

## **The Metamorphoses of Drama Pedagogy in European Arts High Education Institutions Between Constraint and Initiative**

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**Abstract:** In recent decades, the professional and artistic training of the emerging actor in the European area has required significant adjustments. Drama schools in Europe have had to respond positively to the introduction of the Bologna system, whose initial aim was to homogenize the university curriculum at European level. But we must keep in mind that these aspects are the outcome of intense transmutations of an evolving society. Under these circumstances, today's actor is no longer just a drama performer. The concept of his performance, be it artistic, is present in many fields of activity. The show is everywhere; it went out of the theater hall to be present in the street, at rock concerts, at fashion shows, at all type of events, including sports. Today's actor is asked to perform in theater halls, but also in cinemas, or media, to get acquainted with new technologies. From this perspective, should drama schools train actors for all these fields or only for drama? Should there be a separate training for each of these categories or the initial, basic drama training responds to the new skills required of the young actor? At European level, there is a need for pedagogical cooperation in arts high education. Drama schools strive to expand their teaching methods panel, trying to facilitate the coexistence of Stanislavskian methods with the artistic practices of Brecht, Grotowski, Eugenio Barba. The phenomenon itself is accelerated by the development of international trade. Of course, there are international festivals and events that allow drama schools to present their creations, research in the field of drama pedagogy and to give students-actors of different nationalities the knowledge of various artistic traditions. Today, exchanges of students and teachers take place regularly within the European Erasmus + program. Whether we are referring to Western Europe or Eastern Europe, we find that the rapid evolution of society is naturally reflected in the emergence of new drama forms. This makes the mission of drama schools difficult. It seems complicated, but it may not be impossible to predict the type of artistic training that an emerging actor should receive in an arts high education institution. Moreover, the clear boundaries between the various fields are fading. Contemporary artists like to explore territories bordering the artistic fields, using different methods and techniques, and multidisciplinary is a predominant feature of our era. The educational institutions that train future actors prove difficulties to change their curriculum taking into account the rapid metamorphosis of reality. Could interdisciplinary intervene in this context as an alternative solution that brings together both defining and specific aspects of arts pedagogy? The answer could be affirmative provided that it represents an opening and it is understood as a means of integrating and sustaining the dynamics of each field of activity taught for the training of the future actor.

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## **Introduction**

In recent decades, the professional and artistic training of the future actor in the European space has required significant adjustments. The theatre schools in Europe had to respond affirmatively to the introduction of the Bologna system, which, from the very beginning, had the objective to homogenize the university curricula at European level. We must bear in mind, however, that these aspects are the result of the deep transmutations of an evolving society. We briefly recall the enlargement of the European Union to the east and the European directives applicable in all twenty-seven Member States of the European Union. Until 1990, the situation seemed somewhat simple because we found, in general, the same dichotomy in terms of artistic higher education that exists politically between Western Europe and Eastern Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall caused the emergence of new realities, including in the arts domain. Even today Western Europe is characterized by the diversity of artistic higher education. We could even say that artistic education reflects to some extent the historical and geopolitical, economical, and socio-cultural differences of each country.<sup>10</sup>

## **European theatre schools between the affirmation of the identity and standardization**

Each country in Western Europe has set itself the objective of developing its own cultural tradition, philosophy and artistic pedagogy. If in a country there are several theatre schools, such as in Germany, Great Britain, France, then each of them has its own specificity: the way the institution works, conditions of admission of students, choosing the teachers' team, duration of the course, pedagogical methods,

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<sup>10</sup> « Les grandes écoles de théâtre n'ont pas toutes été créées à la même époque. En France, Le Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Paris a été fondé en 1786 . En Angleterre , la London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) existe depuis la fin du XIXème siècle. En Irlande, les deux grandes écoles supérieures d'art dramatique , la Gaiety School of Acting et la School of Drama-Samuel Beckett, toutes deux situées à Dublin, ont été créées au milieu des années 1980. » (Chantal Boiron, *Europe scène peu commune, La formation des acteurs européens en mutation*, Louvain-la -Neuve, Etudes théâtrales 37/2006, p 85)

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pedagogical contents, obtaining diplomas or professional insertion. In northern Europe, higher artistic education institutions are often multidisciplinary and bring together, as in Romania, two or more artistic fields: theatre, dance, music, visual arts. An example of this is Belgium with the three royal conservatories, INSAS<sup>11</sup> and IAD<sup>12</sup>. This panning makes us notice that even today young actors in Western Europe receive a different artistic education from one country to another. Another fundamental difference from Eastern Europe is that access to the labour market is not conditional on a degree in the field.

Contrary to Western Europe, in Eastern Europe there was a certain homogeneity in the structure, conception and content of higher artistic education until 1990. After the second World War, the Russian model was imposed in all the countries of the communist bloc, with the sovietisation unfortunately managing to erase the specificities related to historical and cultural heritage. The national Conservatories that existed in major cities, including in Iasi, were replaced by the institutes or academies of art that later developed into universities. In these multidisciplinary, structured university institutions, students are admitted by contest, after obtaining the baccalaureate diploma. From the point of view of the pedagogical content there are many similarities between the institutions of artistic higher education, the dominant being still the Stanislavkian method and later of his disciples.

Today we can see a tangible need of the countries of the former communist bloc, which are part of the European Union, to open to European culture and to bring innovation into the artistic field, while considering the pre-existing cultural tradition. The theatre schools are striving to broaden their panel of teaching methods, trying to facilitate the cohabitation of the Stanislavkian methods with the artistic practices of Brecht, Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, etc. The phenomenon itself is accelerated by the development of international exchanges. Of course, there are international festivals and events that allow the theatre schools to present their creations, research in the field of theatrical pedagogy and to give students and actors of different nationalities the chance to know various artistic traditions. Today, exchanges of students and teachers are regularly carried out under the European Erasmus+ program.

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<sup>11</sup> INSAS-Institut national supérieur des arts du spectacle et des arts techniques de diffusion

<sup>12</sup> IAD-Institut des arts du diffusion

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A future actor can complete his artistic education if he knows the language in which he will put his artistic skills into practice. However, the critic George Banu does not give credit to the actor who plays in a language other than his mother tongue, “no actor will be fully fulfilled, if he uses his deepest resources in a language other than his mother tongue”.<sup>13</sup> The statement should be understood in the right key, namely that Europe's linguistic diversity is reflected in the diversity of its actors. Diversity also concerns the pedagogical content on which Jacques Delcuvellerie insists after the signing of the Bologna Agreement, drawing attention to the risk of “lay-out”, considering that theatre schools must remain faithful to the idea of the initiation of the student by the teacher, a principle according to which he is guided by the same teacher during his years of study, together being involved in the “search for the creative uniqueness of the future actor”<sup>14</sup>

We note that theatre schools in both the Eastern and Western areas are faced with two tendencies at least contradictory: on the one hand they try to preserve the uniqueness they have affirmed over the decades and to which they are still very attached today (see animation theatre in Eastern Europe) and on the other hand they are forced to meet the standardization and mobility requirements imposed by the European Commission.

Despite the deep and ineluctable changes that we see with the implementation of the Bologna system, we can say that the professional education of the future actor is still different from country to country and from school to school. It is almost obvious that the great European theatre schools continue to keep their own identity to the advantage of the reputation they have already created.

### **The profile of the future actor in the context of contemporary society**

Today's actor is no longer just a theatre actor. The concept of performance, be it artistic, exists in many fields of activity. The performance is everywhere, it came out of the theatre building to be present in the street, at rock concerts, at fashion shows, at events of all kinds, including sports. Today the actor is asked to work in theatre,

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<sup>13</sup> George Banu, *Théâtre fabrique d'Europe. Vers l'acteur européen*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Etudes Théâtrales 46/2009, p 81

<sup>14</sup> Chantal Boiron, *Europe scène peu commune, La formation des acteurs européens en mutation*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Etudes théâtrales 37/2006, p 89)

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but also in cinema or media, to become familiar with new technologies. From this perspective, should theatre schools form actors for all these fields or just for theatre? There should be a different education for each of these categories, or does the initial theatrical education meet the new skills required of the young actor?<sup>15</sup>

Whether we refer to Western Europe or Eastern Europe, we find that the fast evolution of society is naturally reflected in the emergence of new forms of theatre that make the mission of theatre schools difficult. It seems difficult, but perhaps not impossible, to predict the kind of artistic education that a future actor should receive in an institution of higher artistic education. Moreover, the clear boundaries between the different disciplines are fading. Contemporary artists like to explore territories bordering artistic fields, using different methods and techniques, and multidisciplinary is a predominant characteristic of our age. Educational institutions that form future actors have difficulties in changing their curriculum, considering the fast metamorphosis of reality.

Today we know that the dominant tradition of the 20th century in most artistic educational institutions in Eastern Europe was represented by Stanislavski and by his disciples. Today it seems to no longer meet the needs of the actor and of working with himself. "Stanislavski's pedagogy, as it was conceived, no longer exists, and his students have made a doctrine out of the Stanislavkian system. Therefore, the system is no longer efficient."<sup>16</sup> It is topical that many schools in the East open to other traditions and contemporary theatrical currents such as sports theatre, happening, documentary theatre, involving installations, immersive experiences, proposing a range of methodologies, thus emerging from the dogmatism of the Stanislavkian principles. This idea of forming a multifaceted actor capable of adapting to more and more varied methods and performance directing is found in many schools. On the one hand, there is a tendency to recover artistically after the cultural isolation through comprehensive knowledge of the great theatre movements of the 20th century represented by Mikhail Tchekhov, Meyerhold, Brecht, Peter Brook and on the other hand, the tendency of natural innovation in any creative process.

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<sup>15</sup> *L'école du jeu. Former ou transmettre...les chemins de l'enseignement théâtral* sous la direction de Jossette Féral, Paris, L'Entretemps Publishing House, 2003, p 70.

<sup>16</sup> Jossette Féral, entretien avec Jouri Lioubimov, *Mise en scène et Jeu d'acteur*, Jeu-Lansman Publishing House, 2001, p 221

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As the defining feature of theatre schools in the East, we can see the importance attached to theatre theory. In most institutions, theatrical theory courses occupy 20-30% of the curricula,<sup>17</sup> and practical courses and workshops 70-80%. In the idea of developing theatrical thinking, theatrical theory becomes one of the important objectives, the aim being to increase the chances of the graduate to find work in different fields. We remember Jean-Pierre Ryngaert's point of view, evoked by Marian Popescu, "it is less important to know what we do with theoretical knowledge and more eloquent to discover their multiple connections with the professions in the theatre."<sup>18</sup> If we take the case of Belgium, although the example applies to other schools in Western Europe compared to Eastern Europe, we will find that the percentage for studying the theatre theory varies between 13-23%, with more emphasis on integrating the theory into practice, on the theatrical experiment and direct contact with the theatre environment through workshops led by devoted directors and actors. Although the percentage is lower than the one of the theatre schools in the East, we can notice the theoretical courses from IAD: dramatic writing, staging issues, cultural management.

We cannot overlook a common practice in Western Europe aimed at internships in the professional environment. Whether we are talking about the art of the actor (practice) or theatrical studies (theory) the student spends between three and six weeks in a specialized institution getting familiar with the challenges of the profession for a fast professional insertion. However, the entry into the professional environment is not entirely guaranteed since the labour market is not fully regulated in this respect, being also opened to those who have not attended a school in the field or attended only some courses with which they have re-qualified, for example from singers, acrobats have become actors. The professional education in the theatre/animation field is not fully harmonized in Europe, which is why the Bologna Agreement also takes this into account.

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<sup>17</sup> Tania Maguilevskaia , Gilles Morel, *Mutation entre contrainte et volonté*, UBU Scène d'Europe . La formation des comédiens en Europe centrale et orientale, APITE Publishing House (Association Pour l'Information Théâtrale en Europe), 35/36 2005, p 142

<sup>18</sup> Marian Popescu, *Les débats autour de la formation théâtrale en Roumanie ou le Syndrome de Cendrillon*, UBU Scène d'Europe . La formation des comédiens en Europe centrale et orientale, editura APITE (Association Pour l'Information Théâtrale en Europe), 35/36 2005, p 86

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### **Theatrical pedagogy or the education of wonder and doubt in theatre**

The relationship between the student-actor and his teacher is complex. For several decades, the peculiarity of theatre schools in the East consisted precisely in this privileged relationship between the future actor and his master, which lasted for four years of studies. After the Bologna Agreement, it was revised and gradually replaced with a model adapted to the needs of the contemporary actor, translated into skills, competences that the actor must have to meet the demands of the contemporary scene. Some schools have adopted the mentor-teacher model where seminars are designed as a place of dialog and cooperation between the student and the teacher based on the principle of equality. Another model that seems to work is that of the tutoring where each promotion has its own tutor. Among other things, his role is to make proposals, in the sense of diversifying pedagogical methods, possibly collaborating with artists who propose different working techniques to students.

We understand from here, among other things, the diversity of the working methods in the teacher-student relationship doubled by internships, punctual interventions of artists musicians, choreographers, artists, acrobats, etc.

In an article published in *UBU* magazine, *Scène de l'Europe*, Radu Penciulescu and George Banu quote Evgueni Vakhtangov about the terms “to educate” and “to train” in the theatre field. “To educate, rather than to train. Training in the artistic field involves the intention to convey knowledge, to provide answers, while educating involves training starting with questions and problems that the student faces to find answers.”<sup>19</sup> Antoine Vitez has a similar vision when he asks himself, “do we have the right to train?” We infer the answer, the training is associated with the learning process. Or we know that in the theatre there were great performances, great interpretations that were created in solitude, perhaps in opposition to the methods already known. In other words, the right to learn guarantees nothing, as does the right to train. And yet, perhaps it would be more interesting to analyse the methods of training, with the emphasis on the student-teacher relationship. The dialog is essential in this relationship, it is the central aspect of training in a theatre school. This communication erases the distance sometimes hierarchical between the teacher

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<sup>19</sup> George Banu , Radu Penciulescu, *Observation et réflexions* UBU Scène d'Europe . La formation des comédiens en Europe centrale et orientale, editura APITE (Association Pour l'Information Théâtrale en Europe), 30/31 2004, p 114

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and the student and allows the people who walk together on the path of knowledge and initiation into the theatre to share knowledge.

Do not forget that theatre appeals to two essential principles, as does philosophy, wonder and doubt. Theatre has the mission to raise problems, question, worry, induce uncertainty, and create imbalance. This will lead to resistance and then rejection, allowing what we are instructing to be accepted and rejected at the same time. The natural phenomena are when the student-actor accepts the pedagogy that is taught to him and at the same time rejects it. As Umberto Eco said, not only do we have to doubt everything, but we must doubt that we doubt it. After all, theatre gives very few guarantees, and learning to coexist with doubt is fundamental in this art.

The artistic formation of the future actor can be understood from several perspectives. It may be useful to speak of “training” to emphasize the extraordinary diversity that characterizes artistic education. We could investigate the pedagogies that marked the history of theatre by their theories. We could analyse the privileged relationship that exists between a young actor and his teacher and consider the heritage and artistic tradition. We could talk about training in a practical and concrete manner, considering the expectations and needs of a young actor in order to be able to cope with the realities of the profession<sup>20</sup>.

Without generalizing, however, we can say that many actors after years of artistic training have a critical look at the methods and content of the curriculum of artistic higher education. Many of them believe that acting cannot be taught and that what we call stage presence is a matter of talent, of grace, the rest being a technique that can be learned by practicing it with the teacher. There are more radical ones who believe that the institution of artistic education has the merit of teaching them what is not done on stage.

As excessive as they may seem, these reactions prove that in the artistic field, more than in any other, the process of formation in an institution with artistic characteristics is necessary to be challenged to be overcome. The best teachers are those who provide the student with the necessary means to develop his impulse, the creative energy, which educates more than they teach, as Evgueni Vakhtangov would

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<sup>20</sup> *Editorial. Des écoles pour les acteurs.* UBU Scène d'Europe. La formation des comédiens en Europe centrale et orientale, APITE Publishing House (Association Pour l'Information Théâtrale en Europe), 30/31 2004, Pg 2

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say. But as is natural, they can only tell what they know and what they have experienced, the futility of additional requirements being obvious. The best solution for the student-actor is not to deny the teacher, but his ability to assimilate the acquired artistic knowledge and subsequently to transform or process it in his own way. Thus, the work of becoming an actor is extended even after the years of studies, because this stage represents only the entry into the process of continuous training to which the actor submits with the involvement in each performance. It should be borne in mind that the best artistic training is that which takes place in the name of a particular conception of dramatic art, respectively those with an identity of their own and not those copying practices dissociated from their aesthetics.

In the old paradigm, a great teacher in an important theatre school needed students to match. The candidate's personality was a selection criterion for entering a nationally and internationally renowned school. We deduce that there is a type of profile according to which the jury has the mission to choose the future student. Geniality, exceptional character, were more important than talent itself and a possible prior knowledge of the acting profession. It was essential in theatrical pedagogy to adjust the exceptional artistic personality, of course in the raw state. In the 21st century this way of seeing theatre is obsolete, for it has nothing to do with the evolution of theatre as we know it today. We are justified in asking whether this view of acting is not out of phase even in relation to the theatrical changes of the 20th century, which have shown both an openness to politics, the arts in general and other disciplines, and an increased interest in dramatic writing, contemporary performances of all kinds, for which the notion of character has become problematic.

We understand from the above, that the artistic university system has no negligible repercussions on the way theatre is practiced today. We wonder whether instead of cultivating the extraordinary personality of the future actor, would it not be more interesting to provide him with knowledge and techniques to acquire insofar as they are useful to him in revealing the exceptional nature of the artist? Over time, the theatre school has limited the student-actor, singing him in the sphere of his personality, instead of helping him to discover the diversity of the theatrical phenomenon in relation to the world.

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### **Instead of conclusion**

If we consider acting as a matter of artistic sensitivity, the question relating to the possibility of teaching it allows interpretation. We could develop the artistic sense, the self-knowledge, the cultivation of the creative being to the future actor, and the pedagogy seen in this way can take on various forms and it is not necessarily to find itself in a university. If we go further with our reflection, without denying the necessity of the development of the actor's personality, but on the contrary, in this case higher education is more than justified.

Perhaps it would be interesting not to dissociate theatrical pedagogy from the pedagogy of other arts. We might ask a musician if the technical training and the knowledge of musicology are required before of the play. What could be the answer? A less good instrumentalist might be a great composer, but perhaps never a great performer. Or in theatre, it seems that we also need performers and not just creators. This fact is becoming more and more prominent nowadays, when the technique is more and more present on stage, not necessarily because of the improvement of sound and light installations, it is due to the development of new technologies and the increasingly frequent blending of the arts on stage (music, dance, visual arts). Could interdisciplinarity intervene in this context as an alternative solution, bringing together both defining and specific aspects of theatrical pedagogy? The answer could be affirmative, if it represents an openness and is understood as a means of integrating and supporting the dynamics of each discipline taught for the formation of the future actor.

In our view of theatre today, the presence of the actor on the stage worth looking into closely. The artistic formation of the future actor will not solve all the unknowns, but it should at least give the interpreter the intellectual and technical bases to be able to respond to new goals, but especially to artistic challenges. It is not a matter of teaching him about the basic notions of singing, dancing, or visual arts, but on the contrary, what the actor must learn should be what other dancers, singers, musicians are not capable of doing. Otherwise, they can do it for him.

The evolution of the theatre that we observe at the beginning of the 21st century not only requires the actor to have an extraordinary personality, but also to reflect directly in the interpretation of the characters entrusted to him, which requires

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him to be better intellectually and technically, to affirm his presence on stage. This artistic training can only be given in a higher education institution.

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