

The Spacing of a Message

Anca-Doina CIOBOTARU*

Carmen MIHALACHE*

Abstract: In the 21st century, during the pandemic, as in any other time, people choose keywords to quash their anxieties, to ferment their uneasiness, to free themselves. We build bridges between the art of theater, physics and psychology, with the help of which to cancel the imposed distances, with variable dimensions – from 1.5 m to the... social ones. Appearance and resilience tend to measure our ability to withstand the unexpected closings and openings of theatrical encounters; in fact, they become ways of reflecting the dimension of each artist's desire to get involved, to express themselves, to respond to the needs of those around them - as each knows best, each with his craft. In this context, the definition of the theory of emerging evolution offers us a new perspective on creativity; the hybrid formulas of “theater-filming”, whatever the attached concept would be, carry with them the vibration of the “spontaneous and the unpredictable”. Applied theater is no exception. With or without dolls, it offers the chance for quick reformulations, focusing on the need of the receiver and the transmission of a message. Thus, *The inner tree (Copacul interior)* was transformed from an applicative theater show into a challenge in which artistic research took concrete forms. Firstly: message spacing; the road to the public passed through the narrowness of the camera lens. Unexpectedly, unlooked for, the dream meeting could only be fulfilled in digitized formulas. This perspective allows us to notice the opportunity of the unpredictable, which of the relationship body - puppet - projection has become a formula for training creativity, for reformulating stage expressiveness; this time art humbly serves the message.

Keywords: applied theater, space, message, marionette, projection

I. Analytical reflections

In the 21st century, during the pandemic or the political and humanitarian crises caused by the war – as in any other time - people choose keywords to consume (assimilate) their anxieties, ripened their miseries, and set them free.

Emergence and resilience tend to measure our ability to resist the unexpected closings and openings of theatrical meetings/ encounters (regardless of the causes that determine the closing of the doors); they become ways of reflecting the size of each

* Professor PhD habil., Faculty of Theatre, UNAGE, Iași

* PhD student, Doctoral School of UNAGE Iași

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

artist's desire to get involved, to express themselves, to respond to the needs of others – as they know best, each with his craft (talent/ skills). We build bridges between the art of theater, technology, and psychology, with the help of which we try to cancel the imposed distances, with variable dimensions – from 1.5 m to the... social, and legal ones.

In the current context, the theory of emergent evolution definition gives us a new perspective on creativity; the hybrid formulas of "filmed-theater", regardless of the concept to which they are attached, carry with them the vibration of the "spontaneous and unpredictable". Applied - theater is no exception. With or without dolls, it offers the chance for rapid reformulations, focusing on the need of the receiver and transmitting a well-defined message. A possible starting point of a study in the intended (contemplated) direction could be the recognition of a certain reality: we cannot bypass (avoid) the role of the physical intelligence development in the evolution of creativity, which implicitly leads us to an interdisciplinary approach; thus, the principles of spectacular aesthetics/ stylistics will meet those of pedagogy and coaching in the artistic field (regardless of the level of training). Physical intelligence can be considered as a mandatory dimension (condition) of the creative potential; it can be trained and reflects, equally, the level of *physical empathy*, with direct influences on the ability to transpose messages - through movement, by the way of occupying the space, of establishing relationships with the objects, images, and bodies in the scenic (stage) space – real or virtual.

The relationship with virtual presences challenges both the creators and the public. The clarity of the message requires its essentialization and an open view in a state of search and acceptance. Artistic – research reveals its pragmatic dimension; in our case, it triggers an applied analysis on the theme of message spatialization, of the relationship between stage space and character, a form of implicit reflection of the interpreter's empathy with the character (with the specific notes of the applied theatre).

So, the empathy on stage will generate the empathy of the audience. Starting from this simple and natural principle, the *Inner Tree* (planted in the garden of the Research Center „The Art of Theater – Study and Creation” shared, cordially with the Doctoral School of Theatre) turned from an applied theatre performance into a challenge in which the artistic research took real forms. The first one: is the spatialization of the message; the road to the audience will, however, pass through the narrowness of the camera lens. The long dreamt encounter can only be accomplished in digitalized (virtual) formulas. This time, art serves the message with humility. *The inner tree* is a performance with an undertaken mission: raising the public's awareness

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

of the existence of dystonia (one of the many rare diseases) and – especially – of the impact that this disease has on the patients' lives, people next to us, that only haste, ignorance or carelessness make us not see. The road to the general public, to achieve the goal of raising awareness of the civil - society and political decision-makers (from all over Europe) regarding the need to get involved in supporting each case – individually – can only be crossed (covered) through the performance (show) recording; the line between the arts melts (once again) in favor of transmitting the message.



THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

This perspective allows us to notice the opportunity of the unpredictable, through which the *relationship between body – puppet – projection* has become a formula for training creativity, reformulating scenic expressiveness, and the way of understanding what can be contained in the "spatialization of the message" syntagma (expression). Each working stage brings with it (as the name of the "work in progress" technique suggests) unexpected ideas and challenges, especially regarding the preparation of those involved, the crossing of the psychological comfort threshold, the endurance required by the magnitude (scale) in time and space specific to the project – especially in the initial documentation and structuring phase.



Based on the principles that define artistic research, collaborative practice, and the work-in-progress method, this project opens ways of reflecting on how the puppeteer–puppet couple can generate meanings, in alignment with the projected image and within a projected image. Puppets/marionettes are used in the structures generically included in the "applicative theatre" - art therapy, theatre in education - especially in interactive projects for children; this time the target audience includes adolescents, young people, adults, specialists in medicine, psychologists, sociologists, in other words, those who could support the desired (targeted) change. The presence of puppets captures, attracts, and outlines paradoxes; on the one hand, it is surrounded

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

by prejudices, on the other hand, it opens infinite and subtle paths of stage expression. The co-presence of the body - puppet - virtual projection /presence is no longer just a formula for stage expression, but a way to turn speech into an alarm signal. The puppet metaphor amplifies the voices of the protagonists and actors. Its silences, its facial immobility, and the way it conquers gravity are turned into a scream. We live in a trap of metering (calculus), of quantitative analyses, within which the dimension of each human destiny melts into theories and twisted ideologies, in the name of a strange modern democracy in which social policies get lost between numbers and forget about patients with rare diseases. Art only fulfills its purpose when it provokes.



THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

The doctoral research initiated by the doctoral student Carmen Mihalache¹ had the chance to meet the little known world of these patients, together with the University Lecturer Emanuel Florentin Ph.D., and Assistant Professor Alice Ioana Florentin Ph.D. (who is also the engine of stage movement development); they got involved not only in the process of stage creation but also in the process of documentation. The documentation meant immersing in the personal stories of the heroes, getting closer to the vibration of each day they experienced, and receiving a powerful life lesson. Research in the field of art - therapy brings to attention risk factors generated by: emotional involvement, awareness of personal limits in sustaining change, resistance to change – approaching a new style of spectacular expression, in which the pride (ego) of the stylistic brand is set aside in favor of the message.

This project, which is in full swing, started last year (2021), will not be completed, however, without the involvement of the University Lecturer Andrei Cozlac Ph.D., a renowned specialist in the use of projections and new media techniques in the performing arts, and his colleagues who provide the stage and technical assistance at the STUDIO Hall. This team will be joined by collaborators from UNATC Bucharest, who will ensure the shooting and editing. Thus, the Ph.D. student has the chance to carry out applied research, integrated into an interdisciplinary spectacular (dramatic) project, following the artistic research standards.

These analytical reflections can be argued by revealing some argumentative aspects, regarding the scenic solutions to figure out (technical and aesthetic) the body – puppet – projected image relationship.

II *The Inner Tree* - Scenic Reflections

1. Stylistic Intersections

The Inner Tree is a project that aims for more than a mere (simple) show, including a combination of stylistic challenges specific to a hybrid project, which can be included under the umbrella of the *applied theater* concept and which goes beyond the conventional, placing both the participants and the spectators beyond the usual purposes of the theatrical art. The scenic transposition of the script, achieved through

¹Thesis: The Actor of the Applied Animation Theatre – From Fictional to Real Space

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

the specific techniques of the *documented theater*, contains performance elements, which resonate with the need of those involved in the project to obtain maximum expressiveness, trigger the awareness of the dystonia effects, and produce change, within the community, in the way this condition is viewed and - especially – how the patients are viewed; these are associated with theatrical practices such as dance theater and animation theater.

The Inner Tree is more than just a story. The focus moves on the message; thus, the performers are both the artists experienced in their art, and also the patients who tell their story, through their documented testimonies, for the first time in the double hypostasis both actors and authors of text; the interest was not, however, focused on their interpretive performance, but rather on the information that emerges from their speech. The real characters met the actors, both in the documentation phase and in the construction of the performance, the way they got involved being adapted to their possibilities of participation, of supporting the physical and vocal effort. Addressing such a sensitive subject, in the initiated raising awareness campaign, we opted for them to appear on the show, because, no matter how well an actor would manage to create the character, the *real one* will always have a stronger impact; however, their physical presence would have been almost impossible, so we chose to use projections with their testimonies. Thus, the real-virtual juxtaposition (closeness) becomes a form of scenic expressiveness. The bodies appear in the physical dimension – through the actors -, and the virtual dimension – through the projections where they are the protagonists, the heroes - as they were called in the script –; the storyteller makes his presence felt only through the voice. We deliberately do not use their names in the performance because, although they are three real, personal stories, they have become, by their example, the voice of all those who have this disease (disorder), who have the power to respond to this challenge with dignity by offering what they call a "life lesson."

In our project, the puppet is a third actor. The puppet's status as an actor cannot be disputed and is not the subject of our analysis, but it gives us the chance of a co-presence that allows increasing the impact of the stories transmitted, in addition, it is a form of scenic expression derived from a testimony of the heroes "I felt like a puppet manipulated by a puppeteer". Thus, the juxtaposition of dance theatre – puppet theatre comes up naturally, allowing equally the poetic approach brought by the presence of puppets, as well as (cutting out) adapting the interpretative stylistics, that generates meanings. The Kleistian principles take on new meanings, even after two centuries.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

2. Triple Connection (Juxtaposition) - Interpretative Challenges

The triple Union (Juxtaposition) body – puppet – projected image involves a certain dynamic of movements, adapted to the message, which, in return, causes message spatialization. The body and the puppet confluence get new meanings, and captures the drama of life situations, without falling into the trap of a tragedy presented in clichés. This form of scenic language brings into attention human nature, simultaneously creating and destroying the illusion of being – the combination of animate and inanimate, *of controlling* and *the one that controls* causes deep and unsettling questions on our existential nature. The scenic images were born from the combination of various reformulated techniques – a normality proof (gesture) in the contemporary art landscape. The advantages of this hybrid are obvious, the combination being born from concrete needs: the impossibility for the heroes to be present influenced us in choosing the projected images, the patients' fight with verticality (upstanding) was the engine of dance theatre moments and the use of the puppet was an idea derived from their testimonies.

The stage transposition was born from the scenario (directly influenced by its affiliation to the applied theater) and from the juxtaposition of the announced stylistic elements. Basically, we went from story to script through the testimonies of the three heroes, testimonies that knew an initial narrative form, adapted to the needs to create the internal rhythm of the performance (show), without interfering with the content, without changing the essence of the message. The adaptation was done by consulting the author of the story. The work-in-progress technique, within this project, has not only the role of a concept but becomes a reality; its association with the techniques specific to collaborative practices has determined not only the involvement of the entire team but also the finding of new solutions. The sound universe created by Mihai Cornea triggered inspiration in the interpretive sphere, being both subordinated to the body dynamics imprinted by Alice Florentin, and also to the presence of the marionette. The changes were based on the principle: that the impact on the public will trigger the idea of a change in the perception of ordinary people about this disorder; the performance was also directly influenced by the storytelling pace of the real heroes. Matching the real hero and the actor who became the bearer of the hero's story has the role of determining the synthesis of the message. The projected image does not only suggest the scenographic universe but becomes a character, a game

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

partner. Thus, the 3D projections – made by Andrei Cozlac - become natural, their insertion is based on the unity of the scenographic vision conceived by Rodica Arghir, which also transforms the bodies of the actors into projection spaces.

The juxtapositions serve to provide striking signs through which the public can close the meaning-generating triangle, becoming an active participant in the journey to the world of those affected by rare diseases.



THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

3. Beyond Concepts

Beyond the concepts that can be acknowledged, the *inner tree* is a project in which *artistic research* reveals its advantages:

- It allows creative approaches and coming closer to new theatrical realities within which performance is present in several types of theaters and many other spaces/contexts than theatrical ones. Drama (theater) is counteracted by many convergences with the *devised theatre* "it is not just an aesthetic issue, it is not a *revitalization* of experimental avant-garde practices, it is a change in the production method, challenging/undermining the traditional hierarchy of power in the theatre."² Light - the design extends into scenography. The spectators turn into witnesses, observers, and activists, refusing to stay only in the neutral public category. Responding to the needs of these changes, new approaches have taken the place of traditional ones, creating new forms of theatrical expression.
- Generates scenic structures based on collaborative practices. Theater yearns for freedom; barriers are abandoned; strictly delimited hierarchies and tasks disintegrate; actors do not want to remain placed in "small drawers".
- Allows the involvement of the team in a process where the stage creation is accompanied by reflection, and analysis. The structure of the show, in a context similar to that created around the *Inner Tree*, becomes a journey that brings the creators closer to the interior of the reflected world. In the case of theatrical research, this aspect becomes vital; the placement inside the theme brings the creator closer to the epicenter. The work-in-progress technique involves not only openness and spontaneity but also stage reformulations based on reflection.
- It triggers the overcoming of the "recipes", of the usual solutions, so that the creative approach of the space gives consistency to the performance and freedom of the message. The spacing (spatialization) of the message is a result of a theatrical mixture, which transforms the apparent heterogeneity into an expressive formula, in a vehicle that must carry the message to the heart and mind of the public, determining change: dystonia is no longer a private problem, but a public one, based on solidarity.

²<https://createactenjoy.com/10-tips-for-a-practica-devised-theatre/>

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Sorin Crisan – *Theatre from Ritual to Psychodrama*, Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2007
- Kelly Freebody, Michael Balfour, Michael Finneran, Michael Anderson – *Applied Theatre: Understanding Change*, Springer Publishing House, 2018
- Olivia Grecea - *Devised Theater. (Collective Theatrical Creation). Utopie, Instrument and Political Theatre*, Eikon Publishing House, Bucharest, 2017
- Alison Oddey - *Devising Theater. Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, Routledge Guide, London, 1994
- Iulia Popovici - *The End of Directing, The Beginning of Theatre-Making and Devising in European Theatre*, Tact Publishing House, Bucharest, 2015
- Tim Prentki, Sheila Preston – *The Applied Theatre Reader*, Routledge Publishing House, Oxon, USA, and Canada, 2009