never occurred before that the festival is organized simultaneously in two different countries. Why did you choose the “parallel organization”?*

There is no special concept behind that; the reason is rather practical. Before the decision was made that St. Petersburg would host the Olympics in 2019, Tadashi Suzuki indicated his intention, too. Based on that we felt that the festival this year might become even more special if the programme was conducted in parallel in two countries, since this never happened until now. According to the principle of reciprocity, we had guest appearances in their place and they had guest appearances in Russia; and there were some theatre professionals like Robert Wilson who appeared in both countries, especially since the slogan of the Theatre Olympics this year is “Building bridges”.

We live in an era where people and countries are opposed sharply by political, economical and social events. I am convinced that one of the most important tasks and opportunities of arts and the theatre within is to create the “bridges of understanding” at the level of people and nations that give us opportunities to maintain the dialogue even in the hardest times. In this sense, this harmonizes with the idea of ancient Olympics since it is well known that during the Olympic Games wars were officially suspended by the enemies. Only because Olympics had a special, sacral importance. Similarly, culture and theatre are capable of making peace even between the fiercest enemies. Basically, we are all sensitive human beings with feelings, beings with a heart and soul, even if our heads are filled with all sorts of dreadful and blurred thoughts and ideologies. And theatre is able to trigger direct emotional effects, find its way to our hearts and is perhaps the only channel that can keep us together. It can be narrower or wider, but it still exists! So, I think that theatre is the only chance we have. Unfortunately,

we cannot count on getting to the insight by all kinds of diplomatic manoeuvres or some enlightening of the human mind that it is over and we cannot carry on like this. However, culture still gives some reason to hope that even if we are far from each other, we still understand and feel each other on some level.

– *The play called Rocco and His Brothers, directed by Attila Vidnyánszky, in the programme of the Theatre Olympics this year tells the story of a family moving from the country to the city; a rootless family facing a completely different culture, mentality and way of life. On the other hand, in the performance the manifests of the artists and thinkers of the 20th century appear expressing their rather radical relationship to human existence. What do you think of European civilization from the point of view of 21st century arts?*

In my opinion, European civilization is currently in a state of degradation, especially concerning its fundamental values. It may even be unaware that it is actually burying the extraordinary rich aesthetical, historical and emotional heritage it has accumulated. While we Russians, even Dostoevsky, used to say in the 19th century that we have to strive towards the West, because – despite all our criticism – Europe is still Europe and we have to learn and take an example from it, now I could not say that any more. Of course, one may argue that there are interesting theatres, exciting performances and good movies there, and it is a fact. But I feel Europe is degrading on the whole because it is voluntarily giving up everything it has accomplished through hundreds and thousands of years. Moreover, it is doing so without being aware that it is forcing on itself a completely new way of life, new moral rules, new communication forms, and, in the same breath, basically eliminating everything it created. So I am quite pessimistic in this respect. Furthermore, this phenomenon does not only concern Europe, since there are many people in our country as well who like this attitude, agree with this mentality, and are going down this road for various reasons.

I think this is bad because denying the foundation our culture is built on is very dangerous. This is the wrong way, similar to cutting off our arms, first one, then the other one, and in the meantime living with the conviction that both are still there. This is a delusional disorder, when someone pathologically believes that something exists when it, in fact, no longer does. Nowadays, this is a very widespread phenomenon, especially in the thinking of today's politicians,



Rocco and His Brothers, National Theatre, Budapest, d: Attila Vidnyánszky

which practically means a complete separation from reality. So I have the feeling that now the West is in a state of delusion, in a very active way. Of course, do not get me wrong, I do not believe either in wearing peasant's sandals or an old garment. There is much delusion in our country as well, and the main delusion here is the conviction that the possession of nuclear weapons creates some kind of balance.

– *Based on the manifestos in Rocco and His Brothers it is edifying to observe that the avantgarde programmatic text from the first half of the 20th century expresses the absolute conviction that art is able to influence reality, while latter manifestos rather suggest the resignation that the world cannot be changed by art. What can we say in the 21st century about art and theatre: is it really able to influence reality or is this also just a “delusion”?*

It can influence people, and the world is made of people. But how many people... well, I think that only few. At the same time, it can give real experience, at least when we are speaking of outstanding works of art, like for example the new movie of Lars von Trier (*The House That Jack Built*).

However, I generally don't think that a performance or a movie would change the life of masses. It might be possible in the case of one, two, maybe ten persons, but this has always been like this. Although in some historical situations it is imaginable that theatre sets something off, motivating people to make sacrifices and stand up for something. I remember for example when I was directing *The Government Inspector* by Gogol in 1980 in Łódź, I suddenly noticed at the final rehearsal, attended mostly by college students, a burst of applause and reactions you would not expect related to *The Government Inspector*. But actually, this audience had already been in a state that any pretext would have been enough to start a rebellion. Since I did not at all understand the reaction of the audience, somebody told me that “this is a political performance, isn't it?” And I did not understand where he had got the idea or where politics was in the piece. Of course, this was a satire, but I would never have thought of considering it as some kind of political manifesto. A few months after I left, the rebellion broke out and Solidarność (Solidarity) was founded. Thus, the situation had been ripe well before; you just had to throw a match among them to start the fire. So in such situations, theatre may become a specific stage for change and provoke serious processes. We had a similar experience during Perestroika in 1985 when the renewal of theatre harmonized with the political situation. So, theatre cannot make a change – but it can make contact.

– *In 2001 the location of the Theatre Olympics was Moscow, why St. Petersburg now? Is there any competition involved in this?*

Although since the founding of St. Petersburg there always has been some kind of cultural rivalry with Moscow, in this case it is not about that. The 2001 Theatre Olympics in Moscow was an all-inclusive Gesamtkunst event, but its venues were limited to one city only. For the first time in the history of the

Theatre Olympics, a country has repeatedly been given the opportunity to host it, so it was only natural that the organization of the programme would be related to St. Petersburg in the framework of the Russian Theatre Year of 2019. But the festival now does not include only St. Petersburg but other Russian cities as well, especially in the far east region, like Magadan.

– What does such an event mean to a city and a country? How can the “benefits” be felt?

Like any event of international significance, the Theatre Olympics can also set in motion the creative energies of a city or even a country. Of course, this can have direct economic benefits, too, like an increase in tourism, but I think that the long-term cultural-social impact of such an event is more important.

The fact that a country or a city becomes an eminent location of the world’s cultural life for a while, may mean a serious inspiration for cultural life, especially for the younger generation. And it is especially thrilling that this year we have included farther regions of Russia to host the Olympics, which has invigorated the intellectual and cultural life there, too.

– *Until now, only large countries have hosted the Olympics. Hungary expressed its intention for 2023, too. You are a member of the organizing committee of the Olympics: do you support this idea? Is it not biting off more than a not too large country can chew?*

We have had first-hand experience this year in that organizing and carrying out such a large event is an extremely challenging task both from an economic and a logistic point of view. Obviously, it is not a coincidence that mostly large countries and cities with serious infrastructure have hosted it until now. However, I think that this is not the main criterion, since neither Delphi nor the venue of the 2016 Olympics, Wrocław, are large cities, like the theatre centre built by Tadashi Suzuki on Toga. I consider the cultural traditions of a country or a city and the dynamism of their theatre life much more important. From this point of view, Hungary and Budapest may be a suitable venue, since there I feel the artistic and creative energies essential in organizing the Theatre Olympics.

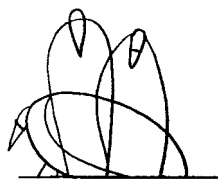


The drummer of *Trans Express* (Fr) at the opening ceremony of the Theatre Olympics with the festive façade of the Alexandrinsky Theatre in the background (photo: Yevgheny Stepanov, source: topdialog.ru)

Translation by Dénes Albert



mitem 2019



ÁGNES PÁLFI – ZSOLT SZÁSZ

Ethnic and / or Professional Identity?

Flash Report on MITEM 2019

Zsolt Szász: In 2014, as preparation for the first MITEM, the March issue of *Szcenárium* had two quotations by Eugenio Barba chosen as a motto for the professional programme titled *Identity – Sacrality – Theatricality*, both taken from the 1993 book titled *Paper Canoe*¹. The same issue also included an interview with the director made in 1985, that is prior to the regime change, on the occasion of Odin Theatre's first appearance before the Hungarian audience, by *The Gospel according to Oxyrhincus* at Szkéné Theatre, in the autumn.² Now, having seen the MITEM 2019 productions, we think it is worth taking stock of these dates and the changing of times.

Ágnes Pálfi: Already back in 2014, we wanted to ask Eugenio Barba (who could not come to our professional programme at the time) whether he was

¹ "Our ethnic identity has been established by history. We cannot shape it. Personal identity is built by each of us on our own, but unwittingly. We call it 'destiny'. The only profile on which we can consciously act as rational beings is the profile of our professional identity." (p. 147) "There is no genius loci, genie of the place, either in theatre and culture. Everything travels, everything drifts away from its original context, and is transplanted. There are no traditions which are inseparably connected to a particular geographical location, language or profession." (p. 146) https://books.google.hu/books?id=Cf6HAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA146&lpg=PA146&dq=barba+paper+canoe+genius+loci&source=bl&ots=Ucf31kTg1H&sig=ACfU3U2iO09lmmxjD8lO4AZb_OdflynAnw&hl=hu&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj_rP3G7o_kAhUrposKHdlJAXEQ6AEwC3oECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=barba%20paper%20canoe%20genius%20loci&f=false Cf. Hungarian edition: Eugenio Barba: *Papírkenu*. Bevezetés a színház antropológiájába (transl. Andó, Gabriella and Demcsák, Katalin; ed. Demcsák, Katalin; proofreader Regős, János), Kijárat Kiadó, Budapest, 2001, p. 184

² Eugenio Barba: "Szeretnék a színházzal mindenkit megérinteni" ("I'd Like to Touch Everyone Through My Theatre") (Interview by János Regős), *Szcenárium*, March 2014, pp. 78–83

still maintaining his view that one's professional identity would override their ethnic and personal identity since the former may be shaped by one as a "rational being". We would also have liked to challenge him if there was indeed no "genius loci" in culture. Related to this, we could have thematized Hungarian philosopher Béla Hamvas's treatise³ on the distinct spirits and mentality of the five geniuses characterizing and embodying the respective Hungarian regions, which together add up to be what is Hungarian.

Zsolt Szász: Perhaps Barba would not respond to our question any different today. But if I think back to earlier MITEMs, productions with a manifestation of the *genius loci* were always memorable. What did surprise me of the trilogy by Barba's international troupe at this year's MITEM, however, was the middle production, *Great Cities Under the Moon*, which made me understand what to them, one by one and as a group, that particular artistic identity, held in the highest esteem, means. In this performance-like production, they are sitting in a line, directly facing the audience, so that they are not protected by their roles and are exposed to the penetrating gaze of the viewers. They only express themselves for an etude, as if handing over their business cards, and back they are on their seats again. It must be no coincidence that the only instance from Brecht's *Mother Courage* amounting to a scene is the evocation of the role of the voiceless girl (played by Iben Nagel Rasmussen), who is trying to warn the city dwellers, fast asleep, of the enemy approaching. This absurd situation raises the question whether the so-called "innocent" artist may in fact be held responsible for what is happening outside the world of theatre. There seems to be no straightforward answer to this question. However, one thing is



Great Cities Under the Moon, Odin Teatret, 2003, d: Eugenio Barba, scene from a 2018 performance in the Netherlands (source: meervaat.nl)



Viktor Ivaskovics as Nelyubov in *Fabulous Men with Wings* (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

³ Hamvas, Béla: *Az öt géniusz. A bor filozófiája. (The Five Geniuses. The Philosophy of Wine)* Életünk Könyvek, 1988

clear: the diverging elements of this performance are brought together by the telegraphic “testament” of the martyred Canadian peacekeeper, who, having gone through the wars in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq, is supposed to document and represent the helplessness of the man of today. This monologue-like text montage reminds me of the scene when in the play *Fabulous Men with Wings*, directed by Attila Vidnyánszky, the actors relate in the first person singular the story of the death of the rocket constructors and disregarded cosmonauts who survived the Gulag, in order to demonstrate the here and now stage presence of the dead they have summoned.

ÁP: Narrative techniques of this kind are getting more and more common nowadays. MITEM this year had them in several performances and with different functions. In *Saigon* and *The Alien*, this type of storytelling gives an epic frame and some kind of perspective to the scene which is taking place in the present. In the case of *Saigon* for instance, at first it is as if we were watching a home cinema, discovering ourselves and our friends from decades ago, “Oh,



Szumbel Gaffarova: *Alien*, Galiaskar Kamal Tatar National Academic Theatre, d: Farid Bikchantaev (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

that’s me over there, d’you recognise me?” And then it becomes more like watching a telenovel, with subtitles indicating the number of the episode as well as the time and location, whether it is Paris or Saigon – which, after all, makes no difference, since, all along, we are staying in the very same Vietnamese canteen, equipped with naturally specific objects. Moreover, the restaurant’s owners are amateur actors who have been doing the same in real life. *The Alien*, like *Saigon*, is set in the same stage space all through the play: we see a wooden house, which turns out to be a replica of the one where the protagonist once lived in Tartary. So, although a Canadian resident for decades, he is surrounded by the same environment as if he was at home. That is why he does not bring himself to return to his homeland. If you come to think of it, both stories are actual descriptions of statelessness in which the genius loci loses sense indeed⁴, but these

⁴ See Gertrude Stein’s enigmatic remark of the United States: “there is no there” commented on by Northrop Frye in his *Words with Power* as follows: “...meaning, I suppose, that the beckoning call to the horizon, which had expanded the country from one ocean to the other in the nineteenth century, had now settled into a cultural uniformity in which every place was like every other place, and so equally <<here>>”, p. 92, University of Toronto Press, 2008, quoted by J. A. Tillmann: *Az eseményhorizonton túl (Beyond the Event Horizon)*, Tipotex, 2018, pp. 116–117



Saigon, Les Hommes Approximatifs, France, d: Caroline Guiela Nguyen (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

heroes are – why? why not? – unable to take root at the new place, either. And this in-between situation does not seem to favour the plot taking a dramatic character, even if there are inexpressible historical cataclysms behind these private human life stories.

ZsSz: I also felt this in-between state during both productions. That is one reason why it was interesting when the actors at the talkback session following *Saigon* spoke positively about their dual identity, which of course may be attributed to the success of the performance, too. Anyway, France, where this production came from, has a several-hundred-year-old tradition of multiculturalism. Yet, even there, mixed language performances are – or at least that is what I presume – still a curiosity, and typical of experimental theatres mainly. The increasingly popular physical theatres, though, have ab ovo superseded verblativity. Presented by João Garcia Miguel & Teatro Ibérico from Lisboa, Garcia Lorca's play, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, which is known to bring into view the dramatic character of Spanish mentality, has been special in this respect, too. Interestingly, this Portuguese- and English-language production, in which the title character and her housekeeper are both played by male actors and there are only two in the cast for the sisters, retains its original ethnic nature. Moreover, and to our surprise, this nature is enhanced when the director has the English actor introduce the story by an ancient Japanese creation myth, that is an epic prologue, which then turns out but to serve the interpretation of the drama.



F. Garcia Lorca: *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Companhia João Garcia Miguel, d: João Garcia Miguel (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)



F. M. Dostoevsky: *The Idiot*, Jókai Theatre in Komarno, d: Martin Huba (photo: Révész Rebeka, source: kulter.hu)

Dostoevsky's recommendation that in dramatizing a novel it is actually worth creating a new piece, either by carrying through the initial idea or highlighting a particular episode⁵. In this case, however, I think the director was right when, in knowledge of the capabilities of the company and that it had two accomplished actors suitable for the role of Myshkin and Rogozhin, he set out to create such a production as is able to introduce the spectator who is just getting acquainted with Dostoevsky to the world of the novel and the theatre at the same time.



Saulius Šaltenis: *Sons of a Bitch*, Klaipėda Drama Theatre, d: Eimuntas Nekrošius (photo: D. Matvejev, source: mitem.hu)

ÁP: Of course, the basis for success here is an excellent drama, which can even withstand that the characters' innermost passions be conveyed in a completely abstract space by physical theatre tools. *The Idiot* is also based on a masterpiece which remains intact from even such a cut-back interpretation as for example director Andrzej Wajda's two-character play in Krakow, with Myshkin and Rogozhin over the body of Nastasya Filippovna. Nonetheless, Jókai Theatre in Komarno, Slovakia (d: Huba Martin), essentially put the entire, even if somewhat slimmed down, plot on stage, ignoring

ZsSz: It is not only the problem of dramatic quality which arises in the case of narrative texts – novels and short stories. I think it is much more a question of what kind of theatricality it is which can breathe life into these texts, and how these figures can make it from page to stage. An example of this dilemma at MITEM 2019 was *Sons of a Bitch* directed by Eimuntas Nekrošius, who passed away last year. This world-famous Lithuanian director is notable exactly for creating a whole new stage language in his home

⁵ See Király, Gyula: *Dosztoevszkij és az orosz próza (Dostoevsky and Russian Prose)*. Regénypoétikai tanulmányok. Akadémiai Kiadó, 1983

country through the concrete, and at once symbolic use of ancient elements and objects. The selected postmodern novel, in the making for 20 years before the regime change, is not yet available in Hungarian. Still, the focus of the production – so abundant in texts – emerges clearly: it is the self-image of the Lithuanian people, the historical background of its identity as well as the pagan and Christian roots of its faith. Nevertheless, no matter how much we are accustomed to the form of narration represented



Vaszil Stefanik: *Morituri Te Salutant*,
Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre,
d: Dmitro Bogomazov (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

here by Karvelis, the ringer (Darius Meškauskas), who holds together the threads of the story and their symbolic imagery, this magic trick was hard for the Hungarian viewer to decode. The director of the production *Morituri te salutant* by Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre, Kiev, Ukraine, also faced a tough nut to crack when he staged the best-known short stories of the Ukrainian national author, Vasyl Stefanyk. Ditro Bogomazov did not even make an attempt to create characters individualised in the dramatic sense of the fancifully poverty-stricken figures in the collection of short stories. He preferred to use the tools of stage animation, showcasing its entire arsenal. The actors moving about in the abstracted space, just like on the puppet stage, sometimes set into motion only one part of their body, sometimes join three persons to form one, sometimes act as singers or instrumental musicians to represent the collective Self, which or who emerges in the spectator's consciousness by the end of the performance as, behold, here is the Ukrainian man, here is the national genius who comes out on top in the most impossible situations in life! The key to his success lies apparently in that every move he makes springs from the playfulness of homo ludens. As a viewer, I had the impression that professional and ethnic identity mutually reinforce each other and fully overlap in this production.

ÁP: However, Eirik Stubø's production is expressly about professional identity and its crisis. Throughout the performance, we are looking at the three protagonists of Tarkovsky's film, *The Sacrifice*, in an in-between situation, during a forced time out in filming, when the question of the final motives for making film or theatre inadvertently arises. In other words, we are witnessing a classic "theatre in the theatre", with that at stake whether these Swedish actors, who are now playing themselves so to say, will find common ground with the Russian director whose mindset they are tightly bound to via the great



Erland Josephson: *One Night in the Swedish Summer*, Dramaten, The Royal Dramatic Theatre, d: Eirik Stubø (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

Swedish director, Ingmar Bergman. Will they be able to escape from the captivity of the double mirror in which they now see caricatures of themselves and each other? Will they not fall back into the over-reflected and alienated state of existence, which was, in fact, not the invention of postmodern or post-dramatic theatre, but the spirit of the 1960s? This inner drama is authentically brought to life on stage by middle-aged actors who grew up with Bergman's films and therefore personally carry the "Swedish code", thanks to which they are able to pose, beyond continuous self-reflection, the

ultimate existential questions to one another and themselves of faith, love, death or loyalty to one's profession.

ZsSz: Actor's life as a theme is the same, but the approach is characteristically different in the production by Divadlo Na Zábřadli theatre, *Hamlets* (d: Jan Mikulášek), representing a comic variety, traceable back to the Middle Ages, of the Czech theatre tradition. At first glance, this play, with the women's dressing room in the theatre as a location, may seem like a revueish garland of cabaret jokes, gags and sketches. The jokes follow each other in such quick succession and with such abrupt changes in perspective that what we see is both ridiculous and astonishing or embarrassing. The spectator is wondering more



Jan Mikulášek, Dora Viceníková and Co.: *Hamlets*, Divadlo Na Zábřadli, d: Jan Mikulášek (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

and more what the aim of this piece is, which reveals with unabashed sincerity the clichés of the acting profession, the superficialities in playing and the nerve-wrecking daily routine. It may remind us of Stanislavski's statement when he compared the actor to a gold digger whose work is ninety-nine percent stonebraking, and only one percent is the award for which he has taken up acting with the "stubbornness of a person in love". The gradually darkening overall image shows the

full physical, psychic and intellectual exposure of the victim of the profession. His escape attempt is futile because he comes to realise that he cannot accept the loneliness of mass man in a consumer society, so to exist in this 'colourful hell' is still a better choice for him. So this conclusion is not lacking in a socially critical attitude, either: here, theatre as a cruel life substitute confronts the outside world, the "unbearable ease" of being for European man.

ÁP: Earlier MITEMs also saw plenty of productions focussing specifically on the cultural heritage and / or identity crisis of ethnic communities. To mention but a few of the memorable examples: the mythical hero of the Hungarian people was memorably evoked by *Isten ostora (Flagellum Dei)* (d: Attila Vidnyánszy, 2015) about Attila, king of the Huns, taking a secessionist piece, Miklós Bánffy's drama on Attila from the early twentieth century as a starting point. The shared "ethnic code" of the Eurasian Turks was marked in the performance by Éva Kanalas's archaic recitative, which she composed of Hungarian cradle songs as well as Tuvan shamanic songs. Another piece worth remembering is the Yakut *Titus Andronicus* (d: Sergei Potapov) featuring at MITEM 2016, which was able to bring to the surface the most archaic layer of Shakespeare's drama through relating the story in the language of heroic epics which bears the Yakut ethnogenesis and archaic tribal culture, incorporating the Olonko tradition.⁶

ZsSz: Many did not consider the Jindo island, South Korea, Ssitgimgut shamanic ritual, celebrated in the same year by Korean traditionalists, as a theatrical production. This funeral ceremony would have deserved more attention though not only on account of its exotic nature, but also because drama and theatre are rooted in the rites of the cult of the dead in all cultures around the world. With respect to its stage realisation, *The Legend of Korkut* (d: Jonas Vaitkus), presented by the Kazakhs at MITEM this year, also narrates in a ritualized form the story of the way in which the mythical ancestor of the Kazakhs died. In connection with the film extract used in the



Iran-Gajip: *Legend of Korkut*, Kazakh State Academic Drama Theatre named after M. O. Auezov, d: Jonas Vaitkus (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

⁶ See Pálfi, Ágnes – Szász, Zsolt: "Ez egy valóságos színházavató volt! Gyorsjelentés a harmadik MITEM-ről." ("It Has Been a Real Inauguration of Theatre! A Flash Report on MITEM III") *Szcenárium*, May 2016, pp. 48–49; Tömöry, Márta: "De ha a légynek apja, anyja van? TIIT: a jakut Titus Andronicus ("But how, if that fly had a father and mother?" TIIT: the Yakut Titus Andronicus), id., pp. 70–80



The title character Duliga Akmolda (bottom centre) with the beautiful Sarin (above) and the two death figures (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

production, the symbolic reading also offers itself that the author of the play, Iran-Gayip, would in fact be identical with this culture hero, squabbling with the creator of the world, Tengri.

ÁP: On a personal encounter with the author, we could see that as far as the role and dedication of the artist is concerned, he shares views with Attila József, who derives himself as well as his poetic genius from his ancestors: *"They speak to me, for not I am they, robust / Despite whatever weakness made me frail, / And I think back that I am*

more than most: / Each ancestor am I, to the first cell." (A *Dunánál* – *By the Danube*, translated by Vernon Watkins).⁷ As for the title character of the play, Dulida Akmolda reminds me not of the culture hero, but more of Jesus, the son of god, who [Dulida Akmolda], according to the lineage in the story, will be followed by his son named Kazak, the originator of the name of the nation.

ZsSz: But once we are looking for the "ethnic code" in the mode of acting, we find that it only becomes really tangible at the dramatic climax of the story. It happens in the series of scenes directly preceding Korkut's life sacrifice, the conflict situation of which is akin to the "love test" story line in the treasure chest of Hungarian balladry or as can be found in ancient Greek drama, too (see Euripides' *Alcestitis*). From this series of scenes counterpointing the tragic denouement, created in the spirit of *parodia sacra*, one could infer the mode of acting which Kazakh theatre may continue to cultivate as its own ethnic tradition even today. However, the performance as a whole, thanks certainly to the Lithuanian director and composer, was characterised more by the toolbox of contemporary world theatre and multimediality, as well as the choreographed movement culture which reminded me of the former revue productions by the Soviet-Russian nationalities. Many of us missed the live sound of the Kazakhs' national instrument, the *kobyz*, which is otherwise playing a key role in this mythical creation story.

ÁP: Ukraine is a young nation-state, like Kazakhstan. No three decades have yet passed since it seceded from the Soviet Union, and it is going through

⁷ 1976, *Hundred Hungarian Poems*, Albion Editions, Manchester
https://www.magyarulbabelben.net/index.php?page=work&interfaceLang=en&literatureLang=hu&translationLang=all&auth_id=127&work_id=512&tran_id=1766&tr_id=0&tran_lang=en

the most intense stage of its search for identity today. By a strange quirk of fate, the day after the premiere of *Coriolanus* at Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a language law violating the fundamental human rights of the Hungarian minority there. So it was a bold decision by both national theatres to opt for this particular Shakespeare play for MITEM 2019, which piece, as the director, Dmitro Bogomazov said at the talkback session, can be interpreted as a parable of today's Ukrainian political relations. (Involving the failure of democracy and dictatorship at the same time, the play was banned by no accident in Stalin's Soviet Union.) However, the success of the production is not attributable to this obvious political topicality, but to the high-calibre director, who approached this ancient story from the elevated point of view in the original work. It is as if Shakespeare had created a counter-piece to *Macbeth* by this play: while Macbeth as a victorious warlord seizes also spiritual power

via regicide, the tragedy of *Coriolanus* stems from his unwillingness to use the power offered to him. It is, on the one hand, because he cannot, and does not want to comply with the rules of the game disguised as democratic, and, on the other hand, because he realizes that his military virtues and strength of character do not yet predestine him to become also the spiritual leader of the community. It is, in fact, this insoluble contradiction that leads to the voluntary sacrifice of his life, which, in the light of the protagonist's (Dmitro Ribalevsky) remark at the talkback session (ie. there are very many Coriolanus in Ukraine today), makes one think indeed.

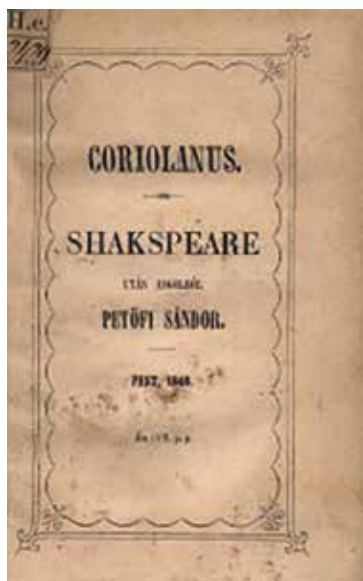
ZsSz: It is no accident that the symbolic object in the performance is the Roman statue from the hand of which Marcius captures his all-powerful sword.



W. Shakespeare: *Coriolanus*, Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre, d: Dmitro Bogomazov (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)



Scene from the performance, with the title character Dmitro Ribalevsky in the middle, and his mother, wife and child in the play (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)



Equally indicative is the fact that in Act Two the very same statue is present already deprived of its divine rank, as a decapitated torso only. This pathos-filled production reminded me to ask why Sándor Petőfi encouraged his poet friends, Vörösmarty and Arany, on the day after the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution, to translate Shakespeare's works, and why his choice fell exactly on *Coriolanus*. I venture to say that this was because he, as a poet-king, looked upon military virtues as some human ability on a par with spirituality, an ambition to rescue the nation. This piece very rarely plays in Hungary, that is why it would be exciting if young actors at the National Theatre in Budapest took up staging Petőfi's *Coriolanus* in their own interpretation for the

2023 bicentenary. Then it would be possible to tell whether these great driving forces behind national romanticism still existed for them.

ÁP: It also took some courage for the National Theatre to invite the Berliner Ensemble's company for the second time. In fact, it had been uncertain until the last minute whether they would accept, because we, the inviters, had failed to meet their precondition of holding a roundtable discussion with the theme of democracy deficit in Hungary prior to their performance. In the end, there was only a proclamation presented by them at the MITEM press conference to express their faith in the liberal concept of democracy. Compared to this, their choice, *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams, was free from any topical political allusions. I remember that a member of the most likable young company remarked at the talkback session that they themselves had asked when rehearsals began whether what message could be conveyed by this piece today. They added that they were also surprised by the success of the performance at home and abroad.

ZsSz: It needs to be acknowledged that Michael Thalheimer's rendition is a thoroughly professional one, and that the German actors did their very best, like in last year's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *The Tin Drum*. However, I found the two former productions more exciting than this year's one on account of the elemental power in the determination to artistically process the German people's 20th century traumas. At the same time, the stage space of *A Streetcar Named Desire* will, I think, remain memorable to all of us: a space triangle cut out of a huge cube, with an inward opening floor tilted at an angle of 30 degrees, where mere coming and going amounts to a breakneck stunt for the actors. This designer-director's concept makes it clear from the outset that

everything in this production will be about comedown. What I as a spectator perceive elementally is that I am beginning to worry about the actors' safety, therefore I am compelled to identify with the physical efforts they are making in order to stay alive. This pre-calculated mechanism stays in effect throughout the performance, which I, a man of feeling, cannot get rid of.

ÁP: This is precisely why we have the overall image emerging that while the characters played by the actors are heroically tackling this almost impossible task, the material challenges of life deprive them of their energy to conquer social conventions as moral beings. To overcome those reflexes which stifle their spiritual aspirations, and do not let them find a solution to their – in fact – not at all hopeless life situation. That is why Blanche and Mitch's planned marriage fails, as a result of which Blanche is no longer able to stay, even in the physical sense, on her feet, thenceforth crawling up and down the slope in her wedding dress. Perhaps it is this directorial reading of the play, having premiered in 1947, that captivates the European spectator who, accordingly, experiences the same dichotomy in their daily lives.

ZsSz: Still, if you take only Blanche's spiritual trauma itself, it could easily be remedied by an ordinary psychologist in America today. Since no matter how shocking the autobiographical background to the play is, the story itself now seems more melodramatic than tragic. To puzzle out why, in contrast, interest has never been lost in Chekhov's dramas (played in a nostalgic and melodramatic tone in Hungary in the 1960s, at the time Tennessee Williams's piece was discovered) goes beyond the scope of this discussion. Yet it is worth asking the question itself, because this year's MITEM featured as many as three of Chekhov dramas. This also indicates what we have seen in Hungary over the past few years, too, that playing Chekhov is enjoying a worldwide renaissance again. However, these recent productions do not resemble the interpretations



Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*,
Berliner Ensemble, d: Michael Thalheimer
(photo: Matthias Horn, source: nachtkritik.de)



The closing scene of the performance
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)



The final scene after Ivanov's death
in A. P. Chekhov's *Ivanov*, National Theatre
in Belgrade, d: Tanja Mandić Rigonat
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

of the '70s and '80s, which were characterized, in both the East and the West, by a kind of cool aestheticization, a rococo-like stylization, as if time around Chekhov's figures had frozen.

ÁP: The intimate familiarity and full-bloodedness, together with the "museum-like" stage space of *Ivanov* by the Serbian National Theatre, directed by Tanja Mandić Rigonat, reminds me of the efforts these days to try and fill empty exhibition halls with life by all sorts of performances so that visitors feel at home among high-culture works of art. Contrary

to the director's statement⁸, however, I think this performance is not so much the live museum of Ivanov's (Nikola Ristanovski) as of the other characters' in the play. For the title character of the drama, with his so-called impossible questions and obsessive search for the meaning of existence, would by no means fit into a group picture of the typical figures of the play to be hung on a museum wall. These characteristic Chekhov figures who surround the protagonist seem to have an everlasting life, though. The vividness of the explicitly realistic, and occasionally naturalistic mode of acting, as well as the proximity of the playing area to the viewer, suggest that their unbridled gestures, hedonistic mentality and insane illusions are still to be encountered anytime, anywhere. This concreteness is counterpointed by the fourth element in the playing area: the still tableau, or still life of the band on the podium placed behind the empty picture frame. It is this symbolic medium of art where the dead wife (Nada Šargin), donning her wedding dress, will also enter. This directorial solution not only emphasizes her loneliness, but also expresses that her detachment is different from Ivanov's, who commits suicide as an escape: Anna Petrovna transitions from life into the museum space of remembrance as the statue of an unrealized artist.

ZsSz: Nonetheless, at the end of the other Chekhov piece this year, Tuminas's *Uncle Vanya*, there is indeed a group photo taken, which stiffens the characters for a moment and freezes them into a tableau. Yet this photo machine is not a camera, but a *laterna magica*, the ancestor of the projector. In a much earlier scene, Astrov (whose name speaks for itself referring to the world of stars) presents the true story of his life condensed into three images to Sonya,

⁸ See interview with the director in the January 2019 issue of *Szcenárium* as attachment to Verebes, Ernő: "A lélek múzeuma" ("The Museum of the Soul"), pp. 41–43

who is staring into the contraption. The first picture shows a wide open place, the second one a garden cultivated by himself, and the third one a misty sunset. Another key scene of seeing and making seen is when, in the course of a conversation, Uncle Vanya, out of the blue, but in the most natural way in the world, lifts a glass strip from the carpenter's bench, chars it over a candle, and gazes at the sun through it; then he hands it over to Sonya, who will also get immersed in the sight. We are looking at them and we can imagine what they see. The only disturbing factor is that from the background, in the middle, there is a stone lion staring at us throughout the whole performance. We do not know what this petrified gaze can see of the performance and of us. One thing is certain: the characters in the play are moving in the crossfire of the spectators' and this mythical being's eyes. If we want to decode Tuminas' directorial thought and the mechanism of action in the production, I think it is worthwhile to take this complex vision as a starting point.

ÁP: In an interview⁹ after the Moscow premiere of the piece, Tuminas regrets that theatre practitioners today tend to forget about the “third eye”. He says, putting it straightforwardly, that acting would need to be taking place in front of the cosmic gaze of the unknown (divine) being above us in order to establish a dialogue between the actors on stage and the spectators. I think this enigmatic lion figure makes this particular third eye present here. And through the solar symbolism, it also represents the higher, cosmic level of existence



Vladimir Vdovichenko as Astrov with the magic lantern in *Uncle Vanya* (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)



A. P. Chekhov: *Uncle Vanya*, The State Academic Vakhtangov Theatre, d: Rimas Tuminas (photo: Roman Boldyrev, source: r-lerman.ca)

⁹ See “A gyöngéd erő színháza. Rimas Tuminas és Mayia Pramatarova beszélgetése” (“Theatre of Gentle Power. Rimas Tuminas and Mayia Pramatarova in Conversation”) (transl. and ed. Regéczi, Ildikó), *Szcenárium*, May 2019

which the characters in this piece – with the pale-glimmer lampshade floating over them in the background to symbolize the setting sun– can only look at through the sooty glass (by the way, this lamp may also refer to the Sun’s loss of vitality, its eclipse). Let me add that 19th-century Russian literature boasts fallen “sun heroes” as well; Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov and Stavrogin exhibit this mythical format¹⁰.

Zsolt Szász: It is a commonplace that Chekhov’s dramas have no real dialogues, no interchange, the characters keep talking past one another, and they are in the state of continuous monologue. Many people still think that this is what makes these plays epic, and that the director should first and foremost have the actors say these monologues so-called authentically. Others misunderstand, in my view, why Chekhov calls his plays comedies when most of his stories end in death, or at least ‘Chekhov’s gun’ is always there to go off at the end of the play. The radical novelty of Tuminas’s interpretation of *Uncle Vanya*, like Purcarete’s *The Cherry Orchard*’s¹¹, lies in approaching the plot, as well as the texts recorded in the drama, from theatricality. Both directors cut and break these large bodies of texts to a great extent, and have the characters say their own lines in a way that they are simultaneously acting out what they verily think and want to do in the meantime. The most conspicuous example of

it in *Uncle Vanya* is when the title character (Sergei Makovetsky) is beginning to undress while saying his lines, then jumps onto the couch turned with its back to the audience, and only his legs protrude, which looks as if he was fornicating with the professor’s wife, Yelena Andreyevna (Anna Dubrovskaya). The scene is more than comic, evoking the burlesque style of silent films, just like the unsuccessful attempt later to shoot the professor. This extremely theatrical approach overrides the “solemn anthem of



Uncle Vanya after the scene of “coveted fornication” (source: vakhtangov.ru)

¹⁰ See Porfiry Petrovich talking to Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, encouraging him that after he has served his sentence, a bright future awaits him: “... What of it that perhaps no one will see you for so long? It’s not time, but yourself that will decide that. Be the sun and all will see you. The sun has before all to be the sun” pp. 643 <https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/crime-and-punishment.pdf>

¹¹ Productions born at the National Theatre in Budapest and featured at MITEM 2019 are not reviewed here. Purcarete’s *The Cherry Orchard* is an exception to provide a fuller picture of the nature of Chekhov’s renaissance.

hope”¹² in Uncle Vanya and Sonya’s closing scene, and underlines the paradox Tuminas has referred to in the above-mentioned conversation, alluding to Pushkin: “... Comedy is not intended to amuse viewers, or to evoke a chuckle, it is not a call to laugh, because (...) more often than a tragedy, it has a tragic end.”¹³

ÁP: All this reminds me of an astonishing experience back in the mid-seventies of the last century. As a visiting graduate with a Russian studies major, I made friends at the Moscow hostel called ‘house for aspirants’ with PhD students, one of whom always related her own life drama during the ritual evening “tea ceremony”. And I noticed that these feminine confessions of a melodramatic tinge, each and all of them, seemed to have been cut out of Chekhov monologues

and reproduced in a customized way. I believe that this perpetual propensity in human nature for self-pity greatly contributes to the enduring popularity of Chekhov dramas. As far as the comic aspect of this phenomenon is concerned, these Chekhov monologues are, in fact, parodies of romantic prose popular in the era, including even the solemn lines of certain romantic-spirited Dostoevsky heroes. Let me remark that parody as such is a most central concept in Russian literary theory; it is enough to refer to the work of Bahtin alone.

ZsSz: As a theatre practitioner, of all his writings, I have made the most of Bahtin’s study on “folk laughter”. Having seen several of Purcarete’s directions, if I had to define the genre of *The Cherry Orchard* in one word, I would say that it was also a death dance, like his *Gulliver* and *Faust*. This medieval genre is never concerned with lonely individuals’ sadness rooted in the fact of death, but with the collective experience that life does not let us become immersed in the dread of the awareness of the finality of human existence. But again, this presupposes that the command of “memento mori” should be integrated into our everyday lives.



Ranevskaya (Dorottya Udvaros) and Firs (Zsolt Trill) in *The Cherry Orchard* at the National Theatre, Budapest (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

¹² cf. Szigethi, András: *Az egzisztenciális idő Csehov drámájában. Ványa bácsi* ('Existential Time in Chekhov's Dramatic Poetics: *Uncle Vanya*'), *Szcenárium*, January 2019, pp. 35

¹³ cf. *ibid.*



A. P. Chekhov: *The Cherry Orchard*, National Theatre, Budapest, 2019.
d: Silviu Purcărete, the final scene (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

ÁP: It is no coincidence that archaic evening prayers also include this formula: “Into my bed I lie down sleeping, my body’s coffin every evening” (where the Hungarian original boasts a poetic surplus raising awareness to the relationship between the words for ‘evening’ and ‘body’). But nowadays, people are forcefully argued out of this “outdated” approach both by mass communication as well as postmodern philosophers, who think that our death is an event beyond our control. By that it is also suggested that there is no point in taking the ethical imperative of “memento mori” seriously, so, to put it bluntly, we have no chance of daily resurrection, either.¹⁴

ZsSz: *The Cherry Orchard* is known to be the death-stricken Chekhov’s last drama, or his farewell symphony, if you like (it premiered at the Moscow Art Theatre just six months before his death). The personal involvement is strongly emphasized in the motif of chopping down cherry trees in blossom. The drastic nature of this, the aggressive form of the deliberate destruction of life, is brought to our attention by the sound of the chainsaw and the immediate vacuuming up of the sawdust. But an even stronger emphasis is placed, in the symbolic handling of the story, on the fact that the actors are playing on a plastic surface, illuminated from above, which, by spreading it, reflects light multiplicatively. This has the same effect as the downstage illumination by candles and mirrors of former Baroque stages, which turned the characters into larval-faced ghosts. This scenic solution may give today’s spectator the feeling that those who step up here are all already dead. The real world is to be seen dimly behind a translucent plastic foil stretched across the full width of the back

¹⁴ “There is just one real thing happening to man in life, and it is death. But it is only a thud. It does not even have time to hurt. Death has no dimension, has no world. It is only the idea of it, its conception, its embellishment and ritualization, in one word, its culture, which may have a world – however, it is just as unreal as anything in human life. Cf. Szilágyi, Ákos: *Halálbarokk. A semmi polgárosítása (Death Baroque. The Civilization of Nothing)*, Palatinus, 2007, pp. 137–138

stage, where passage is possible only through a narrow doorway. Through which, from beyond, only Tramp-Firs, donating thirty kopeks, that is Death alone can enter the acting area. It is worth mentioning here what Purcarete's instructions to Zsolt Trill, playing the old servant Firs, were: "You are 500 years old in this role".

ÁP: By this the director has also drawn attention to the fact that time dimensions are beyond the realm of everyday reality on this stage. In the light of the closing image, we may even risk that this stage is already the gateway to apocalypse, and that is why the characters in the play keep putting off crossing this threshold. Whereas all of them have, in fact, stepped over the boundaries of social conventions and are able to

do things intolaterated by etiquette not only at the time when the piece was written, in 1904, but even today. An outstanding example of this is the scene of Ranyevskaya (Dorottya Udvaros) sitting in the lap of the student living with the landowner family and obsessed with anarchist ideas (Roland Bordás). Watching the play of their extended arms, it is impossible to tell who is having the upper hand in this battle of sexes and generations. This duet scene proves that, as with Tuminas, dialogue is not necessarily textual, and that the meta-language of gestures on stage may have an elemental effect on the viewer. No wonder that an acquaintance of mine showed special interest in the anarchist, played by Roland Bordás, saying even that had Chekhov foreseen the outbreak of the revolution in 1905, he would not have written this piece. Although this assumption may raise a smile, it certainly proves that Purcărete uses his usual radical means in this directing, too, and that he also reflects on specific current events. For example, Roland has told us that the director advised him to take the personality of a 1968 French activist, still active in European public life, as a model for building the character.¹⁵



Duet between Dorottya Udvaros (Ranevskaya) and Roland Bordás (Trofimov) in *The Cherry Orchard* (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

¹⁵ Barnard-Henri Lévy is currently campaigning with his self-staged mono-drama, *Looking for Europe*, across Europe, and also met Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in April 2019.



ZsSz: MITEM has been characterized by multigenericity over the years, as well as by an ambition to have the opening ceremonies reach out to the general public. Remember the environmental productions of Teatro Potlach and Teatro Tascabile, or the 2018 Chekhov adaptation by the Ukrainian Voskresinnia Theatre in the bow. This year's opening ceremony was different from the previous ones in the novelty of both genre and venue. Slava Polunin's *Snowshow* at the Fővárosi Nagycirkusz (Capital Circus of Budapest) proved that circus art has been able to successfully renew itself over the past decades by taking possession of the tools of theatrical art. In return, we can see nowadays that the young



Slava Polunin and his clown companion
in *Slava's Snowshow* (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

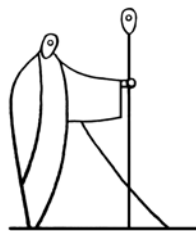
generation of actors is becoming more and more receptive to circus art, is eager to learn the stunts of circus artists and acrobats as well as acquire the necessary physical skills. The *Snowshow* went down quite well with the public, children and adults alike; yet many in the profession asked: where does it have theatre in it? Presumably, they were overwhelmed by the bombastic theatricality of the show: the paper snowstorm to flood the audience, the clowns who kept insulting them, and finally the common passing around of the giant balloons.

One may wonder if telling the tragicomedy of the little man in the language of gestures, as Polunin puts it, has failed to get across to them. Actually, this production aspired to represent the ancient form of theatre, the world of comedians, carnival figures and court fools, who, balancing on the border between life and death, obtained the wisdom that no king could ever be devoid of in times gone by.

Translated by Nóra Durkó



mitem 2021



EUGENIO BARBA

How to Become an Actor*

The Asian tradition of the *guru*, *sensei*, *ta shi*, the older master who knows

For centuries, in Asia and in Europe, continuity and the seeds of change in theatre practice have been rooted in a situation in which apprenticeship took place in a real work situation, not separated from that of the public exercise of the profession. The process of learning was pragmatic and was integrated into the daily routine of repetition, variation and competition within a family or a company.

In Asia, apprenticeship in traditional theatres has always been based, on the one hand, on the professional authoritativeness of the master, the *guru* (India), the *sensei* (Japan), the *ta shi* (China) and, on the other, on the tradition (or the breaking of tradition) that they represent.

In Asia, the relationship between master and pupil was (and often still is) modelled on the relationship between parents and children, in a culture in which the authority of the parents is absolute and, equally, their commands represent a moral imperative. In many cases it actually is a question of biological parents and children. In others the master ‘adopts’ the chosen pupil, giving the child his or her family name and thus creating a veritable dynasty as with kabuki, no and certain families of actors and dancers in Bali and India. Like kings and popes, great kabuki actors succeed one another in a long line in which the different individuals are distinguished by a number indicating the continuity

* Here is the second part of the study. In the first part Barba introduces the concepts of *acculturation* and *inculturation*: “Actors have followed two separate paths to re-elaborate spontaneity. As a point of departure they have adopted a process of *acculturation*, which imposes new models of behaviour; or else they have started out from the behaviour that they individually unwittingly learn since childhood within the culture in which they have grown up, according to those processes we call *inculturation*.” Eugenio Barba – Nicola Savarese: *The Five Continents of Theatre. Facts and Legends about the Material Culture of the Actor*, Brill/Sense, Leiden/Boston, 2019, 160–165.

of a single lineage running through the changing generations: Ichikawa Danjuro I, Ichikawa Danjuro II, Ichikawa Danjuro III up until Ichikawa Danjuro XII, spanning the period from 1660 to the present day.

Learning consists of much practical routine work, of imitation and identification with the professional norms embodied by the master. In addition to the pupil's professional duties, there are sometimes filial ones such as taking care of the day-to-day needs of the master-parent. In return, the parent-master feels responsible for the development of the pupil-son (or daughter), and not merely for his ability within the profession.

The process of selection is a personal one: the learner chooses the master and the master, the learners. The long period of trial before making a final choice allows possible merits and weaknesses to come to light on both sides. This is the very opposite of what happens in modern theatre schools of any continent where the entrance exam lasts an hour at the most and attempts to take into account the aspiring pupil's talent, maturity, age, previous studies and predisposition towards the art.

In the traditional relationship between master and pupil, *learning by doing* is not limited to three or four years, but takes place in a slow succession of phases allowing the pupil to absorb and take possession of the craft. This craft does not consist merely of skills but also of certain intuitive knowledge for which no rules exist. There is no didactic system or formalised method of teaching when it comes to matters such as how long to insist on certain details, how to confront an impasse during the rehearsals, or how to deal with the conflicts that arise in the working relationships.

If it is true that the art of the actor cannot be taught, and yet that certain people can learn it, this means that *the characteristics of the relationships within the working environment* make more or less possible the assimilation of scenic knowledge.



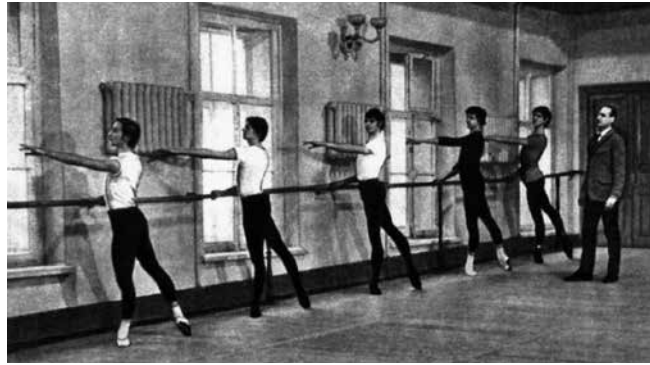
The path of acculturation. Apprenticeship at the Beijing Opera (photo circa 1950)

In many traditions, in Asia as in classical ballet, emphasis is placed on the silent aspect of apprenticeship in which words are considered to be superfluous. The skills and values that the pupil gradually incorporates are not necessarily translatable into precise formulas. When an apprenticeship is successful, the pupils know far more than they think they know. Only later, when they themselves are ready to become teachers, do they begin to question themselves about

the principles that are implicit in what they have incorporated.

The masters – the gurus – have many faces. They are keepers of technical knowledge as well as spiritual guides. They are a professional and a moral authority, masters and parents and, at the same time, head of the working ensemble or family. They are the indisputable judge of the quality of the work, thus enabling the pupil not to be kept on a tight rein by the fickle and imprecise tastes of the public. This way of guaranteeing the handing down of experience appears today to be ‘archaic’ and contrasts with the criteria which rule modern society. It survives with difficulty and is an exception, an exoticism. Today those who train for the theatre profession rarely manage to resist the need to do many things and all of them in a hurry, programming their time, the curriculum and the itinerary to be taken. A way of thinking

prevails in which having your own personality means *doing without* outside influences instead of constantly *struggling* with them. Very soon there will be no true gurus left, not so much because they themselves will disappear, but because the conditions which make their function possible will no longer exist. Gurus are being replaced by teachers and theatre schools.



The path of acculturation. Apprenticeship in classical ballet – mandatory in theatre schools until 1968 (photo circa 1930)



The path of inculturation. A class in reading aloud at the Catalan School of Dramatic Art in Barcelona, founded in 1913; today it is the Theatre Institute (photo circa 1920)

The European tradition of the collective guru

In the tradition of western theatre, which has the path of inculturation as its point of departure, there has never been anything comparable to the Asian apprenticeship guaranteed by the relationship with a guru. It is true that often, in the history of western theatre, experience seemed to pass from parents to

children since many actors came from a family of performers. But even when actors received their training in their family, the learning process did not involve the intensity and the dangerous relationship characterising the bond between the guru and the pupil in India or Japan.

Nevertheless there was a guru: a collective one.

Let us see what happened when an actor was trained within a western theatre company or by moving from one company to another. There was no separation between the moment of learning and that of exercising the profession. The environment with its hierarchies, habits, customs and tacit rules of behaviour shaped the attitude of the apprentice towards the craft. It provided a vast range of artistic models, some based on routine, others on exceptional originality. They could be observed at close hand, evening after evening for months and years, opening possibilities for choices and comparisons.

In the beginning the learner imitated. But s/he could decide on the direction to take, thereby discovering a didactic path in a context with many examples of high quality. By combining imitated elements, selecting them here and there and reorganising them, s/he was able to obtain original effects.

The apprentice played small roles (he was a kind of unskilled theatre worker and as such suffered financial exploitation) until faced by the challenge of a more demanding role which provided him with a foothold to advance in his career. He did not have a master with the time and desire to dedicate himself to him. From time to time his fellow actors – the more experienced and skilful of them – let fall a word of advice or a piece of practical information. It was a reticent form of teaching, one drop at a time, with many voices and often abounding in contradictions mingled with manifestations of indifference, disapproval or appreciation from the spectators.

The young actor was moulded by the presence of two different audiences: spectators and fellow actors. The first were quick to applaud and to disapprove, and ferocious in their indifference; the second were more sceptical and cautious, familiar with the tricks of the trade, difficult to surprise or convince, clever at noticing the details and symptoms of a so-far unexpressed potentiality, accustomed to fighting against the audience's tastes without giving in. The older actors' language, information and explanations contributed to developing the *reflection-in-action* of the younger inexperienced actor (a 'reflective practitioner' in today's terminology).

The rigour of the 'collective guru' was not expressed in the person of the master-parent, but through a wearisome routine with little time for indulgence and encouraging words, where nobody seemed anxious to teach, where the word 'steal' seemed more suitable than 'learn' when referring to the appropriation of a technique or of a 'secret' of the craft, where the numerous characters interpreted were at the same time the instruments and the proof of advancement in one's career, and where almost every evening one had to confront a frightening audience.

The situation of the collective guru seems wretched and chaotic when compared to the other, characterised by the presence of a master-parent. It is surprising to note, however, that in spite of appearances it was an appropriate response to a process of learning based on inculturation and in which the only fixed elements were the texts from the repertoire. Rigid relationships between master and pupil would have been counterproductive. Learning could only happen through trial and error, along the tortuous path of auto-didacticism. Auto-didacticism can be defined as the capacity to have a dialogue with a master who is not there. It presupposes the ability to discern what may be of use, laboriously picking it out from among all the information, rules, encounters, misunderstandings, relationships and clashes within the context in which one lives. It demands, above all, an attitude of hanging on doggedly to something that at first one is unable to grasp.

Today, the ongoing development of the industrial society and its ideology has fostered the illusion that an actor's learning process consists in absorbing everything that school teachers clarify on the basis of a method and an efficient didactic programme.

The first theatre schools

Since the eighteenth century in Europe, enlightened intellectuals such as Voltaire, Denis Diderot and particularly Jean-Baptiste D'Alembert considered the establishment of theatre schools to be a means of overcoming the actor's ambiguous moral and social status. Their motivations were as follows: the actors' social marginalisation is not a consequence of their profession. Their profession is marginalised because it selects its members from among the marginalised. Actors as a whole can never become a respectable and respected class. The majority of actors will continue to be recruited from among the rejected, maladjusted and asocial as long as – in order to become actors – they have to abandon their families, withdraw from the daily life of civil society and join a wandering theatre company. The schools that the intellectuals of the Enlightenment dreamed about never saw the light of day.

The first theatre schools appeared in Europe in the eighteenth century (the first school was founded in Russia as early as 1673). In the nineteenth century their numbers increased. Sometimes they were conceived as being preliminary to the engagement of actors in great theatres like the Conservatoire in Paris which was linked to the Comédie-Française, or like the school attached to the Aleksandrinsky Theatre in Moscow.² Sometimes they were small academies in which experienced

² Barba mentions "Moscow" as the home to Alexandrinsky Theatre, while it was in fact founded in St. Petersburg (- ed.).

actors taught acting to amateurs, in the same way that professional musicians, singers and ballet dancers gave lessons to children from wealthy families. There were also classes at the music conservatories and art academies based on the assumption that opera singers also had to know how to act, and that painters and sculptors could better depict the passions and actions of historical, mythological and religious heroes if they had some notion of the actor's know-how.

Alongside these schools, classes and courses, there also flourished a whole literary branch consisting of treatises on acting, recitation, declamation and gesticulation presented sometimes as a theory or – as they said at the time – a 'philosophy' of scenic art. They were written by scholars, philosophers and physiognomists (like the treatises by Sainte-Albine, Diderot's *The Actor's Paradox*, *Letters on Mimicry* by Engel), or by actors (such as Luigi and Francesco Riccoboni, David Garrick, as well as innumerable other famous performers of the nineteenth century). These schools and books constitute a pedagogical nebula that is of interest to theatre historians. On the whole, however, they had little influence on the actors' practical life where the principal way of apprenticeship was via the criteria set forth by what we have called the collective guru.

This 'pedagogical nebula', on the other hand, became influential in the twentieth century, with new tones, ambitions and prospects. It was in the twentieth century that the idea of training actors far from the routine of the craft prevailed, beyond the influence of an environment that was characterised by clichés, stereotypes and the necessity to 'tread the boards' prematurely. Acting school offered the possibility of initiating and completing a fruitful learning process and developing personal creative capacities without being exploited financially by the directors of companies. The school replaced the company and didactic programmes fulfilled the function previously implemented by the environment. While learning in a school gradually becomes the rule, the environment based on auto-didacticism becomes an anomaly to such an extent that an actor's professional identity is measured by the fact of having a graduation certificate.

Today's theatre schools

Today the term school defines different and often incomparable realities: institutions organised by the State with a general programme preparing for work, prolonged courses offered by professional actors or directors, places where experts teach the method of a known (dead) director or the style of one of the main Asian acting traditions.

The economic law of supply and demand – on the one hand those who wish to be introduced to theatre practice, and on the other those who consider they have the competence to transmit it – has made such proliferation possible. In the twentieth century a 'market of methods' springs up in which different

'masters' or traditions are treated like any other subject. A host of schools or workshops claim in their programmes to be able to introduce the pupil to the method of Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Mikhail Chekhov, Piscator, Brecht, Decroux, the Actor's Studio, The Living Theatre, Grotowski, kathakali, nŕ or the Beijing Opera.

A method is not in itself an effective formula that is successful for all those who wish to achieve a particular result. Method means literally path: it indicates a process which needs a certain context, duration, habitat, stable relationships and constant presence in order to exist. In a school one can learn perfectly how to perform the score of an Indian or Balinese dance-drama or that of the characters in the Beijing Opera or kabuki. In these cases

there is something concrete to teach. But at the cost of sterilising it, reducing it to an unalterable form whose only changes, in time, stem from a progressive lack of precision and from the attempts to simplify or emphasise the points of departure. Change is the lifeblood of tradition, based on the dialectic between preservation and innovation. This dialectic can only come about when there are artists capable of reformulating the forms that are rooted in their tacit knowledge, sometimes even making them unrecognisable.

The didactic programmes of the theatre schools are not enough, since they can only indicate the formalised knowledge that can be formulated. Such programmes are rooted in the emerging top of the iceberg and neglect the submerged part, which is value and responsibility, the student's inner processes, the creation of a personal mythology and a professional super-ego.

Then, what should be done? It would be easy to emphasise the negative aspects of apprenticeship with a traditional or a collective guru or, on the contrary, to idealise the archaic systems of theatre apprenticeship, comparing them with modern deficiencies. But the systems of the past are neither good nor bad. They are past. Our task today is to create an equivalent of their positive characteristics.



Apprenticeship in Asian
(Beijing Opera, a school in Bali)



Western traditions
(LAMDA School, London, and Paris Conservatory)

‘School theatres’: studios, workshops, laboratories

In the West, the twentieth century has been the age of theatre pedagogy. Never was there such a craving to mould the actors and reform their apprenticeship. Oddly enough, the huge legacy of acting pedagogy handed down by this century does not derive from theatre schools, but from the Studios of Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Vakhtangov and Mikhail Chekhov, the Vieux Colombier of Copeau, the Atelier of Dullin, the projects of Craig, Appia, Fuchs, Osterwa, the workshop of Piscator, the school-laboratory of Decroux, the Living Theatre, the Teatr-laboratorium of Grotowski, the decades of constant training by Odin Teatret’s actors.

It is in their anomalous theatres that the protagonists of the Great Theatre Reform give birth to the tradition of *another* apprenticeship. What was the secret longing of their pedagogical efforts? To realise an equivalent of the complexity and wholeness of an environment and a tradition.

Unlike the usual theatre schools, the Reformers understood that almost all traditional learning could disappear, apart from the capacity of organising an environment where learning is not a direct consequence of a study programme, but of an *ethos*. It is the quality of such an environment that the Reformers tried to implement, each in his own way and struggling against the trends of the time.

These heterogeneous environments – as for example the theatre groups which grew up after 1968 all over the world – may be small, consisting of only a few people. But around this nucleus, the diverse components of a theatrical culture congregate in concentric circles: actors, dancers, directors, musicians, playwrights, experts in figurative art, architects, craftsmen, scholars, intellectuals interested in historical and theoretical research into the performance arts, as well as passionate and knowledgeable spectators. Such environments give life to ‘small traditions’ which do not sink their roots into an age-old history – or one that is assumed to be so – and compensate for their young age with research into a transcultural dimension or, better still, a trans-stylistic one.

This new reality implies a vision of knowledge not as an array of information, but as an unfolding process of knowing. Learning is not thought of as the appropriation of established competences, but as continual experimental research within the domain of the performing craft. The pedagogical paradigm is replaced by that of the scientific laboratory, and it is no longer possible to differentiate between ‘school’ and ‘theatre group’.

In the changing conditions of theatre and of the socio-cultural system that surrounds it, the ‘school theatres’ adequately resolve the fundamental problem of learning. This cannot be based solely on articulated knowledge, formulated and organised in teaching programmes, but must also shape and nourish the submerged knowledge which is metabolised by each individual –



Exercises at Jerzy Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium (Poland, 1963)



Exercises at Odin Teatret (Denmark, 1967)

everything *she knows*, *without knowing that she knows it*. The school theatres involve the individual as a human being and not merely as a professional. This ambition – or illusion – to change the ‘human being’ or to ‘work on oneself’ is one of the ways in which is expressed the awareness of the fertility of the submerged and tacit parts of professional knowledge. It is from this perspective that we must look at the introduction of a training based on exercises, a practice which until this moment was absent in the apprenticeship of the European actor.

The paradox of the exercises

Stanislavski, Meyerhold and their collaborators, when they invent the exercises, devise a ‘pedagogical fiction’. Their exercises give the impression that they are pointing out something of importance, but they have nothing in common with the courses at theatre schools in which students learn singing, diction, fencing, ballet and interpret fragments or entire plays from an international repertory. All these are abilities that may be exploited in their future career.

At first the exercises appeared to be an aberration from the point of view of tradition and common sense because it was not easy to see their utility for the actor. What was the point in repeating dynamic patterns that had no direct relationship to the rehearsals, which focus on the interpretation of a character

and the immediacy of a particular effect on the spectator? Why waste so much time learning and incorporating an exercise? What are the concealed merits perceived by Stanislavski, Meyerhold and all the others who devised this way of teaching?

There are several categories of exercises, each with different objectives: overcoming obstacles and inhibitions, specialising in certain skills; freeing oneself of 'spontaneity', conditioning or mannerisms; the acquisition of a particular way of using the brain and the nervous system. The exercises do not claim to teach how to act. Often they do not even aspire to any obvious dexterity. Rather they are models of dramaturgy and composition on an organic and not a narrative level. They are pure form, a linking together of dynamic peripeteias, without a plot, but infused with information which, once embodied by the actor, constitutes 'the essence of scenic movement' as Meyerhold used to say about biomechanics. Decroux considered the exercises to be the foundation of a 'presence ready to represent'.

Through physical activity the exercises allow the assimilation of a paradoxical way of thinking, challenge daily automatisms and become rooted in the extra-daily behaviour of the stage. Even the simplest exercises presuppose a host of variations, tensions, sudden or progressive changes in intensity, an acceleration of rhythm and a breaking up of space in different directions and levels.

The fixed form of an exercise obliges students to think with the entirety of their body-mind; to make this thinking perceptible through the form of a real action (not necessarily realistic); to respect the design of the form; to point out the beginning and the end of this design; to be aware of its different phases, changes, variations and dynamic peripeteias.

The exercises are not work on a text, but on oneself. They ignore the stereotypes or the male/female conditioning of the students, testing them by confronting them with a series of obstacles, divergences and resistances which develop a self-knowledge through the encounter with their own limits and by overstepping them. The exercises result in a self-discipline that also means autonomy with respect to the expectations and habits of the profession.

In this consists the original and audacious perspective of 'the actor's work on himself' expounded by Stanislavski, of Meyerhold's biomechanics, of Vakhtangov's and Mikhail Chekhov's exercises and Decroux's series of *figures* and *attitudes*. These pioneers opened up a path followed by Grotowski, Brook, the Living Theatre and all the founders of small nomadic traditions which were kept alive by the theatre groups in 1960s and 1970s.

Behind the Reformers' exercises there is not a *knowledge* to be acquired and confirmed by belonging to a style, but there is a personal commitment in a process of *knowing* which escapes repetition. It is this process that allows the acquired knowledge to be embodied, becoming 'tacit' and acting as a second nature. It is a metabolism which presupposes a favourable environment.

Learning in an organic environment

There are environments that are formed through an organic process, and others which are aggregated mechanically. An environment is aggregated mechanically when a company signs up its actors for one production at a time, complying with the rules of casting, according to the procedures in the system of today's theatre production. Many permanent companies have an environment that has been aggregated mechanically. Here the different components (actors, technicians, directors, dramaturges) remain together for long periods, but as a corporate organisation based on the rigid division of work and functions.

To define an environment as aggregated mechanically does not imply a negative judgement. It simply means that this work environment is organised with a view to a result, and that its profile and internal dynamic must depend on the objectives it hopes to achieve. It may nurture profound personal motivations and human relationships, but this is a wish, not an automatic consequence. When the aim is the standard of quality of the product, it is essential to recruit a good team of experts, provide them with good tools and well thought out plans, and then to proceed in such a way that their relationships may function more or less harmoniously. In such cases the professional experience of the individual people in the team is a necessary condition, but their training cannot be the objective.

Other examples of mechanically aggregated environments are those schools that follow the paradigms, the formal structures and the way of thinking of the regulations (specialised teachers for the different subjects, pre-established courses, exams, diplomas). Such organisation is a necessary condition in order to guarantee the same opportunities to every single pupil. Any school that offers equal education for all must be impersonal. It may involve commitment in relationships but must exclude personal ties between teachers and pupils. The learning process is often conceived as a continuous progression from incompetence to competence. In fact, learning implies two stages connected by a period of transition. The first stage involves the acquisition of a common basic knowledge. The pupil can absorb a patrimony of impersonal knowledge, in so much as it is considered useful to everybody. The second stage is a non-scholastic one in which the totality of the acquired knowledge is adapted and absorbed in depth. Technique, as a conscious factor or a problem, disappears when the young artist masters it to such an extent that s/he can concentrate on the essential question: what to do with this technique and to what end, and what meaning to give it. This second stage, however, is preceded by a period of transition that is fundamental to the development of the individual.

In certain cases this transitional phase is clearly identified and organised. Before starting out along their own road, the young artisans of past centuries

left their master and set out on a long educative journey, going from one country and language to another, visiting different workplaces and new masters. The same thing applies today in many professions, from doctors to pilots, with a period of 'trial' or 'practical experience' between the school curriculum and the exercise of a profession. But on the whole, the students who have finished theatre school are left to their own devices and must manage alone during the decisive period in which their experience is consolidated. This is the transitional phase in which discursive knowledge must become active knowledge, capable of changing, adapting itself and interacting with the context.

Osvaldo Dragún teaching at EITALC (International Theater School for Latin America and the Caribbean). Founded in 1989 by Cuba's Casa de las Americas, EITALC was an itinerant theoretical-practical project bringing together young actors and the most important directors and theatre groups in South America. The sessions, called *talleres* (practical workshops seminars), lasted one month and took place in different countries at different times of year. Two or three directors, accompanied by a pair of their group's actors, worked with forty other participants. Osvaldo Dragún was director for many years and his advisory council included important figures in Latin American theatre: Santiago García (Colombia), Miguel Rubio (Peru), Fernando Peixoto (Brazil), Magaly Muguercia (Cuba) and Juan Carlos Gené (Argentina-Venezuela).

The quality of the apprenticeship coincides with the quality of the environment. It is a question of *ethos*, a combination of knowhow and values: a scenic behaviour but also a professional ethic.



Actors teach stage movement to opera singers (Paris Conservatory, 18th century)

Techniques of a personality and objective principles

Acting techniques are efficient only after they have been embodied and an actor, looking back, can forget the many setbacks and show the few discoveries. These techniques are evident and stimulating only when observed a posteriori. In reality each of these techniques is a micro-history, the consequence of an unrepeatable biography. The acting techniques are not body techniques, but techniques of a personality, of a body-mind that is particular and unique. It is interesting to note, however, that these personal results make a range of psychosomatic principles objectively perceptible, and these are helpful to any actor or dancer of any style in implementing a state of scenic presence which is potentially creative. The study of these principles is the field of theatre anthropology. (EB)

Theatre anthropology

Theatre anthropology is the study of the human being in a condition of organised representation, when the behaviour of the actor is determined by principles different from those of daily life. The actor's artistic results flow from the fusion of three aspects that refer to three distinct levels of organisation:

1. The personality of the actor: his or her sensibility, artistic intelligence and social persona, which make the person unique and unrepeatable.
2. The particularities of the performance genre and the historical-cultural context through which the actor's unrepeatable personality manifests itself.
3. A physical-mental presence, according to extradaily techniques of the body, in which certain recurrent transcultural principles can be identified.

The first aspect is individual; the second is common to all those who belong to the same performance genre; the third concerns all actors of every era and culture and may be defined as the 'biological' level of theatre.

The recurrent principles on the biological level permit an extra-daily utilisation of the body, which is habitually called technique. Applied to certain material factors (weight, balance, posture, spine, gaze), these principles generate tensions whose quality of energy renders the actor decided, alive, with a life or presence that attracts and stimulates the attention of the spectator.

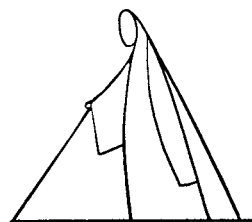
The International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) is the laboratory where, from 1980 until today (2018), fifteen research sessions lasting from two weeks to two months have taken place. The results have been published in three books: *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* (E. Barba and N. Savarese), *The Paper Canoe. A Guide to Theatre Anthropology* (E. Barba), *Thinking with the Feet* (ed. by Anne Vicky Cremona, Francesco Galli and Julia Varley).



THEODOROS TERZOPOULOS

The Return Of Dionysus*

The Body



ὡντὸς δὲ Αἰδῆς καὶ Διόνυσος

Hades and Dionysus are one and the same



A fragment of the calcite statue of *Attis* from Ephesus, 2nd century BC, Archaeological Museum of Ephesus (source: [wikimedia.org](https://www.wikimedia.org))

The performer at the center of the stage, in front of him the ecstatic God of theater, Dionysus, child of a double birth, both of Zeus and Semele, exponent of mutually exclusive and fluid identities, woman and man, angry and meek, god and animal, on the borderline between madness and logic, order and chaos. His body open to inner and outer stimuli, changing constantly, balances on a tightrope between life and death. The body of Dionysus is dismembered only to be recomposed, regenerated. In the myth's journey, Dionysus appears as Adonis in Syria, Osiris in Egypt and Attis in Phrygia. Heraclitus, in one of his dark excerpts, identifies Hades with Dionysus: *Hades and Dionysus are one and the same*.

The fertilizing Dionysus invites the performer to seek the archetypal body, hidden in the depth of his structure, oppressed and repressed by the mind. This Body, with sources of unprecedented psychophysical energy, is the performer's main material; its boundaries extend beyond the limits of the physical body. It is constantly reformed by memories deeply engraved in the performer's structure.

The performer is invited to liberate the multiple dimensions of his inner material and fruitfully cultivate the sense, the instincts, the imagination and the Idea of

* The book by world-famous contemporary Greek director on his creative method, was published in 2015 and has since been translated into 15 languages. This part is the third section of the English version titled *The Return of Dionysus – With a Preface by Erika Fischer-Lichte*, 2020.

the Core. He resists narcissism which creates a distorted image of his body. He overcomes the barriers of fatigue and tries to dilate the limits of mental and physical stamina. He develops the ability of reflective reaction to inner and outer stimuli and tries to cast off the innumerable fears and constraints imposed by everyday life.

The body-voice training helps the performer go beyond the limits of linear perception of time and space. Time loses the linearity of social conventions, expands and contracts, slows down or progresses with leaps and bounds, becomes silent, is projected in space and creates cracks in the man's compact image of the world.

The performer explores materials concerning not only the art of theater, but in a broader sense, human nature and the world. A permanent task is the liberation of the blocked energy throughout the whole creative spectrum from research to performance.

The performer's daily training does not intend to produce rapid acting results, which entrench the imagination in a closed system of inviolable technical rules. It mobilizes the functions of awareness and modulates the Body of Energy.

In modern physics *Energy* is a measure of an endogenous capacity of the body, of motion. *Energy*, then, is motion, the constant change of the body in space and time, but also the inner motion, the e-motion. *Energy* is not an abstract idea, is not implanted from outside, as an order to the performer, but is perceived as an experience and physical memory. The question arises: How will the performer's body be the carrier of the material at hand? How can the voice and the body be cultivated?

Deconstruction

το μεταβάλλον αναπαύεται
After being changed, it rests

The idea of deconstruction and the basic steps of its development were born during the workshops of Euripides' "Bacchae", the first performance of Attis Theater. This performance was the fertile soil for the creation of a working system, which has been implemented interculturally, in several places, with performers of different cultural backgrounds.

On the occasion of Bacchae, I started investigating with my actors in northern Greece the remnants of Dionysian rituals, looking stubbornly for the hidden sources of physical energy. It was a very painful and interesting research. We found in our bodies forgotten echogenic sources; through the research, we even tried to meet traces of our deepest memory.

We were improvising for hours, trying to activate our body globally, wanting to know its dark and mysterious tradition, dancing sometimes awkwardly,

twisting around in an agitated manner, trying to reconsider the world, keeping the eyes of our body opened, expanding the limits of our body, of the body which never knows its maturity. We were sensing that the body should be ready to be reformed, exposed to all kinds of stimuli, improvising constantly, maintaining a love affair with tradition; trying to unite the opposites, dancing the crazy dance of the opposites' conflict. It is shocking to feel the limits of your body penetrable, the energy channels opened and activated the places of mutating the primary materials. We were walking with the faith that our body does not need to mature, as if it was never born and each time it tries to be re-born. We were trying to provoke the uprising of deeper forces, to tear down the walls which were keeping us immersed in ourselves, to bring forth images from the space of the unconscious, to fly out of our known limits. We realized that our duty is to make the people our accomplices and let them be our partners in the long journey to the country of Memory, the country which hides the primary body and the primary language.

A means for this trip was the “exercise of deconstruction,” born and fermented during the rehearsals of *Bacchae*.

The exercise of the deconstruction of the triangle (see dvd) is the cornerstone of my work, it creates the idea of the group. The performers walk for hours, within a collective rhythm, in a circle. Their walking is natural, neutral. They maintain the sense of the triangle, keeping activated the diaphragmatic breathing, supporting the spine without unnecessary tensions. The body is as relaxed as possible. Elbows and knees bend so as to create a global sense of the body. Gradually the position of the hands changes. Firstly, they go up at shoulder height, bent, with the angulars projected and then over the head. Wrists and palms are



Euripides: *The Bacchae*, scenes from the Attis Theatre production, 1986 (source: thedelphiguide.com)

relaxed. At the beginning, the pace is very slow; the acceleration is gradual, without any hurry. At each step the soles' center roots on the ground.

The importance of the sole's contact with the ground is great, as it is a perfect miniature of the entire human organism. In the sole of the foot there are 7,200 nerve endings; as a result, the specific pressures and compressions caused by each step, create a reflective stimulus at each point and organ of the body, activating the nervous system of the organism and the blood circulation. During the cardiac cycle, when the blood goes up again from the legs to the heart, there is a necessary boost needed. For this purpose the body has two appropriate mechanisms. The venous system in the sole of the foot is the first: with the pressure created at each step by the weight of the body, the venous system acts as a "sponge" which is pressed, and pushes the blood upwards. The endings of the nerves are perfused, they accelerate the blood circulation and raise the temperature. Then takes over the second mechanism, the muscle pump of the leg; while it contracts, operates in the same manner. This mechanism is activated by walking, while the veins of the legs act as conduits that carry blood from the legs to the heart.

During the exercise, the collective rhythm of the group accelerates. The performers walk faster and faster. I often participate in the process so as to support the rhythm. The sole's rooting on the ground is preserved throughout the whole duration of the pacing. Spine and head remain loose. Gradually the torso tends downwards. The stimulation of blood circulation increases the body temperature and causes perspiration.

The work on the sole of the foot, the vibrations caused and the rising of the temperature, activate the body and eliminate the flow of thoughts. The growing tension created by the escalation of the collective rhythm and the feeling of tiredness, expand the limits of mental and physical stamina. It is important, always to maintain the sense of inner relaxation, which allows the body, despite the escalation of tension, to spend the necessary amount of muscular energy, remaining open as a receiver to inner and outer stimuli.

At the extreme point of the collective rhythm's development, the performers slightly loose the sense of space; of course, the natural control is in function. Then, very carefully, they fall to the ground on their back. They maintain briefly the natural panting and push the air in the depth of the lungs, so as to mobilize the diaphragm, the kidneys and the rectus abdominis. When they relax, the performers find the control of the breathing cycle. They bend the knees and bring the spine and the waist in contact with the ground; they breathe in a fragmented way with the phoneme "ha", through a series of diaphragmatic pulses. It is important to have the sense of an effortless production of "ha" from the diaphragm, so as not to push at all either the larynx or the chest at all. When the performers realize the new way of breathing, they also inhale in the same way. The discontinuous diaphragmatic inhalation and exhalation

continues at an accelerated rhythm until one “penetrates” the other. The respiratory function is now carried out very quickly, without pressure, from the nose and the mouth, at irregular intervals and rhythms, in a manner which reminds us the dog’s breathing when he pants. This mode of respiration makes the diaphragm stronger and more flexible.

Then the performers gather their sense on the spine and the triangle, where the air of the discontinuous breath of diaphragmatic pulses causes many small vibrations. The triangle receives these vibrations and accumulates the energy they gather, till it becomes their transmitter. Now the rate of the discontinuous inhalation and exhalation depends on the repeated anteroposterior vibrations of the triangle, which begins to move autonomously, till the complete relaxation of the lower vertebrae. The performers experience the area of the pelvis as a guide and a key source of energy in the body.

Through the activation of the triangle, its vibrations spread throughout the whole body, while the sense of inner calmness should be constantly cultivated. As the performers become familiar with the above process, they slowly change the body position, locating and realizing the function of different points in the intervals from one physical position to the next.

The evolution of the movement from point A to point B is continuously analyzed into many small interspaces which create their own points. The performers choose difficult positions, so as to investigate the behavior of the body within them. In a very slow tempo, without ever stopping the function of the triangle, they return back to the upright position. Breathing is free. The air comes and goes effortlessly. The knees are slightly bent to facilitate the movement of the pelvis. The muscles of face, shoulders, chest and back, are completely loose. The performers locate blocked points in the body, which gradually loose. They move in the space slowly. The vibration of the triangle develops throughout

the body, releasing the cervical vertebrae, reaching the head, on which the performers work carefully, thoroughly, without frivolous and sudden movements. The triangle, through its vibrations and pulsations, injects energy to the whole body, creating unprecedented positions and varying rhythms. Opposing forces are activated, the “cross” of the body, diagonals and opposed axes, new counter rhythms are born. The performer gives an order to a part of the body, eg. to a finger, which begins to move autonomously from the rest



Demonstration by T. Terzopoulos during the 2016 Theatre Olympics in Wrocław (photo: Karol Jarek, source: theatreolimpics2016.pl)

of the body. The cooperation of the physical point to the mind is very helpful. The movement from the finger is transferred to the wrist and from there to the entire hand, while the elbow is bent to transfer more energy. A part of the body may be autonomous and assume the dynamics of the center: shoulder, finger and elbow. Thus, the off-center is strengthened and as a new energy center, collaborates with the precedent that, although now is subdued, never loses its dynamics. In parallel with the function of a limb, another part is activated in response to the first, which gives birth to its own, different, pace.

In the exercise of deconstruction, the basic function of the triangle does not stop, it becomes more dense and internal. The performers' physical axles relax and become fluid; through contrasting flows and unpredictable bursts of energy, become autonomous, energy axles, components of the triangle's vibrations and of the impulses that cause, giving birth to unknown till that moment expressive codes, revealing echogenic sources which have not been used again. Energy axles multiply at breakneck speed, and each time, at the intersection point, new axles are created, with new tempo-rhythms, in infinite spindle movement. The facial muscles dilate, eyes and mouth are magnified and the euphoria which the performers start to feel, multiplies the energy and strengthens the stamina.

The pauses in the function of the triangle help the performers realize what happens within the body: the opening of the inner space and time. Time deepens and the performers are taken by surprise. The body turns into an alive resonator of vocal vibrations. The performers investigate various possibilities of sound production, without restriction, with vocalisms, breaths and forgotten tunes of their own tradition.

All kinds of resistance are eliminated. The ecstatic bodies of the performers, on the borderline between order and chaos, are open and perforated, exposed to all kinds of stimuli. Gradually they are reconstructed, regenerated as energy bodies, as bodies- primary material. Through this process, the performers condense the inner energy and acquire its constant feeling. The body projects new bodies, the subconscious – core becomes a reservoir of energy and a powerful source of Art. The body becomes a battlefield of fermentation and artistic expression.

Rhythm

καὶ ὁ κυκεὼν δίσταται (μὴ) κινούμενος
Even kykeon dissolves when is not moving

Rhythm gives birth to Form. Even the most abstract shape, the most fleeting movement born by the rhythm, is based on a deeper logical law. If you can find the core rhythm in two phrases, the rhythm which characterizes the entire section



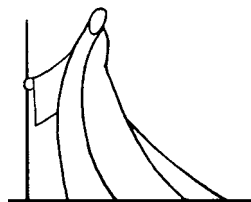
The Pyrrhic Dance of the Curetes defending Dionysus on a terracotta relief from Campania, around 50-100 BC, collection of the British Museum (source: orchesis-portal.org)

will be uncovered and after that, the rhythm of the whole text. I believe that the text consists of rhythmical sections, especially in ancient Greek tragedy. Many times I am amazed, because, without prefabricating the rhythm through a dramaturgical process or through a directorial preparation imprinted on the paper, the process of deconstruction, analysis and reconstruction of the material is born by the rhythm.

In the rehearsals of Bacchae, our research material was the phrase “kamaton t’ efkamaton (κάματος τα’ ευκάματος)”. Bacchae come to Greece from Asia, accompanying Dionysus and singing “kamaton t

’efkamaton”; it means “we are tired, tired but happy.” This phrase has often been attributed in an entirely descriptive way, where the Bacchae come on stage tired; they rest on some stones of the ancient theater, as if they want to rest. While we were investigating “kamaton t’ efkamaton”, we found the rhythm of the pyrrhic dance. Bacchae come dancing the dance of fire, stepping their feet on earth, like in the Pontiac pyrrhic dance or in some relative dance of the East. The performers of Bacchae, intoxicated, were driven in an unexpected burst of energy and through the cracks of their deconstructed body, were bringing forth bright, rebellious materials, ready to be transformed.

I believe there are no punctuation marks in theater. There is no full stop, comma, exclamation mark and bracket. All these, which the bourgeois theater uses extensively as dynamic elements of its expressive language, do not exist. There is always a temperature below the speech and too many variations of the inner sounds. Usually, I follow the rhythm and I do not refer to specific images, wanting to catch the end of the thread. I follow the rhythm, aiming at a point of this abstract and unruly material, exploring its limits. I follow the rhythm as if I’m one of its components and I am often lead to an unusual landscape, where the speech is not illustrative, but natural. Many times speech-pain. For me the speech is not its conceptual interpretation, its description, but the image of the word’s structure, its internal cause. And here is my point of difference from the notional theater. I am interested, how someone, while he is interpreting a phrase, can discover even its echogenic source, its core rhythm.



ROGER SALAS

Robert Wilson Gives a New Light to the Oedipus of Sophocles*

Few places, still silent or empty, are the theater itself, with capital letters and without any other need of the visitor than to be there, immerse themselves in a sacred and perfect space, the true peak of human creation and reverence for the millenary art of Melpomene and Thalia. Andrea Palladio imagined it so at the end of the sixteenth century in the conception of the Olympic of Vicenza masterfully drawing space between the ancient walls of an old prison, and thus receives us today, with a greatness that does not overwhelm, but envelops, with a display harmonious classical forms that become the ideal cornice, the perfect framework for the theater and dance, in all its forms and styles, demonstrate their will to survive, to teach us the mirror path of the arts and its enduring value, its spokesman of the news and the farce, the tragic and the comedian. It is thrilling to think that some of the lamps of the ghostly illumination that Scamozzi designed for the Oedipus premiere in the sixteenth century have survived in part.

The cycle 71 of Classical Shows of the Olympic Theater of Vicenza in 2018 (they began to take place in the distant 1934) has had its climax in the world premiere of *Oedipus*, by Robert Wilson (Waco, Texas, 1941) based loosely on the Oedipus Tyrant, or Oedipus Rex, of Sophocles; since the sixteenth century, it had only been performed once in 1997 under the direction of Gianfranco del Bosio in the reopening of the stage after the restoration. Last Sunday 7 was the last representation in Vicenza of this work that Aristotle placed in his Poetics with the exemplary summit of the tragic theater. The premiere on Thursday the 4th was a seamless triumph of what is probably the most influential live and active stage director on the planet. An artist who has contributed to the contemporary scene a decalogue own and brilliant plastic, sensitive and distinctive that, starting

* First publication: Robert Salas: *Robert Wilson da una nueva luz al Edipo de Sófocles*. El Teatro Olímpico de Vicenza estrena un grandioso proyecto de carácter global bajo una perspectiva netamente coreográfica, El País, 6. Oct, 2018.



Oedipus on October 4, 2018 at the Teatro Olimpico, d: Robert Wilson
(photo/detail: Carlos J. Soto, source: epicnothing.org)

from a militant minimalism, has opened to a kind of encyclopaedism of a new era, globalizing the whole, increasingly internationalizing the template, looking in the most remote corners for the vertical connection to their aesthetic purposes.

The peculiar Olympic space adapts without difficulty to what Wilson draws, which is nothing more than a choreography choral and ritual only interrupted in the hour and 15 minutes that lasts for a few dark shocks that serve as a quick pause between the scenes. The dance, pantomimic or pure, takes up a large part of the evening. Sometimes in solos, sometimes in groups. The choreography of the bridal dance has been expressly devised by the Australian Wesley Enoch in one of those extemporaneous first-time combinations that Wilson likes so much and then marry liquidly and naturally in the plot. Casilda Madrazo and Alexios Fousekis add a special nerve to the dances.

Much more than an aesthetic and a style, Wilson is already a system. *Oedipus*, which is already marked in the repertoires of the twentieth century with, among others, Stravinsky's opera (1927) and Martha Graham's ballet (*Night Journey*, 1947), finds in Robert Wilson a new and current perspective. The dancers as mobile sculptures, the concept of the choir but established within the plastic of the cast, the millimeter control of the stage, a kind of tyranny of the ruler. And there is an indirect reference and homage to Pina Bausch when the stage is flooded with chairs in the final scene, chairs that are knocked down and struck by the inconsequential anger of an already blind *Oedipus*.

'Oedipus', by Robert Wilson, at the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza

It is true that this *Oedipus* had this summer a pre-release at the Teatro Grande Pompeya (Naples was involved as a co-producer), a kind of set-up in a memorial site that needs no introduction, the imposing partenopean ruins, but the work It has been commissioned, rehearsed and thought for the Olympic Theater of Vicenza, which was already inaugurated with this same work. On March 3, 1585, last Sunday of Carnival, the Olympic was opened for the first time with

the representation of this Oedipus in which is the first stable covered theater that is preserved; the chronicles relate that the election of the title was then preceded by long debates of the Olympic Academy (which still today meets in the room adjoining the theater itself) and part of the miracle is that the scenery of that time, with the evocation of the seven streets of Thebes recreated by Scamozzi in those forced perspectives of wood, and still stands in the same place, can be seen and almost touched, and it is there where the actors and dancers of Wilson have deconstructed in a deconstructed way the sofoclianos texts in Greek, Latin, Italian, German and English, and where the classicist ritual has taken on a contemporary body in a magnetic staging, shining from beginning to end, intense and providing a tragic vibration of great depth.

It is true that every time we find a Wilson more “danced” and choreographic, as if the movement regulated and *coach* offer a window of language and structure that seems inexhaustible. This mark has already been seen since the time of *The Knee Plays* [visto en Madrid en el Festival de Otoño de 1985 en el Palacio de Congresos de La Castellana] with the help of the choreographer Suzushi Hanayagi, a personality that since then marked Wilson and entered into the genesis, the stylistic formula of the American, then taken up by Lucinda Childs.

The template chosen for this Oedipus is a declaration of principles and it is worthwhile to write it down. Almost all the actors go over 70 years, the dancers bring the contrast with their sculptural energy and youth. There is nothing casual about it. Mariano Rigillo (Naples, 1939) as relentless narrator, memory and thread of the work; Angela Winkler (Templin, Germany, 1944) in her figuration as an observer and questioner; Meg Harper (Evanston, Illinois, 1944) as Tiresias, a mythical dancer by Merce Cunningham, giving density to a pantomime full of orientalist severity; the saxophonist and plastic artist Dickie Landry (Louisiana, 1938), true catalyst spectrum (who does not remember his photos of William Burroughs?) with his music full of melancholy; Casilda Madrazo (Mexico, 1980) an experimental flamenco dancer embodying a hieratic Jocasta and finally Michalis Theophanous (Greece, 1982), an artist who unites dance and Apollonian presence in his Oedipus, introspective and powerful, and before he demonstrated his arts in the *Adam's Passion* (2015) by Wilson himself with dance and choreography by Lucinda Childs and music by Arvo Pärt and here at the Olympic along with Dimitris Papaioanou in the evocative *Primal Matter*.

Matter the Rwandan Kayije Kagame, deified totem, beautiful and seductive, recites in several languages and walks among the public, balances its steps in the stands and brushes with their clothes to the public. It is not to ignore the plastic influence of Isamo Noguchi, present in costumes and objects. The 4th was Wilson's birthday and Landry came out at the end with his glossy saxophone and the notes of *Happy Birthday*, which all the artists chanted, a moment that could even thrill the director himself, always had an imperturbable ice man in a black convent costume.

The Mission of Rasputin

Compilation About Géza Szőcs's Drama

Transylvanian Hungarian poet and politician Géza Szőcs (1953–2020) in his drama titled *The Mission of Rasputin* (2014) poses the question that if the rulers who brought catastrophe not only to their own nation but the whole of European culture, had foreseen the result of their asinine decisions, the terrible consequences, would they have made the same decisions? Szőcs's drama involves a fictional story with real historical figures. Grigori Yefimovich Rasputin (1869–1916), a Russian mystic desperately visits the eminent political leaders of contemporary Europe: the Tsar, the German Emperor Wilhelm II, Emperor Franz Joseph and King George V of England. However, his attempts prove like water off a duck's back and his eloquence runs aground on the tyrannical and petty narrow-mindedness of the despots. The drama first opened in Venice in 2015, directed by Paolo Franzato. The Hungarian premiere took place on October 4, 2019 in Szatmárnémeti (Satu Mare), Transylvania. The present compilation published in Szamos, 2019/10, translated by László Vértés, comprises interviews by György Elek with the playwright, the leading actor in the performance, Gábor Rappert-Vencz and the director Sardar Tagirovsky.

Rasputin as a Dramatic Hero

GÉZA SZŐCS Interviewed by GYÖRGY ELEK



– *What does the play Rasputin represent in your career? Who is Rasputin?*

The heroes, situations and conflicts of novels and plays are projections of the author's consciousness into human characters and patterns of destiny. I began to write this play in the summer of 2014, in the form of an essay

at the time. I sought an answer to this question: had the rulers who led not only their nations, but also the entire European culture into a disaster foreseen the result, the terrible consequence of their stupid decision, would they, nonetheless, have made the same decisions? All these questions and answers were organised into dramatic dialogues, almost on their own. In other words, originally, I did not want to write a play at all, but the internal laws and imperatives of the material shaped the text into its present form. So, *Rasputin* is a projection born out of the interaction and interference of the questions, hypotheses and answers.

– *When writing the play, to what extent was there a balance between political compulsion and artistic inspiration?*

The issue of internal imperatives leads me to the idea of external coercion. I find the question surprising not only because I cannot even imagine the political force that could make a contemporary author feel obliged to deal with Rasputin. In addition, if there is anyone who can say they never caved in to political pressure, on the contrary, then I do think I am one of those people. By the way: I never gave in to any compulsion or expectation either. Although I have been in many situations. I lived under Ceaușescu's dictatorship, then in the reality of the Hungarian diaspora of the West, then in the last stretches of the Kádár-Aczél era, and in the jungles of a newly free Romania abounding in political witchcraft, and in the New World of free Hungary, in opposition, and also in a government official capacity. However, I do not think I ever wrote a single syllable under pressure or expectation. Or that I ever wrote anything I should be ashamed of. If there is anything I can be proud of, I think this is it.

– *Is it possible to recommence history anywhere, at any time, or is it such a powerful current that we can only go with its flow?*

We can always find our way back to a road we strayed off – see Ady: *Somewhere We Lost Our Way* – if that is important to us, and we will not choose other roads for ourselves, following the path of least resistance.

– *Do you regard the history of Hungary as a story of suffering or as a story of salvation?*

Both at the same time. Obviously, we know that Golgotha was followed by the Resurrection.

– *After the Russian and Italian productions, what does the play's Hungarian-language premiere in Satu Mare represent to you?*

Satisfaction, of course. So much so, that I timed the presentation of the book, i.e. the play in six languages, for the date of the theatre premiere in Hungarian. The book includes the Hungarian, Italian, Russian, German, French and Spanish versions of the play, which is being translated into another five languages. If I want to be honest, I think I should add that the attention is hardly meant for me; rather, it is for Rasputin and the questions his personality raises, to which history gave us a painful answer. By us I mean all Hungarians, Russians and Europeans.



Géza Szőcs at the book premiere of *Rasputin* in Szatmárnémeti, before the first night of the play (source: anziksz.com)

“Rasputin Embodies the Desire and Conscience of Us All”

Director SARDAR TAGIROVSKY Interviewed by GYÖRGY ELEK



– Please tell us briefly about your work so far.

My entire life is one big journey. I was raised in Kazan, Tatarstan, Russia. That is where both my parents are from. Initially, I lived in Kazan, Moscow and Kiev. My parents were invited to work in Hungary, that is how I ended up in Kecskemét and then in Budapest. All the while, I kept going back to Russia. I studied acting in an actors' academy in Budapest, then studied puppetry at the Budapest Puppet Theatre. Over three years there, I learned to do puppetry to an extent. Then I studied a different school of acting, alternately in Rome and Budapest. Meanwhile, I made movies and commercials, mostly abroad, to earn a living, and at the same time, I started to experiment with directing, mostly with amateurs, in abandoned cellars, without any funding. An encounter with theatre director Tamás Ascher strengthened me to continue along this path. In a sense, I consider him one of my masters. After several unsuccessful entrance exams in Hungary, I applied to the Theatre University of Târgu Mureș, Romania, and was admitted to director László Bocsárdi's class, where I did my bachelor's and master's courses. Bocsárdi is my other great master, an important person in my life, who sees theatre through the prism of life in an incredible depth. I began to direct regularly in Sfântu Gheorghe, Oradea, Timișoara, Gheorgheni, then in Hungary at the National Theatre and in Debrecen, then in Novi Sad. I intend to launch an International Art Base in Budapest this year, a new type of school with lots of masters teaching people from all over the world. After this premiere in Satu Mare, I will direct in Celldömölk, Debrecen, Budapest and Moscow.

– How do you find the György Harag Company in Satu Mare?

They are a very strong team, a very diverse one as well. I feel that the actresses and actors are eager to play and act. They have the stamina and strength for theatre. This is worthy of György Harag's legacy. I like the support team working in the background, people are happy to help. (...)

– When were you invited to direct the play?

István Gedő Bessenyei offered me this opportunity about a year ago. I had known the play from the past. When it was directed by Paulo Antonio Simioni in Italy three years ago, he asked me to direct the puppetry



Poster in 2019 for the Italian performance presented in 2017 (source: comuneborgioverezzi.gov.it)

part. I taught the actors to do puppetry. Rasputin was a puppet in the Italian production, while everyone else was played by a human. So I knew the text, and I agreed to direct it, because I found the way the story interacts with the present very exciting. I was intrigued by Rasputin's character, and felt connected to the world of Russia through him. And I took it as a special sign that I would be asked to direct the same play as I had come across three years before in Rome. This opportunity represented the fulfillment of a Rasputin-type prophecy to me.

– *What is Rasputin's message to today's society?*

We now live in a sort of calm here in Europe, but we feel all the time that the world is somehow crumbling around us. Not only because the rain forest is being destroyed, but also because the Siberian taiga is burning in an area the size of Hungary, wildfires rage due to human irresponsibility, and because industrial agriculture really benefits the multinationals only. And also because there is a growing number of mini-dictatorships in our world, springing up in several countries, the consequence of which is that certain borders get closed. Meanwhile, there is a sort of openness as well, people can travel back and forth. This dual nature of the world – being open and closed at the same time – is really very absurd. And I sense that we are using up our reserves, and that sooner or later, this is going to cost us dearly. Obviously, I am wishing us the best of luck minimising the pain of transition into the digital world of the future, into which I would like to smuggle poetry along. You tend to feel today – as people tended to before the First World War – that there will be no problems, life is flourishing here, so you can sit back on your laurels and chill. It was the same way before the Second World War, too. But the concern is that tragedy may strike all of a sudden, because while we exist at our ordinary everyday level, powerful forces of destruction are lurking beneath the surface. When a war was on in the past, people would not know it was a world war raging around them. Distinct conflicts broke out in different countries one after the other. These would then add up, and people would only say afterwards that this had been the First or Second World War. Now we cannot know whether we are already in the Third World War or not. Or whether there is a Third World War in the making. It looks very much like we cannot avoid a global paradigm shift or a global conflict situation...

– *Rasputin takes on a mission to improve the world. At least, the play suggests that he does his best to avoid a disaster. People want to do the same thing today.*

Rasputin's character is multi-faceted: he is a soothsayer who sees the future and wants to stop politicians causing a world war, and to save a hundred million people from dying as a result. According to the play, Rasputin represents nothing other than what we all desire. A lot of records survive suggesting he had orgies and was a criminal while he was living a holy life. The performance gives us a chance of elaborating on that. Rasputin is a highly controversial figure, and nearly a hundred years on, it is impossible to reconstruct his reality

accurately. The playwright shows both his positive and negative sides. Rasputin would visit brothels, but he would also get in touch with the Archangel and the saints, which enabled him to see the future. He tried to stop the First World War breaking out, intervening with Emperor Wilhelm, King George, Emperor Franz Joseph and others to that end. Actually, the play is a work of poetic historical fiction: we see a character trying to stop something we in the audience already know took place. Actually, from the outset, we are rooting for a what-if scenario: what if history had turned out otherwise? It is like watching a good movie we love once again, and though we know full well the story has a tragic ending, it is structured so that we keep hoping against hope that it might end happily.

– *Is there a movie like that – unbeknownst to us – playing in the world?*

Yes. Here in Europe, we have a shared movie, our history, with lots of anguish over territories and lives and assets lost. These wounds are still unhealed. We do not know how they could be healed. But just as Rasputin wanted to prevent the tragic events of the 20th century a hundred years ago, we would also like to rise to the challenges of the 21st century. Humans do not change in this regard. Rasputin embodies the desire and conscience of us all. We seek an answer to the question of whether we can transcend ourselves without unleashing apparently unnecessary destruction and havoc. Can we hear the cries of pain from afar, both in terms of time and geography? Can we – nearly eight billion humans called humankind – act as one to prevent the decline of nature, culture, ideology and society threatening the human race? Can we say loud and clear that we have no need for procrastinating leaders? Because we, citizens, are responsible for our future. Because the name of the game still seems to be 'make people hate each other in order to harvest the profits, keep them in fear and lead them by the nose'.

– *Do we stand a chance of preventing the world from going down the wrong path?*

In terms of thinking, humans are still big babies with their nappies on. Béla Hamvas says people's biggest problem these days is that they think in dichotomies, in terms of black and white, about everything. It would also be important to allow contemplation, to make nuanced statements in debates, so that people do not see one another as enemies. (...)

– *What will the Satu Mare Rasputin production be like?*

We have an exciting production in the making, an amalgam of lots of styles. It will use powerful imagery, music and a throbbing rhythm. It will take us all the way from the intimacy of film to a lively, monumental tableau of history. This allows us to create a very exciting world. It is not a direct mouthpiece for politics, i.e. we do not do contemporary politics. This will be a very outspoken production and, at the same time, a very poetic one. An invitation to tango through history in three acts, a chance to encounter the people among whom Rasputin lived and walked – our great or great-great grandparents.

“This Role Also Gives Me an Opportunity for Introspection”

GÁBOR RAPPERT-VCNCZ, Playing Rasputin, Interviewed by GYÖRGY ELEK



– *What does this role mean to you?*

If I were to liken my acting career to a train ride, I have certainly reached an important station with Rasputin. This role is like time travel within myself and in history. The time capsules of the 20th century must be extracted and opened. This performance takes place at the moment of Rasputin's death. It is about the chain of events playing at the time of his death. We know that the movie of our life runs down in a few seconds just before our death. What would have happened if...? It is a movie like this. I would say it is a powerful current or rather, a whirlpool. This role also gives me an opportunity for introspection. I can say under the same breath that I have nothing to do with Rasputin and that we all have something to do with him, because there are two forces at work in all of us: love and crude conceit, light and darkness. There is an ongoing battle between them in us all. Sometimes we are good, sometimes we are angry, and sometimes we become bad. Whether we regret that or not is a different matter. It depends on the person. It also matters to what extent we are good or bad. In the main, most of us strive to be good.

– *Do the rehearsals result in lasting experiences?*

Throughout this work process, I experienced a lot of beautiful things both within myself and as Rasputin. There were wonderful moments during the rehearsals that I retain as defining moments. How much this will show in the performance is something I do not know yet, because we are still in the thick of this work in progress. Many people say it is not the destination that matters, but the journey that takes you there. Indeed, this is how I feel now. And this is not to suggest that the performance does not matter to me. It does matter, of course, since it is the end result that gets performed to the spectators.

– *The play is a fictitious story, grounded in historical facts nevertheless. And it suggests that history is made by human decisions. To what extent is this emphasised in the performance?*

Rasputin attempts to alter the course of history, to prevent war. He tries to stop the horrors of the 20th century happening. The key message of the play is that these horrors are the result of human decisions. And if a leader makes the inappropriate decision at a given moment, others will or may subsequently make the wrong decisions, too. We may experience this individually, in our own lives. But then, we have not yet talked about destiny, about fate... For we may resist in vain, whatever is to happen to us will happen anyway. There is the law of attraction, and a lot of other things. This performance is very important to me from this angle as well. During our work, the focus has not been on logical conclusions, but on emotions. The director approaches the subject spiritually,



Scene from the performance, András Rappert-Vencz as Rasputin in the middle, to the right
(source: magyarateatrum.hu)

and he tries to get us to do so, too. I am not saying this is completely new, because we live each role spiritually as well, but our rehearsals are certainly exceptional in their intensity. For the time being, we build on emotions, and emotions in turn, will give birth to thoughts. We primarily seek emotions. They will define the shape, in the director's words, of a "surgically precise" performance.

– *Does this mean that the performance is to reflect the present by evoking the past?*

Clearly so. This is a back-and-forth game. We continue to experience the horrors of the 20th century in the horrors of the 21st. We carry the wounds and consequences inside. We all lost a grandfather, and grandfather's friends, a great grandfather, and his friends. There was a beautiful idea that came up during the rehearsal, namely, that we may lose our spouse also through the death of someone who could have given birth to her or him. It is very intriguing how layers of time get stacked on one-another. Everything is interrelated. We still bear the consequences of a decision made thirty years ago. Life has its detours. If you get side-tracked, you can still reverse onto the main track – the story imprints this chance as well on the spectator's mind.

– *Will young people heed the play's message?*

We hope so. We grew up in an era that gave us no choice. What was allowed and what was not were forced upon us. Now we are free to choose anything, stop anything, start anything. Today's youth must use this opportunity. This issue is raised by the play, too.



ANDRÁS VISKY

The *Tragedy of Man* as *Theatrum Theologicum*

A Part from Dramaturg's Diary

The theater to which I commit myself is that which glorifies men's failures much rather than their strength and efficacy. A place where we can observe the human being's frailty, weakness, faults, and inadequacies.

Silviu Purcărete¹

January 1, 2020.

The theater of *parousia*, Silviu Purcărete announces at the first rehearsal of *The Tragedy of Man*:² it's his way of summarizing the goal of the endeavor before us. We see a shabby company on the unusually narrow, built-up stage. The director

¹ Silviu Purcărete: *Images de théâtre*, Carnières (Belgium), Lansman Editeur, 2002, 26.

² Imre Madách (1823–1864): *Az ember tragédiája* [*The Tragedy of Man*], S. Purcărete – András Visky (eds.), a play in verse and one of the foundational works of Hungarian theater: Director, Silviu Purcărete; Sets and costumes, Dragoș Buhagiar; Music, Vasile Șirli; Dramaturg, András Visky; Directorial assistant, Ilir Dragovoja; Musical assistant, Enikő Éder; Sound, Sebastian Bayer; Stage manager, Éva Kertész; Lighting, Zoltán Gidó; Prompter, Marika Czumbil; Photography, Petru Cojocaru; Poster design, Csilla Joó; Cast: Géza Aszalos, Attila Balázs, András Zsolt Bandi, Emília Borbély B., Anna Csábi, Zsolt Csata, Enikő Éder, Attila Kiss, Levente Kocsárdi, Ildikó Lanstyák, Rita Lőrincz, Szilárd Lukács, Etelka Magyari, Zsolt Imre Mátyás, Csongor Mihály, András Csaba Molnos, Enikő Szász, Mónika Tar, Andrea Tokai, Eszter Nikolett Tóth, Richárd Vass; Gergely Csíky Theater, Timișoara, Romania, March 3, 2020.

continues. They're all naked, covered only by beige trench coats: they're all here with us. They will perform the tragedy of man, the man of every age and our own, each in their own way, "poor in spirit." The theater of *parousia*, which means the theater of "Christ's appearance at the Last Judgment." In other words: the theater of the Resurrection. In ancient Greek usage, *parousia* referred to the rite of the ruler's visit; in the Gospels, to the final visit of the Redeemer, that is, to the second coming of the Messiah, the final, fulfilling event when He restores "the country" and sits in final judgment.

What else should we understand in this directorial proposition but the act of rendering justice that represents the essence of theater? It is not solely a philosophical-theological matter – but, of course, that's essentially what it is! – but also poetic advice: with Purcărete, in any event, we come face to face with it, since he regards the theater as the stage of universal events: a space where Revelation is achieved and we participate in the administration of justice. Not a theater of illusion, opposed to reality, but, on the contrary, the theater of the sole reality, opposed to the world as optical illusion. Alain Badiou defines the post-Brechtian theater of political subject(s) as "the means to display truths,"³ whereas Purcărete's theater is the theater of existence-truth, therefore that of the sole truth, which is the final summation of the kaleidoscope-play of Badiou's "truths."

The main entrance to the Gergely Csíky Theater – the enormous building that houses three major theatrical companies (Romanian, Hungarian, and German)⁴ and an opera company – can be found on its southeastern side, from which a fairly uninviting staircase leads up to the former ballroom, now converted into the stage of the Hungarian company. The hall can also be reached from the northwestern side of the building on Opera Square, presently under renovation. For me, well known if not legendary for my poor sense of orientation, it's frightening: the interior spaces, evoking their manifold remodelings with their – to my eyes – utterly illogical connections, sometimes strike me as downright hostile. I'm utterly incapable of finding my way, and indeed, I give up right away, on the first day.

In the theater, as also of course in any context, it is dangerous to speak of "a single truth," but in this case I think of the singular event of reality becoming fact, and not of the diversity of perceptions: the spiritual development that becomes a life fact feels unique in the (practically unknown to the individual) present, which, as a matter of fact, is the *it exists* and the *I am*.

Purcărete uses abstract and largely unknown theological concepts as easily as if they were self-evident, yet the company doesn't start in fright because his next sentence expresses the theatrical language in which he

³ Alain Badiou: *Le siècle*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2005.

⁴ That is, one company for each of the three historical ethnic groups of Transylvania.

explicates *The Tragedy of Man*, not solely Madách's "dramatic poem" but the *conditio humana* itself: namely, that which interests us, *nolens volens*, in theater. People who've just been resurrected perform the work for us, an amateur company whose hands have just picked up the script of *The Tragedy of Man* and who sense an unknown prompting, arising from the depths, to realize this salvation-poem.

It is the theater of *parousia*, and right in the midst of Lent, which is an especially significant season in Romanian culture, even, *mutatis mutandis*, in the age of the consumer apocalypse. During Lent, the city changes its aspect: restaurants and sidewalk crêpe stalls and food carts offer Lenten menus, bells toll more frequently than at other times, visibly more people go to church even on weekdays. This is less noticeable in Hungarian communities, but the atmosphere of the whole city still exerts an effect on everyone.

Purcărete's world is the theater of forms, the *theatrum theologicum*. The form: memory, or rather, the act of remembering. Dust or seaside sand: amnesia. Not only the memory loss of terrestrial beings, but also of astral ones: stardust mingles with the dust, it is not only human bones that become dust – so that we might already think of our appearance and disappearance as form. And to the extent that it is form, it must always be concrete, fundamentally sensory, and experiential: this is what he places in opposition to the abstract quality of Madách's poem. Faced with the great questions, all of us – if, of course, we're fortunate – are poor in spirit. And theater, when it reflects, engrossed, on its own historicity, and then sharply questions its own identity, becomes the existence-laboratory of the poor in spirit: *theologia pauperum*.

What are we performing? Bunraku theater, in our humble manner. The performing actor doesn't speak: he makes an action visible. The actor who speaks is not acting: he makes speech audible and exists as the double of the one who acts in the performance space. This would be the concept of the production being prepared. There is something in this that I find dazzling: the separation of body from soul. The fact that, as it were, we have stepped back into time for the timespan of the performance, into time that we had already left behind us with finality, since we've already died, and indeed, already been resurrected: thus, we have stepped back into the perfect form of the *imago dei*. This is none other than the re-elevation of the theater's communal lifestyle, which had remained current for millennia, into our everyday context. Every story is an origin story, presence is a breaking free, and time is the experience of waiting. The actors come among us from the far side of time; they arise from the earth, as depicted in the frescoes in Orvieto's cathedral of the Assumption of the Virgin. Luca Signorelli, the artist, himself conceives the scene as theater, in which he paints himself and Fra Angelico, the other painter of the cathedral, in bourgeois clothing as they observe the promised resurrection in the theater of the Apocalypse: this is how they take part in the events of the Last Judgment.

They already knew the piece well from the Book of Revelation, and now they see the performance itself as a cosmic spectacle in fulfillment of the Scriptures.

Resurrection: that is, nakedness – the question, *in concreto*, the question of nakedness is unavoidable. It's difficult, in fact impossible, to be naked in the theater. The intimate proximity of the audience in *The Tragedy of Man* in the space proposed here reveals the body's naturalism, rather than demonstrating the spiritual image of the body, namely, the possible sensuality of an abstract concept: it will not be *the* body that we sense, but the actor's concrete, natural (fleshly) body, as a recognizable individual, and this is what would destroy the production's language. The actors wear skin-colored tights under the trench coats, white color paint covering their skin unevenly: these are rather just patches, stripes, the very distant yet recognizable traces of lime-filled mass graves.

Three more important directorial observations regarding the production's world of form. First: we will handle each of the fifteen scenes forming the tableaux of the Madách work separately, leaving it as an assignment for the viewer to create the connections between them. Second: four actors will create the figure of Lucifer. Who is Lucifer? The personage who does not sing. Third: different pairs of actors will play Adam and Eve from one tableau to the other.⁵ (This alone is reason enough for the lack of narrative continuity between Madách's tableaux.)

January 20, 2020

Return to Timișoara after nearly forty years. A broken down and pillaged city greets me; the prettiest portions of bourgeois Timișoara strike me as a ghost town. Beautiful bourgeois buildings, varied yet unified in architectural style, on the far side of the river Bega, around the Hotel Savoy, or on St. Mary Square: waterlogged facades with peeling plaster peer distractedly into the void. One cannot detect the faintest tremor of life. Fear takes up residence in my chest; I don't notice as my ribs tighten, then the muscles between the ribs wrench into a cramp, I cannot inhale enough air: breathlessness, confusion. Temesvár, Temeschwar or Temeschburg, Темишвар or Temišvar, Timișoara – where have they gone?⁶

⁵ For those readers unfamiliar with *The Tragedy of Man*: Adam and Eve, expelled from Paradise, wonder what will become of them and their progeny. Lucifer, with the intent of making Adam give up on humanity and thus spoil God's plan, offers to show them and guides them through scenes spanning human history from Antiquity to the far future (in a pioneering example of science fiction).

⁶ Temesvár had been a major provincial city of Hungary prior to the 1920 Treaty of Trianon that ceded Transylvania to Romania; it was and is a multicultural City.

The production's flexible masks are made of latex and reproduce the actors' own recognizable faces. Their proper faces: masks. White paint will cover the latex surface; at present, it's still skin-colored. In the case of the actors with speaking roles, they'll cut off the masks' lower lip and chin to enable speech. The face as quotation. This three-dimensional license makes the audience see even the nearby, familiar face as distant, placing it in a different time that is not our own.

These latex faces are death masks prepared from living individuals: the death-evoking attitude that belongs to the eternal, but of course mainly the oriental, theater. These flexible masks, on the other hand, evoke the hallucinatory effect that living people wearing their own death masks are walking amongst us. It is the inscenation of "you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead."⁷

Purcărete's absolute pessimism regarding human history is counterpointed by the view of a child who doesn't fall into despair over what he sees but builds himself a new world out of the elements of a Western civilization that has fallen to pieces.

The most important material of the rehearsals, right from the start, is the acoustic environment. As though an opera were being born using the method of "*devised theater*," that is, collective creation. "We're finished,"⁸ says Eve in Scene Two, the Fall in the Garden of Eden: if, in this situation, you speak this sentence on stage, you can attain at most a comic effect with it. "If, however, you sing it as in opera, and the pathos of the singing voice and accompanying music amplify the pronouncement, then it will sound to the viewer as a drama he can experience." This lesson of Purcărete well describes the poetics of his most recent productions: he tends increasingly to investigate the theatrical possibilities of operatic form. His production of *Victor, or Power to the Children* (2013) in Cluj-Napoca⁹ slips unnoticed, as it were, into opera: by the time the viewer realizes it, every rejoinder has long since been sounded in song. It is as if Purcărete's latest works were testing the rehabilitation of pathos in theater.

Actually, I sense every danger of this communal rehearsal process-initiation already in the first rehearsal. Since, as a matter of fact, the director made the

The list here gives the town names as known, respectively, to the Hungarians, Germans, Serbs, and Romanians. The original text uses Hungarian place names for which I have substituted the Romanian place names most likely to be familiar to Anglophone readers.

⁷ Rv 3:1 (All biblical quotations are from the New International Version).

⁸ Imre Madách: *The Tragedy of Man*, trans. George Szirtes, Budapest, Corvina, 1988, 4th ed (2000), 41.

⁹ The capital city of Transylvania, known to Hungarians as Kolozsvár. Cluj-Napoca, its official Romanian name, is colloquially abbreviated to Cluj, which is how it will appear henceforth.

entire enterprise largely dependent on my participation, he had to find someone whose decisions he could trust, given that the work is a monument of the Hungarian literary canon and the holy scripture of its theatrical tradition: thus we must read it together and be brave; to listen to (and hear) and observe (and see) the echoes of tradition and face them if they're unavoidable. Above all because when working with the text I am liable to take a leap in the dark and deal dishonorably with textual canons, "not consulting with flesh and blood"¹⁰ as my heart's apostle, Paul, says. To remain sensitive to every invitation, interior and external equally; and to go to the wall, indeed, to go through it, if that is the price of being able "to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."¹¹

He constructs situations, he outlines and sketches in scenes, then hands them over to Assistant Director Ilir Dragovoja, while we two enter a dressing alcove to work on the text and take account of the interpretive traditions of the *Tragedy*. Purcărete inquires with great sensitivity about the poem's place in Hungarian culture and about its theatrical productions that were, in my experience, defining. I begin by mentioning two films, *The Annunciation* by András Jeles, and the animated version of the *Tragedy* by Marcell Jankovics.¹² My lengthy explications of both films enthrall him. He returns to the Jeles film several times; he cannot tear himself away from it. Today, though, it would be unrealizable, he says, since the virtual (but very much real) space's child pornography mania has made an innocent relationship to the naked child's body impossible. The depiction of the human body, but especially the child's and the woman's, is undergoing a thorough alteration of meaning in contemporary culture, one that relates to the identity crisis of Western culture. We cannot relate to the naked body in an unspoiled manner because we cannot relate that way to our own body, either. The purist and iconoclastic movements of the latest era proclaim the religion of *shut down and restart*, trusting that in doing so, they can eliminate the accumulated Western guilt and – torn away from our own histories – we can continue our lives as newborn infants.

We work on the text in the dressing alcove's many-mirrored, tight, intimate but very much theatrical space – I feel good in here. Purcărete and I discuss and finalize the work conducted via email through December and January. He wants to hear whether the scenes that have remained from Madách's work can stand on their own feet, since the goal he has set is that the performance last no more than two hours; furthermore, he cannot conceive

¹⁰ Gal 1:16.

¹¹ William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, III.2.

¹² András Jeles: *Angyali üdvözlet* [*The Annunciation*], 1984; Marcell Jankovics: *Az Ember tragédiája* [*The Tragedy of Man*], 2011.

of it including an intermission. It had been decided very near the beginning, in December, that we would use not Octavian Goga's Romanian translation as our common text, but Jean Rousselot's freer "adaptation."¹³ Purcărete states that Goga's translation is so over-stylized and nostalgically romanticizing that it hides Madách's philosophical precision and very much followable rhythm of thought – something that he discovered while reading the French text and not the Romanian. He also rejects the somewhat better-known poetic French translation of Roger Richard:¹⁴ in this phase of the work, he's not looking for the text's poetic qualities but a more technical, dryer treatment that can offer us the chance to follow the "ideas" of Madách's writing, as Purcărete calls them, and in this manner to construct a pure script¹⁵ that best serves the production.

The work method is as follows: Purcărete sketches out the scene's construction for me – at least the one the director currently envisages – and he tells me in detail what happens, what each actor is doing at each moment, and I identify the corresponding dramaturgical impulses in the poem and finalize the text. It's classical dramaturgical work, I'd say – from my point of view, it's certainly that, since the dramaturg doesn't "deal with the text," he doesn't "cut the text", but, rather, he verbally constructs the plot embodied in speech and the structure of the suggested situation and follows its tracks, adjusting the always open and flexible textual corpus to it. It is only possible to be faithful to the spirit of the theatrical text when we examine the possibilities of its becoming action, and this, the action, is in every respect a communal act: that of the actors and of the audience. "How long will it be before they inscribe in the theatrical tables the following law: *words in the theater are only embellishments on the design of movement.*"? Yes, Meyerhold.¹⁶

It is a special, interesting and, on the whole, enrapturing moment in the work when, at the end of a given scene, the non-Hungarian speaking Purcărete asks me to read the entire scene out loud to him in Hungarian, in a sort of interpretive reading close to the situation. He wants to hear the text's rhythm, the inflection points; he wants to feel the lifelikeness of the dialogues.

¹³ I. Madách: *La tragédie de l'homme*, Jean Rousselot (ed.), Budapest, Corvina, [1860] 1966.

¹⁴ I. Madách: *La tragédie de l'homme*, trans. Roger Richard, Corvina, Budapest, 1960.

¹⁵ I use this term in the sense of Richard Schechner, that is: "... 'scripts,' by which I mean something that pre-exists any given enactment, which persists from enactment to enactment. ... I assume that the dancing took a persistent (or 'traditional') shape which was kept from one event to another; that this shape was known by the dancers and by the viewers (if there were any), and that the shape was taught by one group of dancers to another." Richard Schechner: *Performance Theory*, 2nd edition, Routledge, New York, 1988, 68.

¹⁶ Vsevolod Meyerhold: *The Fairground Booth*, in Edward Braun (trans and ed.): *Meyerhold on Theatre*, Bloomsbury, London, 1978, chapter 10.

The “*Poème d’humanité*” or the “*Tragödie des Menschen*” is a known trope of the nineteenth century that has become surprisingly close to us at the start of the third millennium, particularly as posed in Madách’s sci-fi-sensitive manner. This is yet another reason why Purcărete’s approach via the theater “poor in spirit” is of particular value to me. He doesn’t put it on a pedestal because he approaches it fundamentally as theater and not as a canonical literary work, locked up, controlled, and guarded by many. In addition, he alloys market-fair acting with Bunraku and then places this refined abstract choreography and marketplace immediacy in an intensely sensory, situative musical world unique to the theatrical music compositions of Vasile Șirli. In the Budapest production of *Richard II* (2019) in which I participated as dramaturg, the musical material, and more precisely the final scene, is exceptionally beautiful; in the musical texture unifying the entire performance, for instance, one can descry the shrieking of the wheels of the no. 2 streetcar as it negotiates the sharp 90-degree bends in front of the Hungarian Parliament: this, too, is a very fine Șirli invention.

January 21, 2020

The reading rehearsals with the actors are also in progress; he distributes the roles for portions of the scenes in different combinations, like someone collecting sound samples. Meanwhile, he provides detailed and extremely precise instructions on methods of voice production. Purcărete sets the Madách text into an opera of his imagination, as if he could already hear the entire performance – this realization is staggering. He requests four different water sounds (*sunet acvatic*, in Romanian) and experiments with them in the scene of Creation, exhaustively, accurately.

As early as our first discussions in November, I mentioned to Purcărete the curious coincidence that I had just been working with Levente Gyöngyösi on the libretto of *The Tragedy of Man*, and that we had completed the outline of the plot – Gyöngyösi is planning to compose a scenic oratorio to the text. Purcărete asks me: where did we end up? We departed significantly from Madách, or at least from the work’s overdone modernist worldview, from the equalized dualism between the Lord and Lucifer. Our theatrical *Tragedy* is much more “a” *Tragedy* interpretation, without any doubt personal to us, and, in fact, a radical rejection of the modern dogma that emphasized the necessity of Evil in the name of development and progress. According to Madách, that is, God generously forgives Lucifer; as a matter of fact, He doesn’t even regard him as The Evil One in the philosophical sense, but merely as the spirit of “cold,” unemotional reason lacking the feminine principle:

And you too, Lucifer, you are a link
Within my universe – and so continue:
Your icy intellect and fond denial
Will be the leaven to foment rebellion
And to mislead – if momentarily –
The mind of man, which will return to me.¹⁷

According to Madách, Lucifer is not merely the “leaven” of progress but also the agent of Salvation, since he only “misleads” humanity temporarily from the Creator so that it may find its way home to Him with yet more eager desire.

It is certain that Madách was familiar with the Augustinian concept of the “*felix culpa*” [happy sin] which resounds in the *Exultet* [gospel, good news] of the Easter vigil, but the theological propositions of the Protestant tradition made no impression on him; at least, I could find no trace of them in the poem. And it is on this point that the difference between *Faust* and *The Tragedy of Man* seems essential. By the end of *Faust*, Goethe’s Mephistopheles becomes isolated, indeed laughable, even in his own eyes. The angels definitively rescue Faust’s soul from him, while Mephistopheles laments thus:

To whom can I go for redress?
Who will get me my well-earned right?
You have been fooled in your old days. Confess,
However, you deserve your sorry plight.
I have outrageously mismanaged,
A mighty outlay – shamefully! – is lost,
Absurd amour and common lust have managed
To catch the canny Devil to his cost.
But if the one of wise experience got
Himself involved in that mad, childish game,
Still, slight the folly was most surely not
Which caught him at the last and overcame.¹⁸

The Lucifer of Madách, however, is convinced that the Lord cannot cast him away, since he himself is an important principle of the creation: God, therefore, depends on his existence, the way a king depends on his valet to dress him: without a valet, the king remains naked. Madách’s poem, examining modern ideas, bears the readily visible imprint of the feudalistic worldview.

¹⁷ Madách: *Ibid.*, Szirtes, 259.

¹⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Faust, Part II, Act V*, trans. Charles E. Passage, Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1965, 402. Alas, no English translation I know remotely approaches the extreme wit, insolence, and toughness of László Márton’s Hungarian translation (Pozsony/Bratislava, Kalligram, 2015) as quoted by the author.



Az ember tragédiája / Tragedia omului / Tragedy of Man, Work Diary and Studies,
edited by András Visky, Koinónia, 2021

The difference between the two, *Faust* and *The Tragedy of Man*, is not only philosophical-theological, but also and at the same time dramaturgical (of course, the latter is the inevitable consequence of the former): it is Adam's induced "Adam and Eve dream" that frames the *Tragedy*, as instrumented by Lucifer. This dream-dramaturgy, with history presented to them (and the fresco of past-present-future displayed before the viewer), takes on the meaning of the crossroads presented to humanity, and it transmits the conviction that purifying struggle ("strive") and doubt-free faith ("trust, have faith") have intrinsic value.¹⁹

The parallel reading in terms of similarities and contrasts will permeate our further conversations. Purcărete's 2007 production of *Faust* in Sibiu – which the standard-setting critiques (N.B.: does such a

thing still exist, hereabouts?) proclaimed as the apex of his lifework, a wonder and a masterpiece, and which the Radu Stanca National Theater of Sibiu continues to keep in its repertory – remains the mirror of our interpretations and disputes, and in a certain sense, our standard. If I count correctly, I saw the Sibiu production six times, and from today's viewpoint I consider Purcărete's distancing from the Sibiu production's language, heading in an entirely different aesthetic direction, to be even more significant. Nothing is brought over from *Faust* into the *Tragedy*, at most his creative experience in debasement and exaltation, the imprint of ephemeral (theatrical) creation in his soul.

We're not playing a parody of Madách – or rather, the *Tragedy* – but a *guignol*: we seek the amateurism and immediacy of folk theatrics, he tells the actors. If the *Bible*, then a peasant bible or a *biblia pauperum*; if theology, then a *theologia pauperum*.

¹⁹ This refers to the closing line of the *Tragedy*; in Szirtes's translation: "Man, I have spoken: strive on, trust, have faith!". Madách: *Ibid.*, 260.

The Beginning of Possibilities

Conversation with Gábor Tompa and Andrei Both

By Fátima Castro Silva*

In *Waiting for Godot*, a saxophone line, taken on loan from Tom Waits, recurs throughout Samuel Beckett's play, highlighting its circularity. The sloping stage, "on the verge of the abyss and at the centre of the garbage dump", is human history in decline. Within the scope of two acts/days, we witness "all the postures of visible humanity, two by two". Vladimir-Estragon, Pozzo-Lucky and the Boy: two duets and one (false) solo. In the mind of Gábor Tompa, the music contained in this precise score is the music of life as waiting, of the pair's complementariness, of interdependence with the other, of hope for salvation. "All theatre is waiting", said Beckett. With the puerile and clown-like games of survival they play to pass the time, Vladimir and Estragon are also literally making time, playing both the Godot-game and the theatre-game. Always together, they show up. "We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?"



FÁTIMA CASTRO SILVA: Gábor, you have, like a maestro, conducted the playing of this musical score with several ensembles, like a chamber music orchestra/play/piece, in different languages, but probably not within the kind of situation we are living in. The pandemic seems to resonate very much with the play. How does this situation changed, if it did change, your view of the play?

GÁBOR TOMPA: It changed. I think we did two versions, strong versions of this score. The first one, almost twenty years ago, was in a small studio space, and we had a kind of totally different set, and it reminded us a little bit of the world of Tarkovski. I wouldn't have proposed *Godot* again, because we know it so well, if the times, even before this huge crisis of the pandemic, wouldn't have changed dramatically in the last few years globally. So I think there's a new side of the play, but it's also a play which interests me because it's probably

* *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, translation Francisco Luís Parreira, directed by Gábor Tompa, set and costume design Andrei Both, lighting design Filipe Pinheiro, direction assistance Manuel Tur, with João Melo Estragon, Maria Leite Lucky, Mário Santos Vladimir, Rodrigo Santos Pozzo, Vicente Melo Boy, produced by Teatro Nacional São João, opening 7 of March 2021 TNSJ.
Dossier Godot_eng.pdf



the last dramatic play about Salvation. And that is something that interests me in the context of dehumanization of the entire world, where God is somehow replaced by profit and interests. The financial capitalism, the banking world starts to dominate so much it becomes almost a one single regime. The media, the press are manipulating the truth, the moral side of journalism disappeared. We can't believe in it anymore. It's

like an Orwellian world now. So that's why I really doubt anything coming from the press, from the mainstream media, even from the officials, because it looks like we have a lot of phantom governments, marionette governments, which are somehow manipulated and driven by these offstage characters, this global elite, let's say, whose name we don't even know always, some of them are on the surface but others are much more behind the scenes. I don't think it can be called a conspiracy theory because a theory exists always after practice exists. So there has to be some conspiracy practice as well. Aristotle wouldn't have written his poetics if there weren't the plays of Sophocles or Aeschylus or before, he didn't have that model.

Actually I think that the despair, which is one of the bases of Beckett's work, is pushed to an extreme and to such an extent that it becomes hope. Despair is a supreme form of hope, in a way. So that's why it is interesting now. We tried to introduce new things materially. I think it's difficult to do anything new from any of the Beckett plays design-wise, because he is thinking in images, he is thinking very strongly at theatrical situations and he indicates the props and the object world of his plays very precisely. I don't think it is worthwhile to replace a dustbin from *Endgame* with something else. You can replace it with something that has the same significance, because all these objects and props in the beckettian



Vladimir and Estragon with the tree on the TNSJ stage in March 2021 (source: porto.pt)

world have significance. A tree, for example, just for the sake of originality, you won't replace it for, say, a pole, although it could, nothing is impossible in theatre. But Beckett's plays are very closed, in a way, so musically structured that you can't really neglect these things. The goal is not to neglect them, because he is a very theatrical playwright, he knows very well the intimate world of the stage. It's like when you write a sonnet as a poet, you have a structure, it's a predesigned form, but within

that you can allow yourself the freedom and that's very interesting, playing with the discipline of form but trying to find your own freedom. It's like your inner freedom, like a prisoner, locked into a cell and still finds his freedom within his own thoughts, because they can't, for now, be controlled. We will get to a time when even our thoughts, like in an Orwellian world, can be, if not controlled at least followed somehow.

FCS: About what you were referring to, respecting this score: getting inside it and seeping in your own energy, is that the key of making it personal?

GT: I think it's a matter of interpretation. You can't exhaust all the senses of a musical score or a masterpiece of theatre, but if you are aware of the multitude of layers which are to be found in the text, then you try to explore. Every single situation or line in *Waiting for Godot* has multiple layers. There's the clownish layer, the narrative layer and the sacred layer, the so-called biblical layer, which is permanently in the background since one of the characters starts to research the truth behind one of the Evangelists' statement that one of the two thieves was saved. And there are also the motifs, the topics we find in Beckett's plays. First of all: the dignity of passing away. He's always putting this question, of being afraid of this very ugly physical death, where you just starve, are burnt or melted in the heat of a desert, like in *Happy Days*. Winnie's umbrella suddenly gets inflamed and she puts herself this question: is it a sign, a divine sign, like the burning bush for Moses? In that case, am I a chosen person who has to suffer for the entire humanity, and then it makes sense. Or is it just the heat and I'm going to melt down in the ugliest possible way and die like a worm? It's the same with *Endgame*. The blind man who can't move, if he's abandoned he's going to starve. Is that worthwhile or is he Noah picking up one of each species to reinvent all humanity with the chance of a rebirth, resurrection or renewal? This is a time where we are on the threshold of a possibility and that's a big challenge for the entire humanity: can we perform this self-analysis and see how we can renew ourselves and the world or will we go directly into this kind of damnation.

FCS: The characters live a precarious existence; they have a sense of self and of self-in-the-world, but they know they are dependent on the "other".

GT: That's an eternal motif of Beckett: the solidarity and interdependence between the characters. It's about friendship, it's about family. It's an interesting thing: in *Waiting for Godot* there aren't female characters, and it's on purpose, it's not by chance. He's putting these characters in the light of the last creatures in the world, and where there's no woman there's no hope to recreate humanity. As nature created us, male and female, these are the premises of recreating the human species. Others can choose whatever they want, in an activist way, but that will not assure the future of humanity. Vladimir, in a way, he keeps the place of a wife, of a sister and a mom: he's taking over these roles in the way he behaves, the way he takes care, the way

he thinks and plans these so-called survival games. They are survival games and it's a lot of fun. I believe that *Waiting for Godot* is not a dark play. It's a play that says that there are no easy solutions, that it's hard, it's really hard, but there is always something there. If we don't believe in that, if we only believe that that's it, we will die, if there is nothing behind or after that, then life is absurd. That's why I say it's the last play about salvation because it puts the main question of Christianity. If there's no resurrection, in that case life is absurd. That's what they try to find together. There are lots of moments of crisis, deep crisis, deepening towards the end of the play, but at the end of the day there is a lot of fun and they stay together.

Love is important, of course, but in a sort of ranking of sorts I would put friendship, because even in a family it's important. Love isn't eternal – it's eternal over time but not in the lifetime of a single person –, it's rare that love burns with the same intensity from beginning to end, but real friendship cannot die. Even in a family, if you have friendship as well, it's easier. And with children, it's not only the relationship of father and child, and obedience and respect, respect is important but if you can get into friendship with your children, that's always an important key.

FCS: The escatological side of the play, the imminent end the characters seem to face, we feel they are on the verge of falling into a pit or something, I feel it materially when looking at the stage design. There's a post- apocalyptic feel to it, with the white dust on the floor and the huge amount of shoes spread up, all different, as they should be, telling us we're all different but deep down all the same so...

GT: ...so it's history.



ANDREI BOTH: It's history, it's being human. A shoe is human history, you wear it, it represents you, it also marks your presence. In our dialogues years ago, Estragon is taking off his shoes, struggling with them all the time, and that's very funny, there's humour and sometimes cynicism about it. For us, and myself, who lived for thirty two years in communism and in oppression, which is also starting to happen now. Somebody talking on TV mentioned the expression the digital cartel, the social media cartel. It's a cartel: if you write something someone doesn't like, you'll be suspended and if you click on anything they have your profile. In this Orwellian world, Big Brother is watching. In all of my designs, there was a preoccupation, parallel to this: defining the dramatic space. If Beckett says, there's an empty space. What is an empty space? You have to jump back to conceptual art of the 70s and 80s, to the ideas of significance and signifying: art was kind of verifying itself. So there were questions like: can you express emptiness with emptiness? How do you do that?

GT: It's the most difficult thing to design, an empty space.

AB: Then you ask: what is emptiness? Is it void, cosmic emptiness? Does that mean anything? And you discover that emptiness has to be expressed with something that is signifying emptiness. This is where the circle comes back. So this is how this set evolved. And lately we introduced the electronic junk, the digital garbage, things we consume and throw away, cell phones, shoes... You can connect the shoes, if you want, even to the Holocaust and death.

GT: Don't forget that shoes are not only signifying shoes. For Estragon, his shoes are his destiny, his life, his cross. He wants to get rid of them for a long time and he leaves them. There's a proverb: you can't step out from your own

shoes. But he wants to, so he wants to put his cross half way down. And it's not possible. At the same time, he's only accepting to put on again the shoes if it's proven that these are not his own shoes. So he wants to step in somebody else's shoes, maybe this way his life would be easier and his suffering would be...

FCS: ...balanced?

GT: Yes, and the same with the hat. Vladimir takes on Lucky's hat because he thinks it will change his character in a way that he doesn't need to think all the time, because there's a lot of thinking. Thinking about the world, thinking about what happened, thinking about the misery of their lives makes him really depressed. When Beckett was asked why is Lucky's name Lucky, why is he Lucky, he answered: because he can't think.

AB: Going back to this idea of changing your destiny by stepping into somebody else's shoes: in my point of view, you want to escape, but you don't, because at the end of the play, they say let's go, but nobody moves, which is a very interesting thing. And parallel to this, just before coming to Porto, two or three months ago, I saw a documentary on National Geographic. They were talking about this huge amount of garbage floating in the Pacific, but what was shocking to me was that it was the size of France, and it's entangled. And then someone mentioned that in India there are a billion five hundred million people and the average Indian person drinks three teas a day. And that tea, because



Mise en scene with Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* (source: tnsj.pt)



Estragon's (João Melo) struggle with the boot (source: tnsj.pt)



The Great Pacific garbage patch
(source: georgerothert.com)

he's poor – that's biblical poverty, you have living in the mud – that tea is important, at least three teas in a Styrofoam cup that he throws away, and this junk is just growing. So what do you do with it? This level of garbage is also there, the garbage we produce by consumerism. And also there is also what Gábor mentioned, this kind of inquisitive power growing. Five years ago I didn't feel it has intensely as now. I have several friends whose Facebook accounts

were suspended because somebody doesn't like it somewhere? So what is this? And we talk about democracy and freedom of speech? Recently in America, in this Presidential election, regardless whether you like that person or not, somebody at Facebook decides to suspend you and then you don't communicate. We lived in this kind of KGB type. This is very frightening to me. I'm also at the end of my life, because I'll be seventy soon. It's like a nightmare I was telling Gábor about: where can I run?

GT: There's nowhere to escape, that's the difference right now.

AB: And there's this paradox: ok, now what? This is chasing me. Jokingly, I said, I'll be moving to South Pacific on an island, luckily I'm seventy so I may live a day or two or ten, it doesn't matter.

GT: It's a very bitter statement: luckily I'm old. *[Laughs]*

AB: What is happening? All these questions that can be thrown up in the air and nobody has answers, this is what this play does to me.

GT: You mentioned these last five years, and it's really from then that the discourse in the world became more extreme and more ideological. There's no dialogue, there's hate speech, there are extreme reactions. Activism, of any kind, whether it's communism, Nazism, feminism, sexism, every activism divides the world in followers and enemies, and this creates hatred. The world was never so polarized, only extremes, and the lack of dialogue about the subject itself is gone. Actually it looks like the Third World War right now, I think. And they invest massive amounts of money in this kind of ideologisation and brain-washing. There's a lot of brain-washing all over the world and in the States, throughout the Universities. It's very hard to resist because they invest billions in this kind of counter-education, in the movement of cancelling culture, history, all the values of the past, tearing off the entire history and classical art. When you designate classical music as racist, that's stunning...

AB: ...I heard it with my own ears: classical music is racist because it was done by white men. So where do you start to even engage in a dialogue, if you think like that? I see around myself friends, people that I know, who are not friends anymore, because you just dared to ask a question. Freedom of speech, how about this, just nuances. You are pigeon-holed, there's a label put on you that you are the enemy, there's no kind of conversation and listening to each other. In my lifetime, I've never seen anything like this, even in the communist regime, because there was a double life. They take it seriously now.

GT: We knew that we don't think what we say. But now there's this brain-washing and fanaticism of culture and activism. And it starts with education. Young people are cut from their past and history, because they say that your history is a sinful history. When they get to take Homer out of the curriculum of Universities saying he was racist and sexist, I imagine how sensitive he was to colours, for example, being blind, of course. Or Ted Hughes, one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century, taken out from the British Library because three hundred years ago he might have had somebody related to him in the genealogic tree who might have kept slaves. Three hundred years ago? That means thirty generations. When they checked for your relatives in the communist regime, they went up to your great grandfather, which means three generations. And if you didn't have a healthy origin, like being from the proletarian, you couldn't apply to the University; you couldn't get a job, in the fifties, in the Stanilist regime, but to go back thirty generations, it's diabolic.

FCS: One of the things that I was reminded of with all the shoes was this huge mass of people, like the migrants.

AB: Yes, it's human condition, generally. Humans surviving, going through life and dying somehow, you don't even know when, what, how, or making sense of life. Even I lived like a mercenary, it was a project after another, I was just going like a donkey after the hanging carrot in front of me, and I wanted to make sense by working, exactly like we all do. But at a certain point, I stopped recently and I look back and I feel like I got off a high speed train, in which I didn't see anything because it was running by my eyes three hundred kilometres per hour and now I see and I don't like what I see. Now that I got off, all these questions that this play raises are there.

GT: To return to Beckett, I think he was a great humanist, especially when he says about his characters, even in the novels, that all of them are clowns. So to look at what the clown really means, it's not necessarily the circus clown, or the two-faced ones, the white and the dry clown, the happy and the sad clown, but also about the history of the clown. Starting very early, I think it's an eternal character, and the fools from Shakespeare plays, who always have a different knowledge about the essential things in life, about love and death, life and friendship, because they come from this inner necessity of love. And it's not by chance that Beckett's favourite actors were Charlie Chaplin and Buster

Keaton, Chaplin in his looks, and Keaton in the method of interpretation, with this kind of poker face clown, the dry clown. We can agree that Charlie Chaplin was one of the greatest humanists of the twentieth century. Beckett learned a lot and took over the fact that in Chaplin's movies sadness is always there in the air, but is always coming in a light way, when you least expect it. And the same is in *Waiting for Godot*. There's a lot of fun, funny lines, funny situations, all the time playing this kind of game, sometimes really stupid ones, sometimes childish, and then suddenly there is a deep sadness or melancholy coming for a moment, or the realization of the fact that life is gone in a second, that the perception of time is very important. Where did all our lives just go? And are we prepared also? That's a very interesting thing. At the end of the play, the two guys pull themselves together in all their rags and they prepare themselves to go away with a certain dignity, and the dignity of just staying together. So this is very important for Beckett and for us as well, because we have to realize everything happens at the same time, as Pozzo says: one day we were born, one day we shall die, one day we go blind, one day we go mute, in the same day, in the same moment. We invented time, but if we look back at the end of the day, only memories remain, and if we look back, everything happened now, it was yesterday, as they say.

AB: They're like fragments in a mosaic and sometimes we lose the sense of time sometimes. Memories which were so intense and important forty years ago, I feel like they happened five minutes ago. It's all these reorganized images. Me being a designer also, there's also a certain aesthetic we work together, because obviously this isn't the first time, and I also follow how we enter a play or a subject. Where is the door you open? And that can be anywhere, in one word. My best designs happen like that, and then you sleep over it and digest it and you come back with an idea that is not an illustration, it's more a dramatic space. It's difficult but when it works, that's the biggest satisfaction, as it does here, as in all big productions. It's this kind of ambiguity that always leaves room for something.

FCS: Talking about ambiguity, let's talk of the Boy appearing but not appearing, meaning he will be there in real time but mediated through an image on a TV set. That's very telling also.

AB: It's like in Skype. [Laughs]

GT: Today, more than never, do we believe in appearance, in all the news fed reality, which is more and more uncontrollable and more and more doubtful? Now in journalism, like I mentioned before, the ethical or the moral part disappeared. And what is it? To tell the truth, by any means. Now it is to sell the news, by any means. To sell the version I'm giving, more than the other. The rating is important, not the truth, not the content itself, but the sensation, the breaking news, the first page news in order to sell, sell, sell. Look at the news about Portugal. I'm not denying the virus, but I'm a little bit doubtful about the way it's presented country by country. They blow it up to make a sensation. The journalists, 99 per cent of them are sold, they sell themselves, they are bought by

the guys behind the curtains. This is connected, just to go back, with memory. If you cut memory, if you delete memory, or history, if you don't remember you cannot forgive either, if you don't remember the past, with the good and the bad, catastrophes and tragedies. Human history is full of tragedies. History is, in a way, on one hand, the fight for power, but parallel there is a cultural history, which is important. So far it's the culture that survived and remained, with all the buildings, the pyramids, the



Vladimir, Estragon and the boy,
scene from the performance (source: tnsj.pt)

paintings, the movies and the books. The tendency now is to delete this, to delete the culture of memory so you can't forgive, so you keep up the hatred, which is not based on facts or evidence, it's based on ideology.

FCS: There's one sentence on the play that struck me since the first reading. It's a line by Vladimir at the end: "Habit is the great deadener." You were talking about memory and habit is about repetition and...

GT: ...and getting used to something.

FCS: Yes, and also about language being ritualized, like when Lucky is doing his broken speech. That sentence I think resonates a lot today because we are kept on a loop of desinformation or on an overload of information that makes us numb.

GT: If we don't stand up and say that we believe the contrary or the opposite, something we know it's not true and we don't say it, that's when we get used to and we accept, we slowly accept this condition. And this is the key moment now. Everybody is put in a situation where almost everything, the lockdowns, the travelling bans, the interdiction to meet, is for the sake of your own health, so it's a very cynical way to put it. Of course, but it can be prolonged forever.

AB: It's politicized.

GT: Yes, and mostly it's not about health. There are a lot of doctors who are protesting about the way the whole thing is communicated and dealt with. And it's not the health people, the experts, the medical doctors; it's always the politicians who are communicating about the pandemic, it's very strange.

AB: They say history repeats itself, without memory, obviously. And to me what's shocking is that history repeats itself within the span of my life. Now everything has such a short span and people are spending half of their lives on digital media, on their phones and computers, objects that I use and love, they make my life easier. There's a positive side to it. Almost everything has a

positive side. Excessive anything can hurt you. There's a balance needed there, a kind of discipline. But how do you learn that when they want to sell you and manipulate you? If the masses are frightened and you tell them everyday don't do this or that, which makes sense but the perversion is that 80 percent is true and the rest is not, the rest is manipulating you. I've been witnessing this sort of manipulation for the last two, three years of my life, a short time span relatively speaking. And it's intriguing; it makes me angry and sad, it's a mixture, as if nothing has changed; only technology is completely different.

GT: You can have a situation where people are running away from a certain regime and ideology, to the so-called free world, get there and then they get the same thing after decades from where they run away.

AB: Even language is the same.

GT: And it becomes more and more absurd, absolutely.

AB: And language is so important. I see people on TV or dialogue or a written text, and I heard it before, forty years ago, by the same extreme Bolshevik left, in that case. And I'm a left wing person; I'm a liberal deep down. So this is much more interesting because I wish I was on the other side but I'm not.

GT: But the extremes are harming exactly the liberal ideas more than others. These ultra liberals don't have anything to do with the healthy traditional liberalism, which is about freedom of speech, freedom of moving, equality, social justice, which are always things that an artist has to support.

AB: When I back home, in Eastern Europe, and I was ten or eleven, one of the things that bestow with me and resonates still today, one of the bright lights of European liberalism originally, is seventeenth century Descartes, who said: I question, therefore I think, I think therefore I exist. It couldn't be said better, science begins with questioning. If you question and if you don't ask the right question, which is considered politically correct, then you're doomed, you may even lose your job and you're marginalized. Back then you were sent to the Gulag, you don't need Gulags, your career is destroyed, and you're desperate and pushed into suicide. Or you are ruined psychologically by smaller things. You don't need concentration camps. I know so many people who don't know how to turn around and they are in their thirties. What do you do? Move somewhere else? This is what frightens me. I hope I'm exaggerating it.

GT: As in the Gulag regime, there's no presumption of innocence.

AB: They don't even listen to you, you're pigeon-holed, you get the label, and the ocean could not wash all your sins off, in their eyes. And perception becomes reality, nobody cares what truth is, it's perception and perception is manipulated.

GT: The last couple of years I was really impressed and influenced by a documentary by Wim Wenders, called *The Salt of the Earth*. It's about the Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado, a wonderful movie. For me, the fact that, after decades of photographing, and being there present in the most

sensitive and dramatic moments of recent history, whether it's about environment or history or politics, thinking that he can change the world and then recognizing that he can't, coming back to Brazil and seeding those millions of trees, somehow there's a glimpse of hope, there's a way back, not to the past, it's not possible, but to repair some crimes, whether against humanity or nature. Nature is very important. Also this documentary tells me that



Sebastião Salgado and his wife Léila
among seedlings for afforestation
(photo: Ricardo Beliel, source: dw.com)

faith is only valid if you can prove it with your own life, with deeds, that's the ultimate proof. Just simple things can change, even if sowing two million trees is not such a simple thing, at his homeland, he recreated that forest.

FCS: And was it that sort of awakening that made you want to end the play with that choral piece by Fernando Lopes-Graça? [option not followed in the final version]

GT: I wanted to have a Portuguese song and to extend the play a little bit. Maybe I'm wrong or it's a necessity I feel, because Beckett's work is very round. I wanted just to have something, a miracle, because they are waiting for the miracle, all the time, in all of Beckett plays they are waiting for the miracle, to happen now. This way, it's a kind of pushing God to the limit, to answer now. I think there are so many miracles that we don't observe around us. We don't have to expect a miracle to happen in a radical way, tomorrow morning when I awake up, that's not possible. There are so many miracles: the blossoming of a tree, but also music itself, the existence of art. It can't be explained otherwise the fact that music exists, that art exists, that especially culture can touch people. Ideologies can only make people either fanatic or blunt, almost taking away the natural instincts to live together. Children are also a kind of miracle, in a way. So something that happens beyond that waiting, it's an extension of the play but it's something which is in the spirit of the play: hell is not necessarily waiting for us, if we consider hell is here anyway. [*Laughs*]

AB: It's very encouraging to look at life like that, I believe it also, waiting for something.

GT: Keep waiting, not to give up this waiting.

AB: There's wait and hope. You just wait, hope will happen or not, same thing is in Tchéchov, they're waiting. This kind of *leitmotiv*, that we are waiting for something to happen, to wake up one morning and just feel good, that kind of inner feeling of happiness, having coffee one morning on your balcony. The miracles are in the everyday life if you can find them.



Mari Töröcsik in 1970, after the premiere of the film *Love* (photo: Éva Keleti, source: gondola.hu)

In Memoriam Mari Törőcsik

RIP Dear Mari, Loved by a Country

To Mari Törőcsik, theatre meant life. When she returned from clinical death in 2009, her old friend, Russian director Anatoly Vasiliev “staged her back to life” in Kaposvár in the production titled *Entire Days in the Trees*. She often got sick later, too, and felt feeble, but when she stepped onto the stage, we watched in amazement the strength, bearing and energy she showed in her role. Yes, she then blossomed, she was reanimated. There was no trace of weakness. We admired and envied her: where does this sick and fragile body get the power which she can mobilize on entering the stage? She lived by herself after the death of her husband, Gyula Maár. We knew that theatre gave her the energy to stay alive. She had a task, she had a job to do.

From 1956 on, when she vaulted into theatre life as Mari in *Körhinta* (Merry-Go-Round), she played without interruption. The figures are also impressive: more than one hundred and thirty roles are archived, sixty-six of which were in productions at the National Theatre, Budapest. She last appeared on stage in *The Life of Galileo*, which opened in 2016. The number of her cinema roles amounts to one hundred and seventy-four. Numbers certainly refer to quantity only, whereas the value of this long career was granted by quality. Her friend, the poet János Pilinszky, was among the first to recognize and articulate the secret of this unique talent. That is how he wrote about it:

“Sober and suggestive at the same time. This extreme and great contradiction can only be tolerated and realized by a brilliant artist. An exceptional soul who belongs to no one and everyone at the same time... Mari Törőcsik, in a symbolic scene, is tearing a cheerful mask off her face. What emerges from behind the mask is not just a crying, smudged face, but something you can barely confront. The face of Mari Törőcsik. The perpetual and naked nourishment of her life, roles and talent.”

She was kept alive by the love of the audience. She was proud, in all modesty, of the love that flowed towards her. Besides the great performances, talent and well-earned recognition, Mari Törőcsik enjoyed a special success as well: she was the only Hungarian actress to become world famous.

Mari Törőcsik was member of the National Theatre, Budapest, for forty years. First at the beginning of her career, from 1958 to 1979, then from 2002 on again. She used to say proudly that she was the first one to be contracted by director György Schwajda to the company of the new National Theatre, which opened in 2002.

She played in one of the most important productions of my life, the mother’s role in the stage, later film version of Ferenc Juhász’s *Szarvassá változott fiú* (*The*

Boy Changed Into a Stag). The famous figure of Hungarian theatre joined the then young Beregszász company in such a way that nothing but work mattered. 2003, Gyula, Castle stage. The sun was blazing during the rehearsals, and the heat in the cauldron of the castle walls was unbearable. "Do not spare me!", she shouted when I had indicated that she did not need to sit through every rehearsal and it was all right for her to take part in her scenes only. She was watching the rehearsals with a wet handkerchief on her head. Because she wanted to understand it all. She was curious. She was working with us. Because there is work, without which there is no performance.

2015. By putting *Körhinta* (*Merry-Go-Round*) on stage at the National Theatre, we invoked her very self. The film, the new career, the first and instant worldwide success. At the beginning of the performance we hear for a moment the voice of Mari Törőcsik and Imre Soós: "We are flying, Mari!" It is a tribute, and an indication that subsequent generations are connected and attached to what has been.

After all, Mari works in this company, among us! I had no peace as a director as to how she should be included in the production. I figured out that she should come in in the end. Not as part of the performance, but at the curtain call. The idea invited many arguments and counter-arguments from my colleagues. They all contained some truth, and I had my doubts as well.

However, doubt was dispelled by the audience. As Mari Törőcsik entered the stage at the end of the production, the auditorium exploded. There was standing ovation, she was celebrated by the audience. Since the power of this personality penetrated their hearts. There is someone you can love. Someone who is loved by a country. Who is not a divisive but a cohesive personality.

There was something sad, and kind of farewell-like after a great career of six decades, about her standing there alone downstage, with all the actors in a circle further back... However, there was no saying goodbye yet. I will let you in on a secret. Several times we had *Körhinta* (*Merry-Go-Round*) playing on the main stage parallel with Ibsen's *Brand* in Attila Kaszás Hall. In the latter piece, the then eighty-year-old Mari Törőcsik had two roles. When she came in at the end of *Körhinta* she was wearing a costume worn in *Brand*, because she still had a scene and had to hurry back to her other performance...

We are grateful to Mari Törőcsik for the many characters she created, the cheerful moments, the love, and the example she set in teaching humility toward creative work and theatre. We thank being able to see her and work with her, as well as her loyalty to the National Theatre.

We are mourning a unique personality in Hungarian theatre life.

On behalf of the company of the National Theatre: Attila Vidnyánszky

LÁSZLÓ BÉRCZES: Respect to Talent. Mari Törőcsik in *Uncle's Dream**

"Where is the boundary between illusion and reality, the stage and the auditorium? Is this boundary, this wall always there? Probably yes. Yet my ambition is to create the illusion that this boundary has disappeared."

Anatoly Vasiliev

What is theatre? What is life?

The actor is placed on this boundary line by Vasiliev and made to slide and step back and forth, first marking, then trampling on the line by their footstep. All this, of course, is only an afterthought, since there is always a concrete situation on stage. The actor does not act out a theory, but simply exists in a situation. In most theatre performances this existence is just an imitation, actors pretend 'as if' and so do we, the spectators... This, in fact, is expected. However, there is something different happening in *Uncle's Dream*.

Mari Törőcsik comes in – the not fully lowered curtain leaves a gap for us to see that she walks in briskly in plain clothes – and sits down on a chair. She is sitting, she is waiting, she is Mari Törőcsik. Then she speaks. She says Pavel Alexandrovich, then she says Zina. She will be called Maria Alexandrovna. It does not make her, so to speak, behave like Maria Alexandrovna – that person does not even exist yet, but is to be born through the actor both in herself and in me. She sits with a straight back and watches intently. That attention is genuine, it is happening now, however, this attention is paid to the story of a certain Prince Gavrila, his uncle. She will react to this and comment, searching for words. But it is not the actor remembering her lines, this is ... who is it? A person named Mari Törőcsik, kept being called Maria Alexandrovna, who wants to find the most accurate words to utter her perhaps silly but sincere arguments about the abolition of serfdom, about Shakespeare and the Prince, whom she is waiting for more and more impatiently and excitedly. Her whole body is motionless, just moving in the air, her fingers twisting and spinning emptily, as if she could pinch and drop the most appropriate word. Then, at the mention of her uncle's piece, she springs up and screams "that's where your farce could come in", and dances, puts on an act – then, all of a sudden, she stops, looks around to find that the others are sitting stiffly, smiling benevolently, and she feels a little ashamed, may even blush, but she keeps the smile and sits down with childlike innocence and guilt, yet with some pride. So something is already happening (is it theatre itself?) and we have slipped in, now we are inside, we believe Maria Alexandrovna, who – or not her, but Mari Törőcsik – stands up,

* A stage adaptation of Dostoevsky's long short story was presented on April 9, 1994 at the Művész Színház (Artist's Theatre), directed by Anatoly Vasiliev.

grabs the thonet chair and sets it for the next scene. This will often be repeated, sometimes she will go and bring a chair from the cover when there is one within reach, and sometimes everybody rushes out of sight while the stagehands will quickly rearrange the space. “Alienation,” we would say in Brecht’s words, but there is much more to it here. Vasiliev is not simply warning of so-called reality. He is creating and destroying an illusion at the same time. He always restarts the actor (and us) to drift deeper and deeper into a previously unknown reality, one soaked in faith, into an artistic reality of higher order if you like. Therefore, he elicits from himself colours, sounds, gestures and movements that he himself may not have encountered before – and this also applies to one of the grand dames of our acting, Mari Töröcsik. And the actor (Dezső Garas or Károly Eperjes for example) who repeats his own – certainly successful – clichés in another performance the day before or the next day, will here, in Vasiliev’s theatre, almost be enchanted and change, and they will enchant and change the viewer who is willing to enter the game with intense attention, giving up their comfortable reclining observation. Attention – turning inwards as well as to the others – beautifies and rejuvenates a person. Dorottya Udvaros may never have been so beautiful, or Töröcsik so young (the adjectives here are now interchangeable), because they immerse in almost every ray of life in their longer-than-an-hour duet scene. Both focus on themselves and each other with their entire being, so it is natural that Udvaros, sitting far away and with her back at her, feels the entry of Töröcsik (this is later repeated in the Eperjes – Töröcsik scene). The presence of Töröcsik – Maria has such radiant power that it gives the actor almost physical strength. Zina starts sobbing and Maria rushes to her frantically, easily jumps up to the almost a meter high platform, and she is already play-acting, daydreaming, and flying the other one to her otherwise petty and ridiculous dreams of Spain, where this beautiful girl will be happy with the imbecile prince ever after.

Zina resists hard, Maria goes quiet again and again, but during her silences she recovers and re-starts, never giving up. Zina knows (and so do I, the viewer, the third participant in the scene) that Maria is play-acting, cheating, daydreaming only – and yet, well beyond the limits of perseverance and endurance, we begin to believe her. They are standing in two areas of the stage, Zina nods to the marriage, Maria, her strength flagging, stands there smiling and her eyes twinkling, and her tears come rolling down, “But Zina, I love you!” she erupts, and, regardless of the thonet chair, so-called reality and so-called theatre have collapsed into each other completely. There are tears streaming down the face of Maria Alexandrovna again, but that will be the end. She has got Zina’s persuasion over with and also the hard fight with the clingy suitor Mozglyakov; victory is complete; coloured pieces of paper are cascading; fireworks are sparkling; the lights of “Madrid”, this model Spain, light up; the beautiful singer emerges from the twilight of the background; a dwarf is playing the violin, his

companion is listening to him standing at attention, and Maria -Törőcsik is overwhelmed by triumph, she is constantly chortling, running around in the space, beating her chest, clinging to the door frame and swinging ... She is happy. Then she is sitting alone, fallen apart, shattered. The uncle does not remember the proposal to the girl, it was only a dream. The brilliant Maria -Törőcsik failed to take this alone into consideration that the elements of dream and reality have become completely confused for her uncle. She has constructed the reality of her daughter and herself based on the dreams of a stranger. She wanted illusion instead of reality. She is aware that there is no solution, so, after a few feeble attempts, she stops talking. She is staring ahead, into nothingness, with tears on her face, while provincial mediocrity is bustling around her. Gathering the last shreds of her flagging strength, Maria Alexandrovna flings "Imbecile!" at the prince before she hurries off the scene. When Mari Törőcsik returns for the curtain call, her face reflects happiness, fatigue and doubt. Is she going to have the strength to start again tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, to play-act before the prince one more time, or to convince Zina once again that this is the only solution? Mediocrity is bustling, confident of victory. And Mari Törőcsik will have to start anew tomorrow, talentedly.

July 1994, Színház (Theatre)

My Encounters with Russian Theatre.

Interview with Mari Törőcsik by András Kozma

ANDRÁS KOZMA: *You are one of the most influential Hungarian actresses in the second half of the 20th century who have worked with almost all major directors, and you are one of the rare artists who have had the opportunity to get in direct contact with the most famous artists in the world. Perhaps your most intense and deepest relationship was established with Russian theatre. How did this special attachment develop?*

MARI TÖRŐCSIK: "Russian theatre and Russian culture have really become a very important part of my life. But you may know that I did not originally intend to take up acting. I can safely say that a series of strange coincidences put me on this course, and I am, to this day, grateful to the people who have facilitated this. In fact, I acted instinctively, played instinctively, which filmmakers loved very much. This is probably the reason for my breakout role in Zoltán Fábri's *Körhinta* (Merry-Go-Round) while still in college, which immediately got me to the Cannes Film Festival in 1957. There, in a single moment, the whole wide world opened up to me and I made the acquaintance of the most famous actors and film directors. It was a huge experience, and I still remember, for example, Nikolay Cherkasov, who played the title role

in Sergei Eisenstein's film, *The Knight of the Icefields* (original title: *Alexander Nevsky* – A. K.) and *Ivan the Terrible*. He loved me in the *Körhinta* (*Merry-Go-Round*), and I was completely impressed by his radiance.

But I did not find my real actor's tools on stage for a long time, and it mattered a lot to me that my masters, my directors, had great patience and love for me. Among these, Russian directors played a particularly important role in my life. I learned a great deal from Grigory Kovsky for instance, the legendary actor-director of the Moscow Artist Theatre, who was a great friend of Mikhail Bulgakov at the time, and came to Budapest in 1959 to stage Arbuzov's *Tanya* with me. To this day, it is ringing in my ear as he is shouting at me from below during the rehearsal, "Energitsneye, energitsneye!" ("More energetic, more energetic!" – A. K.). Then he explained through the interpreter that it does not mean I have to speak louder, but I need to bring in more inner energy, and that a sigh can carry as much power as a scream. I think that became the basis of my acting in a sense. Kovsky was an excellent educator, raising a number of generations of Russian actors. In addition to Bulgakov, Solzhenitsyn was also his friend, and he read their works in manuscripts. He first told me about the *Cancer Ward* and *A Theatrical Novel* – Bombardov's figure was modelled on him by Bulgakov as I know.

Ten years later, in 1969, I had an overwhelming experience when I saw the guest performance of the Gorky Theatre from Leningrad in Pest, *The Petty Bourgeois* directed by Georgi Tovstonogov. It had such a great impact on me that I went to see it three times in a row and I consider it as one of the greatest theatrical experiences in my life ever since. Then I also had the good fortune of playing in *A Warsaw Melody* at the Gorky Theatre in Leningrad, when, as a result of my film roles, I was very well known and popular in the then Soviet Union. Sizes are quite different there, and we played in a huge hall in front of three thousand people, with amazing success. An equally important encounter in my life was the performance by Yuri Lyubimov and the company of Taganka Theatre of *Hamlet*, starring Vladimir Vysotsky. It was theatrical miracle itself – in this production I met the real Hamlet. Sure, Laurence Olivier was also an excellent actor, and he played this role superbly, too, but I felt Vysotsky to be the real one because he in fact died in his role. I remember that after the performance I invited them over to have a party. I got them all kinds of drinks, but none of them wanted to drink alcohol, so we ended up drinking water... Their other brilliant production was *Master and Margarita*, another unforgettable experience. Later Lyubimov staged Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* at the National Theatre in 1981, which is also one of the most important tasks of my life. Yuri Lyubimov is a real gentleman, a very attentive, yet passionate director. I saw almost all his premieres, could even join his rehearsals, and I learned a lot from him.

However, Anatoly Vasiliev is the Russian director that I have worked most with, and in the last twenty years he has been perhaps the biggest influence on

me. On the advice of others, I invited him to a staging in 1994 as the director of the former Artist Theatre. He put Dostoevsky's *Uncle's Dream* on stage, and I can say that the whole rehearsal process was an incredible experience not only for me but for the whole company. He was able to polish a word or a sentence for hours, until it took on its perfect form or the most expressive intonation. Behind the text he always saw the perspective of intentions and demanded it from the actors as well – it was a rather fantastic encounter with a real stage, of whom there are very few left in this world. He is one of the last mentors of the great theatrical era, a true theatrical ascetic. Starting from a small cellar theatre in Moscow, he set up a beautiful theatrical workshop of snow-white spaces, a company of passionate enthusiasm which focussed not on cheap audience needs, but on some higher theatrical ideal. He invited me there, too, to continue the workshop which had started with *Uncle's Dream*. Anatoly Vasiliev wanted to work with me specifically, and he said that the full depth of what I have to offer as an actor goes unnoticed in Hungary. I rehearsed there with him and his actors for several months, and I can say that it was such a fantastic immersion for me in a completely different kind of theatrical reality that I would be forever grateful to him. I used to put it this way: I was given a chance thereby to be part of “some real aristocratic fun”. I have felt so sorry ever since then that I do not speak Russian, so we always relied on an interpreter for conversation, but even so, I think I can count him among the most important people in my life. Later, in 1998, he staged Ostrovsky's *More Sinned Against Than Sinning* with me at the Szigligeti Theatre in Szolnok, and then in 2009, after my “death”, I returned to the stage in Kaposvár with his direction of *Entire Days in the Trees*. It was terribly hard work, Vasiliev had also changed, but he would not let go of his perfectionism. A special man who refuses to bow to the world.”

AK: *What do you think makes Russian theatre, Russian directors and actors special?*

MT: “For me, one of the most important features of Russian theatre, which is also characteristic of Anglo-Saxon theatre, is the extremely high standard cultivation of stage speech. After all, stage speech is not simply used to convey information, but through intonation and musicality it can also convey the tiniest vibrations of the soul or the most subtle changes in emotions. Russian stage speech can show impressively subtle modulations, which could only have been polished in the context of a very advanced theatrical culture, understood by the sensitive and incredibly educated Russian audience. Entire generations of directors and actors have perfected this theatrical culture and I am very glad that I had the opportunity to learn something from that. Unfortunately, today's theatre life places less and less emphasis on this. Of course, I also consider the so-called alternative endeavours important. It is no accident that I take part in productions such as the *Szarvassá változott fiú* (*The Boy Changed Into a Stag*) in Beregszász or *The Marriage of Figaro* by Maladype Theatre, but I am convinced

that in addition to formal experimentation, the essence of theatre should never be forgotten. Like, for example, attention. Andrei Tarkovsky, the famous film director once said that today's world shatters people's attention, and after a while they can no longer pay attention to each other or anything really. Unfortunately, money is becoming more and more a measure of value. I am convinced that even Tarkovsky would not be given subsidy for his films today. But I hope Russia can still preserve the intellectual values it has accumulated through its theatre and films."

A Szív, June, 2011.

Translated by Nóra Durkó



Mari Törőcsik on the stage of the National Theatre, Budapest, curtain call in *Merry-Go-Round*, 2016 (photo: Eöri Szabó Zsolt, source: nemzetiszinhez.hu)



„Óh, e zűr között
hová lesz énem zárt
egyénsége.”

/Madách Imre/

MITEM

MADÁCH NEMZETKÖZI SZÍNHÁZI TALÁLKOZÓ MADÁCH INTERNATIONAL THEATRE MEETING

NATIONAL THEATRE • BUDAPEST, 17 SEPTEMBER – 9 OCTOBER, 2021.

NEMZETI SZÍNHÁZ • BUDAPEST, 2021. SZEPTEMBER 17. – OKTÓBER 9.

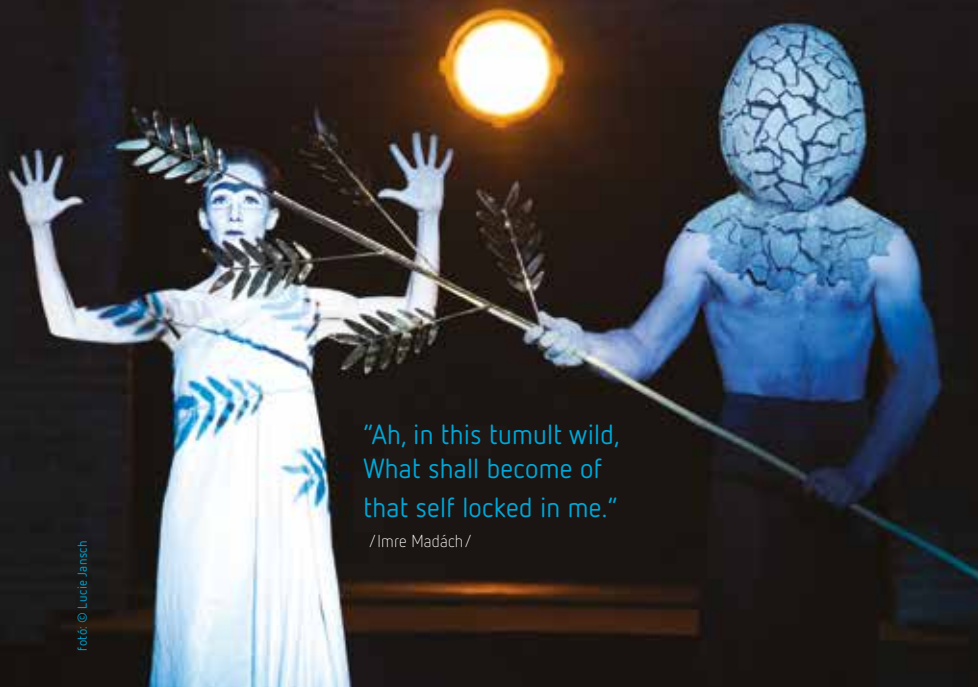


foto © Lúcia Jánosch

“Ah, in this tumult wild,
What shall become of
that self locked in me.”

/Imre Madách/

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“The performer at the center of the stage, in front of him the ecstatic God of theater, Dionysus, child of a double birth, both of Zeus and Semele, exponent of mutually exclusive and fluid identities, woman and man, angry and meek, god and animal, on the borderline between madness and logic, order and chaos. (...) The fertilizing Dionysus invites the performer to seek the archetypical body, hidden in the depth of his structure, oppressed and repressed by the mind. This Body, with sources of unprecedented psychophysical energy, is the performer’s main material; its boundaries extend beyond the limits of the physical body. It is constantly reformed by memories deeply engraved in the performer’s structure. (*Theodoros Terzopoulos*)

“The acting techniques are not body techniques, but techniques of a personality, of a body-mind that is particular and unique. In reality each of these techniques is a micro-history, the consequence of an unrepeatable biography. (...) however, that these personal results make a range of psychosomatic principles objectively perceptible, and these are helpful to any actor or dancer of any style in implementing a state of scenic presence which is potentially creative. The study of these principles is the field of theatre anthropology.” (*Eugenio Barba*)

“If you look at the Greek Tragedies that were create 2,600 years ago you will see, theater has always been thinking about things like how to act with other ethnic peoples, how to think about crime, what rules people need to keep in order to live as a community, the individual and a community, universal problems that transcend ethnicity. I believe that is why the Greek Tragedies and plays like those of Shakespeare have become the shared heritage of humankind that transcends nationality.” (*Tadashi Suzuki*)

“While we Russians, even Dostoevsky, used to say in the 19th century that we have to strive towards the West, because – despite all our criticism – Europe is still Europe and we have to learn and take an example from it, now I could not say that any more. (...) I feel Europe is degrading on the whole because it is voluntarily giving up everything it has accomplished through hundreds and thousands of years. Moreover, it is doing so without being aware that it is forcing on itself a completely new way of life, new moral rules, new communication forms...” (*Valery Fokin*)

“The theater of parousia means the theater of »Christ’s appearance at the Last Judgment«. In other words: the theater of the Resurrection. In ancient Greek usage, parousia referred to the rite of the ruler’s visit; in the Gospels, to the final visit of the Redeemer, that is, to the second coming of the Messiah, the final, fulfilling event when He restores »the country« and sits in final judgment. »This will be the theater of parousia«, Silviu Purcărete declares on the first day of rehearsal of *The Tragedy of Man* with a theater company in Temesvár (Romania) in 2019.” (*András Visky*)

